



College of Media, Communication and Information  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

**Ph.D. in Media Research and Practice**  
**Strategic Communication**  
**Journalism Studies**

**I. Program Overview**

The Ph.D. programs in Strategic Communication and Journalism Studies fall under the Media Research and Practice (MDRP) umbrella and are jointly administered and taught by faculty in the departments of Advertising, Public Relations & Design (APRD) and Journalism (JRNL) in the College of Media, Communication and Information (CMCI) at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Drawing on contemporary sociological, cultural, cognitive and political theory, the program focuses on interactions among the major components of modern mass communication — media institutions, including their content, practices and messages; media audiences or publics; and media effects. The program examines those processes on an interdisciplinary basis through social, economic, political, historical, legal/policy/regulatory and international perspectives.

Students graduate from the program with broad knowledge of the intellectual history of media and communication as an important interdisciplinary field of inquiry – its origins; its perennial questions and controversies; its evolution in response to technological, political, economic and cultural change; the full range of methods it employs, both humanistic and social scientific – and a demonstrated capacity to design and execute original and socially significant research about media.

The program strives to produce graduates who demonstrate intellectual leadership, nationally and internationally, in the area of research specialization they choose. An important part of doctoral students' education is their participation in the departments' research and teaching missions through their assignments as teaching assistants or instructors, and as research assistants.

Doctoral students in Strategic Communication and in Journalism Studies take 46 credit hours of coursework and 30 dissertation credit hours for a total of 76 hours. The coursework includes a required foundational core consisting of the two-semester (6 hours) Proseminar in Mass Communication Theory, one semester each of qualitative and quantitative research methods (6 hours); one semester of Research Design (3 hours), and four semesters of Doctoral Professionalization Seminar (4 hours) — all of which are taken in the first year and second year. The requirements also include 6 courses (18 hours) representing an area of concentration, which must include three courses each from both inside and outside CMCI; and 3 courses (9 hours) of advanced methods, which may be taken inside or outside of the two home departments. A preliminary program plan, comprehensive examinations, a dissertation and a dissertation defense also are required. Students are expected to complete the program and defend the dissertation in four years.

## **II. Requirements for the Ph.D. in Strategic Communication/Journalism Studies**

It is expected that a student will devote her or his full time to the doctoral program and assistantship duties during the fall and spring semesters while in the program, unless other arrangements have been made with the department.

The following is a summary of minimum requirements to earn a Ph.D. in Strategic Communication or in Journalism Studies. Students will take two semesters of Proseminar, two semesters of methods, four semesters of Doctoral Professionalization Seminar and 30 credits of electives, which must include 9 credits of advanced methods electives. Students are expected to take courses numbered at the 6000 or above levels. There are some exceptions to this in which doctoral students can receive permission to take 5000-level courses.

1. Proseminar in Mass Communication (6 Credits): All doctoral students are required to enroll in JRNL/APRD 7001 in their first semester of study, and in JRNL/APRD 7003 in their second semester. These courses are designed to introduce students to the major paradigms within the field of mass communication.
2. Doctoral Professionalization Seminar (4 Credits): All first- and second-year doctoral students will be required to enroll in JRNL/APRD 7004. The course, which is 1 credit each semester, prepares students for life in a doctoral program and for life after one, all while providing a sense of community amongst multiple doctoral cohorts and both departments' faculty.

