

# **Media Studies PhD Program Student Handbook**

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As we gather, we honor and acknowledge that the University of Colorado's four campuses are on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute, Apache, Comanche, Kiowa, Lakota, Pueblo and Shoshone Nations. Further, we acknowledge the 48 contemporary tribal nations historically tied to the lands that comprise what is now called Colorado.

Acknowledging that we live in the homelands of Indigenous peoples recognizes the original stewards of these lands and their legacies. With this land acknowledgment, we celebrate the many contributions of Native peoples to the fields of medicine, mathematics, government and military service, arts, literature, engineering and more. We also recognize the sophisticated and intricate knowledge systems Indigenous peoples have developed in relationship to their lands.

We recognize and affirm the ties these nations have to their traditional homelands and the many Indigenous people who thrive in this place, alive and strong. We also acknowledge the painful history of ill treatment and forced removal that has had a profoundly negative impact on Native nations.

We respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land. We honor them and thank the indigenous ancestors of this place. The University of Colorado pledges to provide educational opportunities for Native students, faculty and staff and advance our mission to understand the history and contemporary lives of Native peoples.

The College of Media, Communication, and Information was founded in 2015 and consists of six departments: Advertising, Public Relations, and Media Design (APRD); Communication (COMM); Critical Media Practices (DCMP); Information Science (INFO); Journalism (JRNL); and Media Studies (MDST).

while there are six unique doctoral programs in CMCI, every program has to adhere to Graduate School policies and deadlines. As such, all MDST graduate students should regularly check the Graduate School's "[Navigating Your Degree](#)" to make sure you're on track and have taken care of any/all deadlines well in advance. Other Graduate School documents we encourage students to review as soon as possible:

[Graduate Student Bill of Rights & Responsibilities](#)

[Graduate Student Grievance Process and Procedures](#)  
[Graduate School Rules](#)

Please also see section 7 below for details on specific Graduate School Requirements.

The MDST PhD is unique in how it excels at delivering specialized research and curriculum while also collaborating with other units on campus to help doctoral students customize their program of study to their specific interests. Most of the department's faculty can be found in the Armory, with the departmental office residing on the third floor, but we teach courses and have activity all over campus. The doctoral program brings graduate students into collegial and scholarly relationships with faculty, and is designed to introduce students into the patterns of research and creative practices and to develop public engagement within our students.

Students and faculty involved in the program may draw heavily on cultural

Students are welcome to join its popular weekly seminar by emailing the CMRC Director/Professor Nabil Echchaibi <nabil.echchaibi@colorado.edu>.

The Media Enterprise Design Lab (MEDLab) is a think tank for community ownership and governance in media organizations. It creates space for researchers and practitioners to challenge the conventional norms and explore possibilities offered by neglected histories and possible futures. Drawing on diverse fields such as cultural studies, law, management, media archaeology, organizational communication and sociology, MEDLab holds space and time for better kinds of business. For more information, contact Professor Nathan Schneider <Nathan.Schneider@colorado.edu>.

The Media Archaeology Lab (MAL) houses the largest collection in North America of still-functioning media from the early 20th century through the 21st century. Everything in the lab is meant to be turned on and played with. From phonograph plays and magic lanterns, to typewriters, word processors, early computers from the 1970s through the 2000s, the lab gives students, researchers, and artists the rare opportunity to have hands-on access to historically important devices of all kinds. The lab believes that having the opportunity to experience how things were can help to envision how things could be. For more information, contact Professor Lori Emerson <Lori.Emerson@colorado.edu>.

Students graduate from our program with broad knowledge of the intellectual history of media studies as an important field of research: its origins; its perennial questions and controversies; its evolution in response to technological, political, economic and cultural change; the full range of methods it employs, both humanistic and social scientific; and a demonstrated capacity to design and execute original and significant research about media and their historical and contemporary power and importance. Our goal is to help students become intellectual leaders, nationally and internationally, in the area(s) of research specialization they choose, and to help them cultivate an interest in generating public awareness about their scholarship. As such, an important part of doctoral students' education is their participation in the department's research and teaching missions through their assignments as teaching assistants, research assistants, and instructors.

