



**MASTER OF SCIENCE
CORPORATE AND PROFESSIONAL
COMMUNICATION**

GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

The Department of Communication offers a Master of Science in Corporate and Professional Communication designed to prepare students for a variety of careers in the public or private sector as well as for pursuing doctoral work. The degree allows students to focus their studies in specific areas of interest and offers both theoretical and practical applications in professional and corporate communication careers. The program is designed to prepare students for a turbulent business, economic, and social climate where effective communication is central to the success of organizations of all sizes, goals, and types. The goal of the program is to create individuals who possess a solid understanding of communication theory and practice and who are capable of making important contributions to contemporary organizations. To that end, we have set specific objectives for our graduate program. At the conclusion of this degree program, students should be able

- To determine an understanding of communication theory;
- To demonstrate skills in applying communication theory to specific contexts and problems;
- To demonstrate an understanding of communication concepts and practices related to organizations;
- To demonstrate an understanding of the public relations profession and practices;
- To demonstrate knowledge of and skills in providing assessment and communication instruction to individuals and groups in organizational settings;
- To demonstrate an understanding of selected communication concepts and contexts related to corporate and professional communication, e.g., conflict management, leadership, the role of gender in communication, management of communication issues, the role of communication in change and innovation in organizations, etc. The specific understandings for this objective will be determined by the electives chosen by each student; and
- To demonstrate the ability to apply academic course material to applied settings and research projects.

Graduates of our program demonstrate the broad range of career possibilities. For example, our graduates currently hold positions in fields as diverse as health care, human services, training and development, corporate management, public relations, computer software, media, higher education, non-profit services, and government. Additionally, students are prepared to pursue doctoral degrees.

THE PROGRAM

1. A full-time student can complete the required course work in a year and a half to two years under normal circumstances.
2. Part-time students are encouraged to apply. To the extent possible, courses are scheduled to accommodate part-time students during regular semesters and during summer school.
3. There are two options in our program: a thesis option and a non-thesis option. The thesis option includes twenty-four hours of course credit and six hours of thesis credit. The non-thesis option includes thirty hours of course credit. Students who wish to pursue the thesis option must apply for permission to complete a thesis.
4. All students must earn a minimum of 30 credit hours. Fifteen hours are completed from a required core of courses; the remaining fifteen are completed as elective course work chosen in consultation with the student's advisor. Thesis students complete a thesis worth six hours of credit (COMM 699); an oral defense of the thesis is required. Non-thesis students complete thirty hours of credit; an examination is required at the culmination of the student's course work. No more than 20 percent of a graduate student's program (approximately 6 credits) can be taken in the 500-level courses. Courses numbered 600 and above are for graduate students only. With approval of the student's advisor, as many as two courses may be taken in a related graduate program on the campus.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

All students must earn a minimum of 15 semester hours by successfully completing the following:

- COMM 600. Communication Theory (3)
- COMM 605. Applied Communication Research (3)
- COMM 610. Seminar in Organizational Communication (3)
- COMM 615. Seminar in Public Relations (3)
- COMM 620. Training and Development (3)

Non-Thesis Option

Electives, approved by the Advisor	15
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Thesis Option

COMM 699, Research and Thesis	6
Electives, approved by the Advisor	9

Because some students may not have completed an undergraduate degree in communication, other factors may be taken into consideration when assessing potential. For example, sufficient experience in a communication-related profession will be taken into consideration when assessing a student's potential. Students lacking a sufficient background in communication (as judged by the admissions committee) may be required, prior to enrollment in graduate courses, to take one or more undergraduate courses to provide the necessary foundation for graduate study in communication. These courses may not be counted as a portion of the thirty hours required to complete the degree.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROGRAM

The basic requirements and procedures for graduate study at Radford University are given in the *Graduate Catalog*. Detailed requirements and procedures for the Master of Science in Corporate and Professional

Communication are spelled out in this *Corporate and Professional Communication Graduate Student Handbook*. In those cases where program requirements and procedures are more stringent than those of the College of Graduate and Extended Education, the program requirements and procedures take precedence. It will be assumed that students are thoroughly familiar with the requirements and procedures stated in the above documents. The ultimate responsibility for meeting all stated degree requirements rests with the student. The Dean and the staff of the College of Graduate and Extended Education, the Graduate Coordinator, and the graduate faculty are all available to guide, advise, help interpret policies, and otherwise assist the student in meeting degree requirements.

