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Introduction

The policies concerning the graduate program in the Department of Communication and Journalism (CMJN) are guided by the basic philosophy that the first priority of all graduate students is their education. In other words, all other aspects of your college life are secondary to your education and your ability to make good progress toward your degree. The following policies are designed to help you achieve academic success.

As graduate students, you are considered advanced Communication scholars. You should exemplify the very best of students of higher education: attending classes regularly, being prepared and being on time, making substantive contributions to class discussion, meeting assignment requirements, etc.

While the pages here outline departmental graduate student policies, you should also be familiar with Auburn University’s Graduate School Policies. Upon being admitted to the program, you are expected to familiarize with graduate school and departmental graduate student policies. If you have any questions about CMJN graduate student policies, you should contact the Graduate Program Officer or the Department Chair. During the graduate student orientation, you will be asked to sign and submit a copy of the Graduate Student Policy Manual Acknowledgement Form. This form will be placed in your departmental file.

The Department of Communication and Journalism recognizes the importance of both reflecting and teaching diversity. Departmental policies are intended to be inclusive of all underrepresented and minority groups whatever their race, religion, national origin, gender, age, ability or sexual orientation.

Admission-Related Policies

Admission decisions are made by the Graduate Program Officer (GPO) in conjunction with a Graduate Faculty Committee. For specific criteria, please contact the CMJN Graduate Program Officer or consult the CMJN Graduate Programs Admissions Information web page.

All students seeking master’s degree who are admitted to the graduate program without undergraduate degrees in Communication (e.g., journalism, mass communication, public relations, radio/television/film) will be required to take an additional nine (9) hours of CMJN graduate level Communication courses beyond the requirements for the degree they are seeking. This requirement does not apply to students seeking a Graduate Certificate. If you are unsure whether your undergraduate degree meets this requirement, you should consult the Graduate Program Officer.

The Department of Communication and Journalism recognizes the importance of both reflecting and teaching diversity. Our policy is intended to be inclusive of all underrepresented and minority groups whatever their race, religion, national origin, gender, age, ability or sexual orientation.

All graduate work toward a graduate certificate or a master's degree must be completed within a period of five calendar years.
You should also familiarize yourself with other related Graduate School enrollment and admission policies (e.g., requirements for continuous enrollment, active/inactive status, leave of absence, etc.).

**Graduate Program Officer (GPO)**

The graduate program is overseen by the GPO. The GPO is responsible for coordinating graduate applications, planning the graduate course rotation, assisting in departmental graduate student orientations, making Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) offers, overseeing the assignment of course sections and faculty service, organizing qualifying exams, and monitoring graduate student and GTA adherence to Departmental and Graduate School policies.

**Mandatory Orientation Sessions**

All graduate students must attend mandatory orientation sessions scheduled at the beginning of every semester (including Summer). These orientation sessions are typically scheduled the week prior to the beginning of classes. Vacation, work, internship plans, etc. should be scheduled accordingly and are not excuses for nonattendance.

**Student Behavior Policies**

**General Policy**

The Department of Communication and Journalism recognizes the importance of both reflecting and teaching diversity. Departmental policies are intended to be inclusive of all underrepresented and minority groups whatever their race, religion, national origin, gender, age, ability or sexual orientation.

As a student, you are expected to abide by the University’s [Code of Student Discipline](#). The Code is also designed to protect you when your rights have been violated. You should familiarize yourself with this document as well as others outlined in the AU student Handbook, [Student Policy eHandbook](#). The [Office of Student Conduct (OSC)](#) is responsible for the administration of the AU Code of Student Discipline.

Students will also abide by University policy’s regarding harassment. As defined by [AU policy](#), “harassment in academic settings and in the employment arena where students are involved is defined as: Conduct (physical, verbal, graphic, written, or electronic) that is (1) unwelcome; (2) discriminatory on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation, or disability; (3) directed at an individual or group in one of the protected classes outlined in this policy; and (4) so severe or pervasive and objectively offensive that it unreasonably interferes with the victim’s ability to participate in or to realize the intended benefits of an institutional activity, opportunity, or resource, unreasonably interferes with the victim’s work or living
environment, or deprives the victim of some other protected right.”

