

A Guide to the Doctoral Program in Communication & Rhetoric

Effective Fall 2023

AS YOU READ this guide for the first time, you are just beginning the process it describes. Your goal in this process is to make a significant and original contribution to knowledge in communication and rhetoric, thereby achieving full collegial membership in an international community of scholars. This goal, which is itself only a beginning, may seem far off. The process of achieving it will be difficult and, at times, challenging. But your work as a doctoral student should also prove satisfying in a way that makes it worth doing in itself, apart from the value of the outcome. We wish you the joy of graduate education within the Rensselaer community and beyond.

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OVERVIEW

This guide explains the requirements for the Ph.D. in Communication and Rhetoric at Rensselaer. Additional Institute policies applicable to graduate students are explained on the [Office of Graduate Education's website](https://info.rpi.edu/graduate-education) <https://info.rpi.edu/graduate-education>. The Degree Progress Timetables at the end of this document will help you plan your progress through the Ph.D. program. They list the milestones by which your progress will be measured through a full-time study period of eight to ten semesters.

MISSION

Building on our reputation in media and communication studies within technological environments, the Ph.D. in Communication and Rhetoric (CMRT) prepares students to study contemporary interactions with multimedia and multicultural texts. Students have the opportunity to work with cognitive and computer scientists, artists, critical game theorists, as well as scholars in STS.

OUTCOMES

The CMRT Ph.D. consists of an interdisciplinary core with flexible tracks that students can tailor to their research interests under the direction of their advisors. Students who successfully complete this program will be able to:

- Conduct advanced scholarly research by developing competence in the following three categories: a) theoretically informed analysis of historical and contemporary communication practices; b) analysis and critique of historical, legacy, and new media technologies; and c) mastery of a set of methodologies necessary to carry out projects in the field of communication and rhetoric.
- Design and articulate research problems and conduct independent, original, and significant research.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the historical, social, cultural, and rhetorical contexts that shape, and are shaped by, diverse communication practices and media environments.
- Communicate effectively to specialized and general audiences.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

While specific plans of study will vary to meet individual needs and interests, all students must meet the program requirements outlined in this section. Note that a course applied to fulfill one requirement cannot be used to satisfy a second requirement. The curriculum outlined below was approved by the institute in 2021 and took effect for those entering in Fall 2021 and beyond.

COURSEWORK

The Core

To provide a foundation for contributions on issues related to communication in technologically mediated contexts, you are required to take **three** core courses. The first, Research Methods, provides an overview of various approaches to designing a dissertation, while the other two combine a horizontal disciplinary base in communication and rhetoric, with depth on issues of communication in technological contexts:

- IHSS 6410 Ethnography or approved substitution
- IHSS 6570 Research Methods or approved substitution
- IHSS 6790 Media Studies or approved substitution

Check other courses in the Course Catalog <http://catalog.rpi.edu/>

To request a substitution, contact the Graduate Program Director (GPD).

Directed Research

You are required to take **three to six credits of directed research** that enable you to prepare a list of readings or a piece of writing (e.g., literature review) in preparation for the **Comprehensive Exam**. Directed Research is an independent study undertaken with your dissertation advisor ("committee chair") before the Comprehensive Exam. It counts as coursework.

Free Electives and Independent Studies

You are required to take a minimum of 18 credits of 4000/6000-level electives and/or independent studies, including Directed Research. Of the 18 credits, at least one course must have a COMM prefix and one has a WRIT prefix.

Independent studies may be arranged within or outside the Department of Communication & Media. A syllabus must be created for the study and the Graduate Program Director (GPD) must sign and approve the course. No more than **12** credits total can be taken as independent studies (including Directed Research), with exceptions if approved by the graduate program director.

Dissertation Credits

Dissertation credits may be taken **after** a Dissertation Advisor and Committee have been approved by the Dean of Graduate Education starting in the semester that the student will take the Comprehensive Exam. The Committee must be formed **prior** to the start of semester in which dissertation credits will be taken and before the Comprehensive Examination will be taken. A minimum of 21 dissertation credits are required for students entering with a prior Master's degree; a minimum of 27 dissertation credits are required for students entering without a prior Master's degree.

Course Levels

No more than 15 credit hours can be at the 4000 level.

