

Media Studies PhD Program Student Handbook

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**Media Studies Department (MDST)
College of Media, Communication, and Information (CMCI)
University of Colorado Boulder**

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1. CU Systemwide Lands Recognition Statement

As we gather, we honor and acknowledge that the University of Colorado's four campuses are on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute, Apache, Comanche, Kiowa, Lakota, Pueblo and Shoshone Nations. Further, we acknowledge the 48 contemporary tribal nations historically tied to the lands that comprise what is now called Colorado.

Acknowledging that we live in the homelands of Indigenous peoples recognizes the original stewards of these lands and their legacies. With this land acknowledgment, we celebrate the many contributions of Native peoples to the fields of medicine, mathematics, government and military service, arts, literature, engineering and more. We also recognize the sophisticated and intricate knowledge systems Indigenous peoples have developed in relationship to their lands.

We recognize and affirm the ties these nations have to their traditional homelands and the many Indigenous people who thrive in this place, alive and strong. We also acknowledge the painful history of ill treatment and forced removal that has had a profoundly negative impact on Native nations.

We respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land. We honor them and thank the indigenous ancestors of this place. The University of Colorado pledges to provide educational opportunities for Native students, faculty and staff and advance our mission to understand the history and contemporary lives of Native peoples.

2. Overview: CMCI, MDST, and the MDST PhD

The College of Media, Communication, and Information was founded in 2015 and consists of six departments: Advertising, Public Relations, and Media Design (APRD); Communication (COMM); Critical Media Practices (DCMP); Information Science (INFO); Journalism (JRNL); and Media Studies (MDST).

Please note: while there are six unique doctoral programs in CMCI, every program has to adhere to Graduate School policies and deadlines. As such, all MDST graduate students should regularly check the Graduate School's "[Navigating Your Degree](#)" to make sure you're on track and have taken care of any/all deadlines well in advance. Other Graduate School documents we encourage students to review as soon as possible:

- [Graduate Student Bill of Rights & Responsibilities](#)

- [Graduate Student Grievance Process and Procedures](#)
- [Graduate School Rules](#)

Please also see section 7 below for details on specific Graduate School Requirements.

The MDST PhD is unique in how it excels at delivering specialized research and curriculum while also collaborating with other units on campus to help doctoral students customize their program of study to their specific interests. Most of the department's faculty can be found in the Armory, with the departmental office residing on the third floor, but we teach courses and have activity all over campus. The doctoral program brings graduate students into collegial and scholarly relationships with faculty, and is designed to introduce students into the patterns of research and creative practices and to develop public engagement within our students.

Students and faculty involved in the program may draw heavily on cultural theory and critical theory to better understand interactions among the major components of the past and present of media. Our work is also often interdisciplinary (as we draw on social, economic, political, historical, legal/policy/regulatory and international perspectives). As our faculty are both scholars and artists, our work is also often hands-on, utilizing the resources of the journal [Cultural Studies](#), [Center for Media, Religion, and Culture](#), the [Media Economies Design Lab](#), and the [Media Archaeology Lab](#).

The journal *Cultural Studies* is housed in MDST, with Nabil Echchaibi and Ted Striphas acting as Editors-in-Chief. This journal examines how cultural practices relate to everyday life, history, structures of power, affect, ideology, economy, politics, knowledge, technology, and the environment. Since its inception in 1987, *Cultural Studies* has understood the term "culture" as ever-evolving and inclusive - rather than exclusive. As such, the journal continues to support the field on a global scale by sharing contemporary, diverse perspectives on popular artifacts and practices.

The Center for Media, Religion and Culture (CMRC) conducts groundbreaking research and promotes innovative teaching at the intersection of religion, media and public life. It is one of very few institutions worldwide dedicated to academic research, teaching and public outreach in this rapidly emerging field. It brings together national and international scholars, students, professionals and the general public at its widely attended conferences, seminars and workshops.

Students are welcome to join its popular weekly seminar by emailing the CMRC Director/Professor Nabil Echchaibi <nabil.echchaibi@colorado.edu>.

The Media Enterprise Design Lab (MEDLab) is a think tank for community ownership and governance in media organizations. It creates space for researchers and practitioners to challenge the conventional norms and explore possibilities offered by neglected histories and possible futures. Drawing on diverse fields such as cultural studies, law, management, media archaeology, organizational communication and sociology, MEDLab holds space and time for better kinds of business. For more information, contact Professor Nathan Schneider <Nathan.Schneider@colorado.edu>.

The Media Archaeology Lab (MAL) houses the largest collection in North America of still-functioning media from the early 20th century through the 21st century. Everything in the lab is meant to be turned on and played with. From phonograph plays and magic lanterns, to typewriters, word processors, early computers from the 1970s through the 2000s, the lab gives students, researchers, and artists the rare opportunity to have hands-on access to historically important devices of all kinds. The lab believes that having the opportunity to experience how things were can help to envision how things could be. For more information, contact Professor Lori Emerson <Lori.Emerson@colorado.edu>.