AU policy also notes that “Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination and is prohibited by federal regulation. Sexual harassment in academic settings and in the employment area where students are involved is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, graphic or physical conduct of a sexual nature when (1) submission to such conduct may be explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a student’s academic success or employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct may be used as the basis for employment or academic decisions affecting the student and the student’s total educational and/or work experience, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with a student’s employment or academic performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work or educational environment that is severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive.”

Handling Problems

As seen above, when interacting with students, peers, faculty, and other university personnel, you should be respectful of them as they should be respectful of you. NOTE: All students and university personnel must adhere to University policies including policies concerning harassment and romantic relationships. If you are having problems interacting with a student, colleague, faculty member, or other university personnel or if you feel your rights have been violated, you should contact the GPO or Department Chair immediately, follow the directions outlined in the Code of Student Discipline, and contact the Office of Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity in 317 James E. Foy Hall, or call (334) 844-4794 between 7:45 a.m. and 4:45 p.m., Monday through Friday. If you feel your safety is threatened, you should contact law enforcement immediately.

Finally, it is important that you be proactive. Any questions or concerns regarding the appropriateness of your own or another’s behavior should be directed to the GPO or Department Chair immediately. These individuals, rather than your peers (i.e., other graduate students/GTAs) are most qualified to help you.

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty goes beyond plagiarism to include issues such as misrepresentation of authorship, fabrication of research, allowing others to submit work from classes previously taken, submitting the same paper to two separate assignments (self-plagiarism), etc. Review the AU student Handbook, Student Policy eHandbook, and be familiar with your rights as well as the penalties of academic misconduct.

Because some students in the past have expressed confusion as to what may constitute plagiarism, you will be given a copy of the departmental plagiarism policy to read and sign (see Appendix A). You should read Student Policy eHandbook prior to signing this form. The signed copy will be placed in your departmental file.
Course Registration & Grade Policies

Required Courses
All graduate students must take the three required graduate courses – COMM 7000-
Communication Theory, COMM 7020-Quantitative Methods of Research, and COMM 7010-
Historical/Critical/Descriptive Methods of Research (also known as Qualitative Methods) – as
soon as possible. If you have questions about when to enroll in these classes, please contact the
GPO. (Also see Qualifying Exams).

Registering for Courses
To maximize the odds of getting your choice of classes, you should register as soon as
registration opens each semester. You must address any holds on your registration immediately.

Taking NonCMJN Graduate Level Courses
Graduate students take a limited number of CMJN courses while pursuing their degree.
Therefore, you are strongly discouraged from taking courses outside of the CMJN graduate
program. In order to take a nonCMJN class, you must: 1) pass your qualifying exams; 2) select
your Major Advisor and Advisory Committee members; and, 3) gain unanimous approval from
your Advisory Committee to take the class. The Advisory Committee, in consultation with the
GPO, will grant approval (or not) for taking the class. With Advisory Committee approval, you
may take up to nine (9) hours of classes in a closely related area. When making your case to
your committee, you must show how the course(s) pertain to your program of study.

Taking Independent Study Courses
Graduate students are rarely allowed to take an independent study class. The guidelines for
taking an Independent Study Course is the same as for taking a NonCMJN graduate course, and
also requires unanimous approval from your Advisory Committee. Only one independent study
class may be approved for your M.A. program plan of study.

Graduate GPA (GGPA) Requirements
All graduate students must maintain a minimum 3.0 GGPA to remain in good standing at Auburn
University. GTAs whose overall GGPA drops below a 3.0 will automatically lose their GTA
position. See the Graduate School Policies for additional information.

Incomplete Grades Policy
Incomplete grades are awarded only for exceptional circumstances and should be negotiated in
advance of the last day of classes. Once an incomplete grade has been negotiated you have until
the end of the 10th day of classes in the next term (including Summer semester) to turn in all
work. If you miss this deadline, your final grade will be computed with a zero credit for all
missed work, and this grade will be reported to the registrar.
Advising Policies

The GPO acts as the advisor for all graduate students until they pass qualifying exams and have assembled their Advisory Committee.

The Advisory Committee must be composed of a minimum of three graduate faculty, including the Major professor. In the Department of Communication & Journalism, this committee can only be composed of members of the departmental Graduate faculty unless approved by the GPO or Department Chair. This committee will approve the student’s program of study (and Plan of Study form), conduct required examinations, and direct the required internship or thesis.