MEETING WITH THE GRADUATE COORDINATOR:

Upon gaining entrance into the graduate program, the student should request a meeting with Graduate Coordinator, who will serve as the student's advisor. At that meeting, the student may become more familiar with the program and its requirements. Additionally, the Graduate Coordinator will assist the student in determining the courses in which he or she should enroll for the first semester in the program. A tentative schedule of the student's remaining course work may also be planned.

Students are encouraged to meet periodically with the Graduate Coordinator to ensure that courses and requirements are being met and to secure any information the student or Graduate Coordinator deems necessary.

PLANNING THE PROGRAM OF STUDY:

A program of study is a listing of the courses and requirements a student will successfully complete to qualify for graduation. Upon gaining admission to the program, the student will receive a letter containing a tentative program of study. This letter usually indicates that the student is required to enroll in and successfully complete fifteen hours of required courses and either nine hours of elective courses and six hours of thesis credit or fifteen hours of elective courses. Either at the initial meeting with the Graduate Coordinator or at a later meeting during the student's first semester in the program, the student and the Graduate Coordinator must confer to determine which courses will serve as the student's electives.

The program of study serves as the agreement between the University and the student regarding the requirements the student must meet to graduate. If the student and the Graduate Coordinator determine at a later date that changes need to be made to the program of study, a revised program of study form must be filed with the College of Graduate and Extended Education. Students are urged to maintain a copy of the program of study (and any subsequent revisions of the program of study).

ENROLLING FOR CLASSES:

Each semester the University prepares and publishes on the University's Web site a listing of the classes to be offered in the following semester. This "schedule" includes information regarding the University calendar (with registration times, holidays, and other important dates and deadlines), registration information, building codes, department locations, final examination schedules, and class schedules. The Web site also provides information regarding graduate student registration. Each semester, students may use their PIN or personal

identification number to register for courses by telephone. Either the Graduate Coordinator or the College of Graduate and Extended Education can provide personal identification numbers.

Required courses are offered each academic year in the following sequence:

FALL

- COMM 600, Communication Theory
- COMM 610, Seminar in Organizational Communication
- COMM 620, Training and Development

SPRING

- COMM 605, Applied Communication Research
- COMM 615, Seminar in Public Relations

Elective courses are scheduled during the academic year and in summer sessions.

600-level courses are always offered in the evening from 6:30 – 9:30; 500-level courses are usually offered two days a week from 5:00 – 6:15. 600-level courses are always open to Corporate and Professional Communication graduate students. To enroll in 500-level courses, students must secure the approval of the instructor.

Students should recall that they may enroll in no more than two 500-level courses for graduate credit. Additionally, students may enroll in graduate-level courses in other programs at Radford; before enrolling in those courses, however, students must secure approval from the Graduate Coordinator.

FINDING YOUR TEXTBOOKS:

The University Bookstore makes available all textbooks and other materials relevant for each course. Prior to the first class meeting, students should visit the Bookstore and purchase those items. All materials required for individual classes are listed by class designation (COMM) and class number. Professors may occasionally recommend specific texts or materials for students during a semester. For example, faculty members often suggest writing guides or reference texts. If the Bookstore does not have these materials readily available, they may be ordered upon the student's request. In addition to the University Bookstore, Radford Book Exchange (on Tyler Avenue across from the campus) carries texts and materials required for specific courses.

Often graduate students who have already taken a specific course are kind enough to share texts and materials with students just enrolling in the course. Students should ensure, though, that the texts and materials required for a specific course in the past will be the same texts and materials required for the semester in which students plan to take the course. New editions of texts and changes in course materials are a common occurrence.

FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND CAMPUS:

Prior to your first class meeting, you should locate the classrooms in which your classes will meet. Additionally, you should visit the campus library to begin to acquaint yourself with its layout and facilities. Although some classes will contain specific explanatory sessions on the use of the library, students are expected to become familiar with the library, its operations and services.

