Department of Communication & Journalism

Graduate Faculty Information & Policies

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Graduate Program Officer Position & Responsibilities

The graduate program is overseen by the Graduate Program Officer (GPO) in consultation with the Graduate Faculty. The Graduate Program Officer is an elected position. A simple majority of the voting Department Graduate Faculty elects the Graduate Program Officer. The election is called by the Graduate Faculty, but supervised and conducted by the outgoing Graduate Program Officer. Only Graduate Faculty may vote. Candidates for the GPO position must be tenured members of the Department Graduate Faculty. The GPO serves for an unspecified term.

The GPO works closely with the Chair, the Deans of the Graduate School, the Departmental Program leaders, the COMM 1000 Director/COMM 1000 Committee, and the Graduate Teaching Assistants. Traditionally, the GPO position has received a one course administrative reduction per year.

The GPO is responsible for planning the graduate course rotation with the approval of the graduate faculty, assisting in the Fall & Spring departmental orientations in accordance with the Chair, making GTA offers in accordance with the Chair, overseeing the assigning of GTA section assignments and service assignments, maintaining adherence to the graduate policies of the Department and the Graduate School, GTA discipline, graduate policy matters, and other duties relating to the graduate program as required.

Basic Course (COMM 1000) Director

When the departmental budget allows, the GPO is assisted by a Basic Course Director (BCD). The Basic Course Director, working with the GPO, typically oversees GTA teaching assignments and responsibilities and assists COMM 1000 instructors.

Admissions

Admission decisions are made by the GPO in conjunction with a three member Faculty Review Committee. The GPO sets the standards for admission with the advice and consent of the Graduate Faculty.

Graduate Student Advising

GPO as Advisor

The GPO acts as the advisor for all graduate students from the time of admission until the completion of Qualifying Exams.
The Major Professor & Advisory Committee

After a student has successfully passed the qualifying exams, students should select a Major Professor, set up an Advisory Committee, and complete a Plan of Study. The Advisory Committee must be composed of at least three members. In the Department of Communication & Journalism, this committee can only include members of the Graduate Faculty unless approved by the GPO or Department Chair. Whenever possible, the student should have had classes with all committee members. Having faculty members as unofficial committee members (i.e., writing and evaluating written comprehensive exam questions) should be avoided when possible, as such members traditionally do not receive recognition for their service to the student’s committee.

Other Advisory committee duties include: approving the student's program of study (and Plan of Study form), conducting required examinations, and directing the required internship or thesis. As soon as possible after identifying a major professor and advisory committee members, the student should be directed to complete a Plan of Study and submit it to the Graduate School.

Faculty seeking additional guidance are directed to Appendix A: Directing the Capstone Project.

Academic Honesty Issues

Faculty are urged to have regular conversations with graduate students on issues associated with academic honesty (e.g., plagiarism, misrepresentation of sources, inappropriate assistance for other students, mishandling of exams, etc.). Such conversations reduce confusion over what constitutes misconduct, and reminds graduate students that academic integrity is of the utmost importance both when researching and when teaching.

When academic misconduct is identified, faculty are urged to file academic misconduct charges in keeping with University policies. In doing so, it emphasizes that we as graduate faculty take academic honesty seriously.

Coursework Related Policies

Student Registration

Graduate students are responsible for registering for classes as soon as registration opens. Any problems resulting in their failure to do so is the student’s problem. Faculty should not feel pressured to take on student overloads, to support nonCMJN graduate course enrollments, or agree to independent study courses because a student delays his or her registration.
Taking nonCMJN Graduate Courses

Because graduate students take a limited number of CMJN courses while pursuing their degree, graduate faculty advisors and committees are asked to discourage graduate students from taking courses outside our graduate program.

That said, students interested in making a case for a nonCMJN class should: 1) have passed their qualifying exams; 2) have selected a Major Advisor and Advisory Committee members; and, 3) make a strong case to the Advisory Committee for the need to take an outside class. *When making the case to the committee, the student must show how the course(s) pertain to their program of study in the clearest manner possible.* The Advisory Committee, in consultation with the GPO, will grant approval (or not) for taking the class(es). With Advisory Committee approval, graduate students may take up to nine (9) hours of classes that are in a closely related area.

Independent Study Courses

For the reasons stated above and because graduate faculty are not compensated for their time, graduate faculty are discouraged from directing Independent Study courses with graduate students. Exceptions are made when a student’s Advisory Committee strongly endorses the need for an Independent Study course for a student’s program of study. Procedures for petitioning to take an Independent Study class are the same as that for taking a nonCMJN graduate level course. Only one independent study class will be applied to a student’s plan of study. Because of reduced student enrollment, graduate faculty are strongly advised against conducting Independent Study courses during the Summer semester.