Choosing a Major Professor and Advisory Committee

After passing qualifying exams, students should select a major professor, set up an Advisory Committee (typically two additional Graduate faculty), and complete a Plan of Study.

1. When selecting your major professor, consider approaching a graduate faculty member with whom you have had a course and who shares a general interest in your academic goals. You can also ask the advice of the GPO or Chair.

2. At your first meeting with your potential major professor, you will discuss your interests and the appropriateness of the thesis and non-thesis options. If both the student and the graduate faculty member decide that they have compatible academic goals and interests, then the major professor will suggest a list of other appropriate graduate faculty members to serve on the Advisory Committee. Preference should be given to graduate faculty members with whom you have taken a class. It is your responsibility to contact these faculty to see if they are interested and/or able to serve on the Advisory Committee.

   a. If pursuing the thesis option, select committee members who have a research or methodological background compatible with the thesis topic.

   b. If pursuing the non-thesis option, select committee members with whom you have taken elective classes (other than COMM 7000, 7010, 7020) whenever possible. Contact the Graduate Faculty Internship Supervisor no later than the 3rd week of the semester to inform him or her that you are seeking an internship. Your internship agreement will be due at the end of the semester prior to beginning the internship.

   c. Once you have assembled your committee, complete and submit your Plan of Study to the Graduate School.
Graduate Program Student Examinations

Qualifying Exams

Graduate students take qualifying exams immediately after successful completion of COMM 7000 (Communication Theory), COMM 7010 (Qualitative Methods), and COMM 7020 (Quantitative Methods). Successful completion is a grade of C or better. The exam consists of these three sections/subject areas (usually 2 hours for each), given over the course of one day in one of the Departmental Computer Labs.

The process is outlined below:

1. **Exam Schedule.** The qualifying exam is given one day at the end of Fall and Spring semester, typically a day or so after final exams are completed. All eligible graduate students are required to take the exam together at the same time.¹

2. **Exam Evaluations.** The exam is written and evaluated by the Qualify Exam Committee. This committee typically consists of the faculty who teach the required classes. In the event that one of these professors is not available, the GPO will evaluate the exams or appoint a substitute. Whenever possible, the GPO will administer the exam such that evaluators will not know whose exam they are reviewing. Students are not allowed to see their qualifying exams after they have submitted them for evaluation.
   a. **Exams are evaluated on a Pass/Fail basis.**
   b. **You must pass all sections of the exam.**

3. **Communicating with Evaluators.** Communication is only allowed with the GPO and should be conducted via email. Thus, questions should be directed to the GPO. Do not contact evaluators directly.

4. **Notification of Status.** You will be notified via email of your performance within two (2) business days of taking the exam.

5. **Successful Completion of Qualifiers.** Students seeking a master’s degree who pass the qualifying exams will be allowed to create their graduate Advisory Committee, complete their Plan of Study, and proceed with their course work, including the capstone project (either a master’s thesis and oral defense, or a professional internship and comprehensive written and oral exams). Students seeking a graduate certificate must successfully complete 18 hours of course work (including the required classes) and pass qualifying exams.

6. **Failing all or part of the Exam.** If you fail all three sections of the exam, you will be informed that you are not qualified to remain in the program, and you will be removed from it.

¹ If you have a documented accommodation from the AU Program for Students with Disabilities you should contact the GPO as soon as possible regarding accommodations.
The following process applies to students who fail one or two sections of the exam:

a. You will be allowed to retake the relevant section or sections.
   i. The date and time for retaking the exam will be scheduled by the GPO. It is normally given within 24-36 hours of the original qualifying exam.
   ii. You will be notified of the results of their retake within two (2) business days.
   iii. If you fail a section again after retaking the exam you may appeal the grading to the departmental Qualifiers Review Committee within one week of notification of failure.

b. If you fail the retake, you will be informed that you are not qualified to continue with your graduate program and will be dropped from the program.

7. **Appeals Process.** Students who fail all or part of the retake exam may appeal. The following process applies:

a. You must notify the GPO by email within one week (five working days) of receiving notification of failure.

b. An ad hoc committee is appointed by the GPO and composed of three (3) Graduate faculty members other than those who initially evaluated the qualifying exams.

c. The Qualifiers Review Committee will review your exam. The Review Committee's decision will be final, and you will be notified as soon as possible of the committee's decision.