Students graduate from our program with broad knowledge of the intellectual history of media studies as an important field of research: 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 significant research about media and their historical and contemporary power and importance. Our goal is to help students become intellectual leaders, nationally and internationally, in the area(s) of research specialization they choose, and to help them cultivate an interest in generating public awareness about their scholarship. As such, an important part of doctoral students' education is their participation in the department's research and teaching missions through their assignments as teaching assistants, research assistants, and instructors.

Our main areas of research and teaching include, but are not limited to:

- Media Technology, Society, and Social Change: Courses and research in

this area focus on the philosophical, ethical, social and political study of information and communication technologies, old and new; social transformations that result from the widespread availability of multiple technologies; the history of technological devices, practices, platforms, and various modalities of mediation; the legal dimensions of media policy; privacy issues related to information technologies as tools of surveillance; and the significance of social media as tools for cultural expression and social mobilization.

- **Global and International Media Studies:** This area focuses on critical theories of globalization, postcolonial studies and de-colonizing studies, global media industries and communication policy, development communication, global social movements and contentious politics, media and cultural geography, multiple modernities, transnational media, and intersectionality (gender, race, sexuality, class, religion, etc.).
- **Media Industries, Politics, and Policy:** This emphasis enables students to explore questions of power in the creation, distribution, and consumption of mediated communication. Areas of inquiry include the political economy of the media and cultural industries (including advertising, public relations, journalism, the music recording industry, film, radio, television and the Internet); political communication, including electoral politics, grassroots activism and political protest; public policies governing media and culture, and the efforts by advocacy groups to influence media policy.
- **Critical Theories of Media and Communication:** The study of media and communication requires engagement with a variety of theoretical traditions, including cultural studies, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, hermeneutics, political economy, pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, Marxism and Frankfurt School critical theory, feminism, gender and queer theory, critical race theory, postcolonialism, de-colonial theory, critical legal theory, field theory, structuralism and post-structuralism. In its core courses and elective seminars the graduate program seeks to train doctoral students to be flexible yet rigorous practitioners of critique in its many forms.
- **Media, Religion and Culture:** The department offers courses and faculty expertise to train students to explore the intersection of media and religion as they influence one another and our daily lives, focusing on the practices and experiences that define religion and spirituality today, the way media

represent religions and spiritualities, and on how the media interact with religion in the public sphere, how media are used by formal and informal groups and movements, and the implications for religious institutions and authority.

- Theory and Practice of Public Scholarship and Public Engagement: Students focus on the role of the intellectual in public life through courses that survey concepts of the public sphere; the role of public opinion polling as a means of generating political consensus; the problems of anti-intellectualism as an impediment to public reason; the idea of “public culture” as an arena in which complex ideas and information are presented in accessible ways; how intellectuals increasingly use new means of communication, including online venues, to widely disseminate and discuss their ideas; and uses of the means of communication to mobilize and sustain social change.

3. Requirements for the MDST PhD

Our program is designed for students to devote their full time to the doctoral program and assistantship duties during the fall and spring semesters. (Students are therefore discouraged from engaging in other work and must get prior written approval from the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies to take on additional work/employment.) Doctoral students in MDST take 42 credit hours of coursework and 30 dissertation credit hours for a total of 72 hours. Students take most of their courses numbered at the 6000 or above levels; however, occasionally doctoral students take 5000-level courses. With a minimum of 72 hours of coursework, students should plan for 9 hours of coursework per semester to stay on schedule.

Please note: 5 hours are required to maintain full-time student status.

The coursework includes a required foundational core consisting in the two-semester (6 hours) Proseminar in Communication and Media Theory; one semester each (6 hours total) of qualitative and quantitative research methods (or equivalent, as determined by the department); 12-15 hours (4-5 courses) representing an area of concentration taken inside MDST; 9-12 hours (3-4 courses) representing an outside emphasis taken from any department outside of MDST; and 6 hours (2 courses) of advanced methods in media research and/or media practice taken inside or outside of MDST. 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 4-5 years. The CU Graduate School requires completion of the

PhD within six years of admission to the program.

