

DEPARTMENT OF
WRITING STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Graduate Student Handbook

2024-2025

MA in Rhetoric and Scientific &
Technical Communication

The information in this handbook and other University catalogs, publications, or announcements is subject to change without notice. University offices can provide current information about possible changes.

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This publication is available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact the Graduate Programs Coordinator: Department of Writing Studies, 214 Nolte Center, 315 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455, (612) 624-4761, writgpc@umn.edu.

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

The University of Minnesota, founded in the belief that all people are enriched by understanding, is dedicated to the advancement of learning and the search for truth; to the sharing of this knowledge through education for a diverse community; and the application of this knowledge to benefit the people of the state, the nation, and the world.

The University's threefold mission of research and discovery, teaching and learning, and outreach and public service is carried out on multiple campuses and throughout the state.

Note: The College of Liberal Arts and Graduate School policies and procedures are continually being developed and implemented. Students and faculty will be notified of significant changes.

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About this Handbook

Welcome to the Master of Arts (MA) program in Rhetoric and Scientific & Technical Communication (RSTC)! This handbook is your guide to navigating your degree program. It outlines degree progress requirements, policies, procedures, and forms necessary to complete your degree.

The Department of Writing Studies (referred to as Writing Studies henceforth) maintains a static handbook for each academic year. We work to ensure that the information in this handbook is accurate. However, nothing in this handbook can supersede the rules and regulations of the College of Liberal Arts (CLA), the Graduate School, or other University of Minnesota governing bodies. The [University of Minnesota Catalog](#) and at the [Graduate School](#) website detail the rules and regulations governing all graduate programs at the University of Minnesota. Non-curricular policies and procedures set by the College of Liberal Arts and Graduate School are subject to change throughout the academic year.

Per University policy, the RSTC program will not make curricular changes during an academic year. The RSTC program will honor the curriculum in place during your entry term. You may, in consultation with your advisor, choose to adopt (“opt in” to) new curricular requirements (coursework and/or preliminary exams) by notifying the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) and Graduate Programs Coordinator (GPC).

The DGS and GPC will notify students in writing if significant changes are unavoidable during the academic year. The DGS and GPC will attach updates to the handbook as external documentation accessible via footnotes.

Note: This handbook is for current students. We invite prospective applicants to learn about our degrees and how to apply on the [Graduate Research Programs section of the Writing Studies’ website](#).

RSTC Program Structure

Program Directors and Staff

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General Department Information

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Writing Studies Department Faculty

The following table lists all graduate faculty in Writing Studies. The [Graduate Education Faculty Role database](#) lists the roles that each individual can serve on an examination committee.

Writing Studies Department Faculty	Additional Affiliations
Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch	Design: Human Factors and Ergonomics Literacy & Rhetorical Studies
Patrick Bruch	Literacy & Rhetorical Studies
Daniel Card	
Richard Graff	Classical and Near Eastern Studies Communication Studies Literacy & Rhetorical Studies
Jacyln Fiscus-Cannaday	
Molly Kessler	
Amy Lee	Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies
John Logie	Communication Studies Liberal Studies Literacy & Rhetorical Studies
Liane Malinowski	
Tom Reynolds	Literacy & Rhetorical Studies

Affiliate Faculty

The following faculty hold affiliate appointments in our RSTC programs. The [Graduate Education Faculty Role database](#) lists the roles that each individual can serve on an examination in RSTC.

Affiliate Faculty	Home Department
Ronald Greene	Communication Studies
Atilla Hallsby	Communication Studies
Zornitsa Keremidchieva	Communication Studies
Joseph Konstan	Computer Science
Daniel Philippon (SM, S&TC)	English
Jasmine Tang	Center for Writing, Writing Studies

RSTC Learning Outcomes

Students in our RSTC programs engage with the intersections of language and society through interdisciplinary research, teaching, and community engagement. Drawing from fields including rhetoric, writing studies, and technical communication—and complementing these with students' chosen areas of specialization—our students and faculty pursue transformative research with local, national, and global significance.

We are a community committed to writing, teaching, and research that matters in our communities, classrooms, and disciplines. Our alumni hold leadership positions in academic and non-academic industries that require a deep understanding of rhetoric, writing, and technology in contemporary contexts.

Students graduate from our programs prepared to:

- plan, conduct, and communicate research that builds knowledge and intervenes in the program's core areas of rhetoric, writing studies, and technical communication;
- lead in academic, professional, scientific, and civic contexts connecting discourses, identities, and power relations;
- advocate for and enact social justice as scholar-teachers and professionals;
- create innovative pedagogies to enable student engagement, agency, and transformative learning; and
- empower students as writers, teaching their students to skillfully compose texts that will help them to shape their worlds.

Graduate Program Standards

Standards for Student Conduct and Areas of Student Responsibility

All University of Minnesota students must follow the [Student Conduct Code](#) and all relevant policies maintained by the [Office for Community Standards](#). Students must also comply with the guidelines on [Mutual Roles and Responsibilities for Faculty and Graduate Students](#).

Writing Studies has additional expectations regarding student conduct and responsibilities:

- Review and be familiar with the content of this handbook; know how to access it to answer common questions about degree progress, policies, and procedures.
- Follow the University's [Online Learning Expectations](#) at all times.
- Check your UMN email account regularly, as this is the University's official means of communication; read and respond to emails from program faculty and staff in a timely manner.
- Follow the University's guidelines for the [Appropriate Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) Tools](#) and adhere to individual instructor and course policies regarding the use of AI.

Areas of Responsibility in Graduate Education

The University of Minnesota maintains principles for what students can expect from their programs and what programs can expect from their students. The [Mutual Roles and Responsibilities for Faculty and Graduate Students](#) policy outlines these principles.

Governance, oversight, and leadership for the RSTC programs involves the following faculty/staff roles.

Department Chair

The college dean appoints a faculty chair in each department. The chair is responsible for overseeing the operations of the department and its relationship with the institution and provides leadership and guidance to department faculty, staff, and students. The chair is responsible for many department-level policy determinations and seeks to balance the needs of the department's many stakeholders.

Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)

The college dean appoints a DGS for every graduate program. The DGS coordinates graduate program faculty, staff, and collegiate leadership to guide and improve graduate education within the programs under the DGS' jurisdiction. The DGS supervises and coordinates the administration and governance of graduate studies and serves as a point of contact for graduate students in the program. See [Typical Roles and Responsibilities of the Director of Graduate Studies](#).

Graduate Programs Coordinator (GPC)

The GPC administratively coordinates all graduate programs in a department. GPCs support students on a variety of issues they may encounter throughout their program and are typically the primary point of contact for degree progress and policy questions. Areas of responsibility include:

- student support services;
- coordination for graduate programs with the wider University;
- student data management and analysis; and
- University, college, and program policy interpretation and compliance.

Grievances and Conflict Resolution

Consult the following resources if you have an academic complaint or other University-based concern:

- The [Writing Studies Constitution](#) includes a section on the Grievance Process (see Item V.C.11).
- The University maintains the [Addressing Student Academic Complaints](#) policy.
- The [Student Conflict Resolution Center](#) is a confidential resource for all students who experience issues concerning grading concerns, academic petitions, advising issues, and more. Ombuds work collaboratively with students to identify appropriate courses of action tailored to students' specific concerns.

Accessibility

RSTC values and welcomes students with all bodymind experiences. We recognize that students might face access barriers at all stages of graduate school. Similarly, changes in disability status and access needs can happen at any time.