8. **Reinstatement Process.** Students who fail qualifiers and have been notified they will be dropped from the program can petition to remain in the graduate program. The petition will be reviewed following procedures outlined in the appeals process (see above). Reinstatement occurs only if, in the committee’s judgment, extraordinary circumstances adversely affected a student’s progress.

a. If the petition is granted, you will be placed on departmental probation.

b. Before taking any additional CMJN graduate courses, you will be required to take the class associated with the failed section again, at the earliest offering. No other class may be substituted. You must take the relevant portion of the qualifying exam again at the end of that semester and pass it.

c. If you fail the exam you will be dropped from the program. There will be no retakes.
Written and Oral Comprehensive Exams

All students seeking the master’s degree must pass comprehensive exams prior to graduation. The nature of the exam can vary depending on your choice of the thesis or non-thesis option (see below). No matter the option you choose, you will have an oral examination (sometimes called an oral defense). The oral defense typically lasts two hours. All members of the Graduate faculty may attend any oral examination as visitors. Your major professor will notify the Graduate faculty of the time and place of your oral examination.

Students Choosing the Thesis Option. Typically, the thesis constitutes the written portion of the comprehensive examination, covering your program of study as well as your research interests. There is also an additional oral examination (typically lasting two hours). Please note that your Advisory Committee could also require a separate written examination. Consult with your Advisor and Committee Members for specific guidelines as to how this may apply to you.

Students Choosing the Non-Thesis Option. The non-thesis option involves passing both a written and oral comprehensive examination covering the program of study as well as any research and special project/internship.

Scheduling Comprehensive Exams. Work closely with your Major professor and your Advisory Committee to schedule all written and oral comprehensive exams at a mutually agreeable time in keeping with the Graduate School calendar. Failure to complete comprehensive exams by the listed Graduate School deadline will delay graduation.

Comprehensive Exams, like Qualifying Exams, are taken at a designated time and place provided to you by the GPO. Thus, neither written nor oral examinations should be scheduled between semesters or during the first or last week of the semester. In order to provide adequate time for written exams to be evaluated, at least one week should be scheduled between the time written exams are completed and the oral defense occurs. Exceptions to this policy can be made with approval of your Advisory Committee and the GPO.

NOTE: It is important that you and your internship supervisors are aware of and willing to schedule your work schedule around the assigned comprehensive exam and oral defense schedule.

Your major professor coordinates with the GPO and Graduate Internship Coordinator when scheduling and organizing the exams, arranging room and equipment reservations, administering the exams, and arranging the oral defense. In the event that your major professor is unavailable to fulfill these duties, a member of your Advisory Committee will. Direct questions about the process to your major professor (or to your Advisory Committee members if s/he is not available).

All exams must be taken in person, in Tichenor Hall, or other designated campus location. If available, a Departmental computer will be provided. Your advisor will provide a storage device to save your responses and distribute them to other committee members.
**Passing Comprehensive Exams.** Successful completion of your exam requires the unanimous support of all members of the Advisory Committee.

**Failing Comprehensive Exams.** If you fail the examination, one reexamination may be given on the recommendation of the Advisory Committee and approval by the Dean of the Graduate School. That examination will be scheduled for the next semester. Further examinations will only be granted under exceptional circumstances with unanimous approval of the student’s Advisory Committee and approval of Auburn University’s Graduate Council.

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**Graduation Requirements**

All students must submit a Plan of Study (Auburn DegreeWorks) and a graduation check to the Graduate School prior to the semester of expected graduation. You will not graduate if you fail to do this. Graduation day is the official last day of each semester and, therefore, is the deadline for submitting Plans of Study and graduation checks for each semester listed in the calendar. It is your responsibility to keep up with and meet all Graduate School deadlines and requirements. Contact the graduate school if you have any questions about meeting requirements and deadlines.

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**Communication Policies**

**Communicating with Faculty**

Your professors will frequently use email to communicate class assignments and other messages to you. Email is the University’s official form of communication, which means you should check it regularly in order to stay abreast of these communications. You should also respond to professor inquiries within one business day of receiving the message.

