

DEPARTMENT OF  
**WRITING STUDIES**

---

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Graduate Student Handbook

2023-2024

PhD 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.**

© Copyright 2023 by the Regents of the University of Minnesota. All rights reserved.

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](mailto: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.**

## Introductory Note on Changes to this Handbook

Per University policy, the Rhetoric and Scientific & Technical Communication (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 Department of Writing Studies (referred to as Writing Studies henceforth) maintains a static handbook for each academic year. However, nothing in the handbook supersedes the rules and regulations of the Graduate School or other University of Minnesota governing bodies. Non-curricular policies and procedures set by the College of Liberal Arts and Graduate School are subject to change throughout the academic year.

For all RSTC students, the current handbook is typically the best resource for policies and procedures, improved explanations of established procedure and policy, and access to available resources. If you find a discrepancy in departmental policy between your entering handbook and this version of the handbook, the DGS, GPC, and advisor(s) will work with you to identify appropriate options.

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.

# Table of Contents

<b>Introductory Note on Changes to this Handbook</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>About this Handbook</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>RSTC Program Structure</b>	<b>8</b>
Program Directors and Staff	8
General Department Information	8
Writing Studies Department Faculty	9
Affiliate Faculty	9
<b>Graduate Program Standards</b>	<b>10</b>
Standards for Student Conduct and Areas of Student Responsibility	10
Areas of Responsibility in Graduate Education	10
Department Chair	10
Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)	10
Graduate Programs Coordinator (GPC)	10
Grievances and Conflict Resolution	11
Departmental Graduate Student File	11
<b>Advising</b>	<b>12</b>
Advising Roles and Responsibilities	12
Adding a Co-Advisor and Changing Advisors	13
Successful Advising Relationships	13
Navigating Challenging Situations	14
<b>PhD Curriculum</b>	<b>15</b>
Curricular Requirements	15
Methods and Pedagogies Requirements	16
Core Areas	17
Specialty Area	17
Outside Coursework (Supporting Program or Minor)	18
Course Timing	19
WRIT Seminars	19
Second Language	19
Transferring Courses from Another Institution	19
Auditing Courses	20
<b>Planning &amp; Tracking Your Degree Coursework</b>	<b>22</b>
Coursework Planning & Support	22
GPAS Submission	22
GPAS Access & Instructions	23
Modifying the GPAS	23
Tracking Progress Toward Courses and Other Degree Requirements	23
<b>Preliminary Exams</b>	<b>24</b>

	4
Overview	24
Exam Areas	24
Exam Timing & Windows	24
Committee Membership & Examiner Roles	25
Reading Lists & Contextual Statement	25
Reading List Requirements	25
Contextual Statement & Sample Questions	26
List Review Process and Criteria	26
Exam Questions and Essays	26
Essay Question Development	26
Essay Requirements	27
Evaluation of the Written Exams	27
Written Exam Outcomes	27
Guidelines for Retakes of Written Examinations	28
The Preliminary Oral Exam	28
Evaluating the Oral Exam	28
Oral Exam Outcomes	28
<b>Dissertation Prospectus</b>	<b>30</b>
About the Prospectus	30
Prospectus Meeting Steps	30
<b>The Dissertation and Defense (Final Oral Exam)</b>	<b>31</b>
Expectations for the Dissertation	31
Timing the Final Steps of Dissertation Review and Oral Defense	31
Dissertation Committee	32
Committee Roles & Composition	32
Steps for Assigning Your Committee	32
Manuscript Review & Final Oral Examination	32
Preliminary Scheduling of the Defense	33
Manuscript Review and Reviewer’s Report Form	33
Schedule Your Final Oral Examination with GSSP	33
The Final Oral Examination or “Defense”	34
Editing, Formatting, and Depositing the Dissertation Manuscript	34
<b>Degree Progress</b>	<b>36</b>
Degree Requirements	36
Time to Degree	36
Example Degree Timeline: Direct-to-PhD	36
Year 1	36
Year 2	37
Year 3	38
Years 4 and 5	39