- **Proseminar:** All doctoral students are required to enroll in MDST 7011 in their first semester of study and in MDST 7021 in their second semester. These courses are designed to introduce students to the major paradigms within the field of media studies.
- **Methods:** All first-year doctoral students enroll in methods classes in their first year. While we often offer MDST 7051 Qualitative Research Methods in the fall and in MDST 7061 Quantitative Research Methods in the spring, alternative methods courses are often offered in their place, as determined by the department. These general courses deal with a variety of research methods used within the field of media and communication studies. MDST PhD students are also required to take two additional graduate level courses in the areas of research methods and/or media practice (6 hours). These may be taken inside or outside the department of Media Studies.
- **Inside Emphasis Electives (12-15 hours):** Doctoral students are required to take a minimum of 12-15 hours of course work inside the department of Media Studies, selected on the basis of the student's area(s) of research interest. The courses that may be counted as inside emphasis electives for doctoral credit include:
 - MDST 5001 Connected Media Practices
 - MDST 5002 Media Activism & Public Engagement
 - MDST 5211 Asian Media & Culture
 - MDST 5331 Gender, Race, Class & Sexuality in Media
 - MDST 6071 Critical Theories of Media and Culture
 - MDST 6201 Global Media & Culture
 - MDST 6211 Communication & International Development
 - MDST 6250 Algorithms, Culture, & Power
 - MDST 6301 Comm., Media & Concepts of the Public
 - MDST 6311 Power, Politics & Mediated Culture
 - MDST 6341 Children, Youth & the Media
 - MDST 6551 Media & Communication Policy
 - MDST 6671 Media, Myth and Ritual
 - MDST 6711 Media & Popular Culture
 - MDST 6771 History of Media & Communication
 - MDST 6781 Economic & Political Aspects of Media

- MDST 6871 Special Topics in MDST
- MDST 7871 Special Topics (Advanced Research Methods)
- Outside Emphasis Electives (9-12 hours): Doctoral students are required to take a minimum of 9 hours of additional elective courses outside of MDST. Electives courses need not be, and usually are not, taken in only one department. Rather, elective courses are selected to form a cohesive whole, pointing toward a student's primary area of research.
- Colloquia: Part of joining our program is learning how to be a member of a scholarly community. To that end, attendance at all colloquia, workshops, and called meetings is expected.
- Independent study: Ph.D. students may take a maximum of two independent study courses in their course of study, either inside or outside the department. Generally, these will be taken no earlier than the third semester of the program. An independent study course may not duplicate, in whole or substantial part, the content of regularly scheduled courses.
- Comprehensive examinations: Each doctoral student will be required to pass comprehensive examinations, consisting of four questions (general theory, research methods, inside area of specialization, outside area of specialization), which are generally administered during the last semester in which the student takes course work (other than dissertation hours). The examinations are individually tailored for each student and comprise both written and oral examinations.
- Dissertation: A minimum of thirty hours of dissertation credit, MDST 8991, must be taken.
- **Please note:**
 - 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.

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. Appeals of additional requirements are made first to the departmental Associate Chair of Graduate Studies, and then formally approved by the CMCI Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research.

Please note: as a general policy, MDST does not accept transfer credits into the doctoral program. However, the Progress and Evaluation Committee and/or the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies 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 the requirements in any other degree program.

4. MDST PhD Timeline Overview

A detailed discussion of the timeline is included in section 6, below. At its heart, the Media Studies PhD program is designed with flexibility and customization for students. We want to empower students to design their doctoral degree to suit their present and future needs. Still, there are certain requirements and deadlines set by both our department and the graduate school; students must keep track of these deadlines to successfully graduate.

First, students are required to complete 42 course credit hours, which typically means completing 14 courses. Keeping in mind that since students must choose their advisor by the end of their second year (ideally by the end of the third semester) we recommend that, if possible, students immediately start taking classes with a faculty member they think might be an advisor who has the appropriate scholarly expertise to assist with the dissertation. We also recommend students take classes inside and outside MDST to look for other appropriate dissertation committee members. The coursework may be undertaken 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:

- Proseminar I (required)
- Qualitative or Quantitative Methods (or equivalent; required)
- Elective (optional - most students do not take an elective in their first semester)

Spring Semester:

- Proseminar II (required)
- Quantitative or Qualitative Methods (or equivalent; required)
- Elective (optional)
- file a preliminary program plan with the Media Studies Graduate Committee (required); this plan outlines the expected courses that will form your course curriculum

Year Two

Fall Semester:

- 3 electives (or up to two methods/practice courses)
- ideally select an doctoral chair / advisor

Spring Semester:

- 3 electives (or up to two methods/practice courses)
- select a doctoral chair/advisor and committee members

Year Three

Fall Semester:

- 3 electives
- plan for comprehensive exams by conferring with advisor to determine their preferred method of proctoring your comprehensive exams, then conferring with committee members to create reading lists and study plans for spring semester

Spring Semester:

- Take comprehensive examinations; once completed, file for candidacy
- Prepare and obtain committee approval of a dissertation prospectus

Year Four

Fall and Spring Semesters:

- Research, write and defend dissertation

5. MDST PhD Employment / Financial Aid

Provided that students make satisfactory progress through the program and perform assistantship duties in a satisfactory manner, all MDST PhD students are guaranteed funding for eight semesters in the form of a TA, GPTI, or RA position (details on RAships are provided in section 5.2). These positions involve about 20 hours of work per week. Students are paid monthly and are provided a waiver of tuition costs. In addition to assistantships, doctoral students are eligible for fellowship awards. Criteria and deadlines for these awards are announced during spring semester. PhD 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.