Credit-Hour Requirements

The Ph.D. degree requires satisfactory completion of **seventy-two (72) hours beyond the Bachelor's degree.**

- A. Students who have completed (or are about to complete) an **appropriate Master's degree** in a relevant field prior to entry into the Ph.D. program (for a Post-Master's Doctorate) will ordinarily be able to transfer in and apply **twenty-four credit hours** toward the Ph.D. They are then required to complete an additional **twenty-seven credit hours of course work** (including Required Core and Directed Research) and a **minimum of twenty-one dissertation credits** at Rensselaer following completion of the Master's degree. [24 + 27 + 21 = 72]

B. Students who enter the Ph.D. program *without* an appropriate Master's degree (for a Post-Baccalaureate Doctorate) are required to fulfill the requirements for the Communication & Rhetoric Master's degree at RPI. They are also required to complete an additional **eighteen hours of course work** (including Directed Research) and a minimum of **twenty-seven dissertation credits** at Rensselaer following completion of the Master's degree. The table summarizes the credit requirements for students entering with or without an appropriate Master's degree. [27 + 18 + 27 = 72]. If you enter without a prior Master's degree, the Comprehensive Exam and Candidacy Exam occur one year later.

This table summarizes two tracks of the PhD program: PhD Only and MS/PhD:

		Required Coursework	Dissertation Credits
Enter PhD <i>with</i> a Masters	Can apply 24 credits from prior Master's degree	9 credits Core + Min. 18 credits elective/ independent studies, including Directed Research	Min. 21 credits
Enter PhD <i>without</i> a Masters (Earn RPI MS)	Earn RPI MS with 27 credits course work (including the 9 credit Core) + 3 credits Capstone (not applied to PhD)	Beyond RPI MS degree, Min. 18 credits elective/ independent studies, including Directed Research	Min. 27 credits

Transfer Credits

If you have taken additional graduate-level course work in an appropriate area prior to matriculating in the Ph.D. program, you may apply to the departmental Graduate Program Director (GPD) for additional transfer credit. Per RPI regulations:

- Courses considered for transfer may not have been taken more than 5 years prior to matriculation at Rensselaer
- No more than 6 credits can be transferred for an MS program; no more than 24 credits can be transferred for a 72-credit Ph.D. program.

For more information and procedures of graduate credits transfer, see:

<https://rpi.app.box.com/s/o5qceu2s5t1i9b62rgm2kq8j724pujul>

M.S./Ph.D.

The Department admits qualified students with an appropriate Bachelor's degree to the M.S./Ph.D. combination. You should apply for the Master's degree **while finishing your first 27 credits and taking a 3-credit Master's Capstone or Thesis course** with your advisor:

You will need to:

1. Draft a separate M.S. Plan of Study in addition to a new Ph.D. Plan of Study and obtain the appropriate approvals (Advisor, Graduate Program Director, and OGE).
2. Complete a Change of Status form, indicating that you would like to "Add Additional Degree Program" and obtain the appropriate approvals (Graduate Program Director and OGE).
3. Complete a Degree Application by the degree application deadline in the planned semester of graduation.

THE ADVISING PROCESS

The Ph.D. advising process is intended to assist students in their course selections and preparations for the comprehensive exam, prospectus (candidacy exam), and dissertation, both to ease them through the process and to ensure that they are well prepared.

Typically, the Graduate Program Director serves as the initial academic advisor for new students in their first year. The GPD helps each student identify an appropriate dissertation advisor ("committee chair") and committee by the **end of the fourth semester at the latest** for students entering with a relevant prior Master's degree. You may choose a dissertation advisor, either the initial academic advisor or a new advisor. Any changes made to the doctoral committee after the initial approval by OGE must be requested by the Graduate Program Director and with the consent of the dissertation advisor. Changes include adding or removing internal or external members or adjusting a member's role on the committee (such as Chair to Co-Chair). Note: late changes (i.e., after the Candidacy Exam) usually require strong justification and must be re-approved by OGE.

You are required to develop a Graduate Plan of Study (POS), in consultation with your academic advisor, prior to the end of your second semester of coursework and you will need to update this immediately if courses are changed.