Example Degree Timeline: MA-to-PhD	40
Year 3	40
Year 4	40
Years 5 and 6	41
Sample Five Year and Six Year Plans for the RSTC PhD	42
Maintaining Active Status	44
WRIT 8444 – Doctoral Full Time Equivalent Status (FTE) with One Credit Registration	44
Course Withdrawals and Leaves	45
Satisfactory Degree Progress and Annual Progress Reporting	46
Expectations	46
Annual Progress Report (APR)	46
Addressing Extenuating Circumstances	47
Consequences of Unsatisfactory Progress	47
Reestablishing Good Standing in the Program	48
University-Wide Policy on Academic Progress for PhD Students	48
Program Withdrawal	48
<b>Graduation &amp; Commencement</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>The Job Search</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Assistantships, Fellowships, and Financial Aid</b>	<b>51</b>
Graduate Instructorships (GI) & Teaching Assistantships (TA)	51
First-Year Writing (WRIT 1301)	51
Technical and Professional Communication (WRIT 3562W)	52
Fellowships and Grants	52
Departmental Fellowships (Summer Funding)	52
Graduate School Fellowships	52
External Fellowships	53
Research Assistantships and Administrative Fellowships	53
Other Funding Mechanisms and Opportunities	53
Travel, Research, and Professional Development (TRPD) Funding	53
Financial Aid	53
<b>RSTC Program Governance &amp; Student Representation</b>	<b>54</b>
The Graduate Committee	54
MA & PhD Student Representatives	54
Graduate Committee Student Address Policy	54
The Council of Graduate Students (COGS)	55
<b>Graduate Student Travel Policy &amp; Procedures</b>	<b>56</b>
Conference Participation	56
Traveling for Conferences	56
Funding	56
Policies and Procedures	56

Reimbursement for Pre-Approved TRPD Expenses	56
<b>Appendix A: Common Acronyms and Abbreviations</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Appendix B: Graduate Student Online Resources</b>	<b>60</b>
Graduate Student Services and Progress (GSSP)	60
Writing Studies Intranet	60
RSTC Student Hub	60
<b>Appendix C: Resources for Alumni</b>	<b>61</b>
Stay Connected	61
Follow Writing Studies on Social Media	61
Alumni Relations	61
Maintain Access to Resources	61
Library Access After Graduation	61
Email Access After Graduation	61

## About this Handbook

This handbook is for students entering the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) program in Rhetoric and Scientific & Technical Communication (RSTC) in the 2023-24 academic year. This handbook is also a resource for all RSTC PhD students seeking the most current information on departmental practices and procedures, and enhanced explanations of degree requirements.

The handbook also serves as the gateway to College and Graduate School policies and procedures. Prospective students seeking information on admissions are invited to consult the [Office of Graduate Admissions' website](#) and the Writing Studies' website for [program-specific application instructions](#).

## RSTC Program Structure

### Program Directors and Staff

---

**Molly Kessler** (she/her/hers)  
Associate Professor  
Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)

Office: 210 Nolte  
Email: [kesslerm@umn.edu](mailto:kesslerm@umn.edu)

---

**Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch**  
Professor  
Chair of Writing Studies

Office: 233 Nolte  
Email: [lkbreuch@umn.edu](mailto:lkbreuch@umn.edu)  
Phone: (612) 624-1784

---

**Allie Cooperman** (she/her/hers)  
Graduate Programs Coordinator (GPC)

Office: 220 Nolte  
Email: [writgpc@umn.edu](mailto:writgpc@umn.edu)  
Phone: (612) 624-4761

---

**Bill Fricke**  
Financial Preparer

Office: 233 Nolte  
Email: [frick169@umn.edu](mailto:frick169@umn.edu)  
Phone: (612) 624-1784

---

**Jennifer Franko**  
Department Administrator

Office: 225 Nolte  
Email: [frank010@umn.edu](mailto:frank010@umn.edu)  
Phone: (612) 624-2283

---

### General Department Information

Department of Writing Studies  
University of Minnesota  
214 Nolte Center  
315 Pillsbury Drive SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Campus Mail code: 0093A  
Phone: (612) 624-3445  
Email: [writ@umn.edu](mailto:writ@umn.edu)  
Fax: (612) 624-3617  
Web: <https://cla.umn.edu/writing-studies>

