Student Thesis/Practicum Guide

A Guide to fulfillment of

COM 660 and COM 689/690

The Master of Arts in Communication Program
University of Dubuque
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SECTION I
Clarifying the Options

MAC Mission Statement
Recognizing that the globalization of business, education and industry requires excellence in the communication skills of writing, speaking and control of mediated communication mediums, the Master of Arts in Communication program seeks to enhance the professional communication skills of managers and business leaders. The MAC trains graduates for a leadership-service role in one of the selected communication concentrations or for advanced academic study in organizational communication.

Philosophy
Our unique MAC program incorporates the art and science of effective communication, providing a multi-disciplinary approach to teaching. Today’s – and tomorrow’s – leaders learn how to recognize, embrace, and pursue opportunities through world-class communication skills. Courses are designed to maximize student participation in learning with a minimum of testing. Grades are often determined through the production of hands-on demonstration practums.

Requirements for Degree
The Master of Arts in Communication degree requires the successful completion of 30 credit hours of coursework in selected communication concentration. Courses may be taken in any sequence, except

- COM 660 (Research and Writing in Communication Studies) must be taken the semester before a student begins the final thesis/practicum/skills practicum course.
- COM 689 (Practicum) is the culmination course of a 36 credit non-thesis program.
- COM 690 (Thesis/Practicum) is the final course enrollment for a 30+ credit thesis program.

The Thesis/Practicum (COM 690) requires completion of an extended research study or a practicum conducted under the care and approval of the MAC Thesis Committee. The student will have finished 27 credits of coursework and initiates the thesis practicum by enrolling in COM 690 for three credits. The student continues to enroll in COM 690 for at least 1 credit in subsequent semesters until the thesis is completed. The student may select a topic of academic interest for a thesis or a topic relevant to current or anticipated employment for a practicum in the area of organizational communication.

COM 660 as Prerequisite to COM 689/690
It is important to note as you begin to develop your topic for a practicum or a thesis that you must work closely with both the instructor of the COM 660 course and your selected advisor for your COM 690 course. The prospectus/proposal that you develop in COM 660 must be acceptable to both the instructor of COM 660 and your COM 690 thesis advisor or the Instructor of the COM 689 course.

- Students may fulfill the requirements of COM 660 and still not have developed a prospectus/proposal acceptable to the COM 690 advisor.
- Students may repeat COM 660, if necessary, in the effort to develop a prospectus/proposal acceptable to the thesis advisor with whom they will write the work.
- All incompletes in COM 660 must be resolved prior to the first day of coursework in COM 689 or COM 690.
Submission of a Thesis, Final Practicum, or a Professional Skills Practicum

The primary objective of this stage of the student’s degree program is to demonstrate evidence of individual achievement that 1) contributes to or significantly engages knowledge in a field of study; 2) reports on the result of findings of a specific practicum; or 3) accomplishes the specified goals of a practicum course of study. All final work for the degree must involve research and writing that reinforce core concepts from the curriculum and apply knowledge and skill gained in the program. All work is to be accomplished with faculty guidance through an approved framework. This work may be pursued in one of three ways:

1. **Thesis Option (COM 690):** A work (usually written) embodying the results of original research or survey analysis concerning some aspect of organizational communication theory or practice. It should be the work of the candidate for the Master of Arts in Communication degree and should represent a specific view concerning the material it engages. The student must be able to locate the subject matter of inquiry within an existing tradition of coursework in organizational theory either by way of Jablin and Putnam’s *New Handbook of Organizational Communication* or through a reasonable review of existing literature in the field of organizational communication.

2. **Professional Skills Practicum Option (COM 689):** A student may fulfill their degree program through this option. In this option, students produce a final practicum that is characterized by analysis of a practical intervention with an existing organization’s work. Students may also explore Action Research within Organizations to explore how to report on an effort to develop knowledge within an existing employment setting. The student must be able to locate the subject matter of inquiry within an existing tradition of coursework in organizational theory either by way of Jablin and Putnam’s *New Handbook of Organizational Communication* or through a reasonable review of existing literature in the field of organizational communication.

**Objectives**

COM 660/689 or 660/690 form a trajectory of preparation for end of studies supervision in the MAC program. The objective is that students be able to

1. Demonstrate an ability to design a research practicum.
2. Integrate and interrelate concepts, techniques, and skills acquired in the course of the program.
3. Acknowledge earlier research of relevant theoretical perspectives and or practicum efforts.
4. Develop and apply his or her analytical and communication skills.
5. Demonstrate professional competence suitable for the awarding of a Master of Arts in Communication.

**Planning Ahead**

The following pages explain how you will succeed if you:

1. Select a suitable topic
2. Design an appropriate planning and analytical framework
3. Manage your research, time and writing resources.
SECTION II
CHOOSING THE TOPIC—COM 660

Selecting a Thesis/Practicum Topic
Start by identifying an area of work that is: 1) of personal and professional interest to you, 2) relevant to the development of communication skills/understanding, and 3) has value to your professional aspirations 4) can be located in the literature of organizational communication as identified in some portion of Jablin and Putnam’s *New Handbook of Organizational Communication* and/or a reasonable review of the literature that establishes that the subject matter of the proposal can be located as an area of theory or practice inquiry within the area of organizational communication study.

