

# Department of Communication Studies

## Graduate Student Handbook

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## GRADUATE PROGRAM IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES

The goal of this program is to prepare M.A. recipients for further graduate study toward a Ph.D. Additional objectives are to enhance the job and financial potential of public and private elementary and secondary school teachers, community and small four-year college instructors, and assistants to trained and licensed professionals in marriage and family counseling. The program's teaching and research focus is family communication, with a secondary emphasis on interpersonal communication. This area of study is increasingly in the forefront of scholarly activity in communication studies, with the creation of new journals devoted to family issues and the relatively new Family Communication Division within the National Communication Association. Private and governmental agencies increasingly look for help through workshops and seminars in parenting, remediation of family violence, and other related issues.

NOTE: Requirements of the Office of Graduate Studies at Sam Houston State University (SHSU) as stated in the *Graduate Catalog* (<http://www.shsu.edu/gradcat/>) apply to all operating procedures of the Department.

### GOVERNANCE

**Director of Graduate Studies** - The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) is appointed by the Department Chair and is selected from among the Department graduate faculty members. His/her duties include:

- Supervision of the Graduate Program in Communication Studies
- Graduate student advisement
- Coordination of recruitment of students and advertisement of the Graduate Program

#### ***Supervision of the Graduate Program in Communication Studies***

The DGS is in charge of implementing and enforcing the rules of the graduate program in Communication Studies at SHSU. He/she must be familiar with the University and Departmental rules concerning enrollment in the program, academic requirements, academic specializations, and other aspects of the graduate career in Communication Studies at SHSU.

#### ***Graduate Student Advisement***

The DGS is the temporary advisor of incoming graduate students. It is the duty of the DGS to advise students during their first semester of class work. It is also the duty of the DGS to encourage students to select a permanent advisor out of the graduate faculty in the Department. To this end the DGS will organize an orientation session with students where he/she will introduce the features of the program and the other graduate faculty members.

#### ***Coordination of Recruitment and Advertisement***

The DGS supervises and promotes the production and distribution of material advertising the Graduate Program in Communication Studies at SHSU. He/she is

also responsible for identifying and contacting other institutions and individuals for the purpose of recruiting students. At the beginning of each academic year the DGS will prepare a recruitment and advertisement plan and submit it to the Department Chair and to the graduate faculty for discussion and approval.

**Department of Communication Studies Graduate Faculty.** The Department of Communication Studies Graduate Faculty (DCSGF) consists of Communication Studies regular faculty approved to teach graduate courses who have maintained high academic standards in research, teaching, and service for the previous five years, or hire date when less than five years. Basic requirements for membership in DCSGF include:

- satisfactory teaching evaluation for the previous five years, or hire date when less than five years.
- satisfactory service evaluation for the same period.
- either the publication of one refereed journal article or four papers presented at Communication Studies academic conferences for the past five years.

### **MASTER OF ARTS (M.A.)**

M.A. candidates in Communication Studies are expected to develop a general understanding of communication theory, methods and statistics, and a substantive awareness of theoretical and methodological issues within one or more areas of specialization.

Students can select between a Thesis Option and a Non-Thesis Option.

#### **Requirements**

A. Thesis Option (36 semester hours):

- Minimum of 30 hours of graduate course work; no more than 6 of these hours can be 400-level courses, except with special permission of the DGS and the course instructor.
- Write a thesis of 6 credit hours (COM698/COM699)

B. Non-Thesis Option (36 semester hours):

- No more than 6 of these hours can be 400-level courses, except with special permission of the DGS and the course instructor.

#### **Required Courses**

Students pursuing a Master's Degree in Communication Studies must take the following required courses:

COM531 Speech Communication Methods and Research  
COM532 Statistical Methods for Communication  
COM535 Advanced Communication Theory  
COM560 Advanced Interpersonal Communication  
COM580 Advanced Family Communication  
COM590 Seminar in Interpersonal Communication

COM591 Seminar in Family Communication

### **Other Graduate Courses**

COM570 Health Communication and the Family  
COM571 Sex & Gender in Communication  
COM575 Graduate Readings in Communication Studies

COM698 Thesis I: Practicum  
COM699 Thesis II: Completion

NOTE: A student may take COM575 only with the approval of the DGS.