As stated in its [discrimination policy](#), UMN provides reasonable accommodations to anyone with a disability. Disability status is determined through consultation with the [Disability Resource Center \(DRC\)](#). UMN defines a [reasonable accommodation](#) as “a modification to an environment, practice, or process in order to eliminate or minimize disability-related barriers to an individual’s participation in the University’s education or employment programs or activities.” Examples of reasonable accommodations include:

- Additional time for exams and projects;
- Schedule modifications; and/or
- Use of assistive technologies, interpreters, and captioning.

As a graduate student, you might request accommodations for courses, preliminary and final exams, research projects, and/or teaching.

We encourage any RSTC student to [contact the DRC](#) with any questions or concerns regarding access and accommodations. The DRC has [resources specifically for graduate students](#). Students starting with the DRC can also review their [frequently asked questions](#).

Departmental Graduate Student File

Writing Studies maintains a file for each student in the MA program. This file contains:

- copies of your application and program nomination letter;
- degree progress forms with departmental signatures;
- annual progress reports;
- applications for independent study courses, incompletes, and leaves of absence; and
- fellowship and award applications submitted to the department.

Your student record is confidential. Faculty and staff have access to the file on a need-to-know basis, per [FERPA regulations](#). You have access, by written request to the DGS and GPC, to contents in your file, provided that you have not waived viewing rights to the documents you are requesting. Please contact the GPC if you would like to see this file.

Advising

Here we outline important elements of advising in the RSTC program. Your advisor(s), in partnership with the GPC and DGS, help you navigate policies and support you in timely progress toward your degree.

Advising Roles and Responsibilities

When you are admitted to the MA program, faculty members and the DGS select an Initial Advisor or Initial Co-Advisors for you. This decision balances your stated interests with faculty expertise and availability. Initial Advisor assignments last through the first year of the program.

Initial Advisors:

- help you articulate scholarly and professional goals;
- share resources within the program and University;
- help you choose courses and plan a coherent program of study;
- discuss pedagogy and appropriate service roles;
- complete program forms;
- provide guidance on maintaining satisfactory academic progress;
- identify resources to help you maintain a healthy work-life balance;
- field questions and concerns;
- advocate for you in the program, and
- support your choice of a Degree Advisor.

In the fall of your second year, the GPC will send you a form where you will officially identify your Degree Advisor (or Degree Co-Advisors). You can either continue working with your Initial Advisor(s) or you can select a different faculty member whose interests and working style better align with your needs. You must meet with and obtain approval from your chosen Degree Advisor(s). We aim to confirm all Degree Advisors by early October to maintain equitable workloads among faculty advisors.

Degree Advisors:

- help you meet program milestones;
- discuss pedagogy and appropriate service roles;
- visit your classrooms to offer feedback on your teaching;
- help you develop a work plan for the Plan B project;
- review Plan B project drafts;
- brainstorm, review, and refine scholarly and professional goals;
- encourage participation in conferences and scholarly events;
- review and constructively critique drafts of fellowship and grant applications;

- complete program forms;
- provide guidance on maintaining satisfactory academic progress;
- identify resources to help you maintain a healthy work-life balance;
- field questions and concerns; and
- advocate for you in the program.

Adding a Co-Advisor and Changing Advisors

Selecting a Degree Advisor in the fall of your second year is one point when you can change advisors. You might determine at another point in your program that selecting a new advisor or adding/changing a co-advisor would be most supportive. Any tenured or tenure-track RSTC faculty member can be a Degree Advisor if they are willing and available. Additionally, RSTC affiliate faculty members can be a Degree Advisor if their specialties align with your interests. To change advisors at a time other than the Initial-to-Degree Advisor decision point, you must:

1. contact the potential new advisor(s), discuss expectations, and secure approval for changing advisors;
2. inform the outgoing advisor(s) of the change;
3. complete the [Change of Advisor form](#) (also available on the RSTC Student Hub).

In rare circumstances, an advisor may decline to continue working as your advisor. The advisor must notify both you and the DGS of this decision in writing. The DGS will meet with you to discuss finding a new advisor as soon as possible. The program will work with you to identify a new advisor within 10 weeks of your previous advisor's initial notice. In the event that you cannot find a new advisor, the DGS will contact you to discuss whether you wish to continue in the program.

Successful Advising Relationships

Successful advising relationships involve regular contact between advisors and advisees. While your working styles may vary, we encourage you and your advisor(s) to establish meeting schedules that help maintain and build your working relationships. In RSTC, we encourage you to meet with your advisor(s) in person or virtually at least monthly during the regular academic year (fall and spring semesters).

We encourage you and your advisor(s) to set expectations around communication. For example, on what days and during which hours do you typically respond to emails? You can also discuss expectations regarding reasonable response times for email and asynchronous communication (such as writing feedback). Setting clear expectations clarifies the point at which an expected response is overdue or missing.

We also encourage you to proactively discuss:

- summer availability and communication timelines;
- how advising will be handled during a sabbatical or other leave; and

- other circumstances that may limit advisor availability.

Some circumstances may require appointing a temporary co-advisor or alternate advisor. The DGS and GPC are available to support both students and faculty in navigating these cases.

Writing Studies, CLA, and the Graduate School strongly commit to supporting students and faculty in developing positive, affirming, and supportive advising relationships. Students and advisors should familiarize themselves with the following resources outlining best practices for advising relationships:

- [The Dignity Project: Responsible Conduct in Graduate and Professional Education](#), from the Student Conflict Resolution Center;
- University policy: [Managing Nepotism and Personal Relationships](#);
- University policy: [Mutual Roles and Responsibilities for Faculty and Graduate Students](#); and
- [Advising & Mentoring Resources](#) from the Graduate School.

You can discuss many issues in confidence with your advisor. However, University employees must report sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence to the University's Title IX Office. Please review the [Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, Stalking and Relationship Violence policy statement](#) for details.

Navigating Challenging Situations

Writing Studies works to foster positive working relationships among students and faculty. However, you or your advisor(s) might encounter difficulties in your working relationship. Many resources are available to support you and your advisor(s) in these cases.

Individuals may confidentially speak with the DGS, GPC, or Department Chair to:

- seek advice on how to approach a situation of concern;
- clarify program expectations; and/or
- identify relevant resources outside the department.

[The Dignity Project](#) provides guidance on navigating difficult conversations. The [Student Conflict Resolution Center](#) also provides confidential consultations, facilitated conversations, and other support for resolving conflicts.

Students or faculty who feel that formal reporting is necessary should contact the appropriate UMN office:

- [Office for Community Standards](#)
- [Bias Response Referral Network](#)
- [Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action](#)

MA Curriculum

Our curriculum requires 34 credits (typically 12 courses). Of these 34 credits, 28 must be in Writing Studies and six must be taken outside of Writing Studies. Importantly, you must:

- take all courses on an A/F grading basis unless a course is only offered S/N;
- obtain a grade of B or better for the course to count toward the degree; and
- maintain an overall GPA of 3.0 or better.

Curricular Requirements

The curriculum requires courses in **methods and pedagogies**, **core areas**, your **specialty area**, and **outside coursework** (as a **supporting program** or **minor**). The table below indicates the course titles and number of credits applicable for each curricular requirement.