In the majority of cases, the subject chosen for investigation should refer to a specific problem or opportunity that emerges out of your course of study in this program. At the initial stage, it may be appropriate only to identify a general communication issue for investigation rather than provide a specific title or a narrow definition of what you will research.

i. For example, if you are thinking of pursuing a practicum COM 689 practicum you might choose the topic of local political campaign strategies. By the end of COM 660, you will need to have narrowed this general topic to something specific (either quantifiable or measurable). For example, you may decide to interview four individuals who have run for a variety of elected offices locally and then evaluate their campaigns in light of the elements of campaign strategy identified in Thomas A. Hollihan’s *Uncivil Wars: Political Campaigns in a Media Age*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 2001.

ii. If you choose to write a thesis, you might have identified the issue of the need to develop a specific piece of action research in an area in which you are already employed. This might involve the development of materials that advance knowledge and practice in an area. For example, if you have decided to devise a Training Manual for a specific area of training for leaders in the local Boys and Girls Club of Dubuque (See the Thesis Analysis of adult training practices at Big Brother Big Sisters of Eastern Iowa by Lorie Bumphrey), you would need to observe the original training event, evaluate the missional needs of the training event from an organizational perspective, use effective adult education theory to develop an alternative training event, demonstrating at each turn how effective communication theory enhances the proposed training design as an effective improvement on existing practice. This begins by first identifying a relevant topic: Effectiveness in the Design of Training Events for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Dubuque.

Assessing the Feasibility of a Topic
To help establish the feasibility of a research topic, you should consider:

1. **The Availability of Data and Information:** Is it likely that
   - such data exists;
   - you will have access to it; and
   - it can be collected with your time and budget constraints?
2. **Available Time:** It is essential that you plan and manage your time effectively throughout the thesis and/or practicum process. If problems look to be too large and unmanageable *in the available time, break them down into smaller parts* or limit the scope of your research.

   - Practicum topics need to be something that you and the individual who will direct the COM 689 course can agree “appears to be do-able” in the time constraints of one semester.
   - Thesis topics have the luxury of being more open-ended in time constraints for completion.

3. **Personal Skills and Interests:** The topic should be within your capabilities and should reflect your specific interest and possibly be the means by which you develop opportunities for your professional or academic future. Please choose a topic that you will be able to sustain an interest in over the whole period of the thesis/practicum and beyond.

4. **Need for the Practicum:** There should be a recognized need for the practicum. While the results of the research may not be implemented immediately, you need to be able to demonstrate its significance to your advisor and, where relevant, your employer.
SECTION III
DESIGNING IT—COM 660

The Thesis/Practicum Plan

Once you have identified the topic of your thesis or your practicum, the next phase involves designing the process:

1. First, clarify your objective: how do you envision that the practicum will be different when it is finished than the idea for the topic you are beginning with?
2. Second, define the necessary activities and the order in which they should take place to accomplish the thesis/practicum.
   i. For example, for the practicum suggested above, you would need to identify key people who have run for office locally (both those who have won and lost) and plan for the possibility of interviewing them. That means you will have to do some work to discover different kinds of interviewing processes relevant to naturalistic inquiry. You would also need to think about the kinds of questions that would elicit information enabling you to sift these different election strategies by Hollihan’s election strategies in Uncivil Wars.
   ii. The thesis and the practicum are both organized by a similar strategy of design in the writing.
      • The practicum reduces chapter divisions to argument divisions in a paper.
      • The practicum paper itself is generally much shorter than a thesis
      • The practicum does not require the same rigor of design as does the thesis; the difference is to be worked out with the COM 689 faculty member.
   iii. If you are writing a thesis, you must formulate the major divisions of your study. Using the example above, you would begin with a review of literature on the topic of television violence and its effects on children. After reviewing the divisions of the literature listed above, to limit the scope of your study, you may wish to focus on issues of macro-level effects and critical approaches to assessment. If this is combined with viewing results from a ritual perspective, you would be able to draw conclusions and make recommendations without becoming entangled in the strict problem of demonstrating direct cause and effect. Your chapters would likely demonstrate this “winnowing process” permitted by the perspectives you introduced, briefly, in your introduction. Your research may lead you to propose recommendations for both the entertainment industry and/or parents who wish to effect change in the amount of violence served up in the media.
3. Try to frame the big ideas of what you expect to happen in each of the chapter divisions of your work whether it is a thesis or a practicum. Typically the major moves of a study will include the following chapters for a thesis or paper divisions for a practicum:
   i. Introduction and identification of the problematic that controls the issue at stake in the study.
   ii. A review of the literature that theorizes the research design or the intervention design
   iii. A proposal of what the study and/or intervention entails methodologically that clearly integrates the relevant literature with the specifics of what is to be done in this inquiry.
   iv. A report on the findings of the study; this is the most extensive portion of the paper that has the most detailed analysis of the findings of the students efforts.
   v. A conclusion that summarizes what has been evaluated in the study, draws out final implications, recommendations for further research, and final observations.
4. Once you have begun to conceive of your study’s major moves, you are able to focus on
determining research necessary to support this inquiry. Identify the key resources; e.g., books,
articles, Web resources, experts to be consulted; individuals to be interviewed, etc.
5. Now, sketch a time plan. When will you have each piece done in the process?

The Thesis/Practicum Framework
Initial Stage: To be accomplished while taking Research and Writing in Communication
Studies—COM 660
(1) Meet with chosen thesis advisor (COM 690) or practicum advisor (COM 689)
(2) Identify the thesis/Practicum topic with Preliminary Topic Proposal and
   Approval with a preliminary 100 word précis of thesis/practicum
(3) Develop of an Annotated bibliography to support final work of development
   of a Review of the literature section/chapter in COM 689/690
(4) Identification of an appropriate research method

Processes Relevant to Conceiving the Prospectus/Proposal

Issues Relevant to Review of Literature. You will:
(1) Identify existing knowledge relevant to your topic
(2) Identify key research studies for the Prospectus/Proposal
   ● Academic studies for a thesis
   ● Applied studies for a practicum
(3) Must be coordinated with the COM 660 course instructor and
    practicum advisor.

Issues Relevant to Practicum Methodology. You will:
(1) State assumptions
(2) Document supporting research/theory
(3) Prepare practicum design
(4) Identify any predictive models
(5) Get initial approval of practicum methodology from COM 660 course
    instructor and practicum/thesis advisor.

