

**CCI Graduate Student Handbook
PhD Program
2025-2026**



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION
AND INFORMATION

CCI PhD Program Student Handbook

2025-2026

College of Communication & Information
University of Tennessee

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Welcome

Welcome to graduate study in the College of Communication & Information at the University of Tennessee! The College offers two master's degrees and one doctoral degree:

- Master of Science in Communication & Information
- Master of Science in Information Sciences
- Doctor of Philosophy in Communication & Information

All three degrees combine a solid grounding in theory and methods with an understanding of key professions served by the College. Graduates of the College of Communication & Information (CCI) have gone on to successful careers in higher education, government, industry, and other business sectors.

The College came together in its current configuration on July 1, 2003. It is made up of four Schools: School of Communication Studies, School of Information Sciences, School of Journalism & Media, and Tombras School of Advertising & Public Relations. Each of the disciplines housed within these schools has a distinguished history on the University of Tennessee campus. The beneficial synergy of bringing these schools together into a single College is most apparent at the graduate level, where students are encouraged to explore the diverse traditions in the College.

College Mission

Uniquely positioned at a flagship, land-grant, Research 1 university, the College of Communication & Information:

- Provides a rigorous education in a supportive academic environment that inspires our students to engage in the social, scientific, and professional challenges of our time and future.
- Serves Tennessee through research, teaching, service, and engagement that enhances the well-being and vitality of the state and its residents.
- Commits to excellence in access and engagement and community as core tenets in developing future Volunteers.
- Lives this mission through its world class people and programs and with the support of a passionate alumni base that spans the globe.

Teaching

The College serves the general education goals of increasing awareness of the importance of communication and information in the contemporary world and improving personal skills in communication, critical thinking, information analysis, and evaluation. It serves the professional goals of preparing graduate and undergraduate students for careers in the communication and information professions. It serves the academic goals of preparing students to become leaders and to pursue future academic study and research.

Research and Creative Activities

The College advances knowledge in the fields of communication and information sciences by the efforts of its faculty, staff, and students who often collaborate with colleagues in other disciplines and at other institutions.

Service

The College provides its expertise to the campus, to professional disciplines, and to the public through regional, national, and international service.

Purpose of this Handbook

The purpose of this *Handbook* is to provide graduate students with information about the policies and procedures of graduate programs in the College of Communication & Information, as well as to address frequently asked student questions. Please note that this is not inclusive of all graduate school policies and procedures. Those regulations are documented in the UT Graduate Catalog: <https://tiny.utk.edu/grad-catalog> and Hilltopics: <https://hilltopics.utk.edu>. The *CCI Graduate Student Handbook* does not deviate from established policies of UT Graduate School.

Graduate students are expected to be aware of and satisfy all regulations governing their work and study at the University. Graduate students should also review the Rights and Obligations section of the Graduate School website: <https://gradschool.utk.edu/graduate-student-life>. Nothing in the CCI handbook supersedes the requirements stated in the UT Graduate Catalog or other university official publications. However, it is our hope that this document will be helpful during your graduate studies.

This handbook discusses the CCI PhD degree program. The CCI Master of Science in Communication and Information (MSCI) program information is discussed in a separate handbook. The College of Communication & Information website is: <http://cci.utk.edu>. This CCI PhD Handbook is available on both the CCI website and CANVAS: <https://utk.instructure.com/courses/146914>. Forms and guidelines you will need as you progress in your graduate program are also on this Canvas page.



Office of Graduate Programs

The Office of Graduate Programs oversees all academic-related functions for CCI graduate students, including recruitment and admissions, curriculum development, policy implementation, assistantship processing, course scheduling and registration, tracking academic milestones, and certifying degrees.



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Duties, Responsibilities, and Opportunities

Graduate programs in the College are intentionally kept relatively small and focused so that faculty and students have the opportunity to get to know each other well and to work together closely. Faculty members enjoy mentoring and working with advanced-level students.

Duties and Responsibilities of Faculty

College faculty have important responsibilities to graduate students. First, faculty as well as administrators review the applications of graduate students. After students are admitted into one of the graduate programs in the College, they will get to know the faculty because faculty members teach graduate courses, involve graduate students in research projects, and serve as advisors to help students plan their curriculum and their careers.

Faculty advisors are expected to be familiar with the *Handbook* and to guide their students in following policies and procedures outlined in the *Handbook*. Faculty and School Directors also provide feedback on graduate student progress. If students are not performing satisfactorily in graduate studies, they will be informed, and the Associate Dean and faculty will work with those students to help them evaluate their goals.

Duties and Responsibilities of Graduate Students

- All graduate students are expected to understand and follow the UT Student Code of Conduct. See <https://studentconduct.utk.edu/> and <https://studentlife.utk.edu/Hilltopics/> for details.
- Graduate students are expected to meet all the requirements set forth in the current Graduate Catalog and all the other requirements specified by the College. These are subject to change; students will be notified via UT email of major modifications in College rules and procedures. Students are expected to keep informed about these changes.
- Graduate students are expected to attend their classes and to successfully meet all the requirements of their courses.
- Graduate students are also strongly encouraged to participate in College activities such as the CCI Research Symposium that is held each spring. The graduate student serves on some College committees and should consider participation in professionally oriented groups. These include academic associations such as the American Library Association, the Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication, the International Communication Association, and the National Communication Association.

Opportunities for Campus and Community Involvement

Many opportunities for engagement with campus and local chapters of organizations also exist, such as the Advertising Club, American Society for Information Science & Technology, the Society of Professional Journalists, Communication Studies Club, and the Public Relations Student Society of America.

Joining CCI's Graduate Student Association (GSA) is a wonderful opportunity for students to socialize and feel connected, network, gain professional tips, and learn from each other. Meetings are held throughout the academic year. For more information, email ccigradinfo@utk.edu or follow [@utkccigrad](https://www.instagram.com/utkccigrad) on Instagram. Both the GSA and the UT Graduate Student Senate (GSS) provide an open forum for students to discuss College and University issues and matters they would like the College to address.



Overview of the CCI Ph.D. Program

The PhD program in the College of Communication & Information is interdisciplinary. Students receive a PhD with a major in communication and information and a concentration in one of the disciplinary areas within the College—advertising, communication studies, information sciences, journalism and media, or public relations.

The doctoral program is intended to prepare students for research, teaching, administration, and service in the fields of communication and information. The goal of the program is to prepare graduates for positions in research-intensive institutions. This preparation also enables them to work at other types of educational institutions and in industry positions.

Doctoral students develop publishable research as part of their coursework, and provide evidence of publishable research prior to taking comprehensive exams. The program offers the opportunity for students to learn how to be effective teachers and to participate in service and outreach activities.

The doctoral program strives to offer ongoing student engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences. At the University level, the Graduate School offers workshops, training sessions, and job fairs to graduate students that target research, teaching, and career development.

Student learning outcomes for the doctoral program are to be able to 1) apply core theories and/or concepts within their area of concentration (i.e., advertising, communication studies, information sciences, journalism and electronic media, and/or public relations); 2) apply quantitative and/or qualitative research methods; and 3) be productive in advancing knowledge in the communication and information fields using an interdisciplinary approach to research.



Doctoral Student Advising

All doctoral students are assigned an advisor at the beginning of their first semester. The advisor provides guidance regarding course selection and professional development, serving as both mentor and the student's initial committee chair. Students should work with their advisor to schedule regular meetings. Maintaining an active student-advisor relationship is critical for making steady progress in the program.

Students in the doctoral program go through three stages of advising: First-year studies, comprehensive exam, and dissertation. Students may have the same advisor or a different advisor at each stage of advising.

Advisor for First-year Studies

The goal of assigning a first-year advisor to the new doctoral student is to guide the student in their early coursework, research activities, and developing a preliminary program of study. **See Appendix A for a sample of the Program Planning Form that is used to develop the student's program plan.**

During the first year of study, the student and first-year advisor collaborate to develop a preliminary program plan outlining the coursework that the student plans to complete to fulfill program requirements. This program plan is reviewed by the Associate Dean and Director of Graduate Programs. **Ph.D. students must submit the completed and signed Program Planning form to the Office of Graduate Programs by APRIL 7** of their first year of study.

Advisor for the Comprehensive Exam (Program Chair)

The student should identify a faculty member who will serve as the comprehensive exam program chair (advisor) by the end of the student's first year of studies. The student may have the same advisor or a different advisor during the first and second year of studies. As the student continues to take coursework, the program plan may need to be amended—particularly as the student more clearly defines a secondary area. *It is the responsibility of the student and advisor to ensure that the final program plan meets all degree requirements.*

In addition to course work, the student and advisor focus on identifying a dissertation topic and consider the kind of individualized readings and research in preparation for the doctoral comprehensive exam. This exam synthesizes the student's doctoral course work and focuses on the dissertation area.

The student and program chair (advisor) typically assemble the comprehensive exam committee during the second year of studies. The committee must be composed of a minimum of four members. Committee composition must comply with the **Academic Policies & Requirements for Graduate Students** as listed in the Graduate Catalog (see "Index for Academic Policies" à "Doctoral Degree") on the following website: <https://tiny.utk.edu/grad-catalog>.

