

HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

Nido R. Qubein School of Communication

MASTER OF ARTS IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION



COMPREHENSIVE EXAM GUIDE*

This handbook is a work in progress, so be sure to consult your adviser and the NQSC graduate coordinator about comprehensive exam specifics.

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COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

A Strategic Communication MA student's graduate program culminates in the completion of a master's project or passing a comprehensive exam. The comprehensive exam route is only available to students who completed their bachelor degree five years prior to the semester in which the comprehensive exam is completed. This option is not available to BA to MA students.

Whether your choice is project or exam, anticipate similar workloads, concentration of study, and time commitments to your work. The MA student should understand that the same high standards of methodological, theoretical, and production quality applies to both project and comprehensive exam. The choice of project or exam route should depend primarily on what you, the student, are interested in, what kinds of questions or problems you wish to consider, and what kinds of outcomes you anticipate as a result of your efforts. Your MA committee provides input related to your project/exam interests and is designed to assist you in reaching your goals.

Comprehensive Exam

Students who earned their Bachelor Degrees at least five years prior to their last semester can select a non-project option. The steps to the comprehensive exam are:

(1) In lieu of the 4 required credits for a master's project, students pursuing the comprehensive exam option will register for 1 credit of COM 5990 (comprehensive exam) **and** will take **one additional 3-credit course in their areas of specialization**.

(2) Students are eligible to register for the comprehensive exam (COM 5990) after they have either completed 31 graduate credits, or during the semester when they are enrolled in the courses that will add up to their 31st credit.

This means a student can either complete the exam during his/her final semester or during the second-to-last semester if he/she only has one course remaining.

(3) Students will complete the written and production portion of the comprehensive exam during the semester they are registered for COM 5990, as follows:

(a) A committee of three NRQSC graduate faculty write a case study. Students will have to design a campaign that addresses the case.

(b) The required components of the campaign include an analysis of the problem and target audience, an overview of the campaign plan and why it is the best solution to the problem, a theoretical framework that informs the message development for the campaign, the production of a “proof of concept” media piece and plan for additional media, the completion of a professional quality production piece (completed before the oral exam), a budget worksheet and justification, a timeline of activities and events, and an evaluation plan for the campaign, including data collection instruments and an analysis plan.

(c) Students will have **72-hours** to complete the exam. The exam scenario will be provided at noon on the Friday before spring/fall break and will be due the following Monday at noon. The exam answer, including all materials, must be turned in electronically and in hard copy. Late exams will not be accepted.

(4) Approximately two weeks after the initial exam period, the student will complete the oral portion of the comprehensive exam, which is a one-two hour defense of the campaign plan and materials developed. The student meets with the committee, who ask clarification and extension questions.

GOALS

- A. To demonstrate general expertise in the communication field
- B. To demonstrate understanding of various theories and research methods.
- C. To provide general descriptions, explanations, and evaluations of communication theories, methods, and practices.
- D. To demonstrate production skills consistent with professionals in entry-level positions

PROCEDURES

Each semester the graduate coordinator appoints a three-person comprehensive exam committee. This committee will write the

examination scenario and evaluate the student's performance. Exams are different each semester and for each student but standardized in their general format.

Before The Exam

By the end of the second semester or early in the third semester of their program students should complete, with the help of the graduate coordinator, a program of study that will go in their file. This plan will help students determine whether the exam option best meets their needs and will identify the course work expected to be taken. Course work should be chosen that strengthens a student's knowledge of communication. In no case may more than six of the total 35 hours be taken outside of the School of Communication.

Typically, by either February 1st or September 1st (of the semester in which the exam will be taken), the student must have turned in an application to the chair of the comprehensive exam committee. This application will consist of the following: A) a copy of the faculty mentor approved program of study noted above; B) an unofficial copy of the student's HPU transcript (exams may only be taken in the final semester of course work or later); C) a 1-2 page statement that identifies the student's specific content area of expertise, as well as a brief explanation of how the student's course work and the comprehensive exam option support the student's career goals.

Upon approval of the application, the student should arrange to meet individually with each member of the MA Comps Committee to review material relevant to the exam scenario and the faculty member's expectations.

The Exam

Comprehensive exam involves (a) a written (problem and audience analysis, campaign plan, media development plan, theoretical framework, budget justification, a timeline of activities and events, and evaluation and analysis plan), (b) a production component (proof of concept piece developed during the 72 hour exam period and a professional quality piece completed before the oral defense), and (c) an oral component (1-2 hour defense of the written portion), covering methods, theory, production, and a general questions from the student's concentration area. All materials are typed and professionally presented.

The comprehensive exam will be administered over spring or fall break. The student must take the exam on the scheduled day/s or wait until the

next semester. The student can check out equipment from the School of Communication.

The oral part of the exam will be conducted within two weeks of the written exam. The oral portion of the exam is not open to friends and family.

Evaluation and Outcomes of the Exam

The comprehensive exam committee is responsible for determining if the student passed the exam and for turning in the required forms to the Norcross Graduate School. A passing evaluation is based on both the written, production, and oral portions of the exam.

A student must pass all elements of the exam to graduate. If only one of the areas given a non-passing evaluation, the student may be allowed to revise that element as long as it is done within one week after the oral portion of the exam. Revisions could involve minor or major corrections or entail redoing a portion of the exam. If the student is given a non-passing evaluation on two or more elements, the student has failed the exam and must wait until a future semester to retake it.

A student may retake the exam in a future semester only once. If a student fails the exam, the student will receive written feedback that explains the rationale behind the committee's decision within two weeks. If the student fails a second time, the student is dropped from the program.

Additional Information

1. You need to be enrolled for at least one unit the semester you take comps (this can be the credit for the comprehensive exam). You also need to complete your intent to graduate form in the semester you are taking comps, if you have not done so the semester before.
2. See the [above] Comprehensive Exam Guidelines for Master's Students for dates and other details. Note that you will have to fill out the appropriate forms early in the semester to schedule comps.
3. Typically, a committee of three NRQSC faculty will comprise the MA Comps Committee. The graduate coordinator chooses this committee at the start of each academic year. MA Comps Committee members will develop the case study, either by themselves or by consulting with other faculty. These three will also comprise the oral defense committee. If no one on the committee represents the student's specialty, a fourth person can be added or substituted. Another option is that the committee will

simply consult with a faculty member in that specialty before the oral defense.

4. Consult with the graduate coordinator about the exact conditions in which you will take and defend your comps.

5. What the faculty is looking for in a comprehensive exam response:

A. Ability to be a scholar—to organize, categorize, synthesize information, to make claims and defend them.

B. Less interested in how much knowledge you can spout back but in what you do with the knowledge. They're interested in original thinking, creative thinking, organized thinking that assimilates and expounds on what you have learned.

C. Create coherent argument around a claim—not just strings of information

D. Demonstrate professional production skills consistent with someone in an entry-level position. Originality, creativity, and adherence to professional guidelines and style for the media created will be evaluated.

E. Writing style is clear, well organized, and proofread.

7. There are no preset definitions for competence, but the following may help you understand what might be considered competent [and worthy of passing].

A. Very solid grasp of information and synthesis of it. The answer demonstrates a genuine understanding of the implications of a theory, research methodology, or an argument.

B. The answer makes an interesting claim, supports that claim, and may even push some boundaries of understanding.

8. You may not share your comps questions and answers with anyone except your committee members and the graduate administrator. Distributing your comps questions or answers to other students would be considered academic dishonesty. This is true now and in the future.

It is acceptable to discuss the concept behind your production piece if you need to recruit other students to help you with it (such as crew for a video shoot), but your questions and written answers should be kept confidential.