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

Funded doctoral students generally alternate between 2-course instruction semesters and 1-course instruction semesters, as either a TA or GTPI. Students often begin by serving college or departmental introductory courses in the first year, moving on to supporting or teaching departmental core courses in the second year, and teaching upper division topical courses in the third and fourth year. The goal is to get doctoral students a wide variety of teaching experiences before the graduate, and hopefully to allow them to offer a course related to their research expertise in the final year.

Please note: Students within their designated funding window receive priority consideration on teaching assignments. Students who are beyond their designated funding window are not guaranteed funding, a teaching position, or an RA position. The department will, however, endeavor to find appointments where possible.

The process of making teaching assignments is complex. Doing so involves carefully aligning departmental and college curricular needs with the expertise, professional objectives, and availability of ± 40 instructional staff (both faculty and graduate students). Bearing in mind these complexities, MDST makes every effort to assign teaching responsibilities in a fair, consistent, and intentional manner. In the case of graduate students on assistantship, whom we recognize as both students and employees, the following values and principles are used in the decision-making process:

- Teaching assignments are informed by data, not guesswork. The graduate student teaching preferences survey, which is administered at least annually, is an important element of the data collection process. Multiple measures of teaching effectiveness will inform the decision-making as well. Students on assistantship should discuss pedagogical objectives with their faculty advisor(s) prior to completing the annual teaching survey.
- The department chair, associate chair of graduate studies, and other relevant faculty may seek additional input on teaching assignments directly from students on assistantship and/or their advisors.
- Whenever possible, the department will do its best to match the express interests, objectives, and experience of students on assistantship with the appropriate class or classes. The department will make a reasonable effort to accommodate specific preferences and requests, balancing them with departmental curricular needs and the qualifications necessary to teach specific classes.
- All students are expected to be making steady progress toward their graduate degrees and maintaining academic good standing. Students on assistantship who are on-track for their degrees will receive priority consideration on teaching assignments. The department also understands that, at times, unforeseen circumstances may impede student progress toward their degree. Those circumstances will be considered if conveyed directly to the department chair.

The department will do its best to abide by the following general framework when assigning teaching duties. Curricular needs or unexpected circumstances may, in specific cases, require deviations from this framework:

- Year 1: TA position
- Year 2: TA and/or GPTI position
- Year 3: GPTI position (typically, general interest/lower division courses)
- Year 4: GPTI position (typically, general interest/lower division courses and/or “boutique” upper division courses)
- Year 5+: No funding guarantee (on contingency: Continuing Education; Norlin Library; MDST instructorships; outside fellowships)

5.1 Teaching Assistantships

Being a Teaching Assistant in MDST entails supporting a lead instructor (either faculty or advanced PhD student). The following are standard TA duties, with the

caveat that the lead instructor for a course may, in any given semester, communicate different expectations and duties:

- Attend all required trainings at the beginning of the semester
- Hold 1-2 scheduled office hours per week
- Schedule office hours at the beginning of the semester and make sure your students know when they are and how to schedule an appointment (e.g., email, gCal, some other calendar app, Canvas, in-person sign-ups only, online sign-up form, etc.)
- Check in with your lead instructor to see if they have a preference for how TAs offer office hours
- Attend all lectures; communicate to your lead instructor as early as possible if for some reason you must miss one
- Stay current on all course materials; this includes readings, films, podcasts, and any other assigned materials; even if you're not lecturing or leading recitations, your students may come to you with questions about the materials and you are expected to be prepared to help them answer them
- Attend all TA meetings; some instructors hold TA meetings and some do not; these may be weekly, biweekly, monthly, on an irregular basis, or not at all; check in with the lead instructor early on to confirm meeting schedule; you are expected to attend all meetings (and to communicate in advance any required absences otherwise)
- Guest lecture; TAs will often deliver a guest lecture in the lead instructor's course; this will depend on the instructor: some may require more than one, and others may not require any; communicate expectations about if and/or when the lead instructor may want to review your lecture materials prior to the lecture, along with any protocols they may have for how the lecture content is selected (some will have lecture materials prepared for you and others will leave the topic completely open for you to write)
- Maintain up-to-date records of student metrics (as outlined in your course's syllabus); these often include criteria such as attendance, participation, assignment grades, and exam grades; regular updates are important as they help you identify students who are struggling early on; they can also ease student frustration significantly (and in turn the number of emails you receive)
 - If you are unsure of how to support a student who is struggling significantly or missing too many classes, reach out to your lead instructor for guidance, or refer the student to that instructor directly; when in doubt come up with a shared policy for this with your lead

instructor as early in the semester as possible; bring up any major student concerns (e.g., their mental or physical health, inability to get hold of a student who is not showing up repeatedly) to the lead instructor