Issues Relevant to Data Collection. You will:
(1) Decide what count as “data.” Observations by you? Self-reports from
    participants? Survey responses? Interview notes? Reading notes from
    your review of relevant writings?
(2) Identify how data will be gathered--paper-pencil surveys?
    Observation? Interviews? Participant observation? Reading?
(3) Clarify how data will be analyzed after/as they are gathered, and
(4) How analyzed data will be turned into findings.
(5) Specify how you will argue for the validity of data and findings.
(6) Argue, where appropriate, for the reliability of data and findings.
(7) Interpret findings—tell what you believe you can make of data and findings and how these results provide responses to your research questions.

Issues Relevant to Conclusions/Recommendation. You will:

(1) Offer an interpretation of your findings
(2) Draw conclusions from interpreted findings
(3) Propose a course of action (Practicum) or a way of understanding (Thesis)
(4) Determine Relevance of research
   i. for Communication Studies
   ii. for other relevant publics

**COM 660 Syllabus Requirements**

The Syllabus for COM 660 provides specific information on the way in which these dimensions can be practically fulfilled. The Syllabus always supersedes any requirements indicated by this document.
SECTION IV
METHODOLOGIES

An integral aspect of doing a thesis or practicum research project is knowing, acknowledging, and appropriately using disciplinary methodology. Methodology reflects a research tradition that has developed out of concerns for validity and reliability of knowledge disseminated within a discipline. Your knowledge of theory from the literature may provide a springboard for a leap of insight into the phenomenon you wish to study, but serious inquiry requires a disciplined, step-by-step approach to testing your hypothesis or expectation and grounding what you claim to have discovered. Just as a basketball player cannot score without mastering fundamentals and following the rules of the game, so a researcher must follow certain guidelines to insure the results reported in the study are fair and accurate. Methodology provides those guidelines.

While methodological concerns are front and center for doctoral research (which aims to extend and refine disciplinary knowledge), the standards are less rigorous for MAC research, which focuses on increasing understanding of some local phenomenon without necessarily changing or extending the way the discipline understands that phenomenon in general. The MAC thesis or practicum requires you to recognize the appropriate methodology for your study, understand it, and “get your feet wet” in applying that methodology so as to yield grounded insights into the local phenomenon you investigate.

Qualitative & Quantitative

The emphasis on the local and particular in MAC research means that the student will typically use qualitative methodology (with the possible inclusion of descriptive quantitative data that support the holistic, qualitative analysis of the local phenomenon in question). Generally, quantitative research in the social sciences abstracts some feature (variable) from human behavior, reduces it to a measurable quantity, and gathers such measurements from a relatively large sample of human beings (or behaviors) in hopes of supporting a conclusion that can be generalized beyond that sample. In other words, it aims to contribute to disciplinary knowledge as a whole. Qualitative research, on the other hand, seeks to create a rich, rounded, deeply insightful picture of a particular human phenomenon in its local context. That holistic picture may be analogous to other particular human groups/behaviors in other contexts, but generalizability is a limited by-product, not the researcher’s primary goal.

Because the MAC program prepares graduates to intervene in local organizations rather than create generalizable knowledge for the academic discipline of communication, qualitative methodology is a better fit for the thesis / practicum paper. However, unlike doctoral-level qualitative research, MAC studies focus only on understanding a very small piece of local organizational (or other) communication behavior in a brief slice of time. The picture produced is not as deep, wide, or complete as one finds in full-blown qualitative studies of groups/organizations. As such, MAC research provides the student with a “taste” of qualitative investigation.
Key Strategies in Qualitative Research

The specific methods within qualitative methodology are many, and different scholars break them down into somewhat different categories. Berg (2004) identifies eight:

- Interviewing
- Focus Group (a form of interviewing)
- Ethnography
- Action Research
- Unobtrusive Measures (archival material and physical traces of activity)
- Historiography and Oral Traditions
- Case Studies
- Content Analysis

One problem with these categories is that they contain a mixture of “apples and oranges.” Interviewing, focus groups, and unobtrusive measures are relatively simple, well-defined data-collection methods. On the other hand, ethnography, action research, and case studies are more complex, holistic approaches that use some combination of the above plus other distinguishing methods or orientations.

MAC research does not entail the comprehensiveness and depth associated with ethnography (rooted in the anthropological tradition of studying enduring cultural/ethnic groups), case studies (aimed at a full-orbed understanding of complex social/organizational events or processes gained through multiple data-collection methods), or action research (which works to empower groups and organizations through a combination of participatory empirical research and a spiraling process of planning, action, and evaluation to solve problems), although a MAC practicum/thesis may draw upon selected aspects of one of these complex approaches.

In light of the constraints upon MAC research, it may be more useful to think in terms of very specific, unitary types of data collection followed by data analysis.

Data Collection

Creswell (1994) provides a list of distinct collection procedures. Below is an adapted list (with some items added and subtracted) of methods to collect data for MAC research:

- Observing the human activity in question (from the ethnographic tradition)
- Observing as a participant in the activity (distinctly ethnographic)
- Unstructured, open-ended interviewing (recorded on tape and/or through notes)
- Focus group interviewing
- Collecting personal letters/e-mails from informants
- Gathering public documents (e.g., official memos, minutes, reports, archival material, websites)
- Examining physical traces (e.g., wear and tear on a relevant piece of technology)
- Surveys with open-ended questions
- Surveys with closed questions (forced choice among predetermined answers).

Technically, this is a quantitative data collection method since the goal is to gather...
statistics on the response choices. Survey data are of little use unless the sample size is relatively large in proportion to the group/organization/phenomenon being studied.