Methods and Pedagogies (all required)		Availability (typical)	Credits
WRIT 8011	Research Methods in Writing Studies	Spring - odd years	3
WRIT 5531	Introduction to Writing Pedagogies	Fall	3
WRIT 5532	Practicum in Writing Pedagogies	Spring	1
Total Methods and Pedagogies Credits: 7			
Core Area: Rhetoric (choose at least one)			
WRIT 5775	Rhetorical Traditions: Classical Period	Fall - odd years	3
WRIT 5776	Rhetorical Traditions: Contemporary Era	Fall - even years	3
Core Area: Writing Studies (choose at least one)			
WRIT 8540	Seminar in Writing Studies Pedagogies	Periodic	3
WRIT 8560	Seminar in Writing Studies	Periodic	3
Core Area: Technical Communication (choose at least one)			
WRIT 8520	Seminar in Scientific & Technical Communication	Periodic	3
WRIT 8550	Seminar in Technology, Culture, & Communication	Periodic	3

Total Core Area Credits: 12			
Specialty Area			
WRIT 5xxx or 8xxx	Courses in WRIT, typically two 3-credit courses	Variable	Variable
Total Specialty Area Credits: 6			
Outside Courses - Related Field Competency Area or Graduate Minor			
non-WRIT	Courses in other departments, typically two 3-credit courses	Variable	Variable
Total Outside Course Credits: 6			
Plan B Paper			
WRIT 8794	Directed Research	Fall and Spring	3
Total Plan B Paper Credits: 3			
Total Degree Credits: 34			

The [MA page in the University Catalog](#) and the [Graduate Planning and Audit System \(GPAS\)](#) document all degree requirements and eligible courses. You will also use the [MA curriculum planning worksheet](#) to plan your coursework. You must formally submit your degree plan with GPAS.

Methods and Pedagogies Requirements

The required **methods** course in the MA program is WRIT 8011: Research Methods in Writing Studies and Technical Communication. This course provides an overview of the research literature and research approaches in rhetoric, writing, and technical communication. You also learn principles of problem formulation, research design, ethical inquiry, data collection, and analysis. With these skills, you can develop what you learn in seminars into larger research projects. WRIT 8011 is typically offered **every other spring term**. We strongly encourage you to pursue a second methods course in another department that aligns with your research interests.

The MA program also requires two **pedagogy** courses, WRIT 5531: Introduction to Writing Theories and Pedagogies and WRIT 5532: Practicum in Writing Pedagogies. These courses are foundational for both your professional development as a teacher of writing and scholarship in writing pedagogy. **You will complete the two courses as a sequence during your first year in the program.** These courses are also required to teach in the First-Year Writing Program.

Core Areas

You will take courses from each of the three **core areas**:

1. Rhetoric;
2. Writing Studies; and
3. Technical Communication.

You will be competent in the core areas when you:

- familiarize yourself with foundational works in the chosen areas, justifiably represent the ideas of other scholars, and synthesize and analyze concepts across works;
- critically read and critique research articles and monographs on various topics in writing studies; and
- reflect on the development and future of important theoretical and applied disciplinary concepts.

MA students demonstrate knowledge of the core areas through course grades. In rare circumstances, non-WRIT courses at UMN are applied to the core area requirement if the course closely aligns with an RSTC core course. Speak with your advisor(s) if you believe that applying a non-WRIT course to the core area requirements is the best step for your course plan. Applying a non-WRIT course to the core areas requires advisor(s) and DGS approval and follows the same process as [applying transfer courses](#), described below.

Specialty Area

Your **specialty area** includes Writing Studies courses that relate to your individual interests. You should work with your advisor(s) to select these courses. We encourage you to use the specialty area courses as a foundation for research projects like the Plan B project. You can apply many course types to the specialty area:

1. **Core area courses:** Once you have fulfilled the core area requirement, you can apply additional core courses to your specialty area. We encourage this approach when available RSTC courses align with your specialty area focus. If you are considering pursuing a PhD, this approach can also help you prepare for preliminary exams and dissertation research.
2. **MS/Certificate Program courses:** Writing Studies' [professional graduate programs](#) offer online, asynchronous courses in technical communication. Course topics include information design, usability, and science, medical, and health writing. These courses reserve seats for students enrolled in the MS and Certificate programs, so talk with your advisor(s), the GPC, and the course instructor if you are interested in taking one of these courses.
3. **Elective-only RSTC courses:** Writing Studies sometimes offers RSTC courses that do not fulfill other degree requirements. The department offers these courses to support your specialty area development.

4. **Independent Study:** You might enroll in WRIT 8792: Independent Study, Reading, and Research. An independent study requires advisor approval and is an opportunity to read secondary literature with guidance from a faculty mentor. Independent studies are a possibility if no available course fits your needs. You must complete a [student/faculty contract](#) and receive a permission number from the GPC to enroll in WRIT 8792.

You will be competent in the specialty area when you:

- understand the theoretical and empirical foundations of the area; and
- can conduct independent, original, and ethical research, including
 - formulating researchable questions;
 - executing and justifying methods appropriate to those questions;
 - conducting systematic analyses; and
 - articulating conclusions and theoretical implications specific to the analyses.

Outside Coursework (Supporting Program or Minor)

Graduate students in CLA must supplement their major field coursework with courses outside the major. You should work with your advisor(s) to select your outside courses.

Outside coursework should complement major coursework by:

- expanding your methodological or theoretical expertise to support dissertation research and career goals;
- extending your understanding of your specialty area;
- broadening perspectives on Writing Studies courses;
- enhancing your areas of expertise through the pursuit of a **formal minor**; or
- building an individualized and coherent **supporting program** from coursework in one or more departments.

While a **supporting program** does not have formal requirements, many departments offer a **graduate minor** through a formal suite of courses. If you wish to pursue a graduate minor, we encourage you to identify a minor as soon as possible, ideally by the end of your first semester, so that you can complete all of the required coursework.

You can complete a minor either at the MA or PhD level. If you select an MA graduate minor, you should [add the minor](#) by the end of your first year. If you plan to continue with the RSTC PhD and complete a PhD graduate minor, we recommend you begin the minor coursework while in the MA and apply for the minor once you enroll as a PhD student. Note that minor application processes can differ by department.

The [University of Minnesota Catalogs](#) maintain a full list of graduate minors. You must work with the minor field DGS on your minor degree plan. Graduate coursework can only apply to either the MA or the minor program. If you declare a graduate minor, the minor coursework will be applied to the GPAS planner for the minor program. The GPC will

modify your GPAS planner for the MA to reduce the number of required credits in the outside coursework requirement. Therefore, pursuing a graduate minor does not require that you take more than 34 total credits.

Course Timing

Some coursework must be completed in specific terms. Many WRIT courses are only offered once during your program, so plan accordingly. You must register for the following courses during the listed terms and year:

Term, Year	Course
Fall, Year 1	WRIT 5531: Introduction to Writing Theory and Pedagogies (3 credits)
Spring, Year 1	WRIT 5532: Practicum in Writing Pedagogies (1 credit)
Spring, Year 2	WRIT 8792: Directed Research (3 credits) Note: this course provides research and writing time for the Plan B project.

The typical course load for this program is 9 credits a semester. However, you will register for a total of 10 credits in Spring of Year 1 including the 1-credit WRIT 5532 practicum.

WRIT Seminars

Most WRIT 8xxx seminars are “topics courses.” The course topics change each year even as the course number stays the same. Many topics are either offered once or rotate periodically, such as every three years. Faculty select the topics in response to current trends in the field, emerging research, and RSTC program needs. You can take the same course number more than once as long as the topics differ. [Schedule Builder](#) provides descriptions of upcoming seminars.

Second Language

We do not require a second language. If you plan to study classical rhetoric, you should be proficient in Latin, Greek, or both Latin and Greek. If you plan to study rhetoric, writing, or technical communication in an international setting, you should be proficient in the relevant language(s).

Students who wish to have a language proficiency notated on their transcripts should use the [Language Department Certification of Language Proficiency form](#) (OTR 192).