Regarding these specific requirements, Academic Policies & Requirements under Category One stipulate that "University of Tennessee tenured or tenure-track faculty holding a doctoral degree or joint faculty holding a doctoral degree are automatically granted the approval to chair or be a member of any doctoral committee..." In this college, tenure-earning faculty (i.e., assistant professor) should consult with their School Director to determine eligibility to serve in this role.

It is the advisor's responsibility to ensure that the committee includes the diversity and expertise to properly judge the student's examination.

At least **one semester before** taking the comprehensive exam, the student should update and finalize the program plan and have it approved and signed by **all** members of the comprehensive exam committee. The student must submit a copy of this signed final program plan form to the CCI Office of Graduate Programs PRIOR to scheduling the comprehensive exam. **The exam will not be scheduled until this plan has been submitted.**

Note: Students are to have successfully completed the comprehensive exam *before* beginning registration for dissertation hours. Please plan accordingly.

Advisor for the Dissertation (Dissertation Chair)

The student should identify a faculty member who will serve as the dissertation chair (advisor), upon successful completion of the comprehensive exam. The student may keep the same advisor or change to a different advisor at this stage of advising. The student will form a dissertation committee in consultation with the dissertation chair. Follow the same criteria for the composition of the dissertation committee as outlined in the Academic Policies & Requirements for Graduate Students in the Graduate Catalog as above.

- The dissertation chair oversees the writing of the dissertation, as well as the oral defense of both the dissertation proposal and the final dissertation. To maintain satisfactory academic progress and remain eligible for fourth-year funding, you must defend your dissertation proposal within six months of passing your comprehensive exams and reaching ABD (All But Dissertation) status, and complete the proposal by the end of the third year at the latest. The student must submit a copy of the dissertation to all committee members *no less than two weeks prior to the oral defense*.

Students must notify the CCI Office of Graduate Programs at least two weeks prior to their scheduled dissertation defense to ensure that the necessary College forms are prepared and distributed to the committee.



Degree Requirements

Program Milestones and Academic Progress

The doctoral degree requires a minimum of 62 credit hours of approved graduate work, successful completion of written and oral comprehensive examinations, and satisfactory defense of a dissertation. During their first year, doctoral students will develop both a program plan and an Individual Development Plan (IDP) that align their academic and professional goals with the Ph.D. program's curriculum. As part of this process, students will first be assigned an advisor and later form a supervisory committee to guide their progress throughout the program. Each year, students undergo an annual review to evaluate their academic development and update their IDP as needed. After completing the required coursework, students must pass a comprehensive exam to advance to doctoral candidacy. The final stages of the program include completing a dissertation and passing a final oral defense of the dissertation. Each of these milestones is described in detail below. Additional information is available in the Graduate Catalog.

Residency

Doctoral students may satisfy the residence requirement in either of two ways:

- Enroll in 2 consecutive semesters of 9+ credit hours.
- Enroll in 3 consecutive semesters of 6+ credit hours.

Except in rare cases, students will meet this requirement in the first year of graduate study.

Admission to candidacy

Students should complete the admission to candidacy form immediately following the approval of dissertation proposal, no later than one full semester prior to the date the degree is to be conferred. At the time the [Admission to Candidacy form](#) is submitted to the Graduate School, the [PhD Committee form](#) should also be filed with the Graduate School. Following a successful dissertation defense, the [Dissertation Defense pass/fail form](#) must be submitted to the Graduate School, along with the completed [Dissertation Approval form](#). **A copy of these three forms must be submitted to the Office of Graduate Programs.** The forms are available on the Graduate School "Forms Central" webpage (<https://gradschool.utk.edu/academics/forms-central/>).

Number of Years Allowed for Degree Completion

Candidates for the Ph.D. degree have **eight years from the time of enrollment to complete the degree.** Students must take the doctoral comprehensive examination within **five** years of enrollment.



Curriculum Description and Coursework

Curriculum Description

Doctoral students are required to take a set of core, concentration, and cognate courses that are taught by faculty from across the College. Students are encouraged to think about knowledge creation from a disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspective. For example, CCI 605 is designed to provide the student with an overview of the philosophical presuppositions and theoretical frameworks that inform the communication and information fields. In turn, the concentration-specific doctoral theory course (ADVT 680, CMST 680, INSC 680, JMED 680, and PBRL 680) provides discipline depth by surveying the major theories and studies in the student's concentration area.

Multiple courses in the curriculum incorporate pedagogical innovations that advance student learning in communication and information. The curriculum is designed to contribute to mastery of the doctoral program and the three student learning outcomes for the program.

- **Core Courses.** Core courses are designed to help students understand the common threads across disciplinary areas in communication and information that are found in literature, theories, and methods to integrate knowledge and skill set. Faculty from each school teach the core courses.
- **Concentration Courses.** Concentration courses are taught by faculty from each of the four schools. Most students define their concentration area in terms of one of the disciplinary areas within the college based upon their research focus in advertising, communication studies, information sciences, journalism and media, or public relations. The concentration area is defined by the student and their program committee.
- **Cognate Courses.** Cognate courses are most often a set of courses from a discipline outside the college. Frequent cognate areas include marketing, sociology, political science, psychology, education, etc., and some students define their cognates in a more interdisciplinary way, taking courses from across the university in broad areas. A database of university-wide courses is provided to first-year studies students to consider as they plan their program of study.
- **Theory-intensive and Methods-intensive Courses.** Theory-intensive courses include a significant volume of theory-based readings. These courses require students to complete assignments that strongly draw on that theory base. Methods-intensive courses provide instruction in use of one or more research methods and students employ that method in an original research project. These courses are designed to provide the student with a sound grasp of methods.

All students are required to take CCI 611 Statistical Design and Analysis for CCI Research (introduction to methods of statistical analysis of data, with an emphasis on the use and interpretation of statistics in communication and information) or an advanced statistics course (e.g., STATS 537); CCI 631 Quantitative Communication & Info Research Methods I (introduction to quantitative approaches to research in communication and information); and CCI 635 Qualitative Communication & Info Research Methods I (introduction to qualitative approaches to research in communication and information).

Required Hours

A minimum of 62 credit hours of approved graduate work is required for the Ph.D. The following outline provides a general overview of the required doctoral courses and credit hours to complete the doctoral degree:

- Core Courses (17 hours minimum): CCI 605, CCI 631, CCI 635, CCI 620 (2 credits), CCI 611 or Advanced Statistics, and an additional 3 credit hour CCI Doctoral Level Course.

- CCI 611 or an advanced statistics course should be taken either in the first semester or in the third semester of doctoral studies.
- Concentration Courses (12 hours minimum): 3 credit hours of ADVT 680, CMST 680, INSC 680, JMED 680, or PBRL 680. Other concentration courses are defined by the student and his/her program committee.
- Cognate Courses (9 hours minimum): Defined by the student and his/her program committee.
- Dissertation (24 hours minimum): CCI 600.

Within the combined primary concentration and cognate areas, a total of 6 credit hours must be from theory-intensive courses and a total of 6 hours must be from methods-intensive classes. Courses both inside and outside the College (including graduate-level courses in the Schools) may be identified as theory-intensive and/or method-intensive. To be considered theory intensive, the course should include a significant volume of theory-based readings and should require students to do assignments that draw strongly on that theory base. To be considered method intensive, the course should provide instruction in use of one or more research methods and require students to employ that method in an original research project. Students may also submit courses to their program committee for consideration as theory-intensive and/or method-intensive.

Table 1. A list of eligible theory-intensive and methods-intensive courses housed within the College

Theory Intensive Courses	Method Intensive Courses
ADVT 510 Advertising and Society	ADVT 530 Advertising and Public Relations Research
ADVT 520/620 Advertising and Communication Theory	CCI 643 Qualitative Com & Info Research II
680 Theory Course in ADVT, CMST, INSC, JMED, or PBRL	CCI 644 Quantitative Com & Info Research II
CMST 520 Foundations of Interpersonal Communication Theory and Research	CMST 508 Quantitative Methods of Communication Research
CMST 580 Foundations of Organizational Communication Theory and Research	CMST 509 Qualitative and Ethnographic Methods of Communication Research
INSC 536 The Information Society	JMED 512 Mass Media Research Methods
JMED 520 Seminar in Political Communication	
JMED 522 Seminar in Journalism Issues and Theory	
JMED 525 Public Opinion	
JMED 610 Research Questions in Journalism and Media	
PBRL 525 Public Opinion	
PBRL 540/640 Public Relations Management	

Note: Students typically are able to complete coursework in two full years of study and should expect to spend one to two years writing the dissertation. Students may not take more than 6 hours of independent study as part of their coursework, with rare exceptions. *No transfer credits are accepted for the doctoral program.* **Appendix B provides an overview of the steps in the process of earning the Ph.D. degree.**

Suggested Courses for First-year Studies

The following outline identifies courses that full-time doctoral students typically take during their first year of study:

FALL (10 credit hours):

- CCI 605 Philosophical and Theoretical Foundations of Communication and Information (3) or Concentration course (3)
- CCI 620 Professional Development Seminar (1)
- CCI 631 Quantitative Com & Info Research Methods I (3)
- Graduate Level Statistics Course (CCI 611 or advanced statistics course) or course in Concentration Area (3)

SPRING (10 credit hours):

- CCI 635 Qualitative Com & Info Research Methods I (3)
- CCI 620 Professional Development Seminar (1)
- Theory Course in Concentration Area – Students choose one of the following theory courses:
 - ADVT 680 (Mass Communication Theory – cross-listed with JMED 680 and PBRL 680)
 - CMST 680 (Communication Studies Theory)
 - INSC 680 (Information Science Theory)
 - JMED 680 (Mass Communication Theory – cross-listed with ADVT 680, PBRL 680)
 - PBRL 680 (Mass Communication Theory – cross-listed with ADVT 680, JMED 680)
- Concentration Area or Cognate Area (3)



Graduate Student Registration

All graduate students who use university facilities or faculty time must be registered. This includes access to services such as library checkout, laboratories, and recreational facilities that are not open to the public.