Incomplete Grades in Graduate Courses

Because of the nature of graduate coursework, incomplete grades are awarded only for exceptional circumstances and should be negotiated with the student in advance of the last day of classes. Once an incomplete grade has been negotiated, the student has until the end of the 10th day of classes in the next term (including Summer semester) to turn in all work. If they miss this deadline, the faculty member should compute the final grade with a zero credit assigned to all missed work. Because of its implications for a student’s GGPA, the final grade should be reported to the registrar as soon as possible.
Exam Policies

Qualifying Exams
Faculty who teach the required graduate courses (COMM 7000, COMM 7010, COMM 7020) will write and evaluate their respective section of qualifying exams for both Spring and the Fall terms. Questions for the exam should be provided to the GPO five (5) working days prior to the scheduled exams. These faculty members will evaluate exams for both Fall and Spring semesters, and should make every effort to be available during this period (including evaluating rewrites). However, in the unlikely event that one of these faculty members is unavailable, the GPO will take responsibility for evaluating the exams. When possible, the GPO will remove identifying information from the exams allowing for an anonymous evaluation of student exams. The GPO coordinates and administers qualifying exams and any exam rewrites, handles all student communications regarding qualifiers, notifies students of their success/failure, handles any student initiated appeals, and notifies the Graduate School that failing students should be dropped from the program. Faculty evaluating the exams should bear in mind that the exams are evaluated on a pass/fail basis. Thus, students may do poorly on one section of the exam, but do very well on another. The faculty member will judge whether the student’s performance overall merits a “pass.” Students who fail one or more sections of the exam are provided one opportunity to revise their exam response. Students who fail will not be able to continue in the program. Graduate students who fail do have an appeals process, as outlined in the Graduate Student Policy Manual.

Comprehensive Exams
All students must pass comprehensive exams prior to graduation. However, the nature of the exam can vary depending on the choice of the thesis or non-thesis option (see below). No matter the option chosen, students will have an oral examination/oral defense. Graduate students work closely with their Major Professor to schedule examinations in keeping with the Graduate School calendar. All members of the Graduate Faculty may attend any oral examination as visitors. It is the responsibility of the Major Professor to notify the Graduate Faculty of the time and place of oral examinations.

Students Choosing the Thesis Option
All candidates under the thesis option must pass a comprehensive examination covering the program of study as well as their research and thesis. Typically, the thesis constitutes the “written” portion of the examination, with an additional two-hour oral exam. However, if deemed necessary, the Advisory Committee also may require a written examination.

Students Choosing the Non-Thesis Option
All candidates under the non-thesis option must pass both a written and oral comprehensive examination covering the program of study as well as any research and special project/internship. The Graduate Program Officer working with the Graduate Internship Coordinator and the Major Professor will schedule the examinations not later than the deadline indicated in the Graduate School calendar and notify Graduate Faculty.
Comprehensive Exam Pass/Fail Policy

Successful completion of the comprehensive exam requires the unanimous support of all members of the Advisory Committee. If a student fails the examination (written or oral), one reexamination may be given if recommended by the student’s Advisory Committee and given approval by the Dean of the Graduate School. If a student fails the oral examination, the Advisory Committee may also direct the student to take a second round of written exams before the second oral examination. All reexaminations will be scheduled for the next semester. Further examinations will be allowed only under exceptional circumstances and with the approval of Auburn University’s Graduate Council.

Scheduling Comprehensive Exams

The Graduate Program Officer in conjunction with the Graduate Internship Coordinator and Non-thesis Committee Chairs will schedule the examinations not later than the deadline indicated in the Graduate School calendar and notify the Graduate Faculty. NOTE: It is important that a student’s internship supervisors be aware of and willing to schedule work schedules around the assigned comprehensive exam and oral defense schedule.

The student and his/her Major Professor should work closely with their Advisory Committee to schedule oral comprehensive exams. All parties should be aware of the deadlines imposed by the Graduate School calendar for each semester. Failure to complete comprehensive exams by the deadline will delay a student’s graduation. In general, the Major Professor should keep the scheduling requirements of the Advisory Committee in mind as she/he plans the exams. In scheduling written exams, the Department suggests that the Major Professor allow the committee members at least one week to write their questions and at least one week to read and evaluate the student’s answers before the scheduled oral examination.

Whenever possible, students should take their comprehensive exam during the scheduled exam time. Exams (written or oral) should not be scheduled either the first or last week of classes or during final exams. No exams should be scheduled for the periods between semesters.