Graduate Plan of Study [POS]

Prior to the end of your second semester of full-time Ph.D. study, you must meet with your advisor to complete the Office of Graduate Education's Plan of Study (POS). The purpose of this Graduate Plan of Study is to help you to design a series of courses that will prepare you to complete a dissertation in your chosen area of study. The Plan of Study must be approved by you, your advisor, the departmental Graduate Program Director, and OGE. The POS **needs to be formally re-approved** immediately after you have made changes to an approved POS.

Graduate students who completed the master's degree at another institution should list the degree and institution for a total of twenty four credit hours (and no more than twenty-four credit hours) plus some or all of the courses completed at Rensselaer, **not to exceed the total of seventy-two credit hours** required for the degree. Additional courses or dissertation credits beyond the seventy-two hours should not be shown on the Plan of Study.

The OGE-approved Plan of Study may be modified if your scholarly interests change, but any modifications are subject to the full approval process. **Note:** the Office of Graduate Education will not approve requests for late adds.

Advisor's Role

An advisor will:

- Know program and university guidelines and requirements
- Meet with a student multiple times during a semester
- Assist with course selection
- Offer advice on the formation of the Dissertation Committee
- Make an effort to help locate internal (e.g., HASS Fellowship) or external funding for the advisees
- Help students complete the Plan of Study, DSYR (Doctoral Student Yearly Review), and develop SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-bound).

<https://info.rpi.edu/sites/default/files/Developing%20SMART%20Goals.pdf>

Student's (Advisee's) Role

A student will:

- Complete OGE TA orientation and training (see details in the Accountability Section)
- Maintain full-time status, i.e., TA 9 credits per semester, RA 12 credits per semester, Fellowship 12 credits per semester). Note: After the add deadline, do not drop any course that will put you below the minimum number of credits required for full-time status. There is no way to add credits back to your schedule after the add/drop deadline, and dropping below the required minimum will **jeopardize funding**
- Take required CITI Responsible Conduct of research (RCR) module in their first semester and re-take the RCR Training once it expires (3 years after initial completion). Further details can be found on pages 1 and 2 here: <https://info.rpi.edu/sites/default/files/Candidacy%20Packet.pdf>
- Get to know program guidelines and expectations
- Meet with their advisor multiple times during a semester
- Read and respond promptly to emails from faculty and graduate administrators
- Keep track of their progress and make good progress toward degree completion
- Complete necessary forms on time
- Inform the advisor ("dissertation chair") of needed changes/signature requests well ahead of time
- Register for courses on time and based on the most recent OGE-approved Plan of Study. Consult with both your advisor and the Sr. Graduate Student Services Administrator before making any changes with course registration.
- Complete POS, DSYR, and SMART goals with their advisor, and get these approved by the GPD

Doctoral Student Yearly Review [DSYR]

Toward the end of each academic year, you and your advisor must meet and complete the Doctoral Student Yearly Review (DSYR) and SMART goals provided by the Office of Graduate Education (OGE). The DSYR provides a timetable to plan your degree progress. The DSYR asks you to list what you have accomplished in the current academic year and to indicate dates for milestones such as the comprehensive exam, doctoral committee formation, candidacy exam, and expected graduation. The review will allow you and your advisor to pinpoint problems and modify your plan of study.

Academic Conditional Continuance

At the end of each Spring semester, C&M faculty meet to review the progress of each student toward degree completion. In order to maintain good standing in the program, you are required to maintain a minimum of a 3.0 (B) graduate point average (GPA). In line with OGE policy, if your GPA is below 3.0 you may undergo an Academic Progress Inventory. This involves a review of your individual obstacles and barriers and an assessment of your attributes, behaviors, and skills. You will have two meetings with the Dean of Graduate Experience and develop an action plan. This process is recommended for PhD students with a 2.5-2.99 GPA and required for PhD students below a 2.5 GPA. The review may result in dismissal from Rensselaer's graduate programs.