MEETING THE GRADUATE FACULTY:

When students begin their graduate study, they often become so engrossed in the classes they are taking that they know well only those faculty who are teaching those courses. Students are encouraged to take time to introduce themselves to other graduate faculty members and learn what courses those faculty members teach and what research and consulting interests they have. Getting to know all of the faculty and their interests will help students determine which elective courses they might be interested in taking. Also, students may determine that completing a research project or consulting project with a specific faculty member might be of interest.

Periodically, social occasions are scheduled so that faculty and students can become better acquainted. We advise, though, that you not wait for those occasions, but take the initiative to get to know the faculty by visiting with them in their offices. The secretary for the Department will be glad to provide students with the office hours of all faculty members.

SPECIALIZED COURSES—ENROLLING IN “DIRECTED STUDY”:

The Directed Study course provides the opportunity for students to work in a one-on-one relationship with a faculty member. The exact nature of the course may take one of several forms. For example, a student interested in a particular subject or research question may contract with a faculty member to complete specified research in that area. Or a student may wish, under the direction of a faculty member, to develop a consulting project. The Directed Study, however, should not be used simply as a route to completing one’s program of study.

A student wishing to enroll in Directed Study must first consult with the faculty member with whom the work will be completed to gain tentative approval for enrolling and to determine the exact nature of the work to be completed. Then, the student must submit a “Proposal for a Directed Study” form (available from the College of Graduate and Extended Education as well as the College’s Web site; see: http://www.radford.edu/gradcollege/current_students/forms_applications.html) and a three-to-five page proposal for the Directed Study to the faculty member and to Graduate Coordinator. These two steps must be accomplished by the middle of the semester prior to enrolling in the Directed Study course. If the Directed Study is approved, the student must file both the form and the three-to-five page proposal with the College of Graduate and Extended Education and with the Registrar’s Office at least two weeks prior to registration.

Grades for Directed Study are recorded using the regular grading option (A/F), not pass/fail (P/F).

SPECIALIZED COURSES—ENROLLING IN “INTERNSHIP IN CORPORATE AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION”:

Occasionally, a student will develop, in consultation with a faculty member, an opportunity to engage in the practical application of the theories, methods, and principles he or she has studied. For example, a student may discover an opportunity to complete an internship with a human resources office or a public relations firm in the student’s area of interest. A student wishing to enroll for an internship experience must first consult with a faculty member who will serve as a supervisor of the internship experience. Then, the student must submit a written proposal to that effect to the faculty member and to the Graduate Coordinator. These steps must be accomplished within the first four weeks of the semester prior to enrolling for the Internship course. Upon approval from both the faculty member and the Graduate Coordinator, the student must complete the necessary internship forms (available in the Department of Communication office) and submit those forms prior to enrolling in the course.

SPECIALIZED COURSES—ENROLLING IN “RESEARCH AND THESIS”:

Most students in the Corporate and Professional Communication graduate program elect to complete their degrees by enrolling in thirty hours of traditional classroom course work and completing comprehensive examinations. Some students, however, may wish to enroll in twenty-four hours of traditional classroom work and then culminate their degree with the research and writing of a thesis.

Often, the question arises: What is expected when one completes a thesis? A thesis is an original piece of extended research that addresses a communication question, makes the case for study of that question by investigating past research in that area, argues for and carries out a mechanism for addressing that question, records and discusses the results of that research, and ultimately makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of communication processes and properties. Thus, a thesis requires that the student possess an understanding of theory and research methods, the ability to assess critically research questions and methods for addressing those questions, and the writing skills to complete the text of the thesis. That the course, Research and Thesis, is set at six hours of credit should be taken as an indication of the expectations of the course—it is equivalent in value to two three-hour classroom courses. Another question that often arises is: Should I complete a thesis if I might consider completing a doctoral degree in the future? Most doctoral programs do not require the completion of a Master’s thesis; they require only the completion of a Master’s degree. Clearly, then, the completion of the thesis should only be undertaken after careful consideration of one’s abilities and after consultation with a potential supervising professor and with the Graduate Coordinator.