If students are working on a dissertation (course number CCI 600), they should be properly registered for that class. Once doctoral students who begin taking dissertation credit hours (**CCI 600**), they must continue to do so **each semester, including the full summer session, until they successfully defend their dissertation.**

If domestic students simply need to maintain registration, but are not actively working with a faculty member on a specific project, they should register for “**Use of Facilities**” using their School’s **502** course number. International students must follow **CGE/ISSS** regulations.

- Information concerning registration is available on the One Stop webpage: <https://onestop.utk.edu/class-registration/>.
- The Timetable of Classes contains useful information about classes (https://bannersb.utk.edu/kbanpr/bwckschd.p_disp_dyn_sched). A registration period is scheduled during each semester for the subsequent semester.
- See the Timetable/Financial Deadline Calendar <https://registrar.utk.edu/calendar/> for details on when courses may be added and dropped.
- Late registration will incur late fees. <https://onestop.utk.edu/tuition-detail/>.

Full-Time Enrollment Guidelines

- For a student **not on an assistantship**, the minimum for full-time classification is 9 semester hours. The maximum number of hours that can be taken without special permission is 15.

- For students working as a **Graduate Teaching Assistant or Graduate Research Assistant at 25 percent time (10 hours per week)**, full-time study is defined as a minimum of 9 hours.
- For students working as a **Graduate Teaching Associate at 50 percent time (20 hours per week)**, normally should enroll in at least 6 credit hours during the semesters of the assistantship to be considered a full-time student. **A student must be enrolled in at least 9 credit hours to be considered full-time for federal financial aid purposes, even if the student has an assistantship.**



Doctoral Comprehensive Exam (Written and Oral Defense)

The primary purpose of the comprehensive exam is to help doctoral students synthesize what they have learned in their coursework and make application of that material to their dissertation. The exam is not intended as a “mega-exam” in which students re-hash all the material from specific classes, but rather it is an opportunity for the student to “make sense” of what they have learned over the course of graduate studies at the University of Tennessee.

Scheduling Exam

Doctoral students must successfully complete all coursework specified in their Program Plan **prior** to taking the comprehensive exam. This requirement includes the removal of all grades of “Incomplete,” in accordance with Graduate School guidelines. The CCI Office of Graduate Programs will verify that all coursework has been successfully completed based upon the official posting of grades by the Registrar. *The exam will not be scheduled until this completion is confirmed.* Student schedules exam through the CCI Office of Graduate Programs at least 4 weeks in advance.

A checklist of procedures and timelines for the comprehensive exam appears in **Appendix C**.

Comprehensive Exam Committee

Committee membership requirements are the same as the “PhD Committee” categories listed in the Graduate Catalog (See Graduate Catalog → “Index for Academic Policies and Requirements for Graduate Students” → “PhD Committee”).

Component of Comprehensive Exam

The comprehensive exam committee assesses student performance on the written and oral exam based upon the following rubric evaluation criteria:

(Written)

- Understanding and application of theoretical concepts.
- Understanding and application of research method(s).
- Knowledge of chosen field of study.

(Oral)

- Knowledge of chosen field of study.
- Knowledge of research method(s).
- Ability to handle all questions.

Written Exam. In total, the written exam consists of four questions (*some may have multiple parts*). Question areas will be determined by the comprehensive exam committee, based upon the student’s program of study – including concentration and cognate areas. One question should cover theory; one

question should cover research methods; and the remaining two questions should cover the student's dissertation focus (i.e., Question 1 – theory, Question 2 – research methods, Question 3 – dissertation focus, and Question 4 – dissertation focus). Note: in April 2022 the CCI Curriculum Taskforce agreed to standardize the remaining two question topics going forward to cover the student's dissertation focus. This decision supports the recommendation of the CCI Ten-Year Academic Program Review that occurred in 2021.

The written exam will be completed within a two-week time period. Contact the CCI Office of Graduate Programs to schedule the exam. Students will have four hours to complete each question area for the written exam. They are only allowed to bring in a one-page, non-annotated, bibliography for each question, with no restrictions on font size or spacing. The College will provide a computer for students to use to write their answers. **The College policy stipulates that students are not allowed to bring in or access additional material other than the one-page (one side of an 8.5 x 11" sheet) bibliography for each question; students are not allowed to bring in any computer storage medium; and students are not allowed to connect to any external sources of information during the exam.**

Faculty on the comprehensive exam committee write questions in consultation with the program chair (advisor) and other committee members. The questions are delivered to the program chair (advisor) so that they can send questions to the Director of Graduate Programs at least two weeks in advance of scheduling the exam. The Director of Graduate Programs will review the questions for overall consistency with program guidelines and will notify the program chair (advisor) upon approval. *The exam may not be scheduled until all 4 questions have been approved by the Director of Graduate Programs.*

Committee members will provide general guidance to the student about how to prepare for the comprehensive exam. At a minimum, a committee member should meet with the student to discuss the general framework of the question(s) the member will ask. Committee members should not ask a student questions covering material that was not presented in the student's program of study.

Oral Exam (Defense). The primary goal of the oral exam is to provide the student with an opportunity to address questions from faculty that emerged based on their written exam responses. After the answers to the comprehensive exam questions have been distributed to committee members for review, a meeting will be held with the committee and the student, which serves as an oral defense of the written exam and also facilitates the transition to work on the dissertation. Faculty members should have a minimum of two weeks to read written responses before the scheduled oral exam defense date.

The comprehensive exam committee chair is responsible for informing the CCI Office of Graduate Programs of the committee's pass/conditional pass/fail decision *immediately* after the completion of the oral exam defense by submitting the CCI Pass/Fail form (available from the CCI Office of Graduate Programs).

Comprehensive Exam Policy

Student responses are evaluated by their committee in accordance with university and college policies, and within the framework of the individual student's specific program. **The written exam is not assessed independently; instead, the committee will determine the student's overall pass or fail status on the comprehensive exam following the completion of the oral exam.** There are three options for outcome of the comprehensive exam process:

- **Pass** – For students to earn a **Pass**, all four holistic (written and oral) answers are found to be acceptable. Internal forms are signed off on and the student proceeds to the dissertation proposal stage.
- **Conditional Pass** – For students to earn a **Conditional Pass**, one of the four holistic (written and oral) answers is deemed unacceptable and requires an in-depth revision. The expectation for revision is thoroughly explained by the committee and must be submitted to the committee chair within a maximum 30-day period for additional review. This revision does not require the original closed-door, 4 hour per question format. A final decision of pass or fail results from this revision and is communicated to the student within two weeks. The **deadline** for revision submission must be listed on the pass/fail form.
- **Fail** – For a student to earn a **Fail** on his/her comprehensive exam, two or more of the four exam answers are deemed unacceptable. Once the failure is communicated, the student will retake the failed questions within a 30-to-90-day timeframe in the original comprehensive exam format. A formal, second defense is scheduled to defend the new answers with the full committee. Petition for time extension beyond 90 days can be formally requested to the CCI GSC and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

NOTE: Student-initiated changes to the comprehensive exam committee for the retake are not allowed, *except under extraordinary circumstances*. Such circumstances would require the student to obtain written permission from the Associate Dean. The same College policy applies to the retake regarding use of outside sources during the exam: **Students are not allowed to bring in or access additional material other than the one-page** (one side of an 8.5 x 11” sheet) **bibliography for each question; students are not allowed to bring in any computer storage medium; and students are not allowed to connect to any external sources of information during the exam.**

If a student is not successful in writing and/or defending the exam after a second attempt, they will be dismissed from the program.



Next Steps: After a Successful Completion of the Comprehensive Exam

Following the successful completion of the comprehensive exam (written and oral portions), the student, who is now a doctoral candidate, prepares a proposal of the dissertation and will orally defend that proposal to their dissertation committee. A doctoral proposal typically consists of a clear statement of the problem to be addressed in the study, a discussion of previous academic work in related field(s), and a general outline of how the research will be conducted. This is an opportunity for the student and faculty members to clearly define the dissertation and come to agreement about expectations.