- If you feel the student may need additional support beyond what the teaching team for the class has a responsibility to provide, you may refer them directly to Student Support and Case Management
- Grading is usually due within one week after an assignment's due date; confirm this is your lead instructor's policy as well, and let them know if for some reason you will be unable to make a grading deadline
 - Most comments/feedback for courses with TAs can be minimal. For exams or short papers, try to explain why you're deducting points, what the student may do to improve for next time if the grade is particularly low, or why you're giving a particularly high grade. Do try to highlight when a student has improved significantly from one assignment to the next. For smaller assignments, extensive written feedback is not typically required. Check in with your lead instructor with questions on what level of detail your comments should have.
 - Check in with the lead instructor about when final grades are due. This deadline is extremely firm.
 - Most instructors will have you enter grades directly into Canvas. Check with the lead instructor at the beginning of the semester about their preferences for entering grades.
- Some TAs will set up communication policies with their students; this is your choice; these may include the hours during which you answer emails, your policy for communicating over the weekend, how you prefer students schedule office hours, what type of reply window you maintain (24 hours, 48 hours, etc).
- Some TAs will set up grade dispute policies; this is your choice; such policies may include: requiring 24 hours before the student can dispute a grade; mandating students sign up for office hours if they want to dispute a grade; requiring students write out their reasoning, following a particular format, if they want to dispute a grade; reminding students that grades may go up or down should they choose to dispute; and so on
 - as with all policies, convey these to students as early in the semester as

possible. If a student does not accept your grade after that, you may refer them to the lead instructor

5.2 Research Assistantships

RA opportunities are rare. Most students will receive summer RAship appointments, but we try to also allow students a regular semester RAship when possible (usually in the 3rd or 4th year of the program). Interest in a Research Assistant (RA) position should be communicated on the annual teaching preferences form. RA assignments will be determined in consultation with the faculty member to whom the RA will be assigned. Typically, there are no more than 2-3 RA positions per semester. Students on assistantship are welcome and encouraged to contact the department chair if they have questions about their appointments.

- An average RA stipend during a Fall or Spring semester usually amounts to 20 hours per week. Set up a calendar with the faculty member you are RA'ing for if you have questions about this.
- RA project may involve either (1) doing research for a professor's own project or (2) doing research for a paper or grant co-authored by you and the professor. The research topic is up to the professor to set.
- Both faculty and grad students have preferences for how often to meet. Both parties should share their preferences toward the beginning of the semester and aim to meet somewhere in the middle. Try to clarify your meeting schedule as early in the semester as possible.
- Clarify with the professor the semester's research needs or projects as early in the semester as possible, recognizing that specific research needs may fluctuate throughout a given semester. Changes to research priorities are okay as long as they do not exceed your allotted hours.
- If there is flexibility in the research schedule, try to anticipate times you'll be particularly busy with school work (e.g., around midterms, finals, major deadlines or conferences, etc.). Communicate with the professor well in advance so you can portion out the work to be lighter during those moments if possible.
- There are slight differences between Summer RAships and academic-year RAships. Summer stipends tend to be lower, meaning total hours worked are fewer. Also, faculty are more likely to be off campus and meetings are therefore more likely to take place over Zoom. Regular semester RAships involve more committed hours (20 per week), regular weekly meetings, and research production metrics as assigned by the supervising faculty member.

6. Degree Timeline Details

6.1 Progress and Evaluation

Please take a few minutes to review the "[Graduate School Guidelines for Student Academic Progress and Success and Procedures for Dismissal](#)." In terms of MDST expectations for progress, by the middle of the second semester of the first year in the program, each student is required to submit a preliminary program proposal to the MDST Graduate Committee (formerly the Progress and Evaluation Committee). The proposal is your "statement of purpose" for the program of study and research you plan to carry out during your time here. It's a 5-7 page document in which you describe a general research focus (this isn't your dissertation title or even the specific topic, but a broader description of the area/issues that you wish to seriously engage with), a design of the curriculum (list of courses) you expect to complete (which must also fulfill the PhD course requirements, as noted above) with a brief explanation of why each course is relevant to your research interests, and a timetable for the completion of your requirements toward dissertation defense and graduation.

This document is reviewed and approved by the Media Studies Graduate Committee, a group of 4-5 faculty from the department with the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies in the role of committee chair. It's fairly common for the committee to respond to your document with questions, suggestions, and requests for revisions. The committee typically meets in late April, so you will need to submit your Preliminary Program Proposal (as a Word document emailed to the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies) by the end of the first week of April.

6.2 Student's Advisor and Committee

Each student initially is advised by the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies until the student has selected a dissertation committee chair no later than in their fourth semester. The chair will act as the primary advisor to the student starting in year 3. The chair must be an MDST faculty member and be in good standing with a terminal degree. They are responsible for advising the student on departmental, college level, and graduate school level requirements and ensuring that those requirements are met on time. A dissertation chair and graduate student dynamic depends on the personalities and working styles of each person. It is important to set norms and expectations between the graduate student and advisor early on in order to be successful.

Advising is an essential part of a healthy and successful graduate program. Mentoring graduate students and supervising their work are some of the most important and gratifying tasks faculty perform. We would like you to benefit fully

from this experience and build the strongest working relationship with your advisor. We encourage you to talk with multiple faculty members about their mentoring practice and how best they can assist you in guiding your progress in the program and fostering your intellectual growth. Good advising practice is based on mutual respect, fairness, and a commitment to academic integrity and professional development.