Research with Human Subjects/Institutional Review Board

All research involving human subjects must be reviewed and approved by Rensselaer's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Both faculty advisors and graduate students are obligated to review IRB policies and procedures and monitor research judiciously to ensure that these policies and procedures are followed in all instances and, specifically, in doctoral dissertations and other published work. Failure to obtain IRB approval for the use of human subjects can result in administrative penalties, including formal reprimand, loss of funding for research, prohibition of publication of the research, and/or rejection of theses and dissertation work. Training in human subject research is offered in *Ethnography* as well as other courses. For a detailed explanation of IRB proposal and renewal procedures, proposal guidelines, templates, and timelines, please refer to: <http://research.rpi.edu/compliance/irb>

THE DISSERTATION PROCESS

The doctoral dissertation, the comprehensive examination responses, and the dissertation prospectus must all be the original work of each individual student and must meet the highest standards of academic integrity. Direct contributions by others, either in person or through electronic media, must be approved by the Graduate Program Director prior to their use or implementation.

The Ph.D. committee chair has the primary responsibility for guiding you through the research and

writing of the dissertation, but you should consult regularly with all members of your committee. Ordinarily you should expect to submit individual chapters of the dissertation to all members of your committee for their review and approval before you submit the completed dissertation. If and when your committee considers your dissertation to be defensible, you must defend the dissertation publicly. At that time, your committee may ask for additional revisions. Every member of your committee must approve and sign your **Record of Dissertation Exam Form** before you submit it to the Office of Graduate Education for its approval.

The Dissertation Committee

By the end of **your second semester in your first year** (for Ph.D.-only track) **or** by the end of **your third semester in your second year** (for M.S./Ph.D. track), **you must** establish an agreement with a faculty member who will serve as the chair of your dissertation committee based on mutual intellectual interests and the faculty member's willingness to guide you through your planned dissertation research. Written notice of this agreement should be sent to the **Graduate Program Director** and your dissertation chair.

You and your prospective dissertation committee chair will select the other members of your committee. The dissertation chair must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member with the C&M Department, but **contingent faculty (lecturers, senior lecturers, and professors of practice) may co-chair** along with a tenured or tenure-track faculty member. After inviting faculty to join your committee, you must then propose your committee to the Graduate Program Director for approval and formal recommendation to the Dean of the Office of Graduate Education. The dissertation committee must consist of at least **four members, one of whom must be an "outside" member** who is appointed by the Graduate Program Director in consultation with the student's dissertation advisor. Whenever possible, "outside" shall be "outside the university," but in all cases this person must come from outside the Department. At least **three of the Committee members must be members of the Department, including the committee chair**. The outside member is expected to be a recognized authority on the subject of the dissertation. For appointments of committee members who are not Rensselaer faculty, the Graduate Program Director will forward a recommendation to the Office of Graduate Education. This letter should explain the basis for the appointment and must include the address of the appointee. It is your responsibility to facilitate the GPD to prepare a letter of recommendation for the "outside" member.

Prior to taking your **comprehensive examination**, you **must** submit your dissertation committee nomination form. Substitutions in committee membership, once it has been determined, must be approved by the Graduate Program Director in consultation with the student and the dissertation committee chair. Replacements will only be considered if a member is unable to serve or if a student's dissertation topic changes. In all cases, final approval for changes in committee membership rests with the Dean of the Office of Graduate Education.

Dissertation Committee's Role

Chair (or co-Chairs) will:

- Help students form an appropriate dissertation committee
- Work with the student to develop a suitable dissertation topic
- Read and comment on submitted proposals and chapters promptly
- Convene committee meetings when necessary
- Check student's compliance with the CITI Program and IRB approval if the dissertation involves human subjects
- Publicize dissertation defense
- Work with advisees on the timeline of completing the dissertation

Committee Members will:

- Attend committee meetings and defenses when scheduled
- Provide guidance on the content and structure of the literature review, dissertation proposal, and dissertation
- Promptly read and comment on submitted proposals and chapters

Doctoral Candidate's Role

- Take CITI program (and save the completion report) and submit human subject protocols review required by IRB if your dissertation involves human subjects

- Adhere to established timelines for degree completion
- Be open to suggestions for revising or rethinking research
- Submit drafts and revisions in a timely fashion
- Participate in OGE workshops for thesis and dissertation composition and professional training
- Bring appropriate paperwork to the Prospectus and Dissertation Defense (check **beforehand** with the Sr. Graduate Student Services Administrator)
- Follow dissertation timeline that you discussed and agreed with the committee
- Follow institutional timelines to submit necessary forms and degree application. If late, the graduation date will be delayed for a semester later, or could result in lack of graduation
 - o Plans of Study (if your transcripts do not reflect the last approved POS) for graduating students must be in OGE by the **5th week** of the semester
 - o Degree applications must be submitted online via SIS by the Degree Application deadline, indicated in the [Academic Calendar](#), in the planned semester of graduation.