Transferring Courses from Another Institution

You can transfer up to six graduate credits to your MA program from another program or institution. All transfer courses require advisor(s) and DGS approval. Transfer courses are

commonly applied to the specialty area or the outside coursework requirements. Sometimes transfer courses are applied to the core area requirement if the course closely aligns with an RSTC core course. Speak with your advisor(s) if you believe that applying transfer courses to the core area requirements is the best step for your course plan. Transfer courses cannot simultaneously fulfill a requirement in the MA and a requirement outside the MA (for example, a graduate minor requirement). Transfer courses also cannot be applied to the methods and pedagogies requirement.

Transfer courses can only be approved if the following criteria have been met:

1. you earned a grade of B or better; and
2. your advisor(s) and the DGS determine that the course adequately aligns with the proposed requirement (specialty area, outside coursework, or core areas).

Transfer courses count toward your curricular requirements and the total credit count for the MA. However, transfer courses do not count toward the required minimum 3.0 GPA.

If you are transferring a course taken on the quarter system, you must convert the number of credits to the semester system. To do so, divide the number of quarter system credits by 1.5. For example:

- 3 quarter credits = 2 semester credits;
- 4 quarter credits = 2.67 semester credits; and
- 5 quarter credits = 3.33 semester credits.

To apply transfer credits to your degree plan:

1. Review your transcript and course syllabi with your advisor to identify potential transfer courses.
2. Your advisor(s) email the following information for each transfer course to the DGS and GPC:
 - a. course designator, number, and name;
 - b. institution where you took the course;
 - c. course grade; and
 - d. degree requirement to which you wish to apply the course.
3. The DGS reviews each transfer course.
4. If approved, the GPC enters each transfer course into the [Graduate Planning and Audit System \(GPAS\)](#) to formally apply the course to your degree plan.

More information on transfer credits can be found in the [Application of Credits for Students Earning Graduate Degrees](#) policy.

Auditing Courses

Under certain circumstances, you might choose to audit a course while in the MA program. You must consult with your advisor(s) and the DGS before auditing a course. If

approved by your advisor(s) and the DGS, you must formally register for a course and select "audit" as the grading basis. When auditing a course, you enroll in, pay tuition and fees for, and attend classes. You do not complete assignments or take exams. You do not receive credit for the course, but the course will be included on your transcript with the symbol "V" (visitor). Under University policy, you cannot informally attend a course for which you have not enrolled. Note that not all courses are available to audit.

You can audit a course if:

- the course is taken in addition to your work toward degree requirements (typically nine credits per term);
- auditing will not interfere with your degree requirement completion or adversely impact your degree progress; and
- you do not exceed 14 credits in a term, which is the maximum number of credits allowed under the full-time enrollment 6-14 credit band.

Planning & Tracking Your Degree Coursework

MA students use a two-step process to plan and track degree coursework:

1. **During the spring semester of your first year:** Complete a [curriculum worksheet](#) to plan your remaining coursework.
2. **During the fall semester of your second year:** Complete your [Graduate Planning & Audit System \(GPAS\)](#) planner.

Coursework Planning & Support

You should plan your coursework in consultation with your advisor(s). Your advisor(s) will help you identify courses and ensure that your coursework fulfills the curricular requirements. The GPC and DGS are also available to support you in this process. Each spring, the GPC and DGS share RSTC course descriptions for the upcoming academic year, and course listings are accessible via [Schedule Builder](#). We also recommend reviewing [GPAS](#) and the [University Catalogs](#) to understand your degree requirements.

Courses not explicitly listed in the Course Catalogs or GPAS may be applied to the outside coursework requirement with advisor and DGS approval. Approval will only be given if the substitution aligns with degree requirements set by the College and the Graduate School.

During the spring of your first year, you must complete an [MA curriculum worksheet](#). The GPC will email you when it is time to complete your worksheet. This worksheet asks you to indicate which courses you will take to meet outstanding degree requirements, and in which term each course will be completed. The curriculum worksheet helps you develop an appropriate plan of study that aligns with your goals, degree requirements, and available course offerings.

Your advisor(s), the GPC, and the DGS have access to your worksheet, which is added to your departmental student file. Both your advisor(s) and the DGS will review and approve your course plan. After approval, the worksheet is available for your review and to help you track your degree progress.

GPAS Submission

In the fall of your second year, you will submit your GPAS planner to officially record your degree plan with the University. The GPC will send you instructions when your GPAS must be submitted. When submitting your GPAS, you will indicate any remaining courses you will take to meet curricular requirements. You will also indicate the semester in which you will complete each planned course. Both your primary advisor and the DGS review and approve your GPAS. Once the GPAS is approved, the degree plan milestone will be added to your student record.

GPAS Access & Instructions

You will access your GPAS through the MyU: Academics tab. For step-by-step guidance to access and use GPAS, see

- [GPAS portal access and guide from GSSP on One Stop Student Services](#); and
- GPAS section of the RSTC Student Resources Hub.

Modifying the GPAS

We understand that sometimes plans change. If you need to change the coursework plan that you submitted in GPAS:

- **Before GPAS Planner Approval:** Email the GPC to request that your planner be returned to you for updates. The GPC can also make small adjustments by request.
- **After GPAS Planner Approval:** Contact your advisor(s) and the GPC to explain the anticipated changes. If you are switching the term in which you will take a course, no additional action is required. If you are switching courses, the GPC may seek advisor and/or DGS approval for the substitution for degree audit purposes.

Tracking Progress With GPAS

GPAS helps you visualize your progress through curricular and degree requirements. You can check your planner throughout your program to review your current status. Courses that you register for and complete are automatically applied to the corresponding requirements in GPAS. Completed degree milestones, like the final oral exam, are also automatically applied to GPAS.

The Plan B Project

Project Requirements

As an MA student, you are required to complete a “Plan B” project during your final semester. In RSTC, the Plan B project takes the form of a research/scholarly project with an academic paper as the final deliverable. This is not a formal thesis (the “Plan A” option). The RSTC program only offers the “Plan B” master’s option.

The Plan B project topic typically evolves from your work in one or more seminars. The project should be formatted like the **final draft of an article** suitable for publication in a specific scholarly journal. In the Plan B project, you should:

- demonstrate your ability to identify a scholarly topic of interest to the journal’s readership;
- justify the topic’s importance;
- argue a thesis; and
- contribute to scholarly knowledge or understanding of your topic, placing your work in the scholarly “conversation.”

A literature review is generally not appropriate for the Plan B project.

Plan B papers are typically 6,500 - 7,500 words (25 or more typed pages), including notes and references. Match your paper to the selected journal’s guidelines, including formatting. You should carefully read recent articles from the selected journal that are related to your topic. Take note of these articles’ structures from the abstract to the conclusion.

In addition to the paper, you must write a preface of 750 - 1,250 words (approximately three to five pages). In the preface, you should:

- explain how you developed an interest in the topic;
- situate the topic in the literature and scholarly conversation;
- briefly summarize your argument;
- review two or three other journals that you considered and explain why you selected your particular target journal; and
- include the URL or digital object identifier (DOI) of a typical article from your target journal.

If you publish a solo-authored article in a scholarly journal during your MA program and before starting the Plan B project, you can use it as your Plan B paper. You must write a preface to accompany the article.

The Plan B Committee

Committee Structure

During your final semester, you will complete a final oral exam with a committee of faculty members during which you will discuss your Plan B project. Your advisor(s) will work with you to identify committee members whose expertise aligns with the focus of your paper. The committee composition must meet the [Graduate School's requirements for committee membership and roles](#). Your advisor(s) must be on the committee. If you declare a graduate minor, then the outside member must be from the minor field. Committee members cannot simultaneously represent RSTC and an outside field.