Once the oral examination is scheduled, the GPO and Graduate Faculty should be notified via an email announcement.

Administering Written Comprehensive Exams

All aspects of the comprehensive exam process are the GPO’s and major professor’s responsibility primarily, and the committee members’ secondarily. The GPO is responsible for scheduling and organizing the exams, arranging room and equipment reservations, administering the exams. The Major Professor bears primary responsibility for arranging the oral defense. If the major professor cannot be available for the exam process, other committee members must fill in (committee members are determined by those who are listed on the student’s plan of study). The exam process cannot require and should not request the assistance of office personnel, the GPO (beyond administering the exam), or the department chair for any aspect of the examination process.
All exams must be administered in Tichenor Hall or another designated campus site.¹ Exams may not be taken at other locations or by “distance,” including another computer lab on campus, the student’s home, the student’s workplace, etc. The conference room may be reserved in advance through the proper administrative staff.

Students may take exams using a computer when one is available. Arrangements must be made well in advance of the examination. If a computer is not available, the student will have to write her/his answers by hand. Students cannot use their own computers (especially notebooks and/or laptops). If a student takes the exams by computer, the major professor will provide the flashdrive, etc. to be used to transfer the completed exam from the computer to a print or electronic format for review by committee members.

Graduation Requirements

No student will be permitted to graduate who fails to submit a Plan of Study and a graduation check to the Graduate School prior to the semester of expected graduation. At this time, graduation day is designated as the official last day of each semester and, therefore, is the deadline for submitting Plans of Study and graduation checks for each semester.

Working With GTAs

Teaching Assistants

Faculty desiring a GTA for an upcoming class should respond to the email announcement sent out by the Basic Course Director prior to the semester the class will be taught. Assignment considerations include a number of factors such as the number of GTAs available and the number of students in the course. Assignments are made at the discretion of the BCD. A request does not guarantee the assignment of a GTA.

TA duties should be kept to a minimum. In particular, the duty of first year GTAs is primarily to observe. Typical duties involve taking attendance, handling student questions, leading group discussions, etc. TAs may be allowed to teach 2-3 times during the course of the semester. The instructor of record for the course will provide a written evaluation of any teaching to the TA, will review the evaluation with the TA, and will provide a copy of the written evaluation to the BCD. GTAs are not experienced graders. Minor grading with objective answer keys (e.g., multiple choice exams, quizzes, fill-in-the blank, etc.) may be done. However, no grading involving subjective assessment should be done by TAs (e.g., major papers, reading responses, etc.). Instructors who wish their TA to engage in other duties should meet with the BCD prior to assigning such duties. Work outside of class should not exceed 3-4 hours per week.

Please report any problems with your TA to the BCD and/or the GPO as quickly as possible.

¹ These guidelines may be adapted if a student has a documented accommodation from the AU Program for Students with Disabilities. In such cases, the Advisor, GPO, and student will work together to determine how best to accommodate the student’s needs.
TAs are typically inexperienced teachers who sometimes do not fully understand their teaching and classroom responsibilities. To provide the best classroom experience for our undergraduates, TA problems (large or small) should be addressed as quickly as possible.

**Research Assistants**

As part of their Graduate Teaching Assistantship, graduate students provide graduate faculty and other members of the department with research or other service. This work is limited to five (5) hours each week of the regular semester. Faculty should keep in mind that graduate students are neophytes and, as a result, may take longer than expected to complete an assigned task. At the same time, however, graduate students have been informed that they should contact the faculty member they are assigned to assist during the first week of classes and that they should be proactive in maintaining contact, soliciting assignments, and completing them in a timely manner. Faculty experiencing any problems while working with a graduate student, should first speak with the student. If problems are not resolved quickly, the faculty member should contact the GPO. The GPO will meet with the student to review GTA service responsibilities.

Requests for research assistants should be sent via email to the GPO, no later than one week prior to the start of classes Spring and Fall semester (no assistants are available in the Summer). The GPO makes all service assignments. Faculty assigned a Research Assistant will complete an end of the semester evaluation of the student’s service/research. Faculty are asked to be candid and thorough in their assessment. Evaluations become part of the student’s files and may be used in end-of-the semester evaluations, assigning summer teaching, or determinations of graduate student awards.

**GTA Exam Policies**

GTAs, particularly those with an undergraduate degree from AU, may be pressured by friends and others to provide information about or copies of exams. Thus, GTAs should not handle tests except in highly supervised situations. In addition, it is recommended that GTAs assigned to assist in courses other than COMM 1000 (Public Speaking) should hold undergraduate degrees from institutions other than AU. When they do not, course instructors should be aware of the possibility of increased exam leakage due to lasting friendships and social relationships outside of the academic environment.