Prior to taking comprehensive examinations, the student, in consultation with their 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 Media Studies department and a minimum of one graduate faculty member from outside the department. A student's dissertation committee is responsible for providing intellectual guidance, mentorship and logistical support in navigating the process from comprehensive exams, prospectus preparation, to writing and defending the dissertation. At different junctures the committee members will serve different roles. This committee, which must be approved by the Graduate School, will prepare and evaluate the student's written and oral comprehensive examinations, 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 Associate Chair of Graduate Studies, the student's committee chair, and the Graduate School.

At the comprehensive exam stage, students are required to have the following committee members: a general theory member, a research methods member, an inside theory member (specialty of the student's choosing), and outside emphasis member (specialty of the student's choosing), and an outside reader that is not a member of the MDST faculty that can offer an outside perspective. Outside reader committee members can come from the broader CMCI community or other departments across the CU Boulder campus.

6.3 Comprehensive Examination

Students who will be taking their comprehensive exams should contact CMCI's graduate programs manager, Jorge Garza <Jorge.Garza@colorado.edu>, prior to the start of the semester in which they will be taking the exams. Students must fill out the Doctoral Examination Report with the names of their committee members (details on the constitution of the committee are below) and get approval of their committee from the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies. This form must be submitted to the department at least two weeks prior to the examination defense. Students must also complete the Candidacy Application for

an Advanced Degree, if appropriate. These forms should be submitted to the department along with the signed exam form after a successful defense. All forms can be found [here](#).

The comprehensive examination generally is taken in the semester following the student's last semester of coursework, typically the Spring semester of the third year. Preparation for this examination should start in the Fall semester of the third year when the student is assembling their committee. The CE 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: 1. media and communication theory ("general theory"), 2. theory and other substantive material pertinent to student's work within the Media Studies department ("inside theory"), 3. theory and other substantive material pertinent to student's work in departments outside the Media Studies department ("outside theory"), and 4. qualitative and quantitative research methods (or equivalent, as determined by the department), usually with an emphasis on the method(s) the student will use for dissertation research.

The CE committee is comprised of five members (chair and four faculty members, including a reader). Students are expected to work closely with individual committee members, and in consultation with their chair, to discuss topic areas and solicit reading lists for each question. Please note that each faculty will have different approaches to generating reading lists and writing exam questions. It is important that students confirm expectations and timelines in advance with each member. The fifth member of a CE committee is a Reader. Working with their chair, students must select a reader whose role in the committee is not to ask an exam question but to read all the student written responses and provide comments and feedback during the oral part of the comprehensive examination. In selecting a reader, students should consider an inside or outside faculty member who is familiar with their work and can add a different perspective on the topics of examination and their area of research. The Graduate School must approve the membership of the student's committee prior to administration of the comprehensive examinations.

The comprehensive 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. Students should consult with chairs to determine details about exam administration format (mode

of question delivery, whether readings lists should be provided, etc.). Again, the chair is ultimately responsible for the format and administration of the examination, conforming to the rules of the Graduate School.

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 chair 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 hours in length and will be administered by the student's committee within two to four 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 evaluating the student's written comprehensive examination. The oral examination session 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 and the Media Studies Graduate Director.

6.4 Ph.D. Dissertation Prospectus

Either at the conclusion of the oral defense of the comprehensive exams or in a subsequent defense meeting, the candidate will present a dissertation prospectus to the dissertation committee. The research prospectus maps out the research plan for the dissertation and likely includes relevant material from the comprehensive examination. The more detailed the prospectus, the better the opportunity for feedback from the committee. The purpose of the prospectus meeting is to communicate expectations to the committee for feedback.

Typically, the prospectus includes key literature and sources, explains the focus, scope, and methodological approaches of the research, and provides details

about the outline of the dissertation. 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. If the prospectus is not approved, the student must make the necessary revisions and the chair will determine with the help of the committee if an additional defense is necessary.

Once the prospectus is defended and approved by the committee, the student is then deemed ready to advance to candidacy. Three years is the expected time to complete the dissertation after advancing to candidacy for full-time students. Students must complete all requirements for the degree within six years of commencing work in the doctoral program. Students who wish to request additional time must petition the Dean of the Graduate School and have their faculty advisor's endorsement. Completion of requirements includes defending the dissertation and submission to the Graduate School. Any semester(s) on Time Off are included in the time limit to complete the degree.

6.5 Admission to Candidacy

After writing and defending the comprehensive examination, the student must complete a formal application for admission to candidacy for the PhD 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 earned at least three semesters of residence, completed required course work, and 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.

