

## Communication Arts & Sciences Department Penn State University

### Check-List and Program Roadmap for Students Seeking a Master's Degree<sup>1</sup>

#### Prelude: Before Year 1

- Read your offer letter carefully. This letter explains the department's responsibilities to you, and it explains the basic duties and responsibilities that you have to the department. Keep this letter safe!
- Get familiar with the department's graduate program website. These pages act as your "handbook" during your degree. (<http://cas.la.psu.edu/graduate/current-students>)
- Review the department's statement about what it means to be graduate student and assistant. (<http://cas.la.psu.edu/graduate/current-students/graduate-handbook/milestones-and-best-practices-faq/what-does-being-a-graduate-assistant-mean>)
- Review the Graduate School's Policy and Procedures webpage: <http://gradschool.psu.edu/current-students/student/>
- Review the resources identified by the Graduate School: <http://gradschool.psu.edu/current-students/graduate-student-resource-guide/>
- Register for fall classes by working with your temporary advisor and the Graduate Program Assistant, who is able to register you in the first semester. You will register yourself in every semester thereafter.

#### Year 1: Fall Semester/Semester #1

- Attend and participate in the department's New Student Orientation.
- During the first or second week of class, meet with your temporary adviser. It is often helpful to discuss the following topics:
  - Why you chose to pursue graduate work in Communication.
  - Whether or not you hope to pursue a Ph.D. after the MA.
  - Which conferences you should attend either in your first or second year.
  - The types of jobs that exist in the academy and the type of training and professionalization that is necessary for these jobs.
  - How best to succeed in this program as a Master's student.
  - What makes a graduate course/seminar different from an undergraduate course.
- The first week of *September* you should download a copy of the MA Thesis Outline ([http://cas.la.psu.edu/graduate/documents/MA\\_outline\\_thesis.pdf/view](http://cas.la.psu.edu/graduate/documents/MA_outline_thesis.pdf/view)) from the department website. Discuss with your temporary adviser the courses that you should take in the spring and begin to fill out the Master's Thesis Outline form.
- **October 16, 2017:** Register for 9 course credits.
- SARI Responsibilities, Online Courses.

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<sup>1</sup> This checklist presents an ideal timeline. Individual circumstances and needs vary; consequently, the schedule you follow also may vary provided you have the support of your adviser and make adequate progress.

- By **November 1, 2017** students who are new to the CAS program should have taken **two** “on-line” courses offered by [the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative](#). By creating an account with the CITI program (<http://citi.psu.edu>) you should gain access to the following two online courses:
  1. Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) course.
  2. Social and Behavioral Human Subjects Research (IRB) course.

When you have completed each course, print out the certificate that indicates successful completion and bring it into the office to show the Graduate Program Assistant, who will record your success.

- *October*: Take the time become familiar with those university <http://guru.psu.edu/policies/> and departmental <http://cas.la.psu.edu/graduate/current-students> policies that apply to you. For example:
  - [Research policies](#)
  - [Award applications process](#) for conference travel, specialized training and research.
  - [Mentoring and advising policy](#), which stipulates the principles that guide your relationships to your advisor and mentors within the department.

### **Year 1: Spring Semester/Semester #2**

- By early or mid-**March of 2018**, you should have chosen a permanent adviser. After your permanent adviser has agreed to serve, please inform your temporary adviser and thank her or him for their service.
- When prompted by the Graduate Program Assistant, assemble the necessary material for your annual progress review. This request typically arrives in your email box in early *February* and the meetings listed below will help you fill out the forms for this review. Your data is usually due to the Graduate Program Assistant in late *March*, but you will be given a specific deadline.
- In consultation with your adviser, identify the potential members of your Master’s committee and invite them to join the committee. Prepare an MA Program Proposal for your committee. Your permanent advisor can provide you with guidance as to what should be in this proposal.
- This committee should include at least 3 individuals from your research field/specialization within the department, including your adviser. You do not need an outside of the department member, though your advisor may suggest one.
- Please inform Kirt Wilson and the Graduate Program Assistant who will serve on your committee via email.
- Discuss with your adviser whether you will be taking a course this summer. If you will, you need to inform the Graduate Program Assistant and go through the process of applying for the Summer Tuition Assistance Program (<https://secure.gradsch.psu.edu/stap/>). STAP applications open in February and must be completed by April.
- Sometime in late March you should prepare for your MA Program of Study Meeting by developing your Program of Study document. Your Program of Study document should explain:
  - Why you are seeking a Master’s degree.
  - The details of your course and professional background that will facilitate the degree process.

- Your proposed program of further study, including a list of relevant courses you intend to take.
- The general area of research you hope to pursue in your Master's Thesis.

General guidelines for this document can be found here:

<http://cas.la.psu.edu/graduate/current-students/graduate-handbook/milestones-and-best-practices-faq/how-to-do-i-develop-a-program-of-study-proposal>, but you should follow the expectations and recommendations of your adviser.