TIMELINE AND PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Residence

Doctoral programs require a **minimum of three academic years** (consecutive fall and spring semesters) of full-time graduate-level study. Rensselaer requires that **two of the three academic years are spent as a full-time student in a Rensselaer doctoral program**. At least 48 credit hours in course and/or thesis work must be taken while in full-time residence.

Milestones

Full-time students entering **with an appropriate Master's degree** must finish all degree requirements for the Ph.D. within a **four academic year** time period from registration for the first credits applied toward the degree. Those entering **without an appropriate Master's degree** (i.e., taking an M.S./Ph.D. track) must finish all Ph.D. requirements within **five academic years**. Any financial support will normally be discontinued after this time, and the Office of Graduate Education may not approve

additional time to complete the degree.

- **The Comprehensive Exam:** students entering with an appropriate prior Master's degree must take the **Comprehensive Exam between the end of third semester and the end of the fourth semester**. M.S./Ph.D. students must take the Comprehensive Exam by the end of the third year in the program. Students should complete the Comprehensive Exam as soon as possible so that they have more years in ABD (All but Dissertation) status as fully-funded.
- **Candidacy (i.e., prospectus approval):** students entering with an appropriate Master's degree must complete Candidacy **by the end of 2 and one-half years in the program (typically, before the end of semester 5)**. M.S./Ph.D. students are expected to complete Candidacy by the end of three and one-half years in the program (typically, before the end of semester 7). Students are normally not allowed to defend a dissertation in the same semester they complete Candidacy.
- **Dissertation Defense:** When the dissertation is completed, the candidate must defend it in a public examination conducted by the candidate's doctoral committee. The final exam must be held by the dissertation defense deadline, indicated in the [Academic Calendar](#), in the planned semester of graduation. The Committee may accept the dissertation, reject the dissertation, or accept the dissertation subject to change (due by the Office of Graduate Education's deadline).

The Comprehensive Examination

To prepare for the Comprehensive Examination, you will sign up for Directed Research in the form of independent study with your committee chair. In consultation with your dissertation committee chair and the other members of your committee, you will declare **a major area and two minor areas** in which you will be examined. Your comprehensive examination will consist of written and oral portions. Although only **three of your committee members will pose questions** for the written portion, all of your committee members will read your written examination and participate in the subsequent oral part of the examination. The purpose of the comprehensive examination is not to test your memory of specific, isolated facts but to demonstrate your grasp of a field or fields that you may draw on in your dissertation and employ in future teaching.

Written Portion

The written portion of the examination consists of a major area and two minor area essays. These will assess your ability to review, synthesize, and take ownership of three substantial bodies of literature related to your dissertation work. In addition to consulting with your advisor, you will meet with your other committee members to determine your exam areas and prepare reading lists.

One Major Area Exam

This essay is completed over a period of **five days, at home**. It should be **around 5,000 words** (20 pages, double-spaced) and include a reference section of **approximately 25 texts**. The dissertation advisor will send you the prompt on the first day of the exam period and you then email your completed essay to your whole committee.

Two Minor Area Exams

Each essay is completed within **3 days, at home**. Each should be around **2,500 words** (10 pages, double-spaced) and include a reference section of **approximately 15 texts**. The faculty member of each minor area will send you the prompt on the first day of the exam period and you then email your completed essay to your whole committee. All three exams, if you and your advisor agree, may be preceded by work on **practice questions** that differ significantly from the questions that actually appear on the exam.

Oral Portion: Exam defense

The defense will last for approximately two hours and should occur one to two weeks after you have completed the last written portion. You may be asked to clarify, defend, or elaborate upon your responses in the written examination, to discuss other topics in the examination areas, and/or to discuss your plans for your dissertation research. For the exam defense, please send **room reservation requests** (include dates, times, and room preferences) to the department's administrative coordinator. Please bring **the Record of Comprehensive Exam form to your oral exam**, obtain committee signatures, and return it to the Sr. Student Services Administrator for your HASS file.

