



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

Ph.D. in Media Research and Practice (MDRP)
Journalism Studies Track
Department of Journalism (JRNL)

I. Program Overview

The Ph.D. in Journalism Studies is a distinct doctoral track in the Media Research and Practice (MDRP) degree program, and is administered and taught by faculty in the department of Journalism (JRNL) in the College of Media, Communication and Information (CMCI) at the University of Colorado Boulder.

The PhD in Journalism Studies focuses on exploring the intersection of journalism and society. Students gain a solid foundation through coursework that explores the theories and methods that shape mass communication research. The multidisciplinary program examines not only traditional journalism, but also the ever-increasing boundaries of the industry, including user-generated content, citizen journalism, the audience's impact on news production, social media's role in news, new quasi-journalistic outlets, etc. Students research institutions, content, audiences and publics – and they can approach these subjects through many lenses: sociological, psychological, historical, cultural, political, economic, legal and more.

Students graduate from the program with a broad knowledge of the history of journalism and mass communication; its theories and methods; its current issues; and how numerous other disciplines study journalism and the news. The program graduates students who can design and execute research about mass communication, and specifically journalism studies. An important part of doctoral students' education is their participation in the department's – and the college's – research and teaching missions through their assignments as teaching assistants or instructors, and as research assistants.

The program strives to produce graduates who demonstrate intellectual leadership, nationally and internationally, in the area of research they choose. An important part of our doctoral students' education is their participation in the department's research and teaching missions through their assignments as research assistants, teaching assistants and instructors, and collaborations with faculty and fellow doctoral students both inside and outside of the department.

Doctoral students in JRNL take 46 credit hours of coursework and 30 dissertation credit hours for a total of 76 hours. The coursework includes a required foundational core taken during the first and second year consisting of the two-semester Proseminar in Mass Communication Theory, one semester of Qualitative Research Methods, one semester of Quantitative Research Methods, and four semesters of Doctoral Professionalization Seminar. Students will also take coursework, both inside and outside of JRNL, in their area of concentration, and advanced methods courses, which may be taken inside and outside of JRNL.

A plan of study, comprehensive examinations, dissertation proposal, dissertation research and a dissertation defense also are required. Students are expected to complete the program and defend the dissertation in four years. Additional details about the program requirements are included below in section II.

II. Requirements for the Ph.D. in 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 and approved by the department.

The following is a summary of minimum requirements to earn a Ph.D. in JRNL. Students will take two semesters of Proseminar, two semesters of Methods, four semesters of Doctoral Professionalization Seminar and 30 credits of 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, and specifically within the area of journalism studies.
2. Doctoral Professionalization Seminar (4 Credits): All first- and second-year doctoral students are required to enroll in the one-credit JRNL/APRD 7004 course. The course 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. This course will guide students' creation of their research statement, teaching philosophy, and plan of study documents.
3. Research Design (3 Credits): All doctoral students are required to enroll in JRNL/APRD 7002 in their third semester of study.

4. Methods (15 Credits): All first-year doctoral students enroll in Quantitative Research Methods in the fall, and in Qualitative Research Methods in the spring (6 Credits total). These general courses deal with a variety of research methods used within the field. Students are also required to take three additional graduate level courses in the areas of research methods (9 Credits). These may be taken inside or outside the department.
5. Area of Concentration (18 Credits): 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 JRNL and Psychology would make sense.
6. Independent Study (3 Credits): Ph.D. students may take a **maximum** of six credit hours of independent study courses in their course of study, either inside or outside of JRNL. Generally, these will be taken no earlier than the third semester of the program.
7. Plan of Study: During the Ph.D. student's second semester, the student will submit a Plan of Study with the Progress and Evaluation Committee. The Plan of Study will specify courses the student plans to take to fulfill method and elective requirements related to his/her area(s) of research interest. The Plan of Study will also form the basis of the student's Comprehensive Examination Committee and topic areas.
8. Comprehensive Examinations: Each doctoral student is required to pass comprehensive examinations, which qualify the student for progressing in the program as a Ph.D. Candidate and begin the dissertation process. The Comprehensive Examination consists of five questions, overseen by five faculty members of the student's choosing, which includes his or her advisor/chair and an outside member. Comprehensive Examinations 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 responses and an oral defense. After a successful oral defense, the graduate student is awarded the title of doctoral candidate and proceeds to write and defend a dissertation proposal.
9. Dissertation (30 Credits): Ph.D. Candidates will enroll in a minimum of 30 hours of dissertation credit, JRNL 8991, which involve writing and defending a dissertation prospectus, conducting research and data analysis, writing a dissertation and defending a dissertation to the committee. Various restrictions apply to these hours:
 - Ph.D. students must be registered as full time, regular degree-seeking students at CU Boulder, for a minimum of 5 dissertation hours during the semester in which they pass the doctoral examination.