The student and the dissertation chair may choose to hold a separate meeting to discuss the dissertation plans instead of presenting it following the comprehensive exam defense. **The Dissertation Proposal form is available to use as evidence of the committee’s approval of the dissertation proposal, should the chair and student wish to use it. (See Appendix D.)** As stated earlier, students are to successfully complete comprehensive exams *before* beginning dissertation hours. Please plan accordingly.

Dissertation Information

The Academic Catalog for program requirements for the PhD with a major in communication and information stipulates that students must successfully complete their comprehensive exam *prior* to working on their dissertation (see 2025-26 Catalog entry:

https://catalog.utk.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=55&poid=35073&returnto=11825).

The Graduate School has published a *Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations* (available at <https://gradschool.utk.edu/academics/graduation/theses-and-dissertations/preparing-your-work/>) (direct link to the PDF document: <https://gradschool.utk.edu/documents/2023/07/preparation-guide-for-theses-and-dissertations.pdf/>), which discusses the different elements of a properly formatted thesis or dissertation and describes necessary styles. Reading this Guide early in the writing process can save time and effort down the road. The Guide provides the technical parameters within which all students **must** work.

With full committee approval, a student may choose to complete a multi-part manuscript style dissertation (or thesis). The Guide addresses specific parameters established by the Graduate School that must be met if a student chooses this type of dissertation style: It is only appropriate if the dissertation will contain two or more separate, but *related* essays; a disclosure must be included that details the student's involvement in each paper and also clarifies any co-researcher's role in each paper; and individual papers must be integrated into a unified presentation (see Section 4 of the Guide: Multi-Part/Manuscript Style Theses and Dissertations).

The successful completion and defense of the dissertation signify the completion of the requirements for graduation.

The Graduate School helps students with the process of completing a thesis or dissertation. (See: <https://gradschool.utk.edu/academics/graduation/theses-and-dissertations/>.) The Thesis/Dissertation Consultant (thesis@utk.edu) is available to assist in many areas, including resources for research approval and understanding of copyright, how to use iThenticate,* approval process, formatting requirements, submitting work to the Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange (TRACE), and explaining the policies around the public availability of theses and dissertations.

*The Graduate School's Coordinator of Student Services hosts zoom workshops during the year that provide a comprehensive overview for accessing and using the iThenticate plagiarism detection software. Contact the Graduate School about dates for these workshops.



Ph.D. Student Performance Expectations

The student evaluation process has two key benefits. First, it allows for a comprehensive review of a student's progress and enables systematic identification of successes and problems of doctoral students. Second, it prepares students for the kind of annual report/review that they will undergo as faculty members.

First-Year Review of Ph.D. Students

The first-year doctoral student must electronically submit a completed initial program planning form by **APRIL 7** (see **Appendix A**), in addition to their annual report (see **Appendix E**) for coursework, research,

and service (professional engagement). A review of the academic progress of each first-year student is held at or near the end of the student's first year by the Graduate Studies Committee. A report is then sent to the student with a copy to the school director and first-year advisor.

The review is used as a diagnostic tool. It is intended to provide an early indication of the student's progress in the program, to identify the student's strengths and weaknesses, and to help the student begin to prepare for the comprehensive examination. A student whose performance is not satisfactory may be dismissed from the program.

Progression in Coursework, Research, and Service

Each doctoral student is required to submit the following materials annually:

- An Annual Report summarizing progress in coursework, research, and professional engagement/service (see **Appendix E** for detailed guidelines);
- A current Curriculum Vitae (CV); and
- An updated Individual Development Plan (IDP).

The report must be **electronically** submitted to the Office of Graduate Programs by **APRIL 7** each year in the correct format. The Associate Dean and the Director of Graduate Studies will review the submitted materials in advance of the annual review meeting, which will be scheduled for later in April.

Each student's performance will be evaluated based upon coursework, research, and service areas. The student is determined to be in good standing if his/her performance meets or exceeds the criteria in each area. Performance expectations progress as the student moves through the program. Typical progression is as follows:

- During the **first** year, the student should be completing coursework with an acceptable grade point average, be participating in research, and providing at least one College service (e.g., engage in research talks or participate in CCI Research Symposium, participate in graduate student visitation day, aid in recruiting new graduate students, serve GSA). By the end of the first year of studies, the student should identify a faculty member who will serve as the program chair (advisor) to finalize the program plan and provide further guidance. The student may have the same advisor or a different advisor during the second year of studies.
- During the **second** year, the student is expected to be completing coursework, making progress in preparation for the comprehensive exam, developing research depth, exploring dissertation ideas, engaging in research with papers being presented at major conferences, and moving toward publication. The student should have made substantial progress toward finalizing their dissertation topic, identifying a committed dissertation chair, and an approved comprehensive exam/dissertation committee. The student is expected to provide at least one College service.
- During the **third** year, the student should be successfully completing the comprehensive exam, completing the dissertation proposal (within 6 months after passing the comprehensive exam), and presenting and publishing research. The student is also expected to provide a service to the College and a service to their profession.
- A student **beyond their third year** must submit a dissertation timeline with their annual progress report to be approved by the student's dissertation chair and their School Director. The student will remain in good standing if they meet each goal on the planned timeline they develop with their advisor.

Students meeting these criteria will be considered in good standing. Those who do not meet the criteria will be in poor standing. Any student who is in poor standing for three years will be dismissed from the program.

Research/Teaching Expectations for Students with Assistantships

All doctoral students who receive assistantship funding from the College will complete an annual report each year regarding their teaching and research responsibilities. The school's director, faculty advisor, faculty involved in supervising the work of the student, and the Associate Dean review the report. Instructions for completing the report appear in **Appendix E**, Section II. The report must be **electronically** submitted to the Office of Graduate Programs by **April 7** in the correct format.

If performance improvements are needed, the student will be notified and given the opportunity to improve their teaching and/or research work. However, if the work is completely unacceptable, funding will not be renewed and the student will be relieved of the assistantship, which will be done early enough to open that position to another student.

Ph.D. Student Teaching Experience

- First-year studies students who are Graduate Teaching Associates typically assist faculty with teaching as part of their assistantship duties in preparation for teaching as a sole instructor of record, which often occurs in the second year of study.
- All doctoral students holding assistantships are expected to obtain teaching experience. In addition, the UT Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (CIRTL) offers the CIRTL Asynchronous Certificate Course that is designed to enhance pedagogical practices and skills for graduate students. Doctoral students will complete this course during their first year and should include the certificate of completion in the annual review.



Financial Support for Graduate Students in Communication & Information

The sections below provide information on both assistantships/associateships, scholarships and other funding sources.

Scholarships

The College of Communication & Information awards student scholarships each year to outstanding graduate students. Schools nominate students for these college-wide scholarships and also nominate students for graduate fellowships awarded by the Graduate School. These scholarships and fellowships are normally awarded the following fall semester.

Research Fund

The Research and Innovation Center (RIC) provides funding to assist graduate students with their research expenses.

- **Graduate Student Research Completion Fund (GSRCF)** supports our graduate student researchers who are working on their theses and/or dissertation. GSRCF funding may be used to

assist with costs to complete research that has been approved by the student's committee for their theses or dissertation. This fund does not support travel or dissemination of research results. Funding for each student is capped at \$1,000 and limited to a 2-year period, which can be made over multiple requests. Find more information from here:

https://utk.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1RoJL2zux3IrgHk.

- **Doctoral Student Research Support Fund (DSRSF)** assists our doctoral student researchers on projects outside their dissertation work. Funding may be used to assist with costs to conduct research that has been approved by the faculty research supervisor. This fund does not support travel or dissemination of research results. Doctoral students may request a max award of \$1000 per fiscal year and the award is capped at \$1000 per project over its lifetime. See the link here for more information: https://utk.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_clsMftMuv8artLE.

Conference Travel Fund

The College of Communication & Information encourages all graduate students to submit research papers to conferences. The College provides up to \$2,000 per fiscal year (July through June) in travel funding for doctoral students to support attendance at academic conferences. University Travel Policies must be adhered to during all University-related travel. See: <https://finance.tennessee.edu/travel/>. All CCI graduate students who plan to travel using University funds must have written permission from the appropriate School Director prior to traveling. Doctoral students must complete the CCI Qualtrics travel form to gain permission to travel, and to request funding:

https://utk.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0OFPw7FDiv6zBZQ

Additional travel funding may also be available from the University's Graduate Student Travel Fund administered by the Graduate Student Senate [see <https://gss.utk.edu/> <http://web.utk.edu/~gss/> (GSS Travel and Academic Support Awards section) for more information on these funds].

Note: The use of World Travel and the purchase of travel insurance through Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI) are now **required** for University-related international travel.

Other Funding Sources

Loans and Work Study. Contact the Financial Aid Office for information on loans and the Federal work-study program. Graduate students who do not have an assistantship are eligible to apply for the student work-study program. Work-study is considered a form of financial aid, although it is not a loan and it is not subject to repayment.

University-wide Assistantships. The Graduate School shares University-wide openings for graduate assistantships whenever possible on their Graduate Costs and Funding page:

<https://gradschool.utk.edu/costs-and-funding/graduate-assistantships/>.