Our main areas of research and teaching include, but are not limited to:

Media Technology, Society, and Social Change: Courses and research in

this area focus on the philosophical, ethical, social and political study of information and communication technologies, old and new; social transformations that result from the widespread availability of multiple technologies; the history of technological devices, practices, platforms, and various modalities of mediation; the legal dimensions of media policy; privacy issues related to information technologies as tools of surveillance; and the significance of social media as tools for cultural expression and social mobilization.

Global and International Media Studies: This area focuses on critical theories of globalization, postcolonial studies and de-colonizing studies, global media industries and communication policy, development communication, global social movements and contentious politics, media and cultural geography, multiple modernities, transnational media, and intersectionality (gender, race, sexuality, class, religion, etc.).

Media Industries, Politics, and Policy: This emphasis enables students to explore questions of power in the creation, distribution, and consumption of mediated communication. Areas of inquiry include the political economy of the media and cultural industries (including advertising, public relations, journalism, the music recording industry, film, radio, television and the Internet); political communication, including electoral politics, grassroots activism and political protest; public policies governing media and culture, and the efforts by advocacy groups to influence media policy.

Critical Theories of Media and Communication: The study of media and communication requires engagement with a variety of theoretical traditions, including cultural studies, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, hermeneutics, political economy, pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, Marxism and Frankfurt School critical theory, feminism, gender and queer theory, critical race theory, postcolonialism, de-colonial theory, critical legal theory, field theory, structuralism and post-structuralism. In its core courses and elective seminars the graduate program seeks to train doctoral students to be flexible yet rigorous practitioners of critique in its many forms.

Media, Religion and Culture: The department offers courses and faculty expertise to train students to explore the intersection of media and religion as they influence one another and our daily lives, focusing on the practices and experiences that define religion and spirituality today, the way media



PhD within six years of admission to the program.

**Proseminar:** All doctoral students are required to enroll in MDST 7011 in their first semester of study and in MDST 7021 in their second semester. These courses are designed to introduce students to the major paradigms within the field of media studies.

**Methods:** All first-year doctoral students enroll in methods classes in their first year. While we often offer MDST 7051 Qualitative Research Methods in the fall and in MDST 7061 Quantitative Research Methods in the spring, alternative methods courses are often offered in their place, as determined by the department. These general courses deal with a variety of research methods used within the field of media and communication studies. MDST PhD students are also required to take two additional graduate level courses in the areas of research methods and/or media practice (6 hours). These may be taken inside or outside the department of Media Studies.

**Inside Emphasis Electives (12-15 hours):** Doctoral students are required to take a minimum of 12-15 hours of course work inside the department of Media Studies, selected on the basis of the student's area(s) of research interest. The courses that may be counted as inside emphasis electives for doctoral credit include:

- MDST 5001 Connected Media Practices
- MDST 5002 Media Activism & Public Engagement
- MDST 5211 Asian Media & Culture
- MDST 5331 Gender, Race, Class & Sexuality in Media
- MDST 6071 Critical Theories of Media and Culture
- MDST 6201 Global Media & Culture
- MDST 6211 Communication & International Development
- MDST 6250 Algorithms, Culture, & Power
- MDST 6301 Comm., Media & Concepts of the Public
- MDST 6311 Power, Politics & Mediated Culture
- MDST 6341 Children, Youth & the Media
- MDST 6551 Media & Communication Policy
- MDST 6671 Media, Myth and Ritual
- MDST 6711 Media & Popular Culture
- MDST 6771 History of Media & Communication
- MDST 6781 Economic & Political Aspects of Media



- MDST 6871 Special Topics in MDST
- MDST 7871 Special Topics (Advanced Research Methods)

Outside Emphasis Electives (9-12 hours): Doctoral students are required to take a minimum of 9 hours of additional elective courses outside of MDST. Electives courses need not be, and usually are not, taken in only one department. Rather, elective courses are selected to form a cohesive whole, pointing toward a student's primary area of research.

Colloquia: Part of joining our program is learning how to be a member of a scholarly community. To that end, attendance at all colloquia, workshops, and called meetings is expected.