Before enrolling in Research and Thesis, a student must complete several tasks:

1. First, the student must discuss his or her potential to complete the work and his or her ideas for a thesis project with the faculty member whom the student would wish to supervise or direct the thesis and with the Graduate Coordinator.
2. If both the faculty member and the Graduate Coordinator agree that the student may proceed, the student must then draft a thesis proposal. Students should refer to *Communication Research: Strategies and Sources* by R.B. Rubin, A.M. Rubin, and L.J. Piele for format and guidelines of a thesis proposal. The thesis proposal should be written in coordination with the thesis director. The thesis director and the student must also discuss the composition of a thesis committee (two graduate faculty

- members from the Corporate and Professional Communication Program in addition to the thesis director). This may involve the student discussing his or her thesis ideas with a variety of faculty to determine which faculty members would provide the most effective feedback for the thesis project.
3. When the thesis director has approved the thesis proposal, the student must arrange for a meeting of the thesis committee. The student should provide each member of the thesis committee with a copy of the thesis proposal at least one week prior to the meeting. The purpose of the thesis proposal meeting is to acquaint all committee members with the student's proposed thesis topic and plan to proceed. Also, the committee members may make suggestions for altering the approach to the thesis topic, ask questions regarding the approach to the topic, and offer ideas for research and reading to prepare for the thesis. Committee members may request a revised draft of the thesis proposal before agreeing to continue the process.
 4. Once the thesis committee has approved the thesis proposal, the student must complete the "Proposal for a Thesis" form (available from the College of Graduate and Extended Education) and secure the signatures on the form of the committee members. Note: the "Proposal for a Thesis" form requires that the student attach a copy of the thesis proposal to the form. The form and the thesis proposal must be completed and filed with the College of Graduate and Extended Education. All of the above steps will clearly require time and preparation. Thus, this process should begin no later than the first few weeks of the semester prior to the semester in which a student enrolls in Research and Thesis. The completed "Proposal for a Thesis" form and the copy of the thesis proposal must be turned in to the College of Graduate and Extended Education at least two weeks preceding the semester in which the student intends to enroll in the course for credit.

Students who are approved to enroll in Research and Thesis (see "Enrolling in 'Research and Thesis'" above) should discuss the process of completing the thesis with the thesis director. Typically, in the semester in which the student is enrolled in Research and Thesis, he or she works almost solely with the thesis director to complete the project. Other committee members should be consulted about their roles in the research and writing process. Do they wish to meet periodically with the student and thesis director to assess the progress of the thesis? Do they wish to read each chapter of the thesis as it is completed and provide feedback or would they rather see the entire thesis in a completed form? Students are advised to work with the thesis director to develop a set of deadlines and meeting times to ensure that orderly and consistent progress is being made on the thesis work.

Masters theses in the field of Communication must conform to the style requirements of either the American Psychological Association (generally recommended for quantitatively-oriented theses) or the Modern Language Association (generally recommended for qualitatively-oriented theses). Thesis students should also note that the thesis must conform to requirements published by the College of Graduate and Extended Education and are advised to secure a copy of those requirements early in their graduate careers. See the "Thesis Preparation Manual" and Thesis Appendices:

http://www.radford.edu/gradcollege/current_students/forms_applications.html.

When a final draft of the thesis has been completed with the approval of the thesis director, the student must arrange for a meeting of the thesis committee for the purpose of conducting an oral defense of the work. The student must provide each member of the committee with a complete draft (including all preface material, references, appendices, etc.) at least one week in advance of the oral defense meeting.

The oral defense of a thesis is a public meeting; other members of the graduate program and University community may attend if they so desire. The defense consists of the student presenting a summary of the thesis work and his or her findings, questions or comments from the thesis committee, and general discussion of the thesis.

Often there are corrections, changes, or clarifications to be made in the thesis after the oral defense has concluded. In some cases, individual committee members may request to approve the revised thesis prior to the granting of final approval. In most cases, however, the changes can be made and then approved by the thesis director. Final approval of the thesis by the thesis director signals successful completion of the Research and Thesis course.

Prior to meeting with the thesis committee for the oral defense, the student must secure a copy of the "Report of Final Comprehensive Examination" form (available from the College of Graduate and Extended Education). This form must include the signatures of all committee members as an indication that the student has successfully completed the oral defense and that the requirements of the thesis have been completed. The completed form should be returned to the College of Graduate and Extended Education immediately following the successful conclusion of the thesis requirements.

Students should take careful note of all deadlines appropriate for completing the thesis. See: http://www.radford.edu/gradcollege/dates_deadlines/index1.html.