Employment Opportunities. Knoxville has many organizations that hire communication and information professionals. Some graduate students find part-time employment in the local community. Those without professional experience are especially encouraged to gain experience through internships and/or part-time employment in communication and information-related organizations. Full-time students should not attempt to work more than 20 hours per week. Part-time students should not attempt to take more than six hours of coursework per semester. ☐

Assistantships

Incoming doctoral students with assistantships are guaranteed funding for up to four years, contingent upon maintaining good standing and making satisfactory progress in their program. To

remain in good standing, doctoral students must maintain a **minimum GPA of 3.3**. If a graduate student's cumulative grade point average falls below the required GPA, that student will be placed on **probation** for the following semester. If the student's GPA has not increased to the required average at the end of the probationary semester, the assistantship/associateship will be **revoked**.

The funding package for all types of CCI assistantships provides coverage for maintenance, tuition, and university mandatory fees (covering student programs and services, health insurance, library, technology, facilities, and transportation fees) for the fall, spring, winter mini-term, and summer semesters, as well as university-provided student health insurance. Students are responsible for personal expenses (such as books) and all non-mandatory fees as listed on the One Stop Student Services website (see <https://onestop.utk.edu/tuition-detail/>).

Assistantship positions for doctoral students are 9-month positions. Graduate assistants are paid monthly. The salary for a 9-month position is pro-rated over 12-months (August 1 through July 31) for 9 months of work. Students on assistantship are not expected to work during the summer semester.

Students on assistantship support faculty members in both research and teaching. They have 20 hours of weekly assistantship hours to be divided by the school director in the concentration areas of doctoral study. For teaching, GTAs might help with class-related activities including grading, class preparation, and maintaining computer/lab facilities. They may also teach courses by serving as instructor of record. For research, students might be asked to collect data, edit manuscripts, run statistical analyses, co-author research posters or publications, or initiate the IRB process.



Changing Concentrations

A graduate student who wishes to change concentrations after matriculation must make a written request to the CCI Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Student Success. A doctoral student must make the request before the beginning of their second year. The request must include:

- a. The reason for the change in concentrations.
- b. Approval from the School Director in the unit **from** which the change is requested.
- c. Approval from the School Director in the unit **to** which the change is requested.
- d. Verification from the faculty member who agrees to serve as the academic advisor in the unit **to** which the change is requested.

If the Associate Dean approves the request, the office will forward the request to the Graduate School.



Standards, Problems, and Appeals

A Message to the Graduate Student: Research Involving Human Subjects

You will likely be conducting original research throughout your career as a graduate student. Your research must undergo a review and approval process to ensure that appropriate protections are in place, if any of the research involves human subjects.

Proposed research involving human subjects must be examined by a committee known as the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The University provides instructions and forms at <https://research.utk.edu/research-integrity/>. Instructions and best practices for working with the review committee in the College of Communication & Information can be found at: <https://ric.utk.edu/services/irb-guide>.

Grades

The general grading policy in the College follows that of the Graduate School of the University of Tennessee. See the *Graduate School Catalog* (<https://tiny.utk.edu/grad-catalog>). A student who earns less than a grade of C in a required course will have their program terminated unless the School Director and Associate Dean approve a student petition to waive the requirement of the required course and to accept a substitute course to earn the lost graduate credit. The student must earn a B or better in the approved substitute course.

A student in the College of Communication & Information whose graduate GPA is below 3.0 after the end of 9 hours of graduate credit will be placed on academic probation. A student will be allowed to continue graduate study in subsequent semesters if each semester's GPA is 3.0 or greater. Upon achieving a cumulative GPA of 3.0, the student will be removed from probationary status. A graduate student must achieve a cumulative GPA of 3.0 in order to graduate.

Removal of Incomplete Grades

Under extraordinary circumstances and at the discretion of the instructor, the grade of "I" (Incomplete) may be awarded to students who have satisfactorily completed a substantial portion of the course requirement but cannot complete the course for reasons beyond their control. The "I" must be removed within one calendar year for any graduate student enrolled in the College. The "I" will be changed to F if a supplementary grade report has not been received by the Graduate School by the end of the calendar year. The course will not be counted in the cumulative grade-point average until a final grade has been assigned. No student may graduate with an "I" on their record.

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is a responsibility of all members of the academic community. An honor statement is included on the University's application for admission or readmission. The applicant's signature acknowledges that adherence is confirmed.

The applicant pledges to neither knowingly give nor receive any inappropriate assistance, including plagiarism, in his/her academic work. Violations are investigated when suspected, and violators are referred to the office of Student Conduct & Community Standards (<https://studentconduct.utk.edu/>) if academic dishonesty is established.

Student Appeals of Decisions/Actions

The student handbook, *Hilltopics* (<https://hilltopics.utk.edu/>), which covers problems of misconduct, contains statements of the expected standards of conduct and of all disciplinary regulations for students at UT. For further information on the appeals procedure, see the *Graduate Catalog*.



Resources

Useful Campus Websites

- The Graduate School: gradschool.utk.edu
- [Office of Graduate Training and Mentorship](#)
 - Focus on mentorship and professional development
- Libraries: <https://www.lib.utk.edu/>
- Teaching & Learning Innovation: <https://teaching.utk.edu/futurefaculty/>
- Office of Innovative Technologies: <https://oit.utk.edu/>
 - [OIT Help Desk](#) (allow site to redirect)
 - [Statistical consulting for academic research](#)
- Office of Ombuds Services: <https://ombuds.utk.edu/>
 - Relationship Dynamics
- Graduate Student Life: <https://gradschool.utk.edu/graduate-student-life/>
- Center for Career Development and Academic Exploration (CCDAE): <https://studentsuccess.utk.edu/career/students/get-tailored-career-guidance/graduate-students/>
- Student Life: <https://studentlife.utk.edu/departments/>
- Center for Basic Needs, Division of Student Life: <https://studentlife.utk.edu/basic-needs/>
 - Basic Needs → [Big Orange Pantry](#) & [Smokey's Closet](#)
- Office for Campus Culture and Community: <https://studentlife.utk.edu/campus-culture/>
- Student Disability Services: <https://sds.utk.edu/>
- Student Union: <https://studentunion.utk.edu/>
- Center for Student Engagement: <https://studentlife.utk.edu/student-engagement/>
 - Grad Student Programming - trivia nights, tickets to local sporting events, etc.
- Center for Health Education & Wellness: <https://wellness.utk.edu/>
- Student Counseling Center: <https://studentlife.utk.edu/counselingcenter/>
- Health Center on campus: <https://studenthealth.utk.edu/>
 - Graduate Student Health Insurance: <https://studenthealth.utk.edu/student-health-insurance/>
- UT Recreation & Sports Center: <https://recsports.utk.edu/>
 - Group Sports, Fitness, Aquatics, etc.
 - Outdoor Pursuits: <https://recsports.utk.edu/utop/overview/>

Help with Writing Skills

The [Judith Anderson Herbert Writing Center](#) offers graduate students the opportunity to have one-to-one meetings with writing consultants. The consultants offer constructive feedback designed to help with writing processes and written work-in-progress. They help graduate students with both coursework-related writing and theses and dissertations. The Center also offers freelance editing on documents for a fee. In addition, the Center offers writing workshops each semester and collaborates with the UT Libraries, Graduate School, and the Office of Career Development. Events are posted on <https://calendar.utk.edu> and on the Herbert Writing Center's website, <https://writingcenter.utk.edu> (phone 865-974-2611).

The Center also offers resources for multilingual graduate students whose strongest language is other than English. Visit the Judith Anderson Herbert Writing Center website

(<https://writingcenter.utk.edu/resources-for-multilingual-graduate-students/>) for more details about these resources including Zoom workshops and discussion forums, including:

- **Academic English Writing Workshop Series for Multilingual Graduate Students:** Positive, interactive, and hands-on, these Zoom workshops help graduate research writers gain insights and practical skills they can apply immediately to the writing tasks of their graduate programs.
- **Discussion Forum Sessions for Multilingual Graduate Students:** A community-building, wisdom-sharing forum for multilingual graduate students from across all disciplines who are striving to become research writers in the global language of English.
- **“Writing Resources for Multilingual Students” Canvas Site:** This new Canvas site houses a collection of resources, information about upcoming workshops, and more for multilingual graduate and undergraduate students. Anyone may self-enroll at utk.instructure.com/enroll/FTABWR.
- **One-to-One Writing Help:** As always, multilingual graduate students can get individually tailored feedback from experts who specialize in working with writers whose strongest language is other than English. Book in-person or online appointments using the ESL Writing Help scheduler: <https://utk.mywconline.com/>.

The University also offers a general writing course for multilingual scholars (ENGL122). For more information, contact the ESL Director at the writingcenter@utk.edu. Consult the timetable (https://bannersb.utk.edu/kbanpr/bwckschd.p_disp_dyn_sched) for course availability:

ENGL 122- Graduate Writing for International Students (3 credit hours) – Intensive reading and writing for International graduate students, focusing on a variety of critical and rhetorical approaches to academic writing in the disciplines. Strategies for improving professional oral communication. Comprehensive review of the essential grammar for research writing.