Independent study: Ph.D. students may take a maximum of two independent study courses in their course of study, either inside or outside the department. Generally, these will be taken no earlier than the third semester of the program. An independent study course may not duplicate, in whole or substantial part, the content of regularly scheduled courses.

Comprehensive examinations: Each doctoral student will be required to pass comprehensive examinations, consisting of four questions (general theory, research methods, inside area of specialization, outside area of specialization): Each doctor

least 5 dissertation credit hours (full time) or 3 dissertation credit hours (part time) each semester until graduation.

- o Typically, students enroll for 10 dissertation hours in the semester they are taking comprehensive examinations and 10 dissertation hours each in the following fall and spring terms. Students must be aware of Graduate School rules regarding registration for dissertation hours.

In addition to the requirements listed above, the Progress and Evaluation Committee, or the student's committee chair or committee with the Progress and Evaluation Committee's approval, may strongly recommend or even require additional course work for individual students. Such requirements are particularly likely for students just beginning their studies in the field. Appeals of additional requirements are made first to the departmental Associate Chair of Graduate Studies, and then formally approved by the CMCI Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research.

as a general policy, MDST does not accept transfer credits into the doctoral program. However, the Progress and Evaluation Committee and/or the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies may approve the transfer of a maximum of one doctoral-level course into the program, on the condition that the course was not used to fulfill the requirements in any other degree program.

A detailed discussion of the timeline is included in section 6, below. At its heart, the Media Studies PhD program is designed with flexibility and customization for students. We want to empower students to design their doctoral degree to suit their present and future needs. Still, there are certain requirements and deadlines set by both our department and the graduate school; students must keep track of these deadlines to successfully graduate.

First, students are required to complete 42 course credit hours, which typically means completing 14 courses. Keeping in mind that since students must choose their advisor by the end of their second year (ideally by the end of the third semester) we recommend that, if possible, students immediately start taking classes with a faculty member they think might be an advisor who has the appropriate scholarly expertise to assist with the dissertation. We also recommend students take classes inside and outside MDST to look for other appropriate dissertation committee members. The coursework may be undertaken in various ways. For example, a student may choose to take three courses in the first semester of study rather than the required two. The

following timeline provides one possible way of completing required course work.

Fall Semester:

Research, write and defend dissertation

Provided that students make satisfactory progress through the program and perform assistantship duties in a satisfactory manner, all MDST PhD students are guaranteed funding for eight semesters in the form of a TA, GPTI, or RA position (details on RAships are provided in section 5.2). These positions involve about 20 hours

Teaching assignments are informed by data, not guesswork. The graduate student teaching preferences survey, which is administered at least annually, is an important element of the data collection process. Multiple measures of teaching effectiveness will inform the decision-making as well. Students on assistantship should discuss pedagogical objectives with their faculty advisor(s) prior to completing the annual teaching survey.

The department chair, associate chair of graduate studies, and other relevant faculty may seek additional input on teaching assignments directly from students on assistantship and/or their advisors.

Whenever possible, the department will do its best to match the express interests, objectives, and experience of students on assistantship with the appropriate class or classes. The department will make a reasonable effort to accommodate specific preferences and requests, balancing them with departmental curricular needs and the qualifications necessary to teach specific classes.

All students are expected to be making steady progress toward their graduate degrees and maintaining academic good standing. Students on assistantship who are on-track for their degrees will receive priority consideration on teaching assignments. The department also understands that, at times, unforeseen circumstances may impede student progress toward their degree. Those circumstances will be considered if conveyed directly to the department chair.

The department will do its best to abide by the following general framework when assigning teaching duties. Curricular needs or unexpected circumstances may, in specific cases, require deviations from this framework:

caveat that the lead instructor for a course may, in any given semester, communicate different expectations and duties:

Attend all required trainings at the beginning of the semester

instructor as early in the semester as possible; b

possible. If a student does not accept your grade after that, you may refer them to the lead instructor

RA opportunities are rare. Most students will receive summer RAship appointments, but we try to also allow students a regular semester RAship when possible (usually in the 3rd or 4th year of the program). Interest in a Research Assistant (RA) position should be communicated on the annual teaching preferences form. RA assignments will be determined in consultation with the faculty member to whom the RA will be assigned. Typically, there are no more than 2- 0.24 0 0 0.24 11.9906 590.1694cm BT 50 0 0 50 1274