The Dissertation Prospectus or Candidacy Exam

Before you begin work on your dissertation, your committee must formally approve your dissertation prospectus. The length and format of the prospectus may vary considerably in

individual cases and should be determined in consultation with your committee. In this prospectus, you should answer the following questions:

- What thesis, analysis, or research question do you intend to explore?
- What is currently known about this topic or research question?
- How do you plan to develop your thesis, make your analysis, or answer your research question?
- What is original and significant about your proposed research?

Your prospectus should include a **literature review** or working bibliography that the committee considers sufficiently comprehensive. When developing the prospectus, you are encouraged to discuss your ideas with your committee members, either individually or collectively. The outside member(s) of the committee must attend this meeting (in person or via video chat). After you have made any necessary changes, your **dissertation committee must formally approve** the prospectus on **the Record of Candidacy Exam form**. The committee must also approve any subsequent changes that they judge to be significant. The Record of Candidacy Exam form must be signed by all committee members and submitted to OGE for final approval. Please submit the completed/signed form along with your current CITI RCR Completion Report to the Sr. Student Services Administrator for submission to OGE.

Subsequently, the committee must be kept informed of your progress and agree to give ample and early warning of any reservations concerning your progress. They must specify in writing the changes required for dissertation acceptance.

Candidacy

In the Department of Communication & Media, **candidacy is conferred upon successful defense of your dissertation prospectus**. If you are not successful in the prospectus defense, you will not be permitted to continue to pursue your Ph.D. degree.

According to institute policy, you may sit for the candidacy examination when:

- Your course work nears completion.
- You have an approved doctoral examining committee.
- You have the approval of your doctoral committee to take the candidacy exam.

- You complete the appropriate Responsible Conduct of Research online training **through CITI Program** and provide the Office of Graduate Education with a completion report/certificate available for printing at the conclusion of the training.

See OGE Record of PhD Candidacy Exam Packet here

<https://info.rpi.edu/sites/default/files/Candidacy%20Packet.pdf>

For the M.S./Ph.D. track, all work for the doctorate must be completed within seven (7) academic years of registration for the first credits applied toward the degree. For the Ph.D.-only track, all degree requirements must be completed within five (5) years of registration for the first credits applied toward the degree.

Below is an **example of time to degree [TTD]** for a doctoral student entering **with an appropriate prior Master's degree** and taking 9 credits with a teaching assistantship. A student entering without a prior Master's degree is required to take a Master's degree at Rensselaer (M.S./Ph.D.), take the required examinations a year later, and complete the entire program within five years.

	Coursework*	Administrative	Activities
Year 1 August		TA training, OGE Orientation	
Semester 1	Research Methods Elective Elective		Getting to know faculty
Semester 2	Ethnography Elective Elective	DSYR & POS	Finding chair and committee members
Year 2 Semester 3	Media Studies Directed Research Elective		Comprehensive Exam (3 rd or 4 th semester)
Semester 4	Directed Research Elective Elective	DSYR & POS	Comprehensive Exam HASS Fellowship

	Coursework*	Administrative	Activities
			Prospectus Defense/ Candidacy Exam (before the end of semester 5)
Year 3 Summer/ Semester 5	Dissertation		Grants
Semester 6	Dissertation	DSYR & POS	HASS Fellowship; Wagner Fellowship for female students
Year 4 Semester 7	Dissertation		
Semester 8	Dissertation	DSYR & POS if Summer Graduation	Dissertation Defense

*Named course substitutions need to be approved by GPD or Graduate Committee.

Ph.D. Dissertation

The dissertation is an extended piece of original research within the field of Communication and Media. While you will work most closely with your dissertation advisor, who will chair your dissertation committee, you should also work closely with the other members of your committee. All committee members should be given sufficient opportunity to express their views with regard to your work, your project, and your progress, and contribute to the development of your dissertation. (Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the Ph.D. in CMRT program, dissertation committee members are not "readers" but are expected to be active members of a dissertation committee.) The detailed requirements for committee meetings, committee member input, and student presentation of interim research findings (e.g., field work reports) and early dissertation drafts are left to the chair of the dissertation committee, upon the consultation with the other committee members.