THE NON-THESIS OPTION:

Students choosing the non-thesis option will complete thirty hours of course work. In the semester in which the student anticipates the completion of his or her course work, the student will complete a comprehensive examination. The process begins when the student assembles an examination committee made up of three graduate faculty members. Two of those faculty members are chosen by the student and the third is assigned by the Graduate Coordinator. The student will request one of the three to serve as Chair of his or her examining committee. Given their other duties and responsibilities, faculty members are able to serve on a limited number of examination committees each semester. Therefore, students' requests that faculty members serve on examination committees should be accomplished during the first two weeks of the semester. A student may ask a full-time, graduate faculty member from another department to serve on the examination committee. This faculty member must be someone from whom the student has taken an elective course to meet the requirements of the Corporate and Professional Communication degree. Only one faculty member from outside the Department of Communication is allowed to serve on a student's examination committee. Within the first two weeks of classes in that final semester, the student must also ask the Graduate Coordinator for a "Request for Comprehensive Examination" form, complete that form, and return it to the Graduate Coordinator by the deadline listed on the form.

The comprehensive examination occurs in two stages: 1) the written examination and 2) the oral examination. Each stage of the comprehensive examination process is described below.

THE WRITTEN EXAMINATION STAGE

The material covered in the examination will be based upon 1) the core required classes and 2) the elective courses the student has taken (and is currently taking). In general, the purposes of the examination are to assess the knowledge the student has gained and how well the student can make application of that knowledge. The faculty members of the

committee will determine the specific nature of the examination and will provide instructions regarding the examination to the student.

Once the examinations have been completed, the faculty committee will assess the results. Individual members of the committee may request that a student provide an addendum (supplemental responses) for portions of the examination. For the student to move on to the second phase of the examination process, the oral defense, requires that two of the three faculty members vote in the affirmative.

THE ORAL EXAMINATION STAGE

Following successful completion of the written examination stage, the student (in consultation with the committee members) will set a date for the oral examination. The oral exam consists of the faculty committee discussing with the student his or her written work and posing to the student follow-up questions related to the examination. At the conclusion of the oral examination stage, the faculty committee will assess the student's written and oral responses and will determine whether or not the student has passed the comprehensive examination. A passing status requires the affirmative votes of two of the three faculty members.

Prior to completing the oral examination stage of the comprehensive examination, the student must secure a copy of the "Report of Final Comprehensive Examination" form (available from the College of Graduate and Extended Education). This form must be delivered to the chair of the examination committee before the oral examination portion of the comprehensive examination begins. Following the oral examination, the members of the examination committee will indicate a passing or failing status on the form, and the student or the Chair of the examination committee will return the form to the College of Graduate and Extended Education immediately following the conclusion of the comprehensive examination.

A student who has failed the comprehensive examination may repeat the comprehensive examination process one time, but must wait until the following semester (spring, if the original examination was taken in the fall; fall, if the original examination was taken in the spring) to repeat the examination process. A student may not repeat the examination process more than one time.

Responsibility for arranging for the comprehensive examination rests with the student.

APPLYING FOR GRADUATION:

No later than ten days after the beginning of the semester prior to the one in which the student anticipates completing his or her graduate work, he or she must apply for graduation. To do so, the student should complete and submit the "Graduation and Participation Application" form (available from this site: http://www.radford.edu/gradcollege/current_students/forms_applications.html).

All graduate students are required to be registered during the semester they receive their degree from Radford University. Registration and tuition payment is required of all graduate students when using University facilities and/or faculty time. The minimum number of hours for registration is one. Registration allows use of services such as library checkout, laboratories and recreation facilities not open to the public. Students who are not currently registered for any course work and who have completed all course work but have other outstanding degree requirements (e.g., comprehensive examination, thesis, removal of an I or IP grade), are required to register for a continuous enrollment course each semester, including summer, until they have met the outstanding requirement(s). This course carries no credit hour production and does not count toward

degree requirements. This course option is also available to those admitted students who are not enrolled in a given semester but who wish to use University facilities and services during that time. This form is available online. Approval of the professor of record and the Dean of the College of Graduate and Extended Education is required prior to registration.