Major Conferences in Communication and Information

The following are some of the major academic associations and conferences—though not limited to these—that many CCI faculty and students join and attend to present their research. Please visit their websites for details on submission deadlines, divisions, and available resources.

- American Academy of Advertising (AAA): <https://www.aaasite.org/>
- American Library Association (ALA): <https://www.ala.org/>
- Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC): <https://www.aejmc.org/>
- Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T): <https://www.asist.org/>
- Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE): <https://alise.org/>
- Broadcast Education Association (BEA): <https://beaweb.org/>
- International Association for Communication and Sport (IACS): <https://www.communicationandsport.com/>
- International Association for Media and Communication Research: <https://iamcr.org/>
- International Communication Association (ICA): <https://www.icahdq.org/>
- International Public Relations Research Conference (IPRR): <https://www.iprrc.org/>
- iSchools: <https://www.ischools.org/>
- National Communication Association (NCA): <https://www.natcom.org/>
- Southern States Communication Association: <https://www.sca.net/>



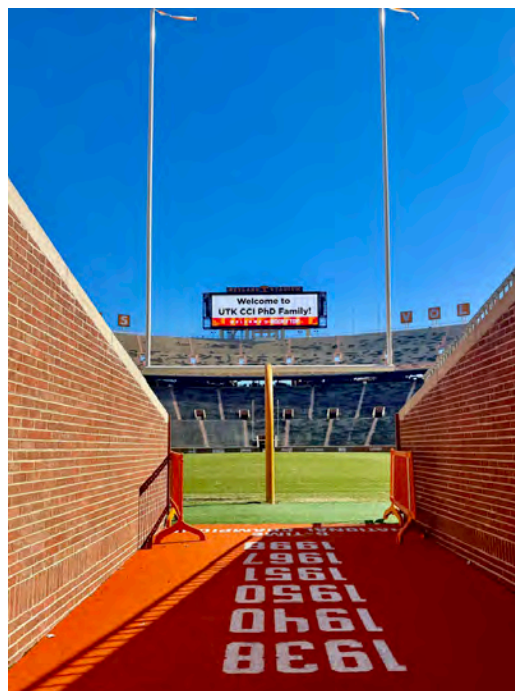
Resources for GTA Instructors

The *UT Student Code of Conduct* is available at: <https://studentconduct.utk.edu/>. Common classroom situations that violate the UT Student Code of Conduct include academic dishonest and disruptive behavior.

Student Academic Misconduct. The GTA who is the instructor of record (person teaching the course) is expected to adhere to all University regulations including meeting times, exams, and must follow academic misconduct procedures outlined in the UT Student Code of Conduct when an academic penalty is given to a student in the instructor's class. The Academic Misconduct Process begins and ends with the faculty member (instructor of record). For more information, visit <https://studentlife.utk.edu/studentconduct/>

Campus Syllabus. UT's Campus Syllabus provides students with important information that is common to all courses at UT Knoxville, such as academic integrity and addressing disability needs. You will see this information included in your course syllabi for many of your courses. We strongly encourage you to add the campus syllabus to the syllabus of the course that you teach. Visit <https://teaching.utk.edu/the-syllabus/>

Campus AI policy. The campus taskforce on the [emergence of AI tools in higher education](#) developed suggested syllabi language on use of AI tools in coursework. There are three types of recommended statements: 1) open use, 2) moderate use, and 3) strict use. Faculty are invited to use the suggested statement that best fits their courses. [View suggested language.](#)



Appendix A – Program Planning Form for Ph.D.

CCI offers a single Doctor of Philosophy in Communication & Information. The Office of Graduate Programs manages application to the program and management of progress through the program. Concentrations are not tightly defined because students are encouraged to think in interdisciplinary ways about the broad fields of communication and information.

However, the interests of doctoral students are usually most closely aligned with one of the four schools in the College and students are encouraged to seek advice from faculty members in that School about how best to define a primary area of study that prepares them for the academic and professional areas they will pursue upon completion of the degree. The following program planning form outlines the basic structure of the program. See the UT Graduate Catalog for more detailed information:

<https://tiny.utk.edu/grad-catalog>.

For first-year students, the form is to be completed and signed by the student, the student's advisor, and the Associate Dean, and must be submitted as a copy to the CCI Office of Graduate Programs no later than **APRIL 7** of the first year.

The Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Student Success will not approve a program plan until all courses are identified and are listed on the form. This is College Policy. Note that program plans are flexible, meaning that if a different course is selected (with approval from the student's advisor) for a future semester, that is allowed.

The PhD Program Plan must be submitted a second time. Typically, by the end of the second year, the student's comprehensive exam committee is assembled. This form is updated, and is signed by the student and the comprehensive exam committee. A copy of this updated form must be submitted to the CCI Office of Graduate Programs before the student schedules the comprehensive exam.

In the College of Communication doctoral degree program, candidates must earn a cumulative graduate grade point average of 3.00 on all graduate coursework, and earn a minimum of 62 credit hours beyond the Master's degree to graduate. The 62 credit hours must be comprised of at least 38 credit hours of approved graduate-level coursework, and at least 24 hours of CCI 600 (Doctoral Dissertation) to meet minimum requirements.

College of Communication & Information
PROGRAM PLANNING FORM FOR Ph.D. IN COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION

Student Name _____

Semester Entered _____

Core (17 hours minimum)

Semester

- | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-------|
| ____ (3) CCI 605 Philosophical and Theoretical Foundations of
Communication and Information | | _____ |
| ____ (3) CCI 631 Quantitative Com & Info Research Methods I | | _____ |
| ____ (3) CCI 635 Qualitative Com & Info Research Methods I | | _____ |
| ____ (3) CCI 611 (or Advanced Statistics Course) | | _____ |
| ____ (2) CCI 620 Professional Development Seminar | | _____ |
| ____ (3) At least one additional CCI doctoral level course | | _____ |

Six hours must be from theory-intensive courses and six hours must be from method-intensive courses within the combined concentration and cognate areas. The student, advisor, and Associate Dean must agree on these designations. Indicate which courses meet this requirement.

Concentration Area (12 hours minimum)

Theory Method

Semester

- | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------|
| ____ (3) <u>680 Theory Course (in ADVT, CMST, INSC, JREM, or PBRL)</u> | ____ v ____ | |
| ____ (3) _____ | | _____ |
| ____ (3) _____ | | _____ |
| ____ (3-6) Additional if needed _____ | | _____ |

Cognate Area (9 hours minimum)

- ____ (3) _____
- ____ (3) _____
- ____ (3) _____
- ____ (3-6) Additional if needed _____

Dissertation (24 hours minimum)

- ____ (24) Indicate all semesters for dissertation
- ____ **Total course hours** must be no less than _____

Student signature: _____

THIS IS A SAMPLE ONLY!

USE THE UPDATED INTERACTIVE FORMS AVAILABLE ON THE CCI GRADUATE PROGRAMS CANVAS PAGE:

<https://utk.instructure.com/courses/146914>
 (Click on Files > 1.Student Forms)

First-Year Approval

Advisor Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Director of Grad Studies: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Final Approval by Comprehensive Exam Committee

Advisor Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B – Steps in the Ph.D. Program

The following infographic summarizes the primary steps in the process of earning a Doctor of Philosophy in Communication & Information in the College of Communication & Information at the University of Tennessee. It does not substitute for the full details provided in the program plan or other official University publications.

NOTES:

*Each student is responsible for applying for graduation at the appropriate time. (Discuss this with your dissertation chair.)

**Each student is responsible for meeting with the Graduate School's Thesis/Dissertation Consultant to ensure that the dissertation is in the required format. The Graduate School will not accept the dissertation until this has been completed. See:
<https://gradschool.utk.edu/academics/graduation/theses-and-dissertations/preparing-your-work/>.

***Comprehensive examinations must be taken within five years, and all requirements must be completed within eight years, from the time of a student's first enrollment in a doctoral degree program. The semester(s) and/or year(s) of an approved Graduate Student Leave of Absence (LOA) will not be counted toward time to degree, and milestone deadlines such as Admission to Candidacy will be adjusted accordingly.

Steps in the Ph.D. Program

The following lists summarize the primary steps in the process of earning a Doctor of Philosophy in Communication & Information in the College of Communication & Information at the University of Tennessee. It does not substitute for the full details provided in the Graduate Catalog or other official university publications.



YEAR ONE

AUGUST



Attend the new grad student orientation. Focus on becoming familiar with your professors, your peers and the university.

COURSEWORK



Take required first-year courses and focus on expanding your knowledge.

RESEARCH



Submit research work for presentation at a conference and/or publication in a journal. This should be an ongoing process throughout your program – think of every class paper as a potential conference paper and journal paper. If rejected, revise and submit it somewhere else.

ANNUAL REVIEW

Submit your annual report due **April 7** to the CCI Office of Graduate Programs. All students must complete Section I. All doctoral students whom the College funds for research and/or teaching must also complete Section II. Complete preliminary program plan and obtain approvals from first-year advisor and Associate Dean.



REVIEW MEETINGS

These will take place mid April-May with the Director of Graduate Programs and the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs & Student Success.