Many qualitative researchers (e.g., Denzin, 1970) recommend “triangulation” (using a combination of two or three such research methods) to check and balance the conclusions that might derived from a single method alone. Triangulating is meant to increase the validity of one’s findings. For example, if you use surveys, you should consider supplementing these data with interviews or observations, etc.

Data Analysis

Virtually all of the above data collection methods yield some form of textual record: researcher notes, transcriptions of interviews, pre-existing textual documents, lists of physical measurements or descriptions, etc. This text must then be analyzed to produce meaningful results in relation to theory and practice. In most cases, this analysis requires one to code the textual data according to categories that are (1) predetermined by one’s chosen theoretical lens or (2) emergent from repeated examinations of the data itself or (3) some combination of both. MAC research adheres to option (1) or (3) since you do not have the knowledge/training to develop theoretical conceptualization from the ground up, and preexisting theory helps you limit the scope and focus of your research. Techniques for analyzing textual data roughly break down into the following two traditions:

- **Rhetorical criticism** (selecting from an array of critical approaches to understanding how human discourse establishes identification and creates influence). Developed in the humanities tradition. [Not commonly used in MAC research of organizational communication.]
- **Content analysis** (regarded by some as a quantitative method since it includes making counts of items that fall in various categories). Developed in the social science tradition; commonly applicable to organizational communication research.

Berg (1994) identifies the following general steps for analyzing textual data within qualitative social research:

- Codes are analytically developed [from theory] or inductively identified [in the data] and affixed to sets of notes or transcript pages.
- Codes are transformed into categorical labels or themes.
- Materials are sorted by these categories, identifying similar phrases, patterns, relationships, and commonalities or disparities.
- Sorted materials are examined to isolate meaningful patterns and processes.
- Identified patterns are considered in light of previous research and theories, and a small set of generalizations is established. (p. 267)

See Berg’s (1994) chapter on Content Analysis for more detailed discussion of this type of data analysis.
**Resources on Research Methodology (Preliminary List)**


SECTION V
WRITING A PRACTICUM PAPER— COM 689

Basic Orientation:
(1) At the outset of this stage of your graduate program you must begin by having a prospectus/proposal accepted by the instructor of COM 689.
(2) Based on the design proposed in your prospectus/proposal you prepare a first draft of the paper in careful consultation with your thesis supervisor.
(3) Edit based on suggested changes. Be prepared for the possibility of multiple edits.
(4) Prepare a final draft.
(5) Students will present the findings of their research in a final PowerPoint Presentation to other students in COM 689.

The Research Process

A. In the basic Literature Review that stands at the outset of most thesis/practicum report, you should ask and answer the following questions:
(1) What is the Communication literature relevant to my practicum? To be determined in conjunction with the advisor.
   - Is the literature of other disciplines (i.e., psychology, sociology) relevant? For example, a student pursuing study of leadership practice needs to examine leadership theory as a subset of organization communication studies, but may also discover that relevant literature may be found in business and psychology. A student examining a thesis in the area of interpersonal communication may find that psychologists and social psychologists also have relevant material on this subject.
   - What types of literature are relevant. (i.e., a thesis should develop the implications of academic literature while a practicum may develop the findings of civic or business studies). For example, a student may have proposed a communication practicum relevant to issues of retention of professional workers in a specific community. Relevant research should include studies of and proposals for employment retention at the national, state, regional and city level. The student may also wish to examine the organizational communication issue of socialization of newcomers to discover if any of the literature in this field is relevant to the study.
(2) What type of literature should I employ? To be determined in conjunction with the advisor.
   - Relevant sections of Jablin and Putnam
   - Academic studies on CIOS and CommSearch3
   - Journals and books from the library resources
   - Materials available from inter-library loan
Materials available from on-line research resources
Materials from civic and government publications
Materials from transcribed resources

(3) How shall I undertake the literature research?
- Is more than one kind of subject survey necessary?
- How extensive should such a survey be? Should it be an Exemplary or an Exhaustive Review. (See Rubin, et. al. pp 234-34.)

(4) How shall I organize my literature review? (See Rubin, et. al. pp 236-37.)
- Topical
- Chronological
- Problem-Cause-Solution
- General-to-Specific
- Specific-to-General
- Known-to-Unknown

(5) Refer to Rubin, Rubin and Piele for additional suggestions. Their guidelines occasionally need to be adapted/modified for MAC Practicums. Discuss these details with your practicum advisor.


(1) General types of research methodologies (See Rubin, Rubin, Piele)
- Historical (often normative for practicums). For example, in Mass Communication theory this would include “Limited Effects” theories such as 1) Attitude Change theories, 2) Reinforcement theories, 3) Uses and Gratification Approach theories, 4) Media as Agenda Setting theories, 5) Social learning theory, and 5) Dependence theory. Other subsets of communication disciplinary research (e.g., Interpersonal, Organizational, Rhetorical, etc.) will have different sets of methodological theories relevant to inquiry in these communication sub-disciplines.
- Critical/Rhetorical. For example, in Mass Communication theory this would include typical Culture-Sensitive theories such as 1) Symbolic Interactionism and Social Construction of Reality theory, 2) Cultivation Analysis, and Critical-Cultural theory like that of the Frankfurt School, etc.
- Legal/policy (both historical and critical)
- Secondary Analysis (Asking new questions of old data/research)
- Conversational/Textual/Content Analysis (rigorously analytical)
- Survey, Observational, or experimental research

(2) A practicum may be conducted without assuming a specific theoretical approach to analysis of literature. However, students of communication
should be aware that there is no real theory-less approach to communication studies. There is only awareness or blindness to one’s assumptions as to what counts concerning issues of validity and reliability in data collection and analysis. In making evaluation of findings, it may help students to have identified at least some basic theoretical approaches such as those suggested in the historical section for Mass Communication. Students who struggle for ways of identifying what should count as “possibly meaningful” conclusions, may find they would have been helped by acknowledging an assumed theoretical orientation at the outset of the study. All writers bring methodological and cultural assumptions about knowledge and reality to the writing task. Make sure you spend time reflecting on how such assumptions may drive or control your conclusions.
SECTION VI
THE COMPONENTS—COM 689