It is the policy of the Corporate and Professional Communication program that a student who takes the Comprehensive Examination Option be permitted to participate in commencement ceremonies only if he or she has successfully completed both the written and oral components of that examination. Additionally, it is the policy of the Corporate and Professional Communication program that a student who takes the Thesis Option be permitted to participate in the commencement ceremonies only if the student has either passed the oral defense of a completed thesis or if the student has submitted to the thesis advisor an acceptable final draft of the thesis (i.e., one that needs only minor revisions prior to oral defense) and has secured the permission of the thesis advisor to participate in the ceremonies.

REMAINING IN GOOD STANDING:

Graduate students are expected to demonstrate adequate progress towards completing degree requirements. Adequate progress is defined as (1) completing all requirements for the degree within six academic years and (2) earning no more than one grade of “C” or below in graduate course work. Students who do not demonstrate adequate progress will not be permitted to remain enrolled in the graduate program.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

Graduate assistantships are awarded competitively on the basis of three criteria: 1) academic qualifications and references, including undergraduate GPA, GRE test scores, TOEFL scores (when appropriate), letters of recommendation, required essay; 2) an assessment of the compatibility of the applicant’s background and preparation with the goals and needs of the Department of Communication; and 3) an assessment of the applicant’s financial need.

Graduate students who receive a teaching assistantship commit to a two-year program of study. During the first year, students are assigned a teaching mentor and work with that mentor in designated COMM 114, Public Speaking sections. Additionally, students complete a three-hour instructional communication course that becomes part of the thirty hours of their programs of study. During the second year, students are generally assigned to teach two individual sections of COMM 114, Public Speaking, as the official “instructor of record” of the course. A mentor is assigned to all second-year teaching assistants. The mentor’s primary duties are to approve course syllabi, be available throughout the semester to provide guidance, give advice, and answer questions from teaching assistants, and to evaluate teaching assistants.

Graduate assistants will be assessed by their mentor. In the case of assistants who teach individual sections of courses, assessment will also take into consideration teaching evaluations conducted each semester in which the student teaches. A satisfactory assessment by the mentor will be communicated to the assistant. Should the assessment indicate less than satisfactory performance on the part of the assistant, the graduate assistant, the Department Chair, and the faculty mentor will meet to discuss the evaluation and specific methods for improvement to be employed during the next semester. Two consecutive semesters of below satisfactory evaluations may result in the termination of a student’s assistantship. All records of the evaluation (including summaries of evaluation meetings) will become a part of the graduate assistant’s files kept in the office of the Department of Communication.

ADVICE FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

The graduate faculty want your experience in our program to be as rewarding and beneficial as possible. To that end, we have compiled a list of suggestions, reminders, and advice that we hope will help you have a successful tenure as a graduate student. In all probability, we will not answer all of your questions or remind you of all you will need to know by creating this list. Please know, though, that our office doors are always open to help you with any questions or concerns you may have.

- Students generally enter our program on one of two types of status: regular or conditional. Keep in mind that if you were admitted as a conditional student, you must petition through the College of Graduate and Extended Education to change that status after the completion of nine credit hours (usually at the end of the first semester for full-time students). Failure to petition to change status could result in your not being allowed to register for subsequent courses.
- Often graduate students find that additional assistance in advancing their writing skills proves quite beneficial in terms of their course work. That assistance is available in the University's Writing Center. Also, you might find the web sites listed later in this handbook may be useful. Because the faculty are most interested in your success, we will help you identify writing concerns as early as possible in your course work.
- Students are expected to take note of the University's honor code, read it, and abide by it. Students who violate that code will be subject to the University's judicial board proceedings.
- Students are expected to secure a copy of the *Graduate Catalog* and the *Radford University Student Handbook* and become familiar with those documents. Of particular interest in the *Student Handbook* are the guidelines regarding plagiarism and grade appeals. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this graduate program. As indicated in the *Handbook*, grade appeals are heard by the Personnel Committee of the department to which the individual faculty member is assigned and the decision of that Committee is final. Students are expected to read and follow all of the guidelines in the *Radford University Student Handbook*.
- Often when a graduate student contemplating the completion of a thesis begins his or her graduate work, the thesis understandably seems too far in the future to even contemplate. We recommend, however, that you begin to think about what interests you and what might conceivably be a topic for your thesis as early as your first semester. No one will hold you to your early ideas for a topic; however, the earlier you can focus your general interest, the easier it becomes to center your attention on that topic in each of your classes. It is conceivable, for example, that a student interested in conflict resolution in the corporate setting could use that interest as the basis for exercises and papers in several courses. The result is that, by the time the student is ready to begin the thesis process, he or she has thought a great deal about the topic, has researched the academic literature on the subject quite extensively, and is ready to begin his or her work.
- Our students tell us that one of the most rewarding experiences in their graduate study is attending professional academic conferences. Among the many advantages they cite are contact with other graduate students, meeting other in the field, hearing and collecting papers on subjects of interest to them, and talking with recruiters from doctoral institutions. The graduate faculty encourage all graduate students to consider attending one or more conferences. We regret that the graduate program cannot always financially support students wishing to attend those conferences. There is often financial assistance available through the College of Graduate and Extended Education, however, for students presenting papers at conferences. Do not hesitate to ask your professors how the papers you are writing for their classes might be restructured for submission to an academic conference. We have had a number of graduate student papers accepted at regional and national conferences. Give it a try. If nothing else, though, inquire about these conferences and how you might attend. The faculty will make every effort to help you get there.