YOUR COMMITTEE

Before the end of the first year, identify a program chair/advisor (may be same or different from first-year advisor) by the end of the first year.



YEAR TWO



COMMUNICATION &
INFORMATION



COURSEWORK

Complete the final program planning form no later than the end of the second year (Obtain signatures from all members of the comp exam committee). Most students complete coursework by the end of year two.

ADVANCE YOUR RESEARCH

Strive for fluency in diverse research methods. Produce both quantitatively and qualitatively tangible outcomes by submitting ALL your completed manuscripts to journals.



GET READY FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM



Assemble a comprehensive exam committee (full program committee) and work with them to define the areas of your comprehensive exam.



Submit a copy of the signed final program plan form to the Office of Graduate Programs PRIOR to scheduling the comprehensive exam.



Schedule your comprehensive exam; typically at end or summer of Year 2 or start of fall of Year 3.

ANNUAL REVIEW

Electronically submit your annual report due April 7 to the CCI Office of Graduate Programs.



DISSERTATION TOPIC

As you near the end of coursework you should begin to define your dissertation topic. Your committee can help you narrow down your focus and ideas.



YEAR THREE



OWN YOUR RESEARCH!

Keep producing both quantitatively and qualitatively tangible research outcomes while narrowing down your dissertation topic.

COMPLETE YOUR COMPREHENSIVE EXAM*

Two weeks after answers to the written exam questions are distributed to the program committee, meet with the committee for an oral defense of the comprehensive exam and a discussion of your dissertation topic. (Some committees want you to discuss your dissertation proposal at this time; other committees allow the student to wait until a later date.)



DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

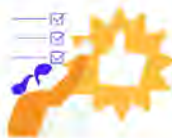
After completing/passing comp exams, assemble dissertation committee (may be the same as your the comprehensive exam committee, or not). File a PhD Committee form with the Graduate School. A copy must be provided to the CCI Office of Graduate Programs.



CCI 600

After successfully completing both the written and oral portions of the comprehensive exam, begin registering for CCI 600. Once begun, Doctoral students must consecutively register for CCI 600, for at least three hours per semester, including summer semester.

ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY



File the Admission to Candidacy form with the Graduate School after successful completion of the comprehensive examination, no later than a semester before intended graduation. The college Associate Dean's approval (as the graduate program director) is required. Provide a copy of the completed form to the CCI Office of Graduate Programs.

YEAR THREE (continued)



DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Work with your dissertation chair (advisor) to prepare a formal dissertation proposal and distribute it to your committee for review.

PROPOSAL DEFENSE

Schedule a proposal defense for two weeks (or more) after your committee receives your finalized proposal to review. A dissertation proposal form is available to use as evidence of the committee's approval of the dissertation proposal. To maintain satisfactory academic progress and remain eligible for fourth-year funding, defend your dissertation proposal within six months of passing your comprehensive exams, and complete the proposal defense by the end of the third year at the latest.



ANNUAL REVIEW

Electronically submit your annual report due April 7 to the CCI Office of Graduate Programs.

**Comprehensive examinations must be taken within five years, and all requirements must be completed within eight years, from the time of a student's first enrollment in a doctoral degree program.*



YEAR FOUR



DISSERTATION

Continue working on your dissertation research and write the full dissertation with direction as needed from your chair and committee.



SCHEDULE YOUR DEFENSE FOLLOWING GRAD SCHOOL DEADLINES

Schedule an oral defense of dissertation (after chair determines you are ready for defense) and submit your dissertation to all members of your committee at least two weeks prior to that date. Notify the CCI Office of Graduate Studies of the dissertation defense date at least 2 weeks prior to the date. Successfully defend your dissertation research in the oral defense. The defense may not be recorded.

AFTER THE DEFENSE

Each member of the Dissertation Committee must sign the Report of Final Exam (pass/fail). Your dissertation chair must provide a copy of the completed Report of Final Exam (Defense of Dissertation) form to the CCI Office of Graduate Programs. The chair then submits the original copy to the Graduate School.



FINAL APPROVAL

The final dissertation approval form must also be signed by all committee members upon dissertation finalization. The completed form is to be submitted to the Graduate School.

SUBMIT YOUR DISSERTATION



The final version of the electronic dissertation needs to be uploaded into TRACE (see the Graduate School Thesis/Dissertation Consultant for guidelines on doing so.) Each student is responsible for meeting with the Graduate School's Thesis/Dissertation Consultant to ensure that the dissertation is in the required format. The Graduate School will not accept the dissertation until this has been completed. See: <https://gradschool.utk.edu/academics/graduation/theses-and-dissertations/preparing-your-work/>.

YEAR FOUR (continued)



APPLY FOR GRADUATION

Each student is responsible for applying for graduation at the appropriate time. (Discuss this with your dissertation chair.)

ANNUAL REVIEW & EXIT SURVEY

Electronically submit your annual report due April 7 to the CCI Office of Graduate Programs. Please complete the exit survey before graduation. The link will be provided by the Office of Graduate Programs.



Finally
Done!

Appendix C – Doctoral Comprehensive Exam Checklist

For students “on schedule,” preparing for the comprehensive exam should start in the spring of second year. Time frames below are based on that schedule but should be adjusted for students who are operating on a different time frame. To reiterate, the University requires that candidates for the Ph.D. degree must take comprehensive examinations **within five years** of enrollment; all requirements must be completed **within eight years** from the time of the student’s first enrollment in a doctoral degree program.

During Spring Semester of Second Year

- _____ Finalize program committee.
- _____ Obtain signatures from all members of the program committee on the finalized program plan form. This indicates their approval of coursework.
- _____ Submit the program plan to the CCI Office of Graduate Programs for final approval.
- _____ Program committee chair works with other committee members to identify what areas will be covered by each member during examination.
- _____ Student meets with all committee members to discuss examination areas and get tips for how to study/prepare for the exam.

During Summer Semester of Second Year

- _____ Student studies for the comprehensive exam.
- _____ Student prepares a brief overview of the dissertation topic.
- _____ Student schedules exam through the CCI Office of Graduate Programs at least 4 weeks in advance.
- _____ Committee chair submits questions to Director of Graduate Programs at least two weeks before the exam begins.
- _____ Student takes the comprehensive exam (typically at end of summer or start of fall).

Fall Semester of Third Year

- _____ An oral defense of the comprehensive exam is scheduled. (Note: This defense may be scheduled during the summer **if all the committee members are available.**) All members of the comprehensive exam committee must be present. Committee members should have a minimum of two weeks to read written responses before the oral defense is scheduled. Final pass/conditional pass/fail decisions will occur only after the completion of the written exam and its oral defense.
- _____ After successful completion of the comprehensive exam, file the Admission to Candidacy form and the Doctoral Committee Appointment form with the Graduate School. A copy of each must be submitted to the Office of Graduate Programs. Must be submitted at least one semester before intended graduation (e.g., for a spring graduation, the forms must be filed no later than the previous fall).
- _____ Student assembles dissertation committee (if different from program committee).
- _____ Students who successfully complete and defend the comprehensive exam write a formal dissertation proposal. Meet with dissertation committee to defend dissertation proposal and ideally start data collection by end of fall semester.

Note: To maintain satisfactory academic progress, you must complete your dissertation proposal defense within six months of passing your comprehensive exams and achieving ABD status.

Appendix D– Dissertation Proposal Form
College of Communication & Information
Doctoral Dissertation Proposal Form

We, the dissertation committee of (student) _____
 have received the dissertation proposal and participated in the student’s oral review of the
 proposal on (date) _____. We consider it satisfactory, subject to the
 changes as noted below*.

Committee Signatures

Date	Committee Member Printed Name	Signature (Approved as-is)	Signature (Approved with Changes*)
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<p>THIS IS A SAMPLE ONLY!</p> <p>USE THE <u>UPDATED</u> INTERACTIVE FORMS AVAILABLE ON THE CCI GRADUATE PROGRAMS CANVAS PAGE: https://utk.instructure.com/courses/146914 (Click on Files > 1.Student Forms)</p>

*Note required changes on separate sheet and attach to all copies.

Distribution: 1 copy: Each member of the committee and the student

Appendix E – Annual Reporting for Doctoral Students

Section I. All doctoral students must complete Section I of the annual report. Section I focuses on self-assessment of coursework, research, and service.

Section II. All doctoral students funded by the College for research and/or teaching must complete Section II of the annual report. Section II focuses on assessment of research/teaching activities. Students who are not funded by CCI do not complete Section II.

Students are required to submit their annual report form electronically, by emailing as a single document to ccigradinfo@utk.edu by **APRIL 7** each year. The document file name must include student's name.

First-year students must also complete the Program Planning form by **APRIL 7 of their first year** and submit it to the Office of Graduate Programs.

The Word template for the Annual Report is available on the CCI Canvas page:
<https://utk.instructure.com/courses/146914>

Annual Report for Doctoral Students
College of Communication & Information
Section I – Coursework, Research, Service

NOTE: This format must be used for each area (Coursework, Research, and Professional Service), or it will be returned to the student for correction.