Contents and Structure: A Thesis/Practicum should include the following:

1. Title Page
2. An Executive Summary
3. Topical Divisions of the Paper will likely include
   i. Introduction
   ii. Statement of the Problematic
   iii. Review of the Literature
   iv. Method for Intervention
   v. Analysis of Findings
   vi. Implications and Conclusion
   vii. Appendices
   viii. Works cited

Typical Sections include:

1. Executive Summary: The executive summary is an extended version of the
   Descriptive Abstract of a thesis. Compose this in clear, non-technical
   language where possible. Provide a brief informative outline in paragraph
   form of the work’s importance, contents, findings and recommendations.
   Indicate the research methodology employed. This should not exceed one
   page.

2. Introduction
   The Introduction should include the following divisions (minor headings)
   as headings: (Can be adapted with approval of advisor)
   - Introduction
   - Statement of the Problem (i.e., Here you answer the question,
     “Why this question/inquiry?” What is your motive for engaging in
     this study?)
   - Research/Theories Relevant to Method
   - The Approach of the Study (Method)
   - The Overview of the Divisions of the Study

3. Review of the Literature
   Exemplary rather than exhaustive surveys are generally appropriate for
   this section of the study. Subheadings should help students to narrow
   (usually from the general to the specific) studies relevant to the inquiry.

4. Research Methodology
   Clearly identify research methodology or methodologies employed,
   assumptions, populations included, variables, materials employed, data
   analyzed, and, where relevant, the public(s) for whom the study is
   intended. You should indicate what counts as data in your study, how it
   was gathered, and how it is analyzed.

5. Findings/Analysis
Specifically provide analysis of data and describe any findings or conclusions drawn from the thesis. Link these to the literature review introduced at the outset of the study whenever possible and to the methodology employed to conduct the study. Conclusions must be drawn from the body of analysis/evidence or data supplied in the study. This section often provides the “solution” to the basic Problem-Solution design of a thesis inquiry.

(6) Recommendations
This section summarizes the findings of the study, notes limitations, and makes recommendations for possible future areas of inquiry needed as a result of this inquiry.

(7) Appendices
Use appropriate form for appendices as indicated in the guidelines of APA or guidelines your advisor has approved. A Thesis or a Practicum may include captures of media source material.

(8) Works Cited/References
Provide correctly documented citations (APA) for all references. Students must work to maintain a rigorous commitment to following correct citation style.
Chapter Addendum:

**The Comprehensive MAC Examination**

In the last or next to last semester before graduation, students taking the 36 credit non-thesis degree M.A. program in Communication must complete the comprehensive examination. The three-hour examination is a comprehensive capstone experience intended to establish the M.A. candidate's knowledge of the field and his or her ability to apply that knowledge in the concrete analysis of problems relating to organizational communication. A successful resolution of this exam process certifies his or her readiness for the degree. Students must be registered for coursework in the semester they take this exam.

**To Initiate the Examination**

To initiate the examination, an M.A. student should contact the MA Program Chair and indicate his or her desire to take the exam. The student should also coordinate the scheduling of the written examination with the Graduate Program Coordinator. The graduate program coordinator will make room and media (computer) reservations that will enable the student to write her or his exam in privacy.

**On the Day**

On the day of the written examination, the student is to report to the Program Director at a designated time. The program director will provide the student with test materials, a non-networked laptop computer, and direct the student to the test room. The student does not bring any other material into the test room.

**Evaluation**

One to two weeks after the written examination is completed, the student will be notified whether the response to the exam questions is acceptable. A student who has provided acceptable written responses will pass the examination. Those who provide excellent or outstanding responses may pass with distinction. Students who do not provide adequate responses will be asked to reschedule the test. Students may only make two attempts to satisfy this requirement in any given semester. Failure to pass the written comprehensive exams will result in the denial of the M.A. degree.

**Comprehensive Examination: Written Defense Checklist**

Student __________________________ Date ______________

Evaluator __________________________________________

**Written Answer:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clarity of answer</th>
<th>very poor</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>excellent</th>
<th>outstanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy of information</td>
<td>very poor</td>
<td>poor</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>excellent</td>
<td>outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensiveness of response</td>
<td>very poor</td>
<td>poor</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>excellent</td>
<td>outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic of argument</td>
<td>very poor</td>
<td>poor</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>excellent</td>
<td>outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of written response</td>
<td>very poor</td>
<td>poor</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>excellent</td>
<td>outstanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:
SECTION VII
WRITING A THESIS—COM 690

Basic Orientation:
(6) At the outset of this stage of your graduate program you must begin by having a prospectus/proposal accepted by the graduate prospectus/proposal supervisor.
(7) Based on the design proposed in your prospectus/proposal you prepare a first draft in careful consultation with your thesis supervisor.
(8) Whether this should be accomplished in chapter installments or as argument of the whole is negotiated with the advisor.
(9) Edit based on suggested changes. Be prepared for the possibility of multiple edits.
(10) Prepare a final draft.
(11) Submit final draft at least three weeks before the end of the semester in which you expect to complete the degree program.
(12) DEFENSE: Student must defend the argument of thesis/practicum with the appropriate graduate committee personnel (to be determined in consultation with the advisor and program director). If a student practicum has included a peer review by someone outside the communication department or outside the university, the reviewer may be asked to sit on the Defense Evaluation Committee. See Attachment A for instructions concerning Defense Procedures.