3. Methods (15 Credits): All first-year doctoral students enroll in Quantitative Research Methods in the fall, and in Qualitative Research Methods in the spring. These general courses deal with a variety of research methods used within the field. PhD students are also required to take three additional graduate level courses in the areas of research methods (9 hours). These may be taken inside or outside the departments.
4. Research Design (3 hours): Doctoral students are required to take JRNL/APRD 7002 in the first semester of their second year. This class is designed to bridge the gap between theory and method. Students will design multiple studies of interest during the course.
5. Area of Concentration (18 hours): Doctoral students are required to take a minimum of 18 hours of course work selected on the basis of the student's area(s) of research interest. These courses should come from a combination of both inside and outside electives. For example, for a student interested in media effects, a combination of classes from both APRD/JRNL and psychology would make sense.
6. Independent study: Ph.D. students may take a **maximum** of two independent study courses in their course of study, either inside APRD and JRNL or outside of those home departments. Generally, these will be taken no earlier than the third semester of the program.
7. Comprehensive examinations: Each doctoral student will be required to pass comprehensive examinations, consisting of four questions, which are generally administered after the last semester in which the student takes course work. The examinations are individually tailored for each student and comprise both written and oral examinations.
8. Dissertation: A minimum of thirty hours of dissertation credit, MDRP 8991, must be taken. Various restrictions apply to these hours.
  - No more than 10 dissertation credit hours may be taken in any one semester
  - No more than 10 dissertation credit hours may be taken prior to the semester in which comprehensive examinations are taken.
  - No more than 10 dissertation credit hours may be taken in the semester in which comprehensive examinations are taken.
  - After passing comprehensive examinations, student must enroll for at least 5 dissertation credit hours (full time) or 3 dissertation credit hours (part time) each semester until graduation.

Typically students enroll for 10 dissertation hours in the semester they are taking comprehensive examinations and 10 dissertation hours each in the following fall and spring terms. Students must be aware of Graduate School rules regarding registration for dissertation hours, see:

<http://www.colorado.edu/GraduateSchool/policies/index.html> .

\* \* \*

Within these requirements, the program is reasonably flexible. There is no single, “correct” schedule of courses for students. Rather, each student, in consultation initially with their home department’s Director of Graduate Studies and later with the student’s committee chair and committee, is expected to develop a program best suited to the student’s needs and interests.

In addition to the requirements listed above, the Progress and Evaluation Committee, or the student’s committee chair or committee with the Progress and Evaluation Committee’s approval, may strongly recommend or even require additional course work for individual students. Such requirements are particularly likely for students just beginning their studies in the field. Students without a professional or academic background in mass communication may be required to take courses that will offer the student a familiarity with the field. Appeals of additional requirements may be made to the departmental Director of Graduate Studies, and then to the CMCI Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research.

It is expected that a doctoral student will complete the program within four years. The CU Graduate School requires completion within six years of admission to the program.

### **Transfer of credit**

As a general policy, the MDRP PhD program does not accept transfer credits into the doctoral program. The Progress and Evaluation Committee and/or the Director of Graduate Studies, however, may approve the transfer of **a maximum** of one doctoral-level course into the program, on the condition that the course was not used to fulfill requirements in any other degree program.

## Timeline

Students are required to complete 46 course credit hours, which typically means completing 14 courses plus the Doctoral Professionalization Seminar. This may be done in various ways. For example, a student may choose to take three courses in the first semester of study rather than the required two. The following timeline provides one possible way of completing required course work

### Year One

Fall/Semester #1 = 7 credits required, potentially 10 credits

Proseminar (required)

Quantitative Methods (required)

Doctoral Professionalization Seminar I (required)

Elective (optional)

Spring/Semester #2 = 10 credits

Proseminar (required)

Qualitative Methods (required)

Doctoral Professionalization Seminar II (required)

Elective

**A student is required to file a preliminary program plan with the Progress and Evaluation Committee in semester #2.**

### Year Two

Fall/Semester #3 = 10 credits

3 electives

Doctoral Professionalization Seminar III (required)

Spring/Semester #4 = 10 credits

3 electives

Doctoral Professionalization Seminar IV (required)

**Students select a committee chair *no later than* early semester #4.**

### Year Three

Fall/Semester #5 = 9 credits

3 electives

Spring/Semester #6

Take comprehensive examinations

Prepare and obtain committee approval of a dissertation prospectus

## **Year Four**

Research, write and defend the student's dissertation

**Note on advising: The home department's Director of Graduate Studies serves as a doctoral student's advisor until the student has selected a dissertation committee chair. In most cases, it is advisable for a student to select a chair no later than the fourth semester of study after interacting with several faculty members and becoming familiar with their research interests and mentoring styles.**

**Note: Doctoral students, the Director of Graduate Studies and committee chairs are responsible equally for being certain that students' graduate programs satisfy all graduation requirements, both those of MDRP and of the Graduate School. Accordingly, every student should become thoroughly familiar with the section in the University of Colorado at Boulder Catalog entitled "Requirements for Advanced Degrees" and with the information in this document.**

### **III. Financial Aid**

Students accepted into the MDRP doctoral program hold an assistantship appointment that provides both a monthly stipend and a waiver of tuition costs. This funding is guaranteed, based on the student making adequate progress toward the degree, for a total of eight semesters.