We recommend that you work with your advisor(s) at the start of your second year to identify potential committee members. You should ask faculty to serve on your committee as early as possible. You can use the [Graduate Faculty Role List](#) to verify a potential committee member's eligibility.

Declaring Your Committee

You will [formally declare your committee with GSSP](#). We recommend that you declare your committee in the fall of your second year. After GSSP approves your committee, it will be added to your student record on MyU.

External Committee Members

You might want a committee member from another institution. Alternatively, your committee member might depart the University prior to the final oral exam. In these situations, please contact the GPC as soon as possible. The GPC will work with CLA to obtain college approval and affiliate status for the committee member. Affiliate status lasts up to three years. This process can take a month or more to complete, so please plan ahead.

Registration when Working on the Plan B Project

You will register for three credits of WRIT 8794: Directed Research during your final semester. This course provides you space to work on your Plan B project and paper. You must complete a [student/faculty contract](#) to register for WRIT 8794. Send your completed contract to the GPC, who will then send you a permission number for registration.

Committee Review of the Plan B Project

Your advisor(s) will first review your Plan B project. Once they approve your project, you must send copies to the other committee members. You must provide your committee with at least two weeks to review your project before the exam.

Final Oral Exam

Exam Structure

The exam is approximately one hour long. You will present your topic to the committee. Then, your committee members will ask you questions about your work and engage you

in a scholarly discussion. At the end of the exam, you will leave the room and the committee members vote “pass” or “fail.” The exam decision is based on a majority vote.

Scheduling the Final Oral Exam

With advisor approval, work with your committee to schedule your exam. Plan to meet for at least one hour. We recommend tools like Doodle to help you and the committee find an appropriate time.

Email the GPC when you select a time for your exam. The GPC can help you with room reservations, the department calendar, and examination protocols.

Initiating the Final Exam Form

Initiate the Final Exam Form for the Plan B master’s degree at least one day before your exam. The GPC will send you the link to initiate the form. The electronic form is then sent to your committee chair. Your chair will record your exam results in the form after the exam.

Exam Retakes

If you fail the final exam, you can only retake the exam if the committee members unanimously agree on a retake. The retake exam must have the same committee members as the original exam (unless there are extenuating circumstances). If you fail the retake exam, you will be discontinued from the program.

Submitting the Plan B Project

You are **required** to submit your Plan B project to the department for record-keeping. Send a PDF of your project to the GPC at writgpc@umn.edu. The GPC will add the project to your student record. The project is stored for confidential department record-keeping only and will not be shared without your permission.

It is **optional** to submit your project to the [University Digital Conservancy \(UDC\)](#), where RSTC maintains a [repository for Plan B projects](#).

Degree Progress

Degree Requirements

The MA program has **four** degree requirements:

1. complete 34 coursework credits;
2. have an approved graduate degree plan on file in GPAS;
3. complete a Plan B project; and
4. complete a final oral exam about your Plan B project.

Example Degree Timeline

GSSP maintains a general overview of [Plan B master's degree completion steps](#). Here we provide additional details and department-specific requirements.

Every Semester

1. Enroll in coursework that you select in consultation with your advisor(s) and the requirements documented in this handbook and GPAS. You are expected to take nine credits per semester (10 credits in spring of your first year) to make timely degree progress. You can reduce your enrollment to six credits one semester with DGS approval.
2. Plan for career exploration and professional development. Graduate study at the University of Minnesota comes with a wide range of opportunities designed to enhance your student experience, extend your research, and prepare you to meet your career goals. Planning is required to make the most of these opportunities and select those that will serve you best. The RSTC program encourages all students to initiate an Individual Development Plan (IDP) in their first year, update it regularly, and share it with advisors and other mentors. Resources to help you create and maintain an IDP are available on the RSTC Student Hub.

Year 1 - Fall

1. Enroll in Introduction to Writing Studies Pedagogies & Practicum courses: WRIT 5531 and 5532. These courses are designed to both support your' pedagogical development as writing teachers as well as acclimate you to the curriculum of our First-Year Writing program.

Year 1 - Spring

1. Work with your advisor(s) and the GPC to plan your remaining coursework and submit your curriculum worksheet. The DGS also provides support for this planning process. See [Planning & Tracking Your Degree Coursework](#) for more information.
2. Complete your annual progress report (APR) through the online workflow. See [Satisfactory Degree Progress and Annual Progress Reports](#) for more information.

Year 2 - Fall

1. Officially select your Degree Advisor(s). The GPC will send you a form to officially select your Degree Advisor(s). See [Advising](#) for more information.
2. Submit your GPAS planner. See [Planning & Tracking Your Degree Coursework](#) for more information.
3. Assemble and declare your Plan B project examination committee. [The Plan B Committee](#) section has guidance on committee composition.
4. Talk with your advisor(s) and the DGS about whether you would like to apply to the RSTC PhD program. The application process (see [From the MA to the PhD](#)) is typically completed during the fall semester.

Year 2 - Spring

1. Take WRIT 8794 with your advisor(s) to write the paper for your Plan B project.
2. Complete your final oral examination (see [The Plan B Project](#)). You cannot take the oral exam until your GPAS planner is approved and you've finished any incomplete coursework.
3. Complete your annual progress report (APR) through the online workflow. See [Satisfactory Degree Progress and Annual Progress Reports](#) for more information.
4. Prepare to graduate from the MA program (see [Graduation and Commencement](#)).

Maintaining Active Status

You will maintain active status in the MA program by enrolling in the appropriate number of credits each fall and spring semester. You must take at least six credits per semester to be eligible for a Graduate Assistantship. The standard credit load for MA students is nine credits per semester (with 10 credits in the spring of your first year to include WRIT 5532).

Contact your advisor(s), the DGS, and the GPC before withdrawing from a course after the open enrollment period closes. You should work with the course instructor to determine the best path forward (for example, withdrawing completely or taking an incomplete). The DGS and GPC can explain how a course withdrawal might affect your degree progress.

You have options if you need to take a semester (or more) off from courses (described below). You should discuss your individualized situation with your advisor(s), the DGS, and the GPC to identify the best path for you. If you do not enroll by the fall or spring semester deadline (and you have not been approved for a leave of absence), you will receive a system-generated, automatic discontinuation from the degree program.

GRAD 999 Special Registration Status

GRAD 999 is a zero-tuition, zero-credit special registration status that satisfies the Graduate School's active student status requirement. Registering for GRAD 999 allows you to maintain active status in the program for a fall or spring semester without taking a course. When enrolled in GRAD 999, you retain access to University facilities and resources and can file degree paperwork.

GRAD 999 does not satisfy registration requirements for international student agencies, most loan deferment requirements, nor does it qualify you for financial aid. You cannot be employed as a Graduate Assistant while registered for GRAD 999. Read all of the information about this [special registration option](#) and consult with your advisor, the DGS, and the GPC before registering for GRAD 999.

The Department of Writing Studies typically limits enrollment in GRAD 999 to one semester. Contact your advisor and the GPC immediately if extenuating circumstances require you to register for more than one semester of GRAD 999.