- 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 if the student is no longer registered in coursework.
- 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.

In addition to the requirements listed above, the Progress and Evaluation Committee, or the student's advisor/chair along with the Progress and Evaluation Committee's approval, may strongly recommend or even require additional coursework. Such requirements are particularly likely for students just beginning their studies in the field. Students without a professional or academic background 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 Director or Graduate Studies, and then to the CMCI Associate Dean of Graduate Programs 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 JRNL Ph.D. program does not accept transfer credits into the doctoral program. The Progress and Evaluation Committee and/or the DGS, however, may approve the transfer of **a maximum** of one doctoral-level course into the program (3 Credits), 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 whereas only two courses are required. The following timeline provides one possible way of completing required course work:

Year One

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

Proseminar (3 hours, required)

Quantitative Methods (3 hours, required)

Doctoral Professionalization Seminar I (1 hour, required)

Elective (3 hours, optional)

Spring/Semester #2 = 10 credits

Proseminar (3 hours, required)

Qualitative Methods (3 hours, required)

Doctoral Professionalization Seminar II (1 hour, required)

Elective (3 hours)

Students submit Plan of Study document.

Year Two

Fall/Semester #3 = 10 credits

3 electives

Doctoral Professionalization Seminar III (1 hour, required)

Spring/Semester #4 = 10 credits

3 electives

Doctoral Professionalization Seminar IV (1 hour, required)

Students select an advisor/committee chair no later than semester #4.

Year Three

Fall/Semester #5 = 9 credits

3 electives

Spring/Semester #6 = 10 credits

Comprehensive Examinations

Dissertation Prospectus Writing and Defense

Year Four

Fall/Semester #7 = 10 credits

Dissertation Research, Writing and (optional) Defense

Spring/Semester #8 = 7 credits

Dissertation Research Writing and Defense

Advising

JRNL's Director of Graduate Studies serves as a doctoral student's advisor until the student has selected an advisor who also serves as the student's 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.

Doctoral students, the DGS and committee chairs are equally responsible for being certain that students' graduate programs satisfy all graduation requirements, those of MDRP, JRNL 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, and CU Boulder's Graduate School Rules.

Research Expectations

Ph.D. students are expected to be involved regularly in research projects (which often transcend, but also can be based on, coursework assignments), conducted independently or with faculty members and/or other graduate students. Students should take the initiative to bring about this involvement by meeting with faculty members to discuss common research interests.

Prior to taking the comprehensive examination, Ph.D. students are expected to have completed *two research projects* of sufficient scholarly quality that they have been selected for conference presentation or publication. Those projects, ideally, are supervised by different faculty members.

III. Financial Aid

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

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 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 Ph.D. program but it may also come from an outside grant administered by one of the departments affiliated with the MDRP program or one of the faculty members in the associated 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 DGS, 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, Comprehensive Exam Committee and Dissertation Committee

By the third semester in residency, the student is required to submit a Plan of Study to the Progress and Evaluation Committee, which is composed of faculty members who teach the first-year cohort in the Proseminar and Methods courses (fall and spring), and the DGS who will serve in an *ex officio* capacity.

The Plan of Study includes a statement of research, a design of the coursework the student expects to complete (within the guidelines specified above), an explanation of why each course is pertinent to the student's research program and a timetable for completion, in addition to the content outlined below.