Doctoral students receiving financial support are expected to make satisfactory progress through the program and perform assistantship duties in a satisfactory manner, both to be determined by the graduate faculty. Satisfactory progress should culminate in the award of a degree within four years from entering the program.

In addition to assistantships, doctoral students are eligible for fellowship awards. Criteria and deadlines for these awards are announced during spring semester. A student with an excellent academic record, strong recommendations and high GRE scores may be nominated by faculty in APRD and JRNL to compete for one of several fellowships awarded by the Graduate School. Excellent fellowships are available for qualified minority students.

Doctoral students also may receive need-based awards granted by the Graduate School. To be eligible for these awards, a doctoral student must submit financial need information to the campus Financial Aid Office prior to April 1.

**Duration of funding:** Each student in the program has a 50 percent appointment that will be granted for eight semesters, assuming satisfactory progress in the program. Typically, funding comes from the MDRP PhD program but it may also come from an outside grant administered by one of the departments affiliated with the MDRP or one of the faculty in those departments. Regardless of whether a student's funding comes from internal or external sources, the total time of funding will be for eight semesters.

**Exclusions:** If a student generates his or her own external funding, either individually or in collaboration with a faculty member, this may be used to extend residency beyond the eight-semester limit.

**Exceptions:** The departments' Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with the Graduate Faculty, may consider exceptions to this general policy when required by an individual student's extraordinary circumstances.

#### **IV. Approving students' programs: Progress and Evaluation Committee and students' committees**

By the middle of the second semester in residency, the student is required to submit a preliminary program proposal to the Progress and Evaluation Committee, which is composed of faculty members who teach the first-year cohort in the Prosem and Methods courses (fall and spring), the DGS from both APRD and JRNL will serve in an *ex officio* capacity.

That petition includes a statement of purpose for the program, i.e., a research focus, a design of the curriculum the student expects to complete (within the guidelines specified above), an explanation of why each course is pertinent to the student's research interests and a timetable for completion. The Progress and Evaluation Committee may require changes in the preliminary program statement and establish a deadline for resubmission of the petition.

The Progress and Evaluation Committee's role is most significant in a student's first two years in the program. When a student selects a committee chair, mentoring or guidance will come primarily from the chair. Once a student has a chair, any changes in course selection will be discussed thoroughly with the chair.

#### **V. Student's Advisor and Committee**

Upon matriculation, each student initially is advised by their home department's Director of Graduate Studies. The Graduate Director serves as a student's advisor until the student has selected a dissertation committee chair. The dissertation committee chair must be a faculty member of the any one of the departments of APRD or JRNL. **Selection of an advisor should occur no later than a student's fourth semester in the program.**

Prior to taking comprehensive examinations, the student, in consultation with his or her committee chair, will select a committee of four additional graduate faculty members, at least two and as many as three of whom are members of the APRD or JRNL departments, and a minimum of one graduate faculty member from outside of CMCI. This committee, which must be approved by the Graduate School, will prepare and evaluate the student's written and oral comprehensive examinations (see Section VII below), oversee the student's dissertation and conduct the student's final defense of the dissertation.

Any changes in the committee membership subsequent to comprehensive examinations must be approved by the students' home department's Graduate Director, the student's committee chair and the Graduate School.

## **VI. Admission to Candidacy**

After writing and defending the comprehensive examination, the student must make formal application for admission to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree on a Graduate School form, submitted with the exam form, which is signed by the committee and chair at the defense.

Admission to candidacy shall be granted after the student has (1) earned at least three semesters of residence, (2) completed required course work and (2) passed the written and oral portions of the student's comprehensive examination.

Normally, a student must have earned at least three and not more than six semesters of residency before admission to candidacy.