- With each successive stage of your graduate career, there are forms to be filled out and filed with the College of Graduate and Extended Education. Always check with the Graduate Coordinator to ensure that you have completed the appropriate forms. See: http://www.radford.edu/gradcollege/current_students/forms_applications.html.
- Spend time with your professors and with the Graduate Coordinator talking about your interests and the interests of the faculty. Often a topic for a course paper, potential conference paper, directed study, or thesis comes as a result of casual conversation. Often, too, you will find that a subject of interest to you is also of interest to a faculty member. The result could very well be that you find a most compatible thesis director or directed study supervisor or you may find a faculty member who can save you research time by directing you to the most helpful sources.
- The secretary of every department on campus maintains a list of when courses in those departments will be offered. Our secretary can tell you about the tentative rotation of our courses. If you are interested in taking related courses in other departments, contact the secretaries of those departments to determine when courses will be offered.
- Spend some time on the web page for our library. You will discover that almost anything you need is either in our library or can be ordered for you in a reasonable amount of time.
- The campus computer center is available for student use. You might want to check with other graduate students to learn the “tricks of the trade” regarding use of the computer lab.
- The use of computers for word processing, information management and data analysis is essential for communication professionals. Students entering the program who do not have basic computer knowledge and application skills may be required to take an introductory course and any additional computing courses which are deemed necessary to their programs of study. No graduate credit will be granted for any undergraduate course work required to develop appropriate background for graduate work in the program. A 3.0 (B) average is required in any undergraduate course work required for background.
- In all of your graduate course work, recall that only 20% (approximately 6 credit hours) can be taken at the 500 level.
- We encourage the students in the program to think of their graduate experience as one of cooperation as opposed to competition. Work in groups, find a buddy, ask questions of second-year students, share your findings. A good graduate education is the result of the discussion and sharing of ideas. If you know, for example, that another student is interested in the communication skills involved in labor mediation and in your research you happen to discover a journal article on the subject, jot down the citation and share it with you fellow grad student. He or she is likely to return the favor.
- We encourage you to keep textbooks from every class you take. They may come in handy when preparing for another course, researching and writing the thesis, or preparing for the comprehensive examination..
- Entering a graduate program means making a major commitment. Being a graduate student requires time and students must be willing to commit time to prepare for classes, to research and write papers, to read and read and read and read and read, and to think and ponder and think and question and think and critique and (oh, did we mention this?) think. The graduate faculty will assume that you want to know about a subject and that you are committed to learning. They will assume that you are prepared for every class; they will assume that you have developed questions to ask during and outside of class; they will assume that you are reading about communication topics and reading above and beyond the assignments they make in class; they will assume that you are as interested in communication as they are.
- Perhaps the “cardinal rule” to remember is this: when in doubt—ask. Ask your fellow students, ask the faculty, ask the Graduate Coordinator, ask the College of Graduate and Extended Education. We may not always know the answer, but we’ll do our best to find it for you. It is not a sin if you don’t know the answer; it is a sin if you don’t ask the question.