Please take a few minutes to review the "[Graduate School Guidelines for Student Academic Progress and Success and Procedures for Dismissal](#)." In terms of MDST expectations for progress, by the middle of the second semester of the first year in the program, each student is required to submit a preliminary program proposal to the

from this experience and build the strongest working relationship with your advisor. We encourage you to talk with multiple faculty members about their mentoring practice and how best they can assist you in guiding your progress in the program and fostering your intellectual growth. Good advising practice is based on mutual respect, fairness, and a commitment to academic integrity and professional development.

Prior to taking comprehensive examinations, the student, in consultation with their committee chair, will select a committee of four additional graduate faculty members, at least two and as many as three of whom are members of the Media Studies department and a minimum of one graduate faculty member from outside the department. A student's dissertation committee is responsible for providing intellectual guidance, mentorship and logistical support in navigating the process from comprehensive exams, prospectus preparation, to writing and defending the dissertation. At different junctures the committee members will serve different roles. This committee, which must be approved by the Graduate School, will prepare and evaluate the student's written and oral comprehensive examinations, oversee the student's dissertation and conduct the student's final defense of the dissertation. Any changes in the committee membership subsequent to comprehensive examinations must be approved by the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies, the student's committee chair

an Advanced Degree, if appropriate. These forms should be submitted to the department along with the signed exam form after a successful defense. All forms can be found [here](#).

The comprehensive examination generally is taken in the semester following the student's last semester of coursework, typically the Spring semester of the third year. Preparation for this examination should start in the Fall semester of the third year when the student is assembling their committee. The CE consists of a written examination and an oral examination. The written examination is intended to test the student's knowledge of course work and readings in the following areas: 1. media and communication theory ("general theory"), 2. theory and other substantive material pertinent to student's work within the Media Studies department ("inside theory"), 3. theory and other substantive material pertinent to student's work in departments outside the Media Studies department ("outside theory"), and 4. qualitative and quantitative research methods (or equivalent, as determined by the department), usually with an emphasis on the method(s) the student will use for dissertation research.

The CE committee is comprised of five members (chair and four faculty members, including a reader). Students are expected to work closely with individual committee members, and in consultation with their chair, to discuss topic areas and solicit reading lists for each question. Please note that each faculty will have different approaches to generating reading lists and writing exam questions. It is important that students confirm expectations and timelines in advance with each member. The fifth member of a CE committee is a Reader. Working with their chair, students must select a reader whose role in the committee is not to ask an exam question but to read all the student written responses and provide comments and feedback during the oral part of the comprehensive examination. In selecting a reader, students should consider an inside or outside faculty member who is familiar with their work and can add a different perspective on the topics of examination and their area of research.



about the outline of the dissertation. The dissertation prospectus will be prepared in consultation with the student's committee chair and approved by the committee. The committee must approve major changes in the dissertation approach or method thereafter. If the prospectus is not approved, the student must make the necessary revisions and the chair will determine with the help of the committee if an additional defense is necessary.

Once the prospectus is defended and approved by the committee, the student is then deemed ready to advance to candidacy. Three years is the expected time to complete the dissertation after advancing to candidacy for full-time students. Students must complete all requirements for the degree within six years of commencing work in the doctoral program. Students who wish to request additional time must petition the Dean of the Graduate School and have their faculty advisor's endorsement. Completion of requirements includes defending the dissertation and submission to the Graduate School. Any semester(s) on Time Off are included in the time limit to complete the degree.

After writing and defending the comprehensive examination, the student must complete a formal application for admission to candidacy for the PhD degree on a Graduate School form, submitted with the exam form, which is signed by the committee and chair at the defense. Admission to candidacy shall be granted after the student has earned at least three semesters of residence, completed required course work, and passed the written and oral portions of the student's comprehensive examination.

counts or pages, but that will be determined by the research question(s) and approaches, as different research projects require different lengths. Some students may also opt for an applied dissertation subject, in which they leverage their research to produce media, platforms, or network services to achieve research outcomes. In these cases, the written portion of the dissertation may look more like a background and planning document, students should consult with their chair for specific expectations.