## **VII. Comprehensive Examination**

The comprehensive examination generally is taken during or in the semester following the student's last semester of course work. It consists of a written examination and an oral examination. The written examination is intended to test the student's knowledge of course work and readings in the following areas: (a) communication theory, (b) theory and/or pertinent material to the student's area of interest and (c) qualitative and quantitative methods, with an emphasis on the method(s) the student will use for dissertation research.

The examination is an opportunity for the student to show an ability to synthesize wide-ranging concepts presented in the courses the student has taken. The theory and research methods examinations will test a basic understanding of a core of information, and also test advanced knowledge of areas pertinent to the student's individual program of study.

The written comprehensive questions will be prepared by the student's committee chair and committee members (Committee members may consult with other appropriate graduate faculty members.). Each portion of the examination will be administered as the student's committee chooses, with the stipulation that the entire written examination be taken within ten calendar days.

The oral portion of the comprehensive examination will be approximately two to three hours in length, and will be administered by the student's committee within two to three weeks after the written examination. At the oral examination, committee members may ask for clarification of written answers and ask additional questions related to the examination material or to the student's course work. There also may be questions about the student's proposed dissertation. Except in unusual circumstances, each member of the oral examining committee will have been involved in preparing and evaluating the student's written comprehensive examination. The oral examination is open to members of the faculty and, if the student and committee agree, to the academic community generally.

The written and oral comprehensive examinations will be evaluated as a whole. A successful candidate must receive the affirmative votes of a majority of the examiners. In case of failure, the examination may be attempted once more after a period of time determined by the examining committee. Additional attempts to pass the comprehensive examinations may be undertaken only with the approval of the student's committee, Graduate Director, and the chair of any of the two departments.

The Graduate School must approve the membership of the student's committee prior to administration of the comprehensive examinations.

### **VIII. The Ph.D. Dissertation**

A description of the student's proposed dissertation topic is to be submitted for review and acceptance by the student's committee chair and committee no later than the end of the semester after the student successfully completes the comprehensive examination.

The dissertation prospectus will be prepared in consultation with the student's committee chair and approved by the committee. The committee must approve major changes in the dissertation approach or method thereafter.

The Ph.D. dissertation must be based upon original investigation and demonstrate mature scholarship and critical judgment as well as familiarity with appropriate tools and methods of research. It should be an important contribution to knowledge in the student's chosen field of interest.

Students are expected to familiarize themselves thoroughly with the various Graduate School rules governing the format and deadlines for the dissertation.

## **IX. The Dissertation Oral Defense**

After the committee has accepted the dissertation, it will hold a final oral defense of the dissertation and related topics. A student must notify the Graduate School of the final oral defense at least two weeks before the scheduled defense date. The student's committee (which must include a minimum of five graduate faculty members, at least one of whom must be from outside CMCI) will conduct the defense. More than one negative vote will disqualify the candidate in the oral defense. The oral defense is open to all who wish to attend.

## **X. Additional Graduate School Requirements**

1. *Residence Requirement:* All candidates for the Ph.D. degree must spend a minimum of six full semesters in residence at the University of Colorado at Boulder as full-time students. A maximum of two semesters of residence credit may be allowed for a master's degree from another institution of approved standing.
2. *Grades and Grade Point Average:* A course grade below "B-" in doctoral studies is unsatisfactory and will not be counted toward fulfilling the requirements for the degree. The MDRP program requires doctoral students to maintain a grade point average of no less than 3.25 (A=4). The home department's Director of Graduate Studies reserves the right to withdraw assistantship funding or to terminate enrollment of a doctoral student if he/she fails to achieve a GPA of 3.25 or higher by the end of the fall semester of the second year of study; receives more than one low-performance evaluations from faculty in TA or RA work; or fails to submit an acceptable preliminary program proposal as evaluated by the Progress and Evaluation Committee. Requirements for grades and quality of work are established by the Graduate School: <http://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/policies> The Director of Graduate Studies retains the authority to establish additional probationary requirements for students when their work falls below expectations.
3. *Continuous Registration:* Doctoral students who have passed their comprehensive examinations must remain continuously registered for five dissertation hours every fall and spring semester they are on campus, including the semester of the oral defense. Students will be so registered only if they are making satisfactory progress toward the completion of their degrees and are in good standing. Students away from campus may take only three dissertation hours each fall and spring. In any event, by the time they graduate, students must have a total of at least 30 hours of doctoral thesis credit.

