

Comprehensive Exams Policy: Non-Thesis Option
M.A. in Communication
Virginia Tech

As noted in the Graduate Student Handbook, each candidate for a Master's degree in the Communication at Virginia Tech must pass a final oral and/or written examination. The purpose of this final examination is to ensure that all graduates display a working mastery of the core concepts of communication studies as related to graduates' specialized program of study. To complete the final examination requirement, non-thesis option students will complete in their final semester a four-hour written examination.

The student's advisory committee also will be the examination committee. Each examination committee member will grade responses using a "pass-fail" designation. A candidate cannot have more than one unfavorable vote from the examination committee to pass the final exam. A student may receive a "provisional pass" from the committee that is contingent upon an additional assignment, which may be either written or oral. Provisional pass assumes that students have demonstrated sufficient knowledge of an important area of the examination, but have not demonstrated sufficient mastery of the area. Upon a provisional pass designation, the committee will direct the student as to the area(s) in need of additional development. Once completed, the results of the additional assignment are assessed by the committee to determine if it satisfies a "pass" vote from a majority of the committee. As per university policy, if a student fails the final exam, the exam may not be rescheduled until the next semester. A student is allowed no more than two opportunities to pass the final examination.

A student must be registered for at least one course during the semester in which the final examination is administered and degree requirements are completed.

Each committee member will agree to the content of the examination. Questions may consist of multiple parts. The questions may touch upon issues/concepts from more than one course, but should be related to the particular student's plan of study and curricular focus. The degree to which a question is revealed to the student prior to the exam is at the discretion of each faculty member, although the degree to which a question is revealed should be taken into account when evaluating the student's answer. Students should consult with their committee members about their specific exam situation at least one month before the scheduled written portion.

The assumption of the comprehensive exams is that they are timed and proctored, no more than 4.5 hours for a four-hour exam. However, these conditions may be altered at the discretion of the committee, taking into account the student's circumstance or the nature of the question. If the exams are timed and proctored, students must complete all four hours of the exams in one day, with breaks totaling no more than one-half hour scheduled between questions if desired by the student. Computerized word processing may be used.

After the student consults with the advisory committee (see below), the written exam must be scheduled through the Graduate School office at least two weeks in advance by completing and submitting a "Request to Admit Candidate to Final Exam" form. In addition, examination cards should be obtained from the Graduate School on the day of the examination. The card should be returned to the Graduate School office as soon as possible after the exam.

At the Departmental level, the written portion of the final exam must be scheduled at least three weeks prior to the last day to complete all requirements for commencement participation for the graduating student. The written portion is scheduled at the department level by the student, with input by the committee. An oral portion of the written exam, when required as part of a provisional pass, must be scheduled at least one week prior to the last day to complete all requirements for commencement participation.

Approved by the Department of Communication Studies Graduate Committee,
February 6, 2001.