### **Specializations**

Students may select one area of specialization from among the topics covered by the courses listed above. If a specialization is declared, then the student will be tested on this area as part of the comprehensive exams (see below).

### **Master's Thesis Committee**

The committee of each master's candidate consists of at least three faculty members, all of whom must be members of the SHSU Graduate Faculty. At least two of the three committee members, including the Chair or one co-Chair, must be faculty members in the Communication Studies Department.

## **COMPREHENSIVE EXAM**

### **The Examination**

The comprehensive examination for the Master Degree in Communication Studies is divided into **three** parts.

- 1) The **first** exam consists of a written examination in theory and methods. This exam requires students to demonstrate a mastery of key concepts and pertinent theories, methodologies, and statistical procedures in Communication Studies.
- 2) The **second** exam is optional and consists of a written examination in a specialty area selected by the student (see above).
- 3) The **third** exam is a required oral exam which is designed to assess the student's ability to explain the meanings and implications of issues relating to key concepts, pertinent theories and methods in Communication Studies and in the specialty area(s) selected by the student. The timing of the oral examination is at the convenience of the student and the Committee that administers it.

### **Exam Administration**

The comprehensive exam will be governed by the **Graduate Examination Committee**. The Graduate Examination Committee is appointed annually by the DGS and is formed by four (4) members of the Graduate Faculty. The Committee's duties involve: preparing, administering, and grading the written exams and overseeing the conduct of the oral exam.

### ***Written Exams***

Written exams are offered in two eight-hour sessions twice each academic year (once during the Fall semester and once during the Spring semester). They are offered during a one-week period to be determined by the DGS no later than the end of the second week of the respective semester. Students may petition to take their written exams in more than one semester by taking the theory and methods exam during one semester and the specialty area exam in the following semester (i.e., Fall and Spring or Spring and Fall). No exams will be offered during the Summer semesters.

Each written exam is given one of the following grades: (a) Pass; (b) Conditional Pass; or, (c) Fail.

If a student fails one or both of the written examinations, then he/she may retake that particular exam or both exams one additional time. The student must retake the written exam(s) the next time the comprehensive exam is offered. If the student fails to pass the written exam(s) a second time, then he/she will be dropped from the Graduate Program in Communication Studies.

If a student receives a conditional pass, then the Graduate Examination Committee in conjunction with the student will develop the protocol necessary to pass outright.

The student must receive a grade of Pass on both written exams before he/she can take the oral examination.

Written exams may only be scheduled during the Fall or Spring semesters.

### ***Oral Exam***

Upon successful completion of the written examinations, a final oral examination is scheduled. The student, in conjunction with his/her Committee, will schedule a day and time for the oral exam to be administered early in the semester after earning a grade of Pass on the written exams. The oral exam requires that students successfully articulate in contemporary English language their level of understanding of key concepts and pertinent theories, methodologies, and statistical procedures in Communication Studies, as well as in the chosen specialty area(s).

The oral exam is administered by the Graduate Examination Committee. The oral exam is open to the other faculty members in the Department; however, they do not vote on the performance of the student.

The oral exam will be graded as Pass or Fail. If a student fails the oral examination, then he/she may retake it one additional time. The student must retake the oral exam within a three month period and by the end of the semester in which it was first taken. If the student fails to pass the oral exam a second time, then he/she will be dropped from the Graduate Program in Communication Studies.

Oral exams may only be scheduled during the Fall or Spring semesters.