Submission instructions: Submit report electronically to the Office of Graduate Programs by **April 7**. Email as one document in PDF format to ccigradinfo@utk.edu. If you are completing Section II, include Section I & Section II in one document. Document file name must include student's name.

Student Name:

Entering Year Cohort (e.g., Fall 2025):

Advisor:

Reporting Period: Summer 20____ through Spring 20____ (Include in this year's report anything that happened since last year's report.)

Please report your academic and professional progress in the following areas for this reporting period:

1. Coursework

- a. List the courses you have taken and the grades earned for this reporting period. (You may access your academic history via your MyUTK account.) Do **not** attach your academic history.
- b. List university-wide cognate courses taken this past year and their professors who have been especially helpful in your doctoral studies: (This helps other doctoral students find useful courses in their cognate.)

2. Research

- a. List the full reference for each conference paper published or presented during the reporting period.
- b. List the full reference for each scholarly work published during the reporting period.
- c. Briefly describe research that you have in progress and explain how it fits into your broad research interests.

3. Professional Service

- a. List service provided to the profession (e.g., conference reviewer, service to professional organizations).
- b. List service provided to CCI (e.g., GSA, committees).

Please be sure to attach your latest curriculum vita to your report.

Annual Report for Doctoral Students
College of Communication & Information
Section II - Assistantship Performance

NOTE: This format must be used for each area (Funded Research Work and Teaching), or it will be returned to the student for correction. *If you are not a CCI Graduate Teaching Associate, you do not need to include Section II in your report.*

Submission instructions: If you are completing Section II, submit Section II with Section I (both sections are to be included in one PDF document).

Student Name:

Entering Year Cohort (e.g., Fall 2025):

Supervisor:

Reporting Period: Summer _____ through Spring _____ (Include in this year's report anything that happened since last year's report.)

Please report your assistantship accomplishments during the reporting period.

1. Assistantship duties assisting faculty in their research. (If you did not assist faculty with research the past year as part of your assistantship responsibilities, leave this section blank.)
 - a. Provide a list of the work accomplished and the names of faculty members with whom you have worked.
 - b. Provide a brief reflection on your experiences with these research projects.

2. Assistantship duties teaching as a sole instructor of record or assisting faculty with a course. (Leave this section blank if you did not teach at UT in the past year.)
 - a. Attach a copy of your TNVoice (CampusLabs Course Evaluations) for each course taught at UT.
 - b. Note your level of satisfaction with the TNVoice scores and discuss any important factors such as class size, new course, or new approaches that may have affected the scores, and course enrollment.

Appendix F – General Information

Contact List

Provost & Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs 529 Andy Holt Tower	Dr. John Zomchick provost@utk.edu
Vice Provost & Dean of the Graduate School 111 Student Services Building	Dr. Marieke Van Puymbroeck gradschool@utk.edu
Associate Dean of the Graduate School 111 Student Services Building	Dr. Ernest Brothers ebrother@utk.edu
Thesis/Dissertation Consultant 111 Student Services Building <i>Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations:</i> https://gradschool.utk.edu/academics/graduation/theses-and-dissertations/preparing-your-work/	Ms. Abby Sherman thesis@utk.edu
Dean, College of Communication & Information 489 Student Services Building	Dr. Joe Mazer joemazer@utk.edu
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs & Student Success 345 Student Services Building	Dr. Courtney Childers childers@utk.edu
College-Wide Director of Graduate Studies 476 Communications Building	Dr. Moonhee Cho mcho@utk.edu
Administrative Specialist III 434 Communications Building	Ms. Margaret Taylor mtaylor8@utk.edu
Interim Associate Dean for Research 424 Communications Building	Dr. Emily Paskewitz epaskewi@utk.edu
Interim Director, Tombras School of Advertising & Public Relations 476 Communications Building	Dr. Courtney Childers childers@utk.edu
Director, School of Communication Studies 293 Communications Building	Dr. Jon Hess jonhess@utk.edu
Director, School of Information Sciences 451 Communications Building	Dr. Abebe Rorissa arorissa@utk.edu
Director, School of Journalism & Media 333 Communications Building	Dr. Amy Jo Coffey ajcoffey@utk.edu

Required Forms to Submit to the CCI Office of Graduate Programs

Note: Download interactive College forms from the **CCI Graduate Program's Canvas page**. *Do not use forms copied from this Handbook.* See <https://utk.instructure.com/courses/146914> (Click on Files > 1. Student Forms).

- [College Program Planning Form for PhD in Communication and Information](#) due **APRIL 7** for first-year students – submit a copy to the Office of Graduate Programs (see Appendix B).
Note: Final approval of the updated program plan **MUST** be signed and dated by the four members of the comprehensive exam committee. Submit a copy of this final program planning form to the Office of Graduate Programs **PRIOR** to scheduling the comprehensive exam.
- [College Annual Report for Doctoral Students](#): due **APRIL 7** each year – electronically submit (see Appendix E).
- Copies of UT Graduate School forms – hard copies or via email with electronic signatures. Must be submitted to the Graduate School by a faculty or staff member.
- [Admission to Candidacy](#) (the Associate Dean also signs this form as the Director of Graduate Studies)
- [Revised Admission to Candidacy](#) (if revised)
- [Doctoral Committee Appointment](#)
- [Thesis/Project and Dissertation Approval](#)
- [Report of Final Examination](#) (Pass/Conditional Pass/Fail form)

Relevant UT Graduate School Forms

Available from the Graduate School website: <https://gradschool.utk.edu/academics/forms-central/>

Doctoral Degree

- [Admission to Candidacy – Doctoral](#) (Dr. Moonhee Cho signs this form as the Director of Graduate Studies) (submit a copy to the Associate Dean)
- [Revised Admission to Candidacy](#) (submit a copy to the Associate Dean)
- [PhD Committee](#) (submit a copy to the Associate Dean)
- [Revise PhD Committee](#) (submit a copy to the Associate Dean)
- [Schedule of Dissertation/Capstone Defense](#) (email a copy of the confirmation to ccigradinfo@utk.edu)
- [Report of Final Examination/Defense of Dissertation](#)
- [Request for Concurrent Master's Degree](#)
- [600 Continuous Enrollment Exemption](#)

Thesis and Dissertation

- [Thesis/Dissertation Approval](#) (submit a copy to the Associate Dean)
- [Initial Embargo Request](#)

Non-Standard Deadline

- [Early Deadline Graduation Application](#)
- [Second Deadline Graduation Application](#)

Registration

- [Late Change of Registration](#)

Other UT Graduate School Forms

- [Graduate Student Leave of Absence](#)
- [Reinstatement Request](#)
- [600 Continuous Enrollment Exemption](#)
- [Request for Letter of Degree Completion](#)
- [Request for Time Extension](#)
- [Change of Program](#) (submit a copy to the Associate Dean)
- [Invitation to International Family Members to Enter US to Attend Graduation](#)

Steps to Graduation

An overview of the graduate program steps is available here:

<https://gradschool.utk.edu/academics/graduation/steps-to-graduation/>

Graduation Deadline Dates

Graduate Student Graduation Deadline Dates can be found here:

<https://gradschool.utk.edu/academics/graduation/graduation-deadlines/>

Pertinent Graduate Student Websites

- The College of Communication & Information
<https://www.cci.utk.edu/>
- CCI Graduate Programs Canvas Page
<https://utk.instructure.com/courses/146914>
- The Graduate School
<https://gradschool.utk.edu/>
- Graduate Catalog
<https://tiny.utk.edu/grad-catalog>
- The Graduate Student Senate
<https://gss.utk.edu/>
- 974-HELP (Vols Help Vols) (865-974-4357)
<https://studentlife.utk.edu/care/>
- The Center for Health Education & Wellness
<https://wellness.utk.edu/>
- The Student Counseling Center
<https://counselingcenter.utk.edu/>
- Center for Global Engagement
<https://cge.utk.edu/> see also <https://international.utk.edu/>
- International House
<https://ihouse.utk.edu/>
- Student Conduct & Community Standards
<https://studentconduct.utk.edu/>
- Office of Equal Opportunity & Accessibility (EOA)
<https://dae.utk.edu/ea/>
- TNVoice, Institutional Effectiveness, Office of the Provost
<https://ie.utk.edu/tnvoice/>

- Research Integrity & Assurance/Human Research Protection Program (IRB)
<https://research.utk.edu/research-integrity/human-research-protection-program/>
- OPIc Program (Proficiency in Spoken English) (ITA Testing)
<https://gradschool.utk.edu/future-students/office-of-graduate-admissions/ita-testing-program/>
- Theses and Dissertations Website
<https://gradschool.utk.edu/academics/graduation/theses-and-dissertations/>
- Library Website for Graduate Students
<https://libguides.utk.edu/graduate>
- Office of Innovative Technology (OIT)
<https://oit.utk.edu/>
- Housing
University Campus - <https://studentlife.utk.edu/housing/>
Off-Campus - <https://offcampushousing.utk.edu/>
- Policy on Taxability of Graduate Tuition Waiver for UT Employees
<https://policy.tennessee.edu/policy/fi0910-taxability-of-graduate-tuition-waiver-for-employees/>