Other exam-related activities that should be avoided include: 1) having GTAs write, edit, or compile questions for exams; 2) having GTAs proctor original exams without supervision; 3) having GTAs answer students’ questions during the course of the exam period; 4) having GTAs store old exams in their home or office; and 5) having GTAs shred or dispose of old exams. All these activities increase opportunities for exam leakage.

**Graduate Faculty Criteria**

**Levels of Membership**

The Department will recognize one level of membership on the Graduate Faculty. The faculty
member may teach at the 6000 or 7000 level, may serve on both master’s and doctoral committees and may direct masters theses.

**Initial Appointment**

Candidates will hold a terminal degree recognized by the Department, typically the Ph.D. or M.F.A and must have a full-time, tenure or tenure-track appointment at the rank of assistant professor or higher.

**Reappointment**

Reappointment is based upon the following criteria:

1. Prior service as a member of the graduate faculty. During the term of appointment, the candidate has contributed to the graduate program by:
   a. Maintaining a level of teaching quality commensurate with the department peers in graduate courses as evidenced by relevant student and/or peer teaching evaluations,
   b. And, contributing in an active and positive fashion as either a chair or a member of graduate advisory committees.

2. The candidate shall have a record of creative works, scholarly publication, or professional publication. The publication requirement should reflect the evaluation criteria as established by the Research/Creative/Professional Track outlined in the CMJN departmental Policies and Procedures manual. A record of publication will be satisfied typically by publication of at least three (3) full-length research articles in reputable refereed journals. ("Reputable journals" are those identified as such by faculty in the nominee's department or academic area.) The research methodology in these articles should reflect methodology appropriate to the nominee's field. The nominee must be the senior author on at least one of these publications. The publication of a book or research monograph can satisfy this requirement completely or in part if it makes a scholarly contribution to the author's field of specialization. Such publications must clearly demonstrate the author's research competence. In those areas where publication is not customarily the end result of the scholarly and creative activity, evidence of comparable achievement suitable for establishing professional standing must be presented and should be in keeping with the CMJN departmental Policies and Procedures Manual description of publication/output for creative and professional tracks.

3. The candidate should have served on at least three (3) examining committees.

   NOTE: In rare cases where the candidate has established a significant scholarly record, and demonstrated in some other outstanding way his/her ability to work with and mentor graduate students, the Graduate Dean may approve a reduction in the requirements for 4 above. Such strongly justified, written requests must be supported by a majority vote of the department' graduate faculty and Department Chair.

4. The candidate shall also demonstrate other significant professional scholarly commitment. Evidence of other significant professional scholarly commitment
involving anyone, or any combination of such activities as a) reading papers before academic and professional organizations; b) writing book reviews, scientific and industrial reports, short notes, popular articles, or similar materials; c) acting as a judge at a juried competition; d) rendering any type of consulting service which provides evidence of the scholar's professional standing and competence in her/his special field; e) participating in the activities of appropriate scholarly, creative, and professional organizations by holding offices or serving in other responsible capacities; f) performing significant administrative duties connected with the graduate program of a department or of the university; or g) attainment of extramural support that is evidence of professional/creative/scholarly standing.

**Term of Appointment**

The term of appointment shall be seven (7) years. Application should be made prior to assuming teaching responsibilities.

**Procedures for Nomination: Initial Appointment and Reappointment**

**Initial Appointment**

The Department Chair shall notify candidates to apply for initial appointment. Application should be made via the Graduate Faculty Approval System (GFAST) on the Graduate School website. Information to be supplied by the candidate includes the current curriculum vitae. The Department Chair will be notified of the application.

**Reappointment**

The Department Chair shall notify candidates to apply for reappointment. Application should be made via the Graduate Faculty Approval System (GFAST) on the Graduate School website. Information to be supplied by the candidate includes the current curriculum vitae. The Department Chair will be notified of the application. For reappointment, application material will be made available to the graduate faculty. Prior to forwarding the nomination to the Graduate School, nomination materials shall be reviewed by all graduate faculty members within the department. Following that review the Department Chair shall call for a vote by the graduate faculty by secret ballot relative to support or non-support of the nomination. Input will be solicited from the Graduate faculty and a vote taken. The nominee shall have the support of the majority of the current graduate faculty in the department. Approval or rejection will be submitted to the Graduate School for action by the Dean of the Graduate School.