Leave of Absence (LOA)

The University understands that there are times when it is in a student's best interest to take a break from their graduate program. If you experience extenuating circumstances that prevent you from maintaining active status for more than one semester, you can request an LOA for up to two years. During an LOA you **cannot** take courses, teach as a graduate instructor, access University services and facilities, nor will loan deferment requirements be met. The following resources provide more information on an LOA:

- University Policy: [Leave of Absence and Reinstatement from a Leave: Graduate Students](#)
- FAQ: [Leave of Absence Reinstatement](#)
- CLA Process: [Leave of Absence \(LOA\) and Reinstatement From Leave](#)

Please meet with your advisor(s), the DGS, and the GPC if you are considering an LOA.

Satisfactory Degree Progress and Annual Progress Reporting Expectations

As an RSTC MA student, you are responsible for:

- maintaining active student status by enrolling every fall and spring semester;
- demonstrating satisfactory degree progress (as defined in the next section);
- completing and filing departmental, CLA, and GSSP forms required for degree progress and graduation (including the GPAS and examination workflows); and
- timely review of and response to email communications sent by the program, department, college, and University to the student's UMN email account.

You will not be cleared for graduation unless all degree requirements are met. Contact the GPC for assistance with departmental signatures on required forms. If you have questions, ask your advisor(s), the DGS, or the GPC.

Satisfactory Progress Defined

Satisfactory progress for MA students is generally assessed using the following criteria:

- Timely progress in completing coursework: typically 9 credits per semester, and any incompletes are resolved by the deadlines established in an Incomplete Grade Contract (required for all incompletes).
- Grades of B or better are in all courses.
- Meeting goals established in a prior progress report.
- Completing degree milestones (exams, degree paperwork, online workflows) on time.
- Participating in professional, academic, and career development activities.
- Timely progress in completing the Plan B Project.

Please also refer to the [Example Degree Timeline](#) in addition to the above criteria for satisfactory progress.

Annual Progress Report (APR)

All MA students must complete an Annual Progress Report (APR) each spring. Our department uses the APR as an opportunity to identify how your advisor(s), the DGS, the GPC, and program faculty can better support your success in the program and your professional development.

The APR is completed online. You will receive instructions to complete your progress report in the middle of spring semester. The APR will ask you to:

- upload your CV;
- describe your activities from the last 12 months;
- share your goals for the program and your professional development; and
- if applicable, address progress towards goals identified in the previous year's progress report.

Upon submission, your advisor(s), the GPC, and the DGS will each review your APR. The APR is meant to be supportive and help you identify beneficial new paths to support your goals. You will meet with your advisor(s) to discuss your experience in the program as part of the annual review process.

In the APR, your advisor(s) will determine whether you are making satisfactory or unsatisfactory progress. If your advisor determines that you are not making satisfactory progress, you will receive a formal notification from your advisor and/or the DGS with guidance on how to establish good academic standing again (see [Consequences of Unsatisfactory Progress](#)).

Addressing Extenuating Circumstances

If you are having difficulty making progress in your degree, we encourage you to proactively address those challenges. The department is here to support you. Please reach out to your advisor(s), the DGS, and/or the GPC as soon as possible for assistance. Do not wait until the APR process has started.

You will have an opportunity to address extenuating circumstances with an optional statement in the APR, which allows you to formally document challenges that you are navigating and how you are working to address them. The GPC will provide guidance on developing this statement.

We are committed to working with you to address challenges and difficulties that you may be facing. Discussions will address whether a letter from the DGS explaining the need for an exception to the progress rules is appropriate or whether a leave of absence or other measure is appropriate. We will also provide support in identifying University and external resources.

Consequences of Unsatisfactory Progress

“Unsatisfactory progress” is an official determination that will be designated in your annual report in the rare circumstance that you do not address challenges with progress. If this occurs, the DGS will provide written notice that you are no longer in good standing with the program. The letter will address whether a registration hold has been placed on your account and address implications for Graduate Instructor support. Students with a registration hold are not able to take courses or hold graduate assistantships until the hold has been lifted.

A copy of the written notice will be sent to the advisor(s), the GPC, and Department Chair. The Department Administrator and the director of the program you are teaching for (First-Year Writing or Advanced Writing) will also be notified, if appropriate, to address instructional consequences of an unsatisfactory progress determination. Your advisor(s) may also opt to write a letter to the DGS that explains the situation and how the problem might be resolved.

The DGS will discuss options with students on a case-by-case basis. Examples of unsatisfactory progress include:

- having two or more incompletes (and must get down to one or zero);
- grades lower than B and/or a GPA below 3.00; and/or
- not completing the Plan B Project in spring of the second year.

Reestablishing Good Standing in the Program

To reestablish good standing in the program and have a registration hold released, you must work with your advisor(s) and/or the DGS to address the concerns raised in your progress report. You will likely need to develop a performance plan in collaboration with your advisor(s) and meet several of the established deadlines before the registration hold is lifted.

University-Wide Policy on Academic Progress for Master’s Students

- Master’s Degree: Performance Standards and Academic Progress: [Policy](#) and [FAQ](#)
- [Annual Graduate Student Reviews: Guidelines](#)

Program Withdrawal

In rare circumstances, you might determine that it is best for you to discontinue your MA. If you are considering leaving the program, please speak with your advisor(s), the DGS, and/or the GPC for support. Any students who withdraw from the program must submit a written statement (email is acceptable) with their decision to the GPC and DGS.

From the MA to the PhD

If you are making satisfactory progress in the MA program, the DGS will contact you in the fall of your second year and invite you to apply to the PhD program. The application process has two components: an internal departmental review by members of the RSTC Graduate Faculty, and an online application submitted to the Office of Graduate Admissions.

Step 1: Departmental Review

Write a memo (approximately 500 words) to the DGS describing what you have accomplished in the MA program to date and why you wish to continue your studies. The DGS will present this memo to the RTSC Graduate Faculty, typically at the November faculty meeting, and your advisor(s) will speak to your progress. The graduate faculty will determine if you can proceed to the PhD. You will receive their decision by the end of the month in which your memo is reviewed.

Step 2: Graduate School Application

If you are cleared to proceed to the PhD by the RSTC Graduate Faculty, you must complete a new online application to the PhD program through the Office of Graduate Admissions. This process includes the following steps:

1. [Initiate a new application with Graduate Admissions.](#)
2. Email the GPC so they can waive some of the application requirements to simplify the application process.
3. Reuse your MA application materials to meet the remaining documentation requirements in the online admission system; the PhD application is for administrative purposes only, so you do not need to update your materials except to provide your unofficial MA transcript.
4. Submit your application to the PhD program and notify the GPC that it is ready.

Step 3: Program Nomination and Offer of Admission

Once your application has been submitted, the Graduate School will review the application and, barring any unusual and unforeseen circumstances, formally admit you to the RSTC PhD program. MA students admitted to the RSTC PhD program will receive a departmental admission letter explaining the terms of the admission offer, including advisor assignment(s) and funding details.

Under the Council of Graduate School's April 15 Resolution, which the University of Minnesota adheres to, all offers of admission to a graduate program with a funding offer attached have a decision deadline of April 15th. You may complete the form in the Graduate Admissions system to accept or decline your offer of admission as soon as you are ready, but you are not required to decide prior to that deadline.

Step 4: Complete your MA Degree Requirements

Continuation to the PhD is contingent upon completion of all MA requirements, including the Plan B Project and formal graduation from the MA program. We recommend that you file to graduate from the MA by August before your first year in the PhD program. The GPC can help you with this process and timing.

Coursework and Funding Information

MA coursework is automatically applied to the PhD degree plan. You will see the MA courses in your PhD GPAS audit and should work with your advisor(s), DGS, and GPC to plan their remaining coursework.

MA-to-PhD students are eligible for up to four more years of funding in the RSTC PhD program, as long as satisfactory progress is maintained in the program and acceptable teaching performance continues.