- Schedule the MA Proposal Meeting before *mid April*, and inform the Graduate Program Assistant of the date and time of this meeting at least 7 days prior to the scheduled date. Please distribute any written materials that your adviser has requested as part of this candidacy exam. This may include your current CV, a Program Proposal Statement, a Professional Identity Statement and/or your BA and first semester transcripts.
- *March*: Select your courses (9 credit hours) for the fall semester. If you intend to take courses this summer, identify those courses and discuss with your adviser and the Graduate Program Assistant [how these courses will be funded](#). It is essential that the Graduate Program Assistant know, as soon as possible, if you are taking summer courses so that we can file the appropriate forms to fund those courses.
- *April*: Schedule a meeting with your adviser. At this meeting, be sure to discuss:
  - Your progress over the course of your first year. Share your grades and any accomplishments, awards or publications that you achieved.
  - Your academic goals for the next year, especially those goals that are related to methodological or theory training, narrowing your thesis project.
  - Your professional goals for the summer and fall, especially those goals that relate to conference submissions, publishing, teaching certification, grant writing workshops, etc.

### **Year 2: Fall Semester / Semester #3**

- In *September* meet with your adviser to:
  - Confirm that the course plan you developed last spring will work given the offerings both in and out of the department.
  - Discuss your progress on the goals you created in April of this year.
  - Discuss whether there are any unique opportunities that you should pursue this year, e.g., Specialized Training, Teaching Certificate, Teaching internships in the dept., etc.
    - *In October* register for 3 course credits and 6 credits of CAS 600 with the Graduate Program Assistant for the coming spring semester. (Note that you may need 9 course credits depending on what your advisor and committee recommend and the number of credits already completed).
    - Between *October* and *January*, you need to create and defend a Thesis Proposal (prospectus).
      - A thesis proposal may be shorter than a dissertation prospectus, but it is still useful to review the department's guidelines for the dissertation proposal.
      - Discuss with your adviser her or his expectations for the proposal.
      - Write and then distribute the proposal to your committee at least two weeks prior to your desired defense date.

- Inform the Graduate Program Assistant of the date/time you intend to defend your prospectus. This **requires at least 7 days notice**.
- *December*: Before you leave for the holidays, I will send you an email that invites you to decide whether you will “reapply” to the Ph.D. Be sure to discuss this decision with your adviser before you leave town. If you choose the continue, the Graduate Program Assistant will specify a date in early *January* by which you must submit to her:
  - A formal letter of application, which explains your history with the department and what you hope to accomplish in continuing with a Ph.D.
  - A letter of recommendation from your adviser.

#### **Year 2: Spring Semester / Semester #4**

- Over the holidays, review the Graduate School’s web page that describes the process of submitting your thesis (<http://www.gradsch.psu.edu/current/thesis.html>). Read especially the PDF version of the Thesis Guide AND the webpage that identifies the appropriate **DEADLINES** for completion in that academic year (<http://gradschool.psu.edu/current-students/etd/thesisdissertationperformance-calendar/>).
- Complete the Thesis
  - At the start of the semester in which you plan to finish your thesis activate the “intent to graduate” in LionPath. *Be aware of the deadlines that apply to this activation process.*
  - Distribute the thesis to the Committee once your adviser approves it for release.
  - Upload a copy of the dissertation for “format review” to <https://etda.libraries.psu.edu> by the *appropriate deadline*.
  - Schedule a defense date with your committee to occur no sooner than two weeks *after* the committee received the completed thesis. (Three weeks is often appreciated). Inform the Graduate Program Assistant of your defense date and time.
  - Make any revisions to the thesis requested by your committee.
  - Submit the final approved formatted thesis and the Master’s Signatory Page. Double check *the appropriate deadlines*.<sup>1</sup>
  - Please also submit a bound copy of your thesis to the department and, as a courtesy, a bound copy to your advisor.
- ⑦ Congratulations: You are done! Consider walking at commencement.
- ⑦ When prompted by the Graduate Program Assistant, assemble the necessary material for your annual progress review. This request should arrive in your email box in early *February*, and the meeting described below will help you fill out the forms for this review. The deadline to submit your data likely will be set for late *March*.
- ⑦ Once you have been officially approved to re-enter the program as a doctoral student, you are free to select courses for the fall semester.

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<sup>1</sup> The Graduate Program Assistant is available to make sure you turn in the appropriate forms with the right signatures.

## **Summary of the Requirements for a Master's Degree**

**Credit Requirements:** (minimum of 24 “course credits” and 6 “thesis credits” CAS 600).

- At least 3 credits of course work outside of your area of specialization.
- At least 3 credits of course work focusing on research methodology.

**Other Requirements:**

- Pass your Master's Program Proposal by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester.
- Pass the required online SARI courses.
- Pass your MA thesis proposal (prospectus), optimally by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester.
- Pass the oral defense of your Master's Thesis (optimally in the 4<sup>th</sup> semester).