6.6 The PhD Dissertation

A prospectus of the student's proposed dissertation topic and research plan 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 PhD 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. The student and their advisor will determine the format and shape of the dissertation with the assistance of the committee members. Students are expected to familiarize themselves thoroughly with the various Graduate School guidelines on how to prepare a dissertation and submit a final copy once it is approved. Students often ask about the length of a dissertation in terms of word

counts or pages, but that will be determined by the research question(s) and approaches, as different research projects require different lengths. Some students may also opt for an applied dissertation subject, in which they leverage their research to produce media, platforms, or network services to achieve research outcomes. In these cases, the written portion of the dissertation may look more like a background and planning document, students should consult with their chair for specific expectations.

6.7 The Dissertation Oral Defense

After the committee has accepted the dissertation, it will hold a final oral defense where the candidate is expected to summarize their research and answer questions from committee members. A student must notify the Graduate School of the final oral defense at least two weeks before the scheduled defense date as well as submit the oral defense examination form via the grad school. The student's committee (which, again, must include a minimum of five graduate faculty members, at least three of whom must be from inside the Media Studies department and at least one of whom must be from outside the department) 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. After completion of the defense, student must complete appropriate submissions of dissertation and forms by the Graduate School.

7. Specific 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 Media Studies PhD program requires doctoral students to maintain a grade point average of no less than 3.25 (A=4). The Media Studies Director of Graduate Studies reserves the right to withdraw assistantship funding or to terminate enrollment of a doctoral student if they fail 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. The Director of Graduate Studies for Media

Studies retains the authority to establish additional probationary requirements for students when their work falls below expectations.

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.

Graduation Requirements and Deadlines: Students should be aware of all relevant graduation requirements and deadlines. Graduation information can be found [here](#). Graduation deadlines can be found [here](#).

Students expecting to graduate should contact CMCI's graduate programs manager, Jorge Garza <Jorge.Garza@colorado.edu>, prior to the start of the semester in which they plan to graduate.

8. Travel Funds for PhD Students

MDST PhD students 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:

The College of Media, Communication and Information (CMCI) will, to the best of its ability, provide funding for research and creative projects to graduate students. The purpose of this document is to describe the policies related to student eligibility and funds disbursement.

All CMCI master's and PhD students currently within their contractually specified window of academic study are eligible for graduate student funds. Students can submit one request per academic year. For master's students, the maximum amount that can be requested per academic year is \$500. For PhD students, the maximum amount that can be requested per academic year is \$1,250. Funds can be used for the following activities:

- Costs associated with travel to and/or participation in academic conferences;
- Costs associated with scholarly/professional association membership;
- Costs associated with data collection and preparation (e.g., sampling costs, costs associated with incentives, transcription costs);
- Costs associated with hardware, software, or other supplies necessary for the execution of research/creative projects; and
- Costs associated with research and creative project-related travel (e.g., travel for fieldwork, travel for interviews).

If funds are requested for an online/virtual conference, CMCI will fund the exact registration costs.

Students should complete the form titled Student Request for Funding (sent to you over email and also available on the [CMCI Grad Student Resources Canvas page](#)). Once the form has been completed, it should be emailed to the student's Departmental Associate Chair of Graduate Studies ("DACGS"). The DACGS will review and approve the request. Upon approval, funds will be directly deposited into the student's bank account.

In addition to funds provided by CMCI, students may also want to consider applying for travel funds from the [Graduate School](#) and the [Graduate and Professional Student Government](#). Eligibility, process, and policies regarding these funds can be accessed below:

9. External Funding

External funding is about much more than covering the costs of your research and writing. It can be almost as important as article publications on the academic job market. It can also help develop your non-CU Boulder academic network: sometimes fellowship or grant programs connect funding recipients to broader communities (both faculty and grad students) that can help in professional development, networking, or academic community support outside of your own institution.

Some external funding opportunities replace your CMCI stipend directly. Others are awarded on top of your institutional stipend. In cases of CMCI stipend

replacement, CMCI does not offer opportunities to “bank” your CMCI stipend and use it after your externally-awarded fellowship year is complete.

See CU Boulder’s Research and Innovation Office (RIO)’s postdoctoral affairs funding sources [site](#), and consult their [how-to guide](#) for navigating their funding database site (SPIN).

Make sure to review 2 items carefully before deciding to apply for a given fellowship or grant: (1) eligibility requirements (these are almost never flexible) and (2) deadlines for the current award year (these can change from year to year)

Take note of fellowship/grant materials required well in advance of funding deadlines, and get started early. (Spreadsheets or lists are helpful for this.) While some funding institutions will allow you to paste in already existing materials, others have prompts for new materials (personal experiences, your intellectual history, your approach to X type of research, your contribution to Y field, etc.). Major fellowships like NSF or Mellon ones can take several months to write and revise. For the latter, start bouncing around your timeline and ideas with your advisor/chair or other academic supports or interlocutors 8-10 months in advance of the deadline

Funding begets funding! The earlier you receive funding—even small awards—the easier it is to get funding later. One or two small research or travel grants in your early years of the program could put you well above other prospective candidates for bigger research or dissertation completion fellowships in your final years of the program.