Graduation & Commencement

Graduation steps are outlined in the [degree completion steps](#) overview for the Plan B master's degree. You must apply to graduate in MyU.

One Stop Student Services provides a [graduation checklist for graduate students](#). Review these steps at least two months before you intend to graduate as some steps must be completed at specific times and in a specific order. Most importantly, students must complete the workflow to apply to graduate in the calendar month before their intended graduation month.

If you would like to walk at [Commencement](#), register by the deadline (typically early March). This is a separate step from applying to graduate, and you do not need to have graduated yet to participate. Review information on eligibility, cap and gown rental, ceremony details, FAQs, and guidance for family and friends provided on the website.

The Job Search

Many RSTC students go on to pursue positions in the academic, non-profit, and private sectors. For example, RSTC graduates have found positions at research- and teaching-intensive academic institutions, as well as organizations like Amazon, Boston Scientific, Travelers Insurance, and Sandia National Laboratories. Our overarching goal is to support all RSTC students in pursuing outcomes that align with their personal hopes and goals. We encourage you to speak with your advisor(s), faculty, staff, and fellow students to develop a clear sense of the diverse range of careers that might align with your skills, expertise, and interests.

Job search resources and support for both academic job searches and diverse career searches, as well as resources to support career exploration, are available on the RSTC Student Hub.

Note: Permission from the director of the teaching program (First-Year Writing or Advanced Writing), the DGS, and the Chair is required for time off from teaching responsibilities to attend job interviews.

Assistantships, Fellowships, and Financial Aid

You must be admitted and in good academic standing to hold the following Graduate Assistant (GA) positions and fellowships. You must also register for at least six credits each fall and spring semester to maintain eligibility.

Graduate Instructorships (GI) & Teaching Assistantships (TA)

Most RSTC students are supported as Graduate Instructors (GIs), who teach their own sections of undergraduate WRIT courses. As a GI, you teach one course per semester for the fall and spring semesters or two courses each academic year. Along with a salary, you receive a tuition benefit (covering 6-14 credits each fall and spring term that you are in coursework) and coverage for 95% of your health insurance premium (summer coverage is included if you have a 50% appointment in both fall and spring terms). Summer teaching is also possible but not guaranteed.

Over their years of support as GIs, MA students teach primarily in the First-Year Writing (FYW) program, although other courses for the Technical Writing and Communication (TWC) major might be possible based on past experience. Courses are taught in face-to-face (traditional) settings, as well as in online and blended formats. This teaching assignment sequence corresponds with the WRIT 5531: Introduction to Writing Theories and Pedagogies, and WRIT 5532: Practicum in Writing Pedagogies sequence.

You may also pursue teaching assistantships (TA) and research assistantships (RA) in the department or with other departments. Teaching assistants assist a faculty instructor by evaluating student papers, meeting with students, and other duties. You must obtain permission from the following individuals prior to taking time off from teaching:

- **First-Year Writing:** Director of First-Year Writing
- **Technical Writing and Communication:** Director of Undergraduate Studies
- **Time off for job interviews:** In addition to the appropriate director, contact the DGS and Department Chair

Graduate Instructorships are typically 9-month, 50% appointments (with the exception of summer teaching). Appointment length for TA and RA positions may vary; some are 25% appointments, for example. Overload appointments (75%) should be rare, pursued only with advisor approval, and if the additional workload will not interfere with degree progress. 100% overload appointments are prohibited.

First-Year Writing (WRIT 1301)

GIs from Writing Studies have opportunities to teach [First-Year Writing \(FYW\)](#) courses as part of a large and diverse teaching community, including fellow graduate instructors from English and American Studies. The FYW Program supports each GI to independently design and teach a class that fulfills course outcomes while reflecting the instructor's unique strengths and interests. GIs participate in orientation sessions and pursue

coursework (the WRIT 5531 & WRIT 5532 sequence) as part of their training and professional development.

Some sections of WRIT 1301 are fully online and asynchronous. For face-to-face sections, the fourth credit hour is fulfilled online (blended).

Technical and Professional Communication (WRIT 3562W)

WRIT 3562W is a required course for several majors at the University; thus, the student body is academically diverse. Writing Studies typically offers a combination of fully online and face-to-face sections. For face-to-face sections, the fourth credit hour is fulfilled online. The department maintains a Canvas shell for WRIT 3562W that can be used as-is for an online class or in part for the fourth credit of blended sessions. Using the shell is optional, but previous instructors have found it useful. Some instructors have found the class to be a site for their own pedagogical research. Summer teaching opportunities are also available for WRIT 3562W, with most being offered online.

Fellowships and Grants

Graduate fellowships are available to support your research and degree progress. These fellowships are available on a competitive basis from Writing Studies, the Graduate School, and external funders. We encourage you to pursue fellowships from all three categories.

Departmental Fellowships (Summer Funding)

RSTC offers multiple competitive summer research fellowships each year, funded by collegiate and endowed funds. Endowed RSTC fellowships include the James I. Brown Graduate Awards in Rhetoric and the Affiliates 21st Century Summer Research Fellowships in Scientific and Technical Communication. Additional fellowships, funded by Graduate School and Provostal funds, are often available and depend on annual funding allocations. These fellowships provide financial support for summer research and writing.

Additionally, Writing Studies graduate students may work with a faculty or academic staff member on a research grant, which could provide summer RA funding. Graduate students enrolled in the [Literacy and Rhetorical Studies](#) minor are eligible for travel grants and dissertation fellowships associated with that program.

Graduate School Fellowships

The Graduate School offers numerous fellowships. [Graduate School fellowships](#) are awarded through university-wide competitions, many of which require a departmental nomination. For information about the fellowships and grants offered through the Graduate School, contact the [Graduate School Fellowship Office](#). Relevant Graduate School fellowships are announced to RSTC students via a weekly email newsletter.

External Fellowships

If you wish to pursue fellowships and grants from external funders, you should consult the RSTC Student Hub for more information and to access funding databases.

Research Assistantships and Administrative Fellowships

Writing Studies sometimes offers research assistantships, usually funded through faculty grants. In this case, the individual faculty member hires the assistant. Students may apply for graduate assistantships in other University departments if they meet the qualifications. [Graduate Assistant Employment Services](#) posts openings from all University departments.

Other Funding Mechanisms and Opportunities

Travel, Research, and Professional Development (TRPD) Funding

Funding to support conference travel, dissertation research, and participation in professional development opportunities is available for the 2024-2025 fiscal year (July 2024-June 2025). The DGS and the GPC review requests at the start of each calendar month. TRPD requests should be made as soon as possible and no later than one month before funds are needed to ensure that staff can process approvals and documentation. The 2024-2025 amounts are \$1,000 per student, plus an additional \$200 for international travel. TRPD funding in subsequent academic years is subject to RSTC program budgets from CLA, the Graduate School, and the Provost's Office. See the funding section of the RSTC Student Hub for additional information and to submit a request.

Financial Aid

Students sometimes elect to supplement their funding packages with federal loans. Please [contact One Stop Student Services](#) for all inquiries concerning financial aid availability, eligibility, and application processes.

RSTC Program Governance & Student Representation

Writing Studies Graduate Committee

The Graduate Committee is one of the core department committees charged with ensuring the effective administration of specific programs within Writing Studies. The Graduate Committee comprises faculty, students, and the core administrators of the department's graduate programs. The committee's responsibilities include reviewing and updating policies, addressing emergent issues, and responding to the concerns of each graduate program community. The Graduate Committee is a voting body, with its recommendations moving on to the full faculty for review and consideration in monthly faculty meetings. There are two subcommittees of the Graduate Committee: the MS/Certificate subcommittee and the MA/PhD subcommittee. Each of these subcommittees meets independently to discuss program-specific items. When agenda items affecting all graduate students arise, the full committee meets to discuss and vote on any necessary items.