**Using Social Media**

The variety and ease of communicating with faculty, fellow graduate students, and others is expanding every day. No electronic posting should ever be considered truly confidential and/or private. Carefully consider what comments, photographs, etc. you post. Off handed remarks and inappropriate photos may reflect badly on you and/or the graduate program, the department, and the university. Obtain permission from faculty and your peers prior to posting photographs, personal commentary, etc.

**Interacting with Faculty, Staff & Colleagues**

You are expected to treat office administrative courteously and respectfully. Their primary role is to assist faculty and other university personnel and direct undergraduate students.

When interacting with peers, faculty, and other university personnel, you should be respectful of them as they should be respectful of you. All personnel must adhere to all University policies.
including policies concerning harassment and romantic relationships. If you are having problems interacting with a student, colleague or other university personnel, please contact the GPO or Department Chair immediately. If you feel your safety is threatened, you should contact law enforcement immediately.

**Graduate Teaching Assistantships and University Paid Tuition**

Graduate teaching assistantships (GTAs) are available to U.S. citizens on a competitive basis. For more information regarding teaching assistantships, you can review information available online at the [departmental website](#) or consult with the GPO.
Appendix A: Plagiarism Policy on Originality of Student Work

All written or oral work submitted for credit must be the product of each student’s individual effort. The learning process involves making one’s own mistakes, then discovering the principles involved as well as ways to avoid similar mistakes in the future. As a part of the process of preparing a piece of original work for final evaluation:

- It is acceptable to receive informal assistance, such as asking another student to review your work and make constructive suggestions about its structure and/or content or proofread a paper for typographical errors.
- It is unacceptable to receive any substantive help, such as having another person write or rewrite your paper or to collaborate with someone (share information, outlines, or other research) on your paper. When you receive such help, you are engaging in academic misconduct. It is also unacceptable for students to engage in self-plagiarism. Self-plagiarism refers to the practice of turning in all or part of an assignment completed for one class to fulfill assignment requirements in another class.

The Department of Communication & Journalism follows the University's policy for academic misconduct in the Student Code of Conduct (see the student policy handbook: http://www.auburn.edu/student_info/student_policies/). You are responsible for knowing and adhering to those guidelines. They apply not only to those students who are currently enrolled, but also to those who are NOT currently enrolled.

“Plagiarism comes from plagiarius, the Latin word for kidnapper.” (Lucas, *The Art of Public Speaking*, p. 43). Plagiarism occurs when you use all or part of another person’s work, or paraphrase that work, as your own.

Common types of plagiarism include:

1) Global plagiarism is “stealing your paper [or other project] entirely from another source and passing it off as your own. [It is t]he most blatant – and unforgivable – kind of plagiarism, it is grossly unethical” (p. 43).

2) Patchwork plagiarism occurs when a writer essentially copies the work word-for-word from a few sources. It is no less plagiarism than copying a work from a single source (p. 45). It is essentially a cut-and-paste job of ideas and words that are not your own. Using a wide variety of research materials will help you to avoid patchwork plagiarism.

3) Incremental plagiarism occurs when the writer fails to give credit for specific parts or “increments” of the paper that are borrowed from other sources. When you quote or paraphrase sources, be sure to give credit to the original source. When in doubt, CITE! and always place direct quotes in quotation marks.

To summarize, common cases of academic misconduct relating to cheating or plagiarizing include (but are not limited to):

- Representing another’s work as your own. This includes copying (completely or partially) a published work (including anything on the Internet and/or worldwide web) without giving credit to the author, or copying (completely or partially) an outline, paper, or exam; or,
- Sharing your work with another person, including lending or otherwise supplying another person with your graded or ungraded assignments, or collaborating on assignments that were to be the product of your individual effort.
- Turning in all or part of an assignment completed for one class as an original effort to fulfill assignment requirements in another class.

Print Your Name: _______________________________________________ Date: _________________________
Appendix B

Graduate Student Policy Manual Acknowledgment

Name: ____________________________________________________________ (printed)

Student Identification Number: ________________________________

I have read and understood the policies stated in the Auburn University Department of Communication and Journalism Graduate Student Policy Manual and agree to abide by them.

Signed: ___________________________________________ Date: ________________