## 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
<a href="#">Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch</a>	Design: Human Factors and Ergonomics Literacy & Rhetorical Studies
<a href="#">Patrick Bruch</a>	Literacy & Rhetorical Studies
<a href="#">Daniel Card</a>	
<a href="#">Ann Hill Duin</a>	
<a href="#">Richard Graff</a>	Classical and Near Eastern Studies Communication Studies Literacy & Rhetorical Studies
<a href="#">Laura Gurak</a>	Communication Studies English Literacy & Rhetorical Studies Mass Communications Studies of Science and Technology
<a href="#">Molly Kessler</a>	
<a href="#">Amy Lee</a>	Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies
<a href="#">John Logie</a>	Communication Studies Liberal Studies Literacy & Rhetorical Studies
<a href="#">Tom Reynolds</a>	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 committee in RSTC.

Affiliate Faculty	Home Department
<a href="#">Ronald Greene</a>	Communication Studies
<a href="#">Atilla Hallsby</a>	Communication Studies
<a href="#">Joseph Konstan</a>	Computer Science
<a href="#">Daniel Philippon (SM, S&amp;TC)</a>	English

## 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.

### 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.

#### 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.

## Departmental Graduate Student File

Writing Studies maintains a file for each student in the PhD 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 PhD program, faculty members and the DGS select an Initial Advisor or Initial Co-Advisors for you. This decision balances your stated interests and 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 their advisees, 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 dissertation;
- review dissertation 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.

## 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 needs and your advisor's 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 their 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](#): The Student Conflict Resolution Center provides best practices for students and faculty in graduate advising relationships and other topics.
- [Mutual Roles and Responsibilities for Faculty and Graduate Students](#): The University's policy statement on expectations for excellence in graduate education.
- The Graduate School's advising resources [for students](#) and [for faculty advisors](#).

There are many issues that can be discussed in confidence with an advisor. University employees must, however, report sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence to the University's Title IX Office. Please review the [administrative 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
- 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](#)

## PhD Curriculum

Our curriculum requires 43 course credits (typically 15 courses) and 24 thesis credits. Of the 43 course credits, 31 must be in Writing Studies and 12 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.

<b>Methods and Pedagogies (all required)</b>		<b>Availability (typical)</b>	<b>Credits</b>
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
<b>Total Methods and Pedagogies Credits: 7</b>			
<b>Core Area: Rhetoric (choose at least two)</b>			
WRIT 5775	Rhetorical Traditions: Classical Period	Fall - odd years	3
WRIT 5776	Rhetorical Traditions: Contemporary Era	Fall - even years	3
WRIT 8510	Seminar in Rhetoric	Periodic	3
<b>Core Area: Writing Studies (choose at least one)</b>			
WRIT 8540	Seminar in Writing Studies Pedagogies	Periodic	3

WRIT 8560	Seminar in Writing Studies	Periodic	3
<b>Core Area: Technical Communication (choose at least one)</b>			
WRIT 8520	Seminar in Scientific & Technical Communication	Periodic	3
WRIT 8550	Seminar in Technology, Culture, & Communication	Periodic	3
<b>Total Core Area Credits: 15</b>			
<b>Specialty Area</b>			
WRIT 5xxx or 8xxx	Courses in WRIT, typically 3 3-credit courses	Variable	3
<b>Total Specialty Area Credits: 9</b>			
<b>Outside Courses - Related Field Competency Area or Graduate Minor</b>			
non-WRIT	Courses in other departments, typically 4 3-credit courses	Variable	Variable
<b>Total Outside Course Credits: 12</b>			
<b>Thesis Credits</b>			
WRIT 8888	Doctoral Thesis Credits	Fall and Spring	Variable
<b>Total Thesis Credits: 24</b>			
<b>Total Degree Credits: 67</b>			

The [University Catalog](#) and the [Graduate Planning and Audit System \(GPAS\)](#) document all degree requirements and eligible courses. You will also use the [PhD 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 PhD 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 PhD 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.

PhD students demonstrate knowledge of the core areas through course grades and preliminary exams in two of the three core areas.

## 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 your third preliminary exam and research projects like the dissertation. 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.
2. **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.

3. **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.
4. **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) and the course instructor if you are interested in taking one of these courses.

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 the College of Liberal Arts 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 in at least one of the following ways:

- 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. Note that minor application processes can differ by department.