## **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

### **Scholarships**

College of Humanities and Social Science (CHSS) Special Graduate Scholarship. A prestigious scholarship from Sam Houston State University – College of Humanities and Social Sciences. It is awarded to selected graduate students who have demonstrated an excellent academic and community citizenship. To be considered for the CHSS Special Graduate Scholarship, a Sam Houston State University student must be enrolled, as a full-time, on-campus graduate student during the semester in which the scholarship is applied. Beginning graduate students must have an overall grade point average of at least 3.5 and a combined GRE (V+Q) score of at least 1080. Once enrolled, the student must maintain a 3.7 graduate grade point average to be eligible for the scholarship in the future. Current graduate students must have at least a 3.7 grade point average and a combined GRE (V+Q) score of at least 1080. Please note that scholarships are not automatically renewed. In addition, new recommendation letters are required for each semester the scholarship applicant applies. Please see <http://www.shsu.edu/~hss001/graduate> for more information.

### **Teaching and Research Assistantships**

Teaching and Research Assistantships (TAs and RAs) are available. They pay a 9-month stipend in return for 20 hours of work per week. Graduate students are required to assist Communication Studies professors in their teaching and research activities. Students interested in receiving an assistantship must first be admitted in 'good standing' to the Communication Studies Graduate Program. Assistantships are competitive; they are awarded based upon academic accomplishments. Application forms can be obtained by contacting the Communication Studies Department. **Interested students must apply for an assistantship each semester.**

### *Assistantship Obligations*

An assistantship requires that students perform certain obligations. Graduate assistantship stipends provide the opportunity for students to work with faculty members and be exposed to various aspects of an academic program. Graduate students receiving departmental support are expected to actively engage in departmental research and/or perform services related to resident education. A student with a half-time assistantship is expected to schedule 6-9 credit hours per semester. Audited courses do not count toward assistantship credit hour levels.

Time expended on a thesis related to a departmental research project is recognized as partial fulfillment of assistantship requirements. A student may choose to write a thesis in an area unrelated to a departmental research project. The student, however, will still be expected to perform departmental research and/or education duties in return for the assistantship stipend.

Departmental policy for all graduate assistantships relative to satisfying services required for payment of a stipend is as follows:

(a) Each semester (Fall and Spring), all half-time (.5) assistants are expected to be available and perform services related to teaching and/or research for an average of 20 hours per week; 30 hours per week for students on a three-quarter (.75) time assistantship and 10 hours per week for students on a quarter (.25) time assistantship. A graduate assistant may accept concurrent employment outside the University only with permission from the Director of Graduate Studies.

(b) The faculty member with whom a graduate assistant works is the assistantship supervisor. The faculty member may or may not be the same person as the thesis advisor.

NOTE: Faculty with grant funds may support summer assistantships or wage payroll positions for graduate students.

Graduate assistants are encouraged to discuss teaching and research expectations with their faculty supervisor(s) at the beginning of each semester. Graduate assistants are also encouraged to seek feedback on their performance from their supervisor(s) throughout the semester.

A student's assistantship may be terminated due to substandard academic performance (i.e., a student's cumulative grade point average falling below 3.5 or a student receiving a grade of C), lack of progress in the degree program, unsatisfactory performance of research responsibilities and assigned teaching duties, or financial exigencies of the Department.

## **GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**

### **Degree Plan**

A degree plan is devised in consultation with the DGS. The degree plan is tailored to the student's academic interests and career goals.

### **Graduation Application**

Graduate students who plan to complete their program requirements (i.e., course work, comprehensive examination, and, if applicable, thesis) are encouraged to submit an Application for Graduation to the Registrar by the deadline specified for that semester.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **The University Center**

Communication Studies graduate courses are offered at The University Center in The Woodlands, Texas. The University Center is located 40 miles south of the SHSU Huntsville campus on I-45.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

All graduate students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. For a complete listing of the University policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/administrative/faculty/sectionb.html#dishonesty>

### **Student Grievance Procedures**

The Department abides by the University policy with respect to student grievances. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

[http://www.shsu.edu/~vaf\\_www/aps/documents/900823\\_001.pdf](http://www.shsu.edu/~vaf_www/aps/documents/900823_001.pdf)

### **Facilities and Supplies**

Students on assistantship will be assigned a desk subject to availability. Long distance telephone calls may only be made from SHSU office telephones in relationship to work assigned by the faculty supervisor. Supplies, such as computer access, pencils, pens, and paper, are provided by the Department to students for work related to assistantship duties.