The Research Process

C. In the basic Literature Review that stands at the outset of most thesis/practicum report, you should ask and answer the following questions:
(6) What is the Communication literature relevant to my practicum? To be determined in conjunction with the advisor.
- Is the literature of other disciplines (i.e., psychology, sociology) relevant? For example, a student pursuing study of leadership practice needs to examine leadership theory as a subset of organization communication studies, but may also discover that relevant literature may be found in business and psychology. A student examining a thesis in the area of interpersonal communication may find that psychologists and social psychologists also have relevant material on this subject.
- What types of literature are relevant. (i.e., a thesis should develop the implications of academic literature while a practicum may develop the findings of civic or business studies). For example, a student may have proposed a communication practicum relevant to issues of retention of professional workers in a specific community. Relevant research should include studies of and proposals for employment retention at the national, state, regional and city level. The student may also wish to examine the
organizational communication issue of socialization of newcomers to discover if any of the literature in this field is relevant to the study.

(7) What type of literature should I employ? To be determined in conjunction with the advisor.

- Relevant sections of Jablin and Putnam
- Academic studies on CIOS and CommSearch3
- Journals and books from the library resources
- Materials available from inter-library loan
- Materials available from on-line research resources
- Materials from civic and government publications
- Materials from transcribed resources

(8) How shall I undertake the literature research?

- Is more than one kind of subject survey necessary?
- How extensive should such a survey be? Should it be an Exemplary or an Exhaustive Review. (See Rubin, et. al. pp 234-34.)

(9) How shall I organize my literature review? (See Rubin, et. al. pp 236-37.)

- Topical
- Chronological
- Problem-Cause-Solution
- General-to-Specific
- Specific-to-General
- Known-to-Unknown

(10) Refer to Rubin, Rubin and Piele for additional suggestions. Their guidelines occasionally need to be adapted/modified for MAC Practicums. Discuss these details with your practicum advisor.

D. In developing a Research Methodology for a thesis see Rubin, Rubin, Piele with special emphasis on the literature resources. For a more comprehensive list and discussion of theories as they relate to research in communication studies see Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen Foss. (2004). Theories of Human Communication, 8th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, on Reserve at the Library.

(3) General types of research methodologies (See Rubin, Rubin, Piele)

- Historical (often normative for practicums). For example, in Mass Communication theory this would include “Limited Effects” theories such as 1) Attitude Change theories, 2) Reinforcement theories, 3) Uses and Gratification Approach theories, 4) Media as Agenda Setting theories, 5) Social learning theory, and 5) Dependence theory. Other subsets of communication disciplinary research (e.g., Interpersonal, Organizational, Rhetorical, etc.) will have different sets of methodological theories relevant to inquiry in these communication sub-disciplines.
- Critical/Rhetorical. For example, in Mass Communication theory this would include typical Culture-Sensitive theories such as 1) Symbolic Interactionism and Social Construction of Reality theory, 2) Cultivation
Analysis, and Critical-Cultural theory like that of the Frankfurt School, etc.

- Legal/policy (both historical and critical)
- Secondary Analysis (Asking new questions of old data/research)
- Conversational/Textual/Content Analysis (rigorously analytical)
- Survey, Observational, or experimental research

(4) A practicum may be conducted without assuming a specific theoretical approach to analysis of literature. However, students of communication should be aware that there is no real theory-less approach to communication studies. There is only awareness or blindness to one’s assumptions as to what counts concerning issues of validity and reliability in data collection and analysis. In making evaluation of findings, it may help students to have identified at least some basic theoretical approaches such as those suggested in the historical section for Mass Communication. Students who struggle for ways of identifying what should count as “possibly meaningful” conclusions, may find they would have been helped by acknowledging an assumed theoretical orientation at the outset of the study. All writers bring methodological and cultural assumptions about knowledge and reality to the writing task. Make sure you spend time reflecting on how such assumptions may drive or control your conclusions.
SECTION VIII
THE COMPONENTS—COM 690

Contents and Structure: A Thesis/Practicum should include the following:

(4) Title Page
(5) Certificate of Approval
(6) Table of Contents
(7) Descriptive Abstract (thesis) Executive Summary
(8) Thesis
  i. Introduction
  ii. Statement of the Problematic
  iii. Overview of the Study divisions
  iv. Review of the Literature
  v. Identification of Relevant Theories/Assumptions
  vi. Identification of Research Methodology
  vii. Data Report and Data Analysis
  viii. Findings and Conclusions
  ix. Recommendations (if appropriate)
  x. Works cited
  xi. Appendices

Typical Sections include:

(1) Title Page (See sample in Appendix A)
This should include 1) a Complete Practicum/Thesis title, 2) Student name, 3) Program name (Master of Arts in Communication), 4) Concentration name (e.g., Concentration in Leadership and Management Communication), 5) Practicum advisor’s name and title, and 6) Date of final draft submission

(2) Descriptive Abstract (for a thesis; see Executive Summary for a practicum)
This abstract includes information about the purpose, scope, methods used, and significant conclusion(s) of the thesis/practicum. Generally, the abstract is no longer than 200-250 words. Key technical terms need to be cited in the Abstract and indicated at the end of the abstract as a keyword index.

(3) Executive Summary (for a practicum) The executive summary is an extended version of the Descriptive Abstract of a thesis. Compose this in clear, non-technical language where possible. Provide a brief informative outline in paragraph form of the work’s importance, contents, findings and recommendations. Indicate the research methodology employed.

(4) Table of Contents
Include major and minor headings, appendices and figures together with a clear page identification for all.
(5) Introduction

The Introduction should include the following divisions (minor headings) as headings: (Can be adapted with approval of advisor)

- Introduction
- Statement of the Problem (i.e., Here you answer the question, “Why this question/inquiry?” What is your motive for engaging in this study?)
- Research/Theories Relevant to Method
- The Approach of the Study (Method)
- The Overview of the Divisions of the Study

(6) Review of the Literature

Exemplary rather than exhaustive surveys are generally appropriate for this section of the study. Subheadings should help students to narrow (usually from the general to the specific) studies relevant to the inquiry.