MA & PhD Student Representatives

Two graduate students, typically one in the MA program (or a PhD student who completed the MA program) and one in the PhD program, serve on the MA/PhD subcommittee of the Graduate Committee each academic year as elected student representatives.

Representatives fully participate in committee work with the exception of cases where confidentiality of student information is required, such as with fellowship application reviews. You may self-nominate or nominate other students for the committee. Students who accept a nomination are included on the ballot for voting by all graduate students in the RSTC programs.

Graduate Committee Student Address Policy

The Graduate Committee (including the MA/PhD subcommittee) encourages input from graduate students on all Writing Studies-related topics. You are welcome to share your experiences by speaking with your graduate representatives, or you may address the committee in person or in writing.

If you would like to address the committee in person:

1. Notify the DGS, GPC, and the elected RSTC MA and PhD representatives via email at least one week prior to the meeting, with your topic (if appropriate) and any materials you wish to present to the committee.
2. Shortly thereafter, the DGS, GPC, and/or graduate representatives will organize your visit to an upcoming committee meeting.
3. You will be given time in the meeting to discuss your agenda item, and you are welcome to remain as an observer for the remainder of the meeting (except in limited cases where confidentiality is required, such as review of fellowship applications).

If you cannot or do not wish to address the committee in person, you are also welcome to send a written statement for the committee's consideration.

The Council of Graduate Students (COGS)

The Council of Graduate Students (COGS) is the Recognized Student Governance Association (RSGA) at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities campus that represents, advocates for, informs, facilitates communications among, and supports Twin Cities graduate students (students who are seeking a research degree: a PhD or a master's that is associated with a PhD program). All COGS-fee paying graduate students are members of the COGS General Assembly. Each graduate program can elect one voting General Assembly member amongst all their graduate students to represent their program.

Graduate Student Travel Policy & Procedures

Conference Participation

Conference participation is an important form of professional development for MA students. The department offers limited financial support to students who travel to a conference. Students who are within their years of funding are eligible for this travel support. Pre-approval from the Director of the program you are teaching for (FYW or ADV) is required for any time off from teaching.

Traveling for Conferences

Funding

Funding for conference and research travel is offered in the 2024-2025 academic year through the Travel, Research, and Professional Development (TRPD) program. Please see the RSTC Student Hub for details about this funding, eligibility, timelines, and how to apply. All TRPD funding requests require pre-approval by the DGS and GPC. Additional opportunities for travel funding can also be found on the RSTC Student Hub.

Policies and Procedures

Please see the RSTC Student Hub and the Writing Studies Intranet's Travel pages for current policies and procedures for traveling on University business. Bill Fricke is the department's Financial Preparer (frick169@umn.edu).

Reimbursement for Pre-Approved TRPD Expenses

University policy requires that all requests for travel reimbursements must be submitted **within 30 days of the expense date or trip return date** or you will not be reimbursed. See the RSTC Student Hub for more information.

Appendix A: Common Acronyms and Abbreviations

You are likely to encounter the following acronyms and abbreviations in this handbook and/or your time at the University of Minnesota. A complete list can be found [online](#).

Acronym	Full Name	Description
APR	Annual Progress Report	All master's and PhD students are required to annually report their progress towards degree requirements. See Annual Progress Report (APR) .
CEI	Center for Educational Innovation	Offers some of the training you will receive as a Graduate Instructor for First-Year Writing (FYW).
CLA	College of Liberal Arts	The Department of Writing Studies is in CLA. CLA is one of several colleges at the UMN.
COGS	Council of Graduate Students	The governing body for graduate students at the U of M. COGS represents, advocates for, informs, facilitates communications among, and supports Twin Cities graduate students seeking a research degree (MA and PhD). If you pay the Student Services Fee with your registration, you are a member of the COGS General Assembly.
DGS	Director of Graduate Studies	Serves as the coordinator of graduate studies within a program. Together with the graduate program faculty and department and collegiate leadership, the DGS shares responsibility for guiding and improving graduate education within the program(s) under the DGS's jurisdiction.

DRC	Disability Resource Center	Works in partnership with students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University to eliminate or minimize barriers and facilitate inclusion on campus.
FYW	First-Year Writing	All undergraduates must take WRIT 1301, WRIT 1401, or an equivalent. All RSTC students teach WRIT 1301 during their academic career.
GPC	Graduate Programs Coordinator	Provides administrative support for the DGS and graduate students. The primary point of contact for graduate students' questions about Program, College, and University policies and procedures, access to University resources, etc.
GPAS	Graduate Planning and Audit System	GPAS allows students to plan future coursework and view degree progress. RSTC students typically complete a GPAS planner in spring of their first year in the program.
GSSP	Graduate Student Services and Progress	The division of One Stop Student Services for graduate students. See Graduate Student Online Resources below for details.
OIT	Office of Information Technology	The University's central information technology unit.
ORGP	Office of Research and Graduate Programs	CLA's graduate programs office. ORGP advances CLA's research mission through support of its research initiatives, graduate-level programs, and students.

OTR	Office of the Registrar	Handles registration-related services for University students. It manages all aspects of current and historical student academic records.
TCAB	Technical Communication Advisory Board	A group of business leaders who provide networking, mentoring, and other experiential learning opportunities to students, including in the MA and PhD programs.

Appendix B: Graduate Student Online Resources

Graduate Student Services and Progress (GSSP)

The Graduate Student Services and Progress (GSSP) office maintains a portal within [One Stop Student Services](#) dedicated to graduate students' needs. It is the most important resource for graduate degree information, degree completion steps, and electronic access to the various forms you need to file. GSSP is your primary contact point for:

- inquiries regarding graduate policy and graduate degree progress;
- understanding your graduate degree completion deadlines and requirements;
- graduate examination committee policy, submission, and approval inquiries;
- doctoral preliminary and final examination scheduling procedures and requirements;
- thesis and dissertation submission procedures; and
- submitting degree progress and completion forms for graduate degrees.

Writing Studies Intranet

Writing Studies maintains an Intranet site where you can access department-specific information and resources that benefit you as both a student and an employee of the department, including:

- departmental news, events, and announcements;
- department calendars;
- HR & Payroll contact information;
- governance documents;
- travel, funding, and reimbursement information;
- teaching resources for First-Year Writing and Advanced Writing instructors; and
- mental health resources.

RSTC Student Hub

Maintained by the GPC, the RSTC Student Hub is a curated selection of resources, departmental forms, and tools to help you navigate your degree requirements and enhance your graduate education experience. It includes:

- onboarding materials for incoming students;
- preliminary and final exam guides and checklists;
- professional development, career exploration, and job search resources;
- research support services; and
- personal, health, family, and financial support resources.

Appendix C: Resources for Alumni

Stay Connected

Follow Writing Studies on Social Media

 [Facebook](#)

 [Twitter](#)

 [LinkedIn](#)

 [YouTube](#)

Alumni Relations

- [UMN Alumni Association](#)
- [Department of Writing Studies Alumni & Friends](#)

Maintain Access to Resources

Library Access After Graduation

- [Alumni access to the UMN Libraries](#)
- [Friends of the University of Minnesota Libraries](#)

Email Access After Graduation

Graduated students may retain access to their Google Apps accounts for a limited time after graduation. See [the account termination reference guide](#).