The [Graduate Education Catalogs](#) maintain a full list of graduate minors. You must work with the minor field DGS on your minor degree plan.

## 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 years:

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)

Note: 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 topic differs. [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 PhD 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 PhD and a

requirement outside the PhD (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 PhD. 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 approves each transfer course.
4. The GPC enters each transfer course into the [Graduate Planning and Audit System \(GPAS\)](#) to formally apply the course to your degree plan.

## Auditing Courses

Under certain circumstances, you might choose to audit a course while in the PhD 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

PhD 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 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 provided the substitution aligns with degree requirements set by the College and the Graduate School.

During the spring of your first year, you must complete a [PhD curriculum worksheet](#). The GPC will email you when it is time to complete your worksheet. This worksheet allows 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, the GPC, and the DGS have access to your worksheet, which is added to your departmental student file. Both your advisor 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 [writgpc@umn.edu](mailto:writgpc@umn.edu) so that the GPC can return your GPAS for you to make updates. The GPC can also make minor updates upon 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 Toward Courses and Other Degree Requirements

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.

# Preliminary Exams

## Overview

The preliminary exams in RSTC consist of a written exam and an oral exam. The written exam consists of three essays; each essay is written in response to an exam question that corresponds to an exam area (see more about exam areas in the next section). Upon passing your written exams, you will participate in an oral exam with a committee of faculty in which you will be asked questions related to your written exams and exam areas.

We encourage RSTC PhD students to begin preparing for the preliminary exams early in their program. The [Preliminary Exams FAQ, Tips, & Timeline](#) offers detailed recommendations regarding the RSTC preliminary exams. The [RSTC Preliminary Exams Checklist Worksheet](#) provides specific guidance on each step of the exam process and the suggested timeline on which you should complete the steps.

## Exam Areas

You will create reading lists and complete written exams in three areas. You will consult with your advisor(s) and committee members to create lists for two of three core areas of the RSTC PhD program's three core areas and a third Specialty exam:

- Select **two core areas** from the following: Rhetoric, Writing Studies, and Technical Communication.
- **Specialty exam:** The specialty exam is often informed by your elective and/or outside coursework. This exam is designed to reflect your distinctive research interests, and to help you prepare for dissertation research.

## Exam Timing & Windows

There are three exam “windows” each academic year during which you can take preliminary exams. There is one exam window during each term: fall, spring, and summer. Your exam windows begin the semester following coursework. For example, if you complete coursework during the spring semester, your first exam window would be summer. We encourage you to take your exams in the first or second window when possible. The third window should be used if you are experiencing significant extenuating circumstances. Your advisor(s) and the DGS must approve you taking your exams in the third window. To maintain satisfactory progress in the program, you must pass both your written and oral preliminary exams within one of the three exam windows immediately following completion of your coursework. That is, you have the three exam windows immediately following the completion of coursework to complete your exam. See [Degree Progress](#) for additional guidance.

For your written exams, you have three weeks to write and submit the three exam essays that correspond with three exam areas. Within these three weeks, you have the flexibility to work on the three essays however you choose (e.g. sequentially or simultaneously). If you anticipate needing more than three weeks, we encourage you to work with the

[Disability Resources Center](#) to obtain accommodations that honor your specific circumstances.

The three-week writing time typically occurs within the following months for written exams:

- **Fall:** October
- **Spring:** February
- **Summer:** July

The oral exam is then scheduled at least three weeks after the end of the written exam window. Flexibility on exam windows is available to respond to individual circumstances. Please contact the DGS and GPC for assistance if an alternative exam window is needed and/or if an emergency arises **during** your exam window so that we can appropriately adjust your exam timelines. You can use the [RSTC Preliminary Exams Checklist Worksheet](#) for suggested timelines within each exam window.

## Committee Membership & Examiner Roles

You will work with your advisor(s) to identify committee members whose expertise aligns with the areas in which you will take your exams. The composition of a preliminary examination committee must also meet the [Graduate School's requirements](#) for committee membership and roles. All committee members participate in the preliminary oral examination and read all exam essays in preparation for the oral exam.