After the committee has accepted the dissertation, it will hold a final oral defense where the candidate is expected to summarize their research and answer questions from committee members. A student must notify the Graduate School of the final oral defense at least two weeks before the scheduled defense date as well as submit the oral defense examination form via the grad school. The student's committee (which, again, must include a minimum of five graduate faculty members, at least three of whom must be from inside the Media Studies department and at least one of whom must be from outside the department) will conduct the defense. More than one negative vote will disqualify the candidate in the oral defense. The oral defense is open to all who wish to attend. After completion of the defense, student must complete appropriate submissions of dissertation and forms by the Graduate School.

**Residence Requirement:** All candidates for the Ph.D. degree must spend a minimum of six full semesters in residence at the University of Colorado at Boulder as full-time students. A maximum of two semesters of residence credit may be allowed for a master's degree from another institution of approved standing.

**Grades and Grade Point Average:** A course grade below "B-" in doctoral studies is unsatisfactory and will not be counted toward fulfilling the requirements for the degree. The Media Studies PhD program requires doctoral students to maintain a grade point average of no less than 3.25 (A=4). The Media Studies Director of Graduate Studies reserves the right to withdraw assistantship funding or to terminate enrollment of a doctoral student if they fail to achieve a GPA of 3.25 or higher by the end of the fall semester of the second year of study; receives more than one low-performance evaluations from faculty in TA or RA work; or fails to submit an acceptable preliminary program proposal as evaluated by the Progress and Evaluation Committee. Requirements for grades and quality of work are established by the Graduate School. The Director of Graduate Studies for Media

Studies retains the authority to establish additional probationary requirements for students when their work falls below expectations.

Continuous Registration: Doctoral students who have passed their comprehensive examinations must remain continuously registered for five dissertation hours every fall and spring semester they are on campus, including the semester of the oral defense. Students will be so registered only if they are making satisfactory progress toward the completion of their degrees and are in good standing. Students away from campus may take only three dissertation hours each fall and spring. In any event, by the time they graduate, students must have a total of at least 30 hours of doctoral thesis credit.

Graduation Requirements and Deadlines: Students should be aware of all relevant graduation requirements and deadlines. Graduation information can be found [here](#). Graduation deadlines can be found

Costs associated with travel to and/or participation in academic conferences;

Costs associated with scholarly/professional association membership;

Costs associated with data collection and preparation (e.g., sampling costs, costs associated with incentives, transcription costs);

Costs associated with hardware, software, or other supplies necessary for the execution of research/creative projects; and

Costs associated with research and creative project-related travel (e.g., travel for fieldwork, travel for interviews).

If funds are requested for an online/virtual conference, CMCI will fund the exact registration costs.

Students should complete the form titled Student Request for Funding (sent to you over email and also available on the [CMCI Grad Student Resources Canvas page](#))



replacement, CMCI does not offer opportunities to “bank” your CMCI stipend and use it after your externally-awarded fellowship year is complete.

See CU Boulder’s Research and Innovation Office (RIO)’s postdoctoral affairs funding sources [site](#), and consult their [how-to guide](#) for navigating their funding database site (SPIN).

Make sure to review 2 items carefully before deciding to apply for a given fellowship or grant: (1) eligibility requirements (these are almost never flexible) and (2) deadlines for the current award year (these can change from year to year)

Take note of fellowship/grant materials required well in advance of funding deadlines, and get started early. (Spreadsheets or lists are helpful for this.) While some funding institutions will allow you to paste in already existing materials, others have prompts for new materials (personal experiences, your intellectual history, your approach to X type of research, your contribution to Y field, etc.). Major fellowships like NSF or Mellon ones can take several months to write and revise. For the latter, start bouncing around your timeline and ideas with your advisor/chair or other academic supports or interlocutors 8-10 months in advance of the deadline

Funding begets funding! The earlier you receive funding—even small awards—the easier it is to get funding later. One or two small research or travel grants in your early years of the program could put you well above other prospective candidates for bigger research or dissertation completion fellowships in your final years of the program.