(7) Research Methodology

Clearly identify research methodology or methodologies employed, assumptions, populations included, variables, materials employed, data analyzed, and, where relevant, the public(s) for whom the study is intended. You should indicate what counts as data in your study, how it was gathered, and how it is analyzed.

(8) Findings/Analysis

Specifically provide analysis of data and describe any findings or conclusions drawn from the thesis. Link these to the literature review introduced at the outset of the study whenever possible and to the methodology employed to conduct the study. Conclusions must be drawn from the body of analysis/evidence or data supplied in the study. This section often provides the “solution” to the basic Problem-Solution design of a thesis inquiry.

(9) Recommendations (optional)

This section may extend the solutions section introduced in the Findings-Conclusions. If recommendations are offered, you must supply necessary information relevant to the implementation of recommendations.

(10) Appendices

Use appropriate form for appendices as indicated in the guidelines of APA or guidelines your advisor has approved. A Thesis or a Practicum may include captures of media source material.

(11) Works Cited/References

Provide correctly documented citations (APA) for all references. Students must work to maintain a rigorous commitment to following correct citation style.
SECTION IX
COM 690 DONE!

I. LAST THINGS: See Appendix D & E for a final check off list for all signatures for program end.

II. DOCUMENT REQUIREMENTS
(1) Typed without errors
(2) Required: Three Bound Copies:
   a. One for the Library
   b. One for the Advisor
   c. One for the MAC Program Office
(3) It is customary to provide your director with a bound copy of your thesis. (You may also talk to library staff about ordering a bound copy for your own use.)
(4) Form: Follows standard format as specified below:
   i. Font: 12 point Times/Roman, CaliforniaFB, Georgia, or Arial are acceptable.
   ii. Margins: 2” Left hand margin; 1” margins at right, top and bottom.
   iii. Headings (See Appendix B for sample of headers):
       Major Heading should be flush to the Left, Bold, Capitalized.
       Secondary Headings should be .25 Tab from the Left with First letter Capitalized, Bold,
       Tertiary Headings should be indented, .5 Tab, First letter Capitalized, Italicized, not Bold.
   iv. Tables and Figures must be conformed to APA or MLA style. The convention here is to indicate that the material can be found in Figure 3.1. You then continue writing. The next page has the figure without any chapter text on that page. The next page picks up right in the middle of the sentence from the text 2 pages back.
   v. Page Header should conform to the recommendations of the Style Manual. No more than 5 words. The Running Head need not appear on the title or the certification page.
   vi. Quotations as headpieces of chapters (should you choose to make use of this convention) do not need to be double-spaced. However, all quotations within a chapter must be double-spaced.
   vii. Pagination should be upper right hand corner.

III. ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
1. General description of thesis
   - Clear Statement of the Problem, Method, and Approach of the practicum
   - Clear objectives
   - Clear organization
   - Theories, models clearly presented
   - Conceptual framework well executed
   - Correct format followed
   - Correct citation system employed
- Correct grammar, spelling, mechanics
- Linkages between ideas clearly provided
- Clean copy
- Demonstration of Master’s level work

2. Review of the Literature
- Appropriate choice
- Appropriate comprehensive or exemplary review and review strategy
- Clear link to inquiry question

3. Research Methodology
- Appropriate methodology chosen
- Adequate explanation of method/theories
- Adequate rationale provided for choices
- Appropriate data collection and analysis
- Correct interpretation

4. Findings/Conclusions
- Clear identification of conclusions
- Adequate linking with literature and methods
- Thorough explanation

5. Recommendations (optional)
- Appropriate to research findings
- Clear explanation

6. Works Cited/References
- Correct form
- Inclusive
APPENDIX A: SAMPLE OUTLINE

The following outline is a sample of headers and sub-headers that provide the linkages and sub-linkages of reasoning that form the logic of chapter divisions in a thesis and to a lesser degree the logic of argument in a practicum intervention assessment. This is NOT a table of contents. Actual can vary with the subject matter and purpose of an inquiry.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM
SPECIFIC STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
  Assessment of the Problem
  Unresolved Elements of the Problem
METHODOLOGY
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
  The Approach of this Study
  The Specific Purpose of the Study
  Overview of Document Division

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

DEFINE THE ISSUE(S) AT STAKE
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
  General Literature Relating to the Issue
    First Literature
    Second Literature (if more than one)
    Third Literature (if more than two)
  SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LITERATURE FOR THE INQUIRY

CHAPTER 3: STUDY DESIGN

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY CONCERN
RELEVANT METHODOLOGY FOR STUDY
  Discussion of relevant literature where necessary
  Discussion of specific literature for present design
DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC DESIGN
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS
   DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS
   EXPLANATION OF ANALYSIS DESIGN
   ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS
   SUMMARY

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION
   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
   CONCLUSION

APPENDICES

WORKS CITED
APPENDIX B: THESIS TITLE PAGE

See the next page for the appropriate form for the title page.

Creating the Title Page
1. Select centering text at the tool bar.
2. Move 7 Returns down the page to enter the first line of text (2 lines of text)
3. From the end of the 2nd line of text, 10 returns: type the title of the thesis/practicum
4. At the end of the title 5 returns for your name.
5. Three returns for document genre
   Master of Arts in Communication Thesis

Creating the Certification Page:
6. Select centering text at the tool bar.
7. Move 7 Returns down the page to enter the first line of text (2 lines of text)
8. Return 5 times to type “CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL”
9. Return 5 times to type “MATER’S THESIS” or “MASTER’S PRACTICUM”
10. Return 5 times to type the next line of type
11. Double space to your name
12. Double space to the next line of text
13. Double space to the name of degree
14. Double space
15. Select “Align Right” at the tool bar
16. Make a line of 35 characters of underlining
17. Type in the name, title, and role of the thesis advisor
18. Double space
19. Type: Date [one blank space] and underline for 30 characters
20. Double space 35 character line with the word “examiner” typed beneath
21. Again.