You can begin asking faculty to serve as committee members as soon as you and your advisor(s) agree that you are ready to start planning the committee. Use the [Faculty Role List](#) to verify prospective faculty members' eligibility to serve on the committee. You should [formally declare your committee with GSSP](#) at least one month before starting your written exams.

Three of the four committee members will serve as examiners. All committee members listed on the [Faculty Role List](#) for the RSTC PhD program are eligible to serve as examiners. For each exam, you will ask a committee member to serve as an examiner. Your advisor(s) should serve as examiner(s). The fourth committee member serves as an outside reader and participates only in the oral exam.

If you are considering a committee member from another institution, or have a committee member that is leaving the University (retiring or moving to another institution), you should contact the GPC as soon as possible. The GPC can help you obtain CLA approval and affiliate status for that committee member.

## Reading Lists & Contextual Statement

### Reading List Requirements

Each list consists of 25 items, drawing from books and articles, that you select in consultation with your examiners and advisor(s). We encourage you to use the list

development process to engage in critical conversations that will prepare you for the dissertation and other career development goals.

RSTC provides an [optional heuristic](#) to support your list development. The heuristic is designed to help you balance theory, methodology, pedagogies, and other individual goals across each list.

A general guideline for the ratio of monographs to articles in the reading lists is approximately 40% monographs to 60% articles and selections from edited collections. Lists should clearly identify selections from edited collections. This ratio is a guideline, and we encourage you to speak with your examiners about the most appropriate reading list composition for your exams.

Prior to 2021, the preliminary exam reading lists contained a combination of required texts and open slots. These lists are available for you to consult and can be found in the [2020-21 RSTC Handbook](#). The RSTC Student Hub also includes student-provided sample lists.

## **Contextual Statement & Sample Questions**

In addition to the three reading lists, you will write **one** 500-750 word contextual statement. The contextual statement invites you to actively position your interests. The statement articulates how and why you selected texts for your lists.

You will also write and submit three to five sample exam questions for each exam area. The sample questions model for examiners the types of issues that you hope to grapple with in your exams.

The primary advisor must submit the final, advisor-approved lists, contextual statement, and sample questions to the DGS and GPC for program-level approval no later than two months (60 days) prior to the planned exam month. Should extenuating circumstances necessitate a delay in submission, you and your advisor(s) should contact the DGS and GPC to identify an alternative deadline and, if necessary, adjust the examination timeline.

## **List Review Process and Criteria**

After you develop lists, contextual statements, and sample questions with your advisor(s) and examiners, you should submit all materials to your advisor(s) for final approval.

To support both students and advisors, the DGS reviews and confirms that reading lists align with the program-level expectations for preliminary exams outlined in this handbook and with [RSTC learning outcomes](#).

## **Exam Questions and Essays**

### **Essay Question Development**

Examiners compose exam questions by drawing on the reading list, contextual statement, and sample questions that students develop in consultation with committee members.

Examiners [submit questions](#) to the GPC, never directly to the student, at least two weeks before the start of a student's three-week writing period. The GPC and DGS review submitted questions to confirm that

- questions and any additional instructions align with RSTC examination policies, including essay requirements and length; and
- the three questions are distinct.

In the unlikely event that this review raises questions, the DGS will work with examiners on any necessary adjustments. The GPC will then release all three questions to the student at the established starting time for the written exams.

## Essay Requirements

You will write three exam essays, one for each exam area. Each exam essay should

- respond directly to the exam question provided by your examiner for that area;
- be 4,000-5,000 words (approximately 15-20 double-spaced pages), excluding images and bibliography; and
- be submitted as an individual PDF file at the end of your exam window.

## Evaluation of the Written Exams

Each examiner evaluates the written exam for their area independently of other members of the committee. The examiner must determine whether the outcome is a pass or fail. When evaluating written exams, examiners expect prose that clearly conveys ideas and arguments, and demonstrates facility with scholarly citation practices. Examiners are **not** expecting the level of polish associated with a final draft manuscript.

Examiners typically seek writing that

- responds directly to the questions asked;
- engages with key disciplinary texts and conversations;
- offers concrete engagement with a range of relevant texts from the reading list;
- synthesizes important concepts;
- articulates positionality within disciplinary communities;
- offers accurate representation of arguments in cited texts; and
- shows readiness to develop a prospectus.