**Appeals Process**

Candidates who are denied graduate faculty status (initial appointment or reappointment) may appeal the decision. Prior to appealing, the candidate shall meet with the Department Chair to solicit information as to why the candidate received an initial vote of non-support. If the candidate chooses to appeal, the candidate shall notify the Department Chair of the decision to appeal. The candidate shall then provide written justification and support addressing graduate faculty concerns that lead to the initial vote of nonsupport. The Department Chair will provide
copies of the written appeal to the graduate faculty for review. Appeal materials shall be reviewed by all graduate faculty members within the department. Following that review the Department Chair shall call for a vote by the graduate faculty by secret ballot relative to support or non-support of the appeal. Input will be solicited from the Graduate faculty and a vote taken. The successful appeal shall have the support of the majority of the current graduate faculty in the department. Approval or rejection will be submitted to the Graduate School for action by the Dean of the Graduate School.
Appendix A: Directing the Capstone Project

Before joining or directing a thesis/non-thesis committee, the student must have successfully completed qualifying exams.

Getting Started

**Thoroughly explore student interests.** The more focused the student is at the onset of the project, the better for determining if you are the right major professor or committee member. Ideally, committee members have research and/or methodological backgrounds compatible with the thesis topic. The major professor will help the student develop a list of appropriate graduate faculty to serve on the committee (the GPO or Chair can assist if needed). It is the student’s responsibility to approach potential committee members.

**Becoming an advisor or committee member.** When considering serving on committee, please keep in mind the amount of time that may be spent on the project and your availability (summer travel, sabbaticals, etc.). When considering serving on a thesis committee, you should consider how your research interests, background, methodology, etc. will contribute to the project. When serving on a nonthesis committee, the student should have taken a graduate course from you, preferably beyond the three required courses. As a nonthesis advisor, if you believe comprehensive exams should broadly reflect the student’s classroom experience, you may want to consider asking more than the minimum of three faculty members to serve on the committee.

**Committee Responsibilities & Duties.** In the case of the thesis option, the level and involvement of Committee Members varies. In some cases, they will act only as readers, while in other cases students may consult with committee members about specific aspects of the thesis (e.g., methodology, etc.). The Advisor and Committee Members, along with the student should consult with each other to determine how involved committee members will be.

**Setting up a Schedule.** Setting deadlines for components of the project and having regular meetings with an Advisee will help Advisors identify potential trouble spots and help keep the student on track for graduation.

The Semester Prior to Graduation

**Committee Responsibilities & Duties.** While the major professor bears primary responsibility, the amount and level of committee member contributions can vary depending on the nature of the project.

Graduate students writing a thesis should complete and present a thesis prospectus. Writing a prospectus helps graduate students more clearly delineate their project. Feedback from committee members in a formal meeting can help identify potential problems that can (and often should) be addressed early in the project.

Graduate students pursuing the nonthesis option should identify and confirm an internship. The internship must be approved by the major professor, the faculty member supervising graduate internships and the internship organization.
Filing the Plan of Study and Graduation Checks. Once the committee is assembled, the graduate student is responsible for filing the Plan of Study and completing a graduation check with the Graduate School. Failure to do so will delay the student’s graduation. You may review a student’s plan of study at the Graduate School's Plan of Study webpage (GSPOST).

The Semester of Graduation

Committee Responsibilities & Duties. Again, the primary responsibility lies with the major professor. The level of committee members in activities such as reading drafts of the thesis or so on should be negotiated between the major professor and the committee members. Students bear the ultimate responsibility for meeting Graduate School deadlines such as those for format checks and submission of theses and supporting documentation.

Scheduling Comprehensive Examinations. See Scheduling Comprehensive Exams and Administering Comprehensive Exams. Typically, in the thesis option, the final draft of the thesis is delivered to the advisory committee no later than two weeks before the Graduate School’s deadline for thesis submission. Similarly, written comprehensive exams for nonthesis students should be scheduled at least two weeks prior to the Graduate School’s deadline for submission of documentation of completion of nonthesis Master’s examinations. Committees may negotiate the actual dates.

Evaluating Comprehensive Examinations. Examinations are pass/fail. Passing requires unanimous approval by all committee members. See Comprehensive Exam Pass/Fail Policy and Comprehensive Exams. Typically, oral examinations for both thesis and non/thesis options should be scheduled at least one week before the relevant Graduate School deadline. This time period allows the student time to make corrections made by the committee and/or to respond to concerns raised by the committee during the oral defense. In any case, the student must submit the approval form (Form 9 for thesis students; Form 8 for nonthesis students) to the Graduate School by the date indicated on the official Graduate School calendar. Failure to do so will delay the student’s graduation.