While some of this depends on how you and your advisor/chair map out your long-term goals and path through the program, in general you should be trying to apply to as many external funding opportunities as you can.

Prepare yourself to be rejected from most fellowships and grants. Then brush yourself off and keep applying.

Develop one project proposal narrative well in advance. Politely ask other people to read it (your advisor/chair at least, but ideally others too, making sure to give your readers enough time to respond). Revise as many times as is needed until you have perfected your narrative. NOTE: you will likely rewrite this at least once a year as your project develops in both the research and writing stages.

Identify what you need to tweak in your proposal for each audience/funding institution in question, leaving the same whatever you can to save time.

First, consider putting together a writing group with other graduate students for support, accountability, and feedback. Make sure to read your colleagues' work as closely as you'd want them to read yours. These groups can make a huge difference in both the quality of your work and your overall sanity.

Additional resources for writing help:

[CU Boulder Writing Center](#) offers one-on-one consults and is a source of support for proposal content

the Graduate School hosts [a summer writing retreat](#) and has other programs that may be of interest

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EMS should contact

The resolution sought.

After reviewing relevant materials (e.g., grades, grading policy information) the departmental Director of Graduate Studies will meet separately with the student and the instructor and will make a recommendation to the faculty member about their grading action. The recommended actions will be communicated to both parties in writing.

Appeal to the College of Media, Communication & Information Associate Dean of Graduate Studies: if a student is dissatisfied with the departmental Director of Graduate Studies' decision, or if a faculty member decides to not follow the recommendation made by the Director of Graduate Studies, written materials may be forwarded to CMCI Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. The Associate Dean will convey their recommendation to both parties in writing.

Issues about Faculty Conduct, Academic Advising, or Course Content: If it is reasonable, students should begin with the individual faculty person or advisor to discuss and resolve the problem together. If this fails, a student should contact the faculty member's department chair. If the decision the Chair makes is judged unacceptable by the student, the student may contact the CMCI Dean's office.

Issues Related to Civil Rights Violations, Sexual Harassment, Disability-Linked Discrimination, or Other Kinds of Complaints: the university provides detailed information about how to pursue appeals, complaints, and grievances of a variety of types. For many of these issues, there are campus offices available to assist a person with a concern. Students can find out about this information [here](#).

The following information on [UCW Colorado](#) has been created by UCWC members and representatives and pasted here in full.

UCW Colorado is a wall-to-wall union that represents all workers in the University of Colorado System. Our mission is to champion and defend the interests and well-being of all University labor, as well as to build and sustain social and economic justice in our workplaces and in our communities. By uniting CU's diverse workforce—including part-time and full-time university staff, faculty, and graduate and undergraduate laborers—we can address the critical issues we all face.

Our union advocates for workers who experience any violations of their contract

or unfair labor practices; takes feedback from workers about their needs; builds relationships with other pro-labor and social justice groups; organizes assemblies, meetings, and rallies; hosts reading groups, social events, and meet-ups; and more. Learn more about our union and how to get involved on our website.

When you join our union, you are choosing to work with other employees collectively to better your/our working conditions and lives. As a member, you will be a direct contributor to the collective power we have to make changes. Evidence shows that workers who are union members generally enjoy higher wages (13.2% more on average!), better benefits, decreased gendered and racial wage inequality, improved health and safety practices, and much more. Beyond that, our union is a great way to meet and interact with other workers, as well as to get plugged in to various events to help our community.

Dues for graduate workers are \$12.00/a month. Dues are our shared resources for growing our union and advocating for campus workers. Currently, dues fund our web infrastructure, printing costs, and contribute to the salary of our two full-time organizers. But as a shared resource, we democratically determine how to spend this money and members can propose new initiatives that our local collectively funds.

Becoming an active and committed member of our union does not require you to sacrifice your current obligations. Many of our members participate on a flexible basis and incorporate volunteering into their weekly schedules. Reach out to <info@ucwcolorado.edu> if you have questions about ways to participate, read our FAQs to learn more about how our union operates, and become a member today.

UCW Colorado is building a mutual aid infrastructure to allow union members