- Identification information, including name of student, advisor and committee members (if known)
- Transfer Credits Requested, if any (a maximum of one doctoral course)
- A statement of research, not exceeding 350 words, that defines your research agenda in journalism studies, states your methodological and theoretical current focus, and explains the significance of your research.
- Coursework by Area and Credits
 - Broad-based Theoretical Background
 - Primary Area of Specialization
 - Secondary Area of Specialization
 - Methodological Expertise
- Coursework by Chronological Order
- Teaching Experiences
- Research Projects and Experiences
- Signatures and Dates: The Ph.D. Plan of Study document is signed by the student and the advisor, using the date of the committee meeting at which that document was approved; it then is signed and dated by the DGS.

The Progress and Evaluation Committee may require changes in the Plan of Study and establish a deadline for resubmission of the petition. The Committee's role is most significant in a student's first two semesters in the program. When a student selects a committee chair/advisor, 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 the DGS, who 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 department of JRNL. The student's dissertation committee chair/advisor should be a tenure-track or tenured member of the Doctoral Faculty, and selection should be based on shared professional interests and compatibility (co-advisors are permitted). *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 JRNL department, 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 DGS, the student's committee chair and the Graduate School.

VI. Comprehensive Examination

The Comprehensive Examination generally is taken during or in the semester following the student's last semester of course work. Upon successful completion and oral defense of the Comprehensive Examination, a student qualifies for admission to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree and may proceed with the dissertation prospectus.

Comprehensive Examinations consist of a written examination and an oral examination. The written examination is intended to test the student's knowledge and comprehension 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). Students can propose readings and should present a reading list proposal to each committee member; however, committee members are responsible for assigning and approving their respective reading lists. The comprehensive exams are timed (four hours per questions) and are closed-book/note. One exam question is administered daily; students may opt to do sequentially or with a day break in between.

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. Note that only two committee members could sign unsatisfactory on a given student's exam. 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, the DGS, and the JRNL Department Chair.

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

VII. Admission to Candidacy

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

Admission to candidacy assumes the student has fulfilled the Ph.D. Plan of Study, received final grades for all coursework including incompletes, demonstrated individual scholarly development by meeting research expectations, demonstrated other appropriate professional competencies such as teaching, pedagogical training and development, and successfully completing the Comprehensive Examination.

VIII. The Ph.D. Dissertation

After successfully completing the comprehensive examination, a description of the student's proposed dissertation topic is to be submitted for review and acceptance to the student's committee chair and committee.

The dissertation prospectus will be prepared in consultation with the student's committee chair and approved by the committee. Once the prospectus is approved, the student may begin data collection and analysis. However, the committee must approve major changes in the dissertation approach or method if these changes are made after approval of the prospectus.

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

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 for review, it will hold a final oral defense of the dissertation. 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

- *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.
- *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, in accordance with the Graduate School, requires doctoral students to maintain a grade point average of no less than 3.0 (A=4). The DGS reserves the right to withdraw assistantship funding or to terminate enrollment of a doctoral student if he/she fails to achieve a GPA of 3.0 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 Plan of Study as evaluated by the Progress and Evaluation Committee. The DGS retains the authority to establish additional probationary requirements for students when their work falls below expectations. Requirements for grades and quality of work are established by the [Graduate School](#), and students should be well acquainted with the policies and procedures.
- *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 Ph.D. 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.

Ph.D. 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 travel funds. 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 the DGS who will make recommendations to the 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 Ethics

Students are expected to adhere to the highest codes of personal and professional ethics. Students who do not adhere to written guidelines regarding academic honesty or academic or research ethics may be dealt with according to the policies for academic dishonesty, academic ethics, or research misconduct as published in the appropriate Graduate School and University policy documents. Students found guilty of misconduct in any of these areas may have sanctions imposed or may be dismissed from CU Boulder.

XIII. Student Appeals, Complaints & Grievances

Grading and Treatment in Courses

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

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 DGS. However, students need to be aware, as stated in the CU policy document regarding issues of grades, that department chairs, DGS, and college deans **cannot require** an instructor to change a properly assigned 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](#).

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 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 DGS' decision, or if a faculty member decides to not follow the recommendation made by the DGS, 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.
4. Issues about Faculty Conduct, Academic Advising, or Course Content. If it is reasonable, students should begin with the 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.
5. **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.