Do not use page numbers or headers or footers on this page.
The University of Dubuque
Dubuque, Iowa

TITLE

[Your Name]

Master of Arts in Communication
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER’S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master’s Thesis of

[Your Name]

has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts in Communication

[Title and Name], Thesis Advisor

Date ____________________________

Examiner

Examiner
APPENDIX C: **PRIMARY FULL-TIME MAC FACULTY—**

**APPROVED TO DIRECT A THESIS**

Robert Reid. BA, MA, MDiv, PhD  
*Professor of Communication*  
*Director of the MAC program*  
MAC Coursework  
- COM 610 Organizational Communication  
- COM 622 Global Communication  
- COM 630 Effective Professional Communication  
Areas of Disciplinary & Literature Competence  
1. Organizational Communication  
2. Speech & Persuasion—Literatures & Practice  
3. Argument Analysis & Rhetorical Criticism  
4. Preaching & Practical Theology Literatures  
5. History of Rhetoric/Contemporary Rhetorical Theory

John Stewart, BA, MA, PhD  
*Professor of Communication*  
*Vice President of Academic Affairs*  
MAC Coursework  
- COM 630 Effective Professional Communication  
- COM 667 Interpersonal Communication in Professional Settings  
Areas of Disciplinary & Literature Competence  
1. Interpersonal Communication  
2. Communication and Identity  
3. Dialogue  
4. Communication Theory & Philosophy  
5. Philosophy of Language  
6. Interpretive (“qualitative”) Communication Research

Kimberly Schwartz, BA, MA, Ph.D. (in progress)  
*Assistant Professor in Communication.*  
MAC Coursework  
- COM 640 Public Relations  
- COM 672 Training and Seminar Methods  
Areas of Disciplinary & Literature Competence  
1. Public Relations  
2. Public Relations Management  
3. Integrated Communications  
4. Organizational Communication

**MAC FACULTY AVAILABLE WITH PRIOR APPROVAL OF MAC DIRECTOR**

Alan Garfield, BA, MA  
*Chair and Professor of Computer Graphics-Interactive Media*
MAC Coursework
   COM 645  Web Development for Organizations
Areas of Disciplinary & Literature Competence
   1. Information Technology
   2. Web Development and Web Design Strategies
   3. CG Interface

Mary Anne Knefel, BA, MLS, MBA
Director of Library.

MAC Coursework
   COM 660  Research and Writing in Communication
Areas of Disciplinary & Literature Competence
   1. Research and Writing in Communication
   2. Academic Integrity and Research: issues, including information literacy, Internet research, plagiarism, Freedom to Read, paper v. online scholarship, ETC.

Jean Neuman, B.A., M.F.A., Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Computer Graphics and Interactive Media

MAC Coursework
   COM 625  Computer Mediated Document Design
   COM 667  Management of IT Innovations
Areas of Disciplinary & Literature Competence
   1. Computer Mediated Document Design
   2. Management of IT Innovations
   3. Digital Illustration & Web Animation
APPENDIX D: MAC COM 689 POST COMPREHENSIVE EXAM STUDENT CHECKLIST:

☐ Student has a final grade submitted for COM 689 with a practicum project fully submitted and accepted.

☐ Student has submitted a fully integrated final electronic copy of the practicum project to
  o The COM 689 faculty member and chair of the MAC program.

  ▪ Signature ________________________ Date: _______________
  o The librarian designated to turn the final project into a PDF file to be made available for international on-line access.

  ▪ Signature ________________________ Date: _______________

☐ Student has checked with the Accounts Office to insure that all outstanding fees have been paid to date.

☐ Student has checked with the Registrar’s office to insure that all coursework is completed according to catalog requirements for completion of program.

☐ FINAL STEP: Turning in this check-off list the Graduate Program Office. The Graduate Office Program director will then initiate the process to finalize your status as a graduate of the MAC program at the University of Dubuque.
APPENDIX E: MAC POST THESIS DEFENSE (COM 690) STUDENT CHECKLIST.

☐ Student has at least 5 signed pages of the title sheet.

☐ Student has clear timeline established for final delivery of the document with Thesis Director.

☐ Student provides the following versions of the FINAL draft of the thesis:

  o Student has electronically sent the final draft of an approved thesis to the Thesis Director

  o Student has electronically sent the final draft of the accepted thesis (with a JPG first page that includes signatures) to the Cataloguing and Inter-library Loan librarian.

  o Three paper copies are required for binding. Please make an appointment to insure that the appropriate person is there to receive your copies (589-3559).

    ▪ Two paper copies bound only with a large clip at the top of the page are to be turned into the Cataloguing and Inter-library Loan librarian as permanent library copies.

    ▪ One paper copies bound only with a large clip at the top of the page is to be turned into the Cataloguing and Inter-library Loan librarian as permanent copy for the MAC Department. Student will be required to hand deliver this to the MAC Director or Director’s Mailbox.

    ▪ It is customary but not absolutely required that additional copies be produced for the committee members of the defense. Please check with the librarian in charge of cataloguing for further information and costs of having these copies bound.

☐ MAC Program Director insures that Student has finished all program requirements.

  ▪ Signature ________________________ Date: _______________

☐ FINAL STEP: Turning in this check-off list the Graduate Program Office. The graduate Program director will then initiate the process to finalize your status as a graduate of the MA program at the University of Dubuque.