Formatting

Because your dissertation will need to be submitted electronically to ProQuest, and because it must go through a rigorous approval process at the Office of Graduate Education, please always follow the guidelines in [OGE's Preparation Manual for Dissertations and Theses](#) and [OGE's Thesis/Dissertation](#)

[Formatting Checklist.](#)

Due Dates

The department follows OGE requirements regarding the dissertation filing and defense deadlines, including submission of a defense draft to all members of the committee by a specified period prior to the date of the defense. Candidates who miss these deadlines will have to move their defense to the following semester. Committee members must supply detailed feedback, and the student must then revise the dissertation draft and provide the version to be defended to the committee as per the OGE deadlines noted in the [Academic Calendar](#).

Dissertation Defense

When the dissertation is finished, a defense is scheduled, announced to the public at least a week ahead of time (usually via email from the Dissertation Chair or GPD), and conducted. It is imperative that you consult the OGE website for precise deadlines for this and all other important milestones in the process (e.g., filing a degree application with the Registrar at the beginning of the semester in which you will graduate). Note especially the deadline for electronic submission of your dissertation to the Office of Graduate Education. After arranging a date with your committee, you should work with the C&M Administrative Coordinator to reserve a room for your defense well in advance. The dissertation advisor chairs this presentation. During the public portion of the meeting, the chair should allow time for questions from the dissertation committee, as well as general questions from those attending. As a general guideline, the meeting should last an hour and a half to two hours. After the question-and-answer period, the dissertation committee meets by itself to determine whether the candidate has passed. On occasion, the defense may pass subject to required changes or additions to the written dissertation. The chair will work out a timeline and process for such revisions, which may necessitate a deferred graduation date. The full committee must sign the Record of Dissertation Exam Form to indicate a satisfactory defense. The completed/signed form should be send to the Sr. Graduate Student Services Administrator for recording in the student's file and for submitting to OGE along with the required accompanying forms and dissertation upload to ProQuest.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Generally, the School of HASS will endeavor to provide financial support for **four** years of graduate study if you enter the program with a prior Master's degree (and five years if you enter without a prior Master's). Award letters are issued on either a semesterly or yearly basis, and continuation of this support is contingent on student status, satisfactory academic performance and academic progress (as established by the department and OGE), satisfactory completion of duties associated with the assistantship, and funding availability. Students who are unable to complete all program requirements and graduate by their funding deadline are advised to request to switch to part-time status and self-pay for one (1) credit of Dissertation with their advisor for an additional semester in order to complete the remaining work. Switching to part-time status and continuation in part-time status would need to be approved by OGE. On rare occasions, the School of HASS may have assistantship lines available to support students who are beyond their support limit. Please note that the funding limit (4 years for Ph.D. only and 5 years for M.S./Ph.D.) and time-to-degree limits (5 years for Ph.D. and 7 years for M.S./Ph.D.) do not align. Therefore, it is important that students aim to complete the degree by their funding limit; otherwise, they may have to pay out of pocket for tuition. If your anticipated graduation date will need to extend beyond your funding limit, then please always make sure to notify both the GPD and GPA so they can advise on how to proceed.

Financial support for all Rensselaer graduate students is regulated by the [Graduate Tuition and Student Support Policy](#) (GTSSP). This provides financial aid in the form of teaching or research assistantships. These awards, made on the basis of scholarly achievement and promise, generally provide a full tuition scholarship and a stipend. Students who receive these awards are required to provide teaching or research assistance equivalent to **twenty hours per week**. A financial support award represents a considerable investment in the career of a student and we expect in return that those who receive awards will pursue their studies with vigor and commitment.

Note: If you have been awarded a teaching assistantship, you must take at least **9 credits of course work** each semester to maintain the full-time status.

In general, CMRT graduate students are supported in one of these ways: 1. Rensselaer Fellowships; 2. Teaching Assistantships; 3. Rensselaer HASS Fellowships; 4. A Wagner Fellowship (for advanced female doctoral students). Teaching Assistantships are awarded semesterly or annually based upon satisfactory performance reviews of the previous year. We encourage students to seek internal (e.g., research center) or external (e.g., NEH) funding opportunities. Students may not hold simultaneous

appointments; for example, you cannot have an external grant and a TA-ship simultaneously without permission from the Institute.