While some of this depends on how you and your advisor/chair map out your long-term goals and path through the program, in general you should be trying to apply to as many external funding opportunities as you can.

Prepare yourself to be rejected from most fellowships and grants. Then brush yourself off and keep applying.

Develop one project proposal narrative well in advance. Politely ask other people to read it (your advisor/chair at least, but ideally others too, making sure to give your readers enough time to respond). Revise as many times as is needed until you have perfected your narrative. NOTE: you will likely rewrite this at least once a year as your project develops in both the research and writing stages.

Identify what you need to tweak in your proposal for each audience/funding institution in question, leaving the same whatever you can to save time.

10. Writing Resources

First, consider putting together a writing group with other graduate students for support, accountability, and feedback. Make sure to read your colleagues' work as closely as you'd want them to read yours. These groups can make a huge difference in both the quality of your work and your overall sanity.

Additional resources for writing help:

- [CU Boulder Writing Center](#) offers one-on-one consults and is a source of support for proposal content
- the Graduate School hosts [a summer writing retreat](#) and has other programs that may be of interest
- the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD) offers multiple [on-demand webinars that teach the "basics" of grant writing](#). CUB has an institutional membership to NCFDD

11. Grad Student Space Use

Grad students have a variety of spaces available for their use. On the first floor of the Armory, the media studies graduate students share a lounge with the other graduate students in the college. The graduate lounge is intended as a space for social gathering, collaboration, and study. It has been important to the graduate student community that the lounge space not be used to hold office hours or as a meeting space for classes.

Graduate students will be provided with cubicle office space to hold office hours. The Armory also has several semi-private cubicles available to reserve online using the QR codes posted outside each cubicle. There are 5 Hoteling Desks for use as temporary workspace, holding weekly office hours, meeting with students, etc. There are also Huddle Rooms ideally suited for small meetings or one-on-one collaboration. Spaces are reservable 7 days/week, Monday-Sunday, 7:00am-10:00pm (Buff Card access required Mon-Fri after 7pm and whenever the University is closed). Drop-in users are welcome to use the space without a reservation if available, but reservations have priority and drop-in users are asked to vacate the space for reservation-holders.

New users requesting access and anyone unable to see the Armory spaces in

EMS should contact Betsy Mulet <betsy.mulet@colorado.edu>, MDST's Departmental Assistant, to request the necessary permissions.

12. Student Appeals, Complaints & Grievances: Grading and Treatment in Courses

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

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 their performance in a course they must first communicate with the instructor(s) in that course to resolve the question.

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 Media Studies Director of Graduate Studies within 45 days of the end of the course in question. 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](#)) 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 their grading action. The recommended actions will be communicated to both parties in writing.

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 their recommendation to both parties in writing.

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 unacceptable by the student, the student may contact the CMCI Dean's office.

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 [here](#).

13. United Campus Workers Colorado (UCW-CWA 7799)

The following information on [UCW Colorado](#) has been created by UCWC members and representatives and pasted here in full.

UCW Colorado is a wall-to-wall union that represents all workers in the University of Colorado System. Our mission is to champion and defend the interests and well-being of all University labor, as well as to build and sustain social and economic justice in our workplaces and in our communities. By uniting CU's diverse workforce—including part-time and full-time university staff, faculty, and graduate and undergraduate laborers—we can address the critical issues we all face.

Our union advocates for workers who experience any violations of their contract

or unfair labor practices; takes feedback from workers about their needs; builds relationships with other pro-labor and social justice groups; organizes assemblies, meetings, and rallies; hosts reading groups, social events, and meet-ups; and more. Learn more about our union and how to get involved on our website.

When you join our union, you are choosing to work with other employees collectively to better your/our working conditions and lives. As a member, you will be a direct contributor to the collective power we have to make changes. Evidence shows that workers who are union members generally enjoy higher wages (13.2% more on average!), better benefits, decreased gendered and racial wage inequality, improved health and safety practices, and much more. Beyond that, our union is a great way to meet and interact with other workers, as well as to get plugged in to various events to help our community.

Dues for graduate workers are \$12.00/a month. Dues are our shared resources for growing our union and advocating for campus workers. Currently, dues fund our web infrastructure, printing costs, and contribute to the salary of our two full-time organizers. But as a shared resource, we democratically determine how to spend this money and members can propose new initiatives that our local collectively funds.

Becoming an active and committed member of our union does not require you to sacrifice your current obligations. Many of our members participate on a flexible basis and incorporate volunteering into their weekly schedules. Reach out to <info@ucwcolorado.edu> if you have questions about ways to participate, read our FAQs to learn more about how our union operates, and become a member today.

UCW Colorado is building a mutual aid infrastructure to allow union members and our larger community to ask for and offer all kinds of assistance. Mutual Aid allows community members to rely on and support each other with the goal of building a stronger, more self-sufficient community, and a safety net independent of the whims of employers and government.