## **XI. Travel Funds for Ph.D. Students**

Students in the PhD program are strongly encouraged to present scholarly papers at, and otherwise participate in, appropriate academic meetings and conventions. To support these activities within the constraints of the program's budget, the office of the CMCI Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research has established the following policy to help defray the costs of attending such conventions and meetings:

PhD students who have their research accepted for presentation at an academic conference (documented with an email of acceptance) are eligible, during a given AY (July 1 of one year to June 30 of the next year) to request/receive a maximum of \$500. Funds not used in a given AY do not roll over into the next AY, and students cannot draw in advance on funds from the next AY.

All doctoral student requests for funding should be submitted to their department's Director of Graduate Studies who will make recommendations to the CMCI Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research. The Associate Dean has final authority to award funds as stated in this policy.

Also, students presenting research findings at conferences and meetings may apply directly to their department and to the Graduate School for travel funds. Information and application forms may be obtained from the Graduate School.

## **XII. Student Appeals, Complaints & Grievances**

### **Grading and Treatment in Courses**

The information provided here refers to grading and treatment within courses.

#### **A. Disputes about Fairness of Grading**

**1. Informal Student and Instructor Meeting.** It is the responsibility of the student and instructor, including both the section and course instructor where applicable, to first attempt to resolve any grievance. If a student has a question regarding a grade or his/her performance in a course s/he must first communicate with the instructor(s) in that course to resolve the question.

**2. Written Appeal and Meet with the student's departmental Director of Graduate Studies.** If the student and instructor are not able to resolve the question regarding the student's performance in the course, the student's grade in the course, or the grading policy, the student shall have the option of making a formal written appeal to the Director of Graduate Studies. However, students need to be aware, as stated in the University of Colorado Boulder policy document regarding issues of grades, that department chairs, directors of graduate studies,

and college deans **cannot require** an instructor to change a properly assigned course grade. Issues of disagreement about whether, for example, a given essay was worth, say, a B or an A, are decided solely by the individual instructor in charge. (See Student Appeals, Complaints and Grievances: A Brief Guide: <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/student-appeals-complaints-and-grievances-brief-guide>)

The appeal needs to specify the problem, the reasons for the grievance, and the remedy desired by the student, and it must be submitted within 60 days of the end of the academic term in which the course was taken. In filing a grievance, the student is expected to provide:

- The name of the person against whom the grievance is made.
- The specific charges, including the date and time of the event(s) precipitating the charge.
- A statement of the student right(s) that was (were) violated.
- A detailed statement of the circumstances and available evidence.
- The names and addresses of witnesses, if any.
- The resolution sought.

After reviewing relevant materials (e.g., grades, grading policy information) the departmental Director of Graduate Studies will meet separately with the student and the instructor and will make a recommendation to the faculty member about his/her grading action. The recommended actions will be communicated to both parties in writing.

**3. Appeal to the College of Media, Communication & Information Associate Dean of Graduate Studies.** If a student is dissatisfied with the departmental Director of Graduate Studies' decision, or if a faculty member decides to not follow the recommendation made by the Director of Graduate Studies, written materials may be forwarded to CMCI Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. The Associate Dean will convey his/her recommendation to both parties in writing.

**B. Issues about Faculty Conduct, Academic Advising, or Course Content**

If it is reasonable, students should begin with the individual faculty person or advisor to discuss and resolve the problem together. If this fails, a student should contact the faculty member's department chair. If the decision the Chair makes is judged by the student as unacceptable, the student may contact the Dean's office.

**C. Issues Related to Civil Rights Violations, Sexual Harassment, Disability-Linked Discrimination, or Other Kinds of Complaints**

The university provides detailed information about how to pursue appeals, complaints, and grievances of a variety of types. For many of these issues, there are campus offices available to assist a person with a concern. Students can find out about this information at:

<http://www.colorado.edu/policies/appealsguide.html>