Teaching Assistantships and Job Responsibility

Teaching Assistant assignments in the Communication & Media Department generally consist of two types: **writing tutors in the Center for Global Communication and Design (COMM+D)** and **classroom teaching assistants**. The GPD and Department Head will make every effort to offer each student both classroom and tutoring opportunities and as equitably as possible.

Classroom TAs

Typical job responsibilities for classroom TAs are: attending classes, helping to prepare syllabi or teaching materials; holding office hours, grading papers (usually under instructor's guidance and supervision); and leading some class discussions or class sections.

Center for Global Communication+Design TAs

Qualified graduate students will be appointed to the Center for Global Communication + Design (COMM+D) as writing tutors. Writing tutors support and promote the development of student writing and other communication skills, including oral presentations and visual communication. Working as a COMM+D TA is different from traditional classroom TAs: once appointed, the Director of COMM+D will inform tutors of specific responsibilities, required training, and the Center's operation routines. Based on the needs of the Center, TAs may be assigned to **assist in administrative tasks**: for example, developing academic writing handouts, preparing workshop materials, recording video materials, training undergraduate mentors, and maintaining the Center's website. TAs are expected to **commit to the writing consultation sessions** at the arranged times.

Qualifications for COMM+D TAs

Graduate Teaching Assistants must demonstrate excellent communication and composition skills and have an interest in working individually with the diverse student population of Rensselaer. Other valued skills include: expertise in visual design, multimedia editing and production, interface design, and data visualization.

Accountability

While appointed as a teaching assistant, you should make every effort to be accountable and dependable, as you would with any paid, professional position. Unfulfilled responsibilities or poor performances may result in a recommendation for financial aid conditional continuance. Other than the official institute break and holidays, there is **no paid vacation time** during the period you have been assigned to work as a TA (i.e., when classes are offered and students have written assignments). If you need to be elsewhere for a professional activity such as a conference presentation, you should notify your faculty supervisor or COMM+D director at least **two weeks in advance** and discuss with them the tasks you can perform to make up for the time you were absent.

Faculty Review and Financial Support Conditional Continuance

Financial support conditional continuance is based on failure to meet the criteria for TA responsibility and eligibility for financial support listed in the first paragraph of the "Financial Support" section on page 16.

In the Spring semester, the graduate faculty as a whole will meet to **review your performance as a TA (e.g., teaching evaluations and fulfilment of TA responsibilities), as well as your general academic progress**. The TA review is mainly based on the criteria of good standing (listed in the first paragraph of this section) and the report of the **faculty member** or members who have supervised you during the past academic year (e.g., class instructor or COMM+D Director). If there is a consensus that your performance of TA duties was poor, the GPD will report the situation to the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies. The Associate Dean will discuss this issue, and you may be placed on **financial aid conditional continuance**.

After a further review by the HASS Associate Dean, you will receive a letter from the Associate Dean or the Office of Graduate Education describing the reasons for conditional financial continuance, the actions that you need to take to return to good standing, and the deadlines for achieving these actions. The deadlines will vary according to the situation and type of TAship, but will provide you with a time period (e.g., a semester) to demonstrate corrective actions. If these corrective actions are satisfactory, at the end of the period, the department head and the graduate director will subsequently recommend that you be taken off conditional continuance.

FORMS

Below are links to some important forms:

- Change of Status
<https://info.rpi.edu/sites/default/files/Graduate%20Student%20Request%20for%20Change%20of%20Status-Electronic.pdf>
- Graduate Plan of Study
<https://info.rpi.edu/sites/default/files/Graduate%20Plan%20of%20Study.pdf>
- Nomination of Doctoral Committee
https://info.rpi.edu/sites/default/files/Nomination%20of%20Doctoral%20Committee_0.pdf
- Record of Comprehensive Exam https://hassinfo.rpi.edu/files/2017/04/Record-of-Qualifying-Examination_PhD-CMRT.pdf
- Record of Candidacy Exam <https://info.rpi.edu/sites/default/files/Candidacy%20Packet.pdf>
- Record of Dissertation Exam:
<https://info.rpi.edu/sites/default/files/Record%20of%20Dissertation%20Exam%20Form.pdf>