Written exams must also adhere to the standards set in the [Board of Regents Student Conduct Code](#). Violations may, at the examiner's discretion, result in a report of scholastic dishonesty, failure of the exam, and/or other consequences, as appropriate.

## Written Exam Outcomes

Two outcomes are possible for each of the three written exams: pass or fail. You must pass all three exams to take the preliminary oral examination. If your advisor(s) and the examiners agree that you have failed all three exams on the first try, you cannot continue in the program. If you fail one or two exams, you will be given the opportunity to retake the exam(s) that you have not passed. Your examiner (usually with your advisor[s]) will

give you specific instructions to prepare for the retake. If you fail one or both of the exams on the second try, you cannot continue in the program. The scheduling of oral exams will be paused until any retakes, if required, are complete and the retaken written exams are evaluated.

## Guidelines for Retakes of Written Examinations

If you must retake one or two examinations, you will work with your advisor(s) to identify an appropriate timeline. The retake should typically take place in the next available examination window (spring, summer, or fall). Examiners may opt to revise questions using the process described above. Students retaking two exams will have a full three-week window (21 days); students retaking one exam will have 10 days.

## The Preliminary Oral Exam

The preliminary oral exam is based on the written exams and may also include additional discussion related to your reading lists as well as discussion of your possible dissertation project. Examiners are typically willing to discuss the results of your written exams with you prior to the oral exam; talking with them is a good way to prepare for the oral exam. You should schedule your preliminary oral exam for two hours.

## Evaluating the Oral Exam

When evaluating the oral exam, your examiners expect that you are prepared to address questions based on the topics presented in your written answers. Examiners will also assess your ability to position your answers in relation to broader disciplinary conversations. Examiners will not expect every answer to be fully and perfectly realized. They will expect you to demonstrate your skills in constructive, responsive, and collegial communication.

Over the course of the examination, examiners typically seek answers that

- respond directly to the question asked;
- accurately discuss major ideas and core arguments from texts on reading lists;
- effectively clarify or extend concepts or arguments from the written exams;
- reflect the examinee's care and consideration with respect to **how** a question might constructively be addressed; and
- demonstrate the examinee's ability to revisit their answers in response to new information.

## Oral Exam Outcomes

Three outcomes are possible for the oral exam: pass, pass with reservations, or fail. If members vote to pass with reservations, it is taken as a passing vote; however, the reservations must be satisfied before you can continue in the program. If two of four members of the committee vote to fail the exam, the vote is recorded as a failure.

Your advisor(s) will notify you immediately if you pass with reservations. Within one week, advisor(s) must send a letter to you that clearly stipulates the reservations, the steps

required to remove them, and the deadline by which they must be addressed. A copy of that letter is submitted to GSSP via the Preliminary Oral Examination Report workflow.

The full committee reviews the materials submitted to address the reservations and votes whether to lift the reservations. If committee members disagree as to whether reservations have been satisfied, the committee chair calls for another vote.

When you satisfy your committee's reservations, the advisor(s) must send a second letter informing you and GSSP (gssp@umn.edu) that the reservations have been removed and that you may proceed with the degree program. If reservations are not addressed adequately and in the time allowed, the exam result will be recorded as a failure.

If you fail the oral examination, you may be excluded from candidacy or may be allowed, on unanimous recommendation of the examining committee, to retake the examination. The original committee must conduct the reexamination. In no case may the reexamination take place before 10 weeks have passed. No more than one reexamination is allowed.

## Dissertation Prospectus

Before you can proceed with your dissertation research and writing, you need to

- form a dissertation committee;
- write a formal prospectus outlining the plan for your dissertation; and
- complete your prospectus meeting.

You should complete the prospectus and prospectus meeting during the semester after you complete your preliminary exams. You must complete the prospectus meeting within a year of passing preliminary examinations.

### About the Prospectus

The prospectus is a crucial step in the dissertation process, allowing you to

- think through your whole project;
- receive help from your committee; and
- ensure that your committee members agree with you and each other about the scope of the project, the methods you will use, and the approaches you will take.

You should work with your advisor(s) on the format of your prospectus, as faculty may have different expectations. Generally, a prospectus should be about 4,500-6,000 words long and includes

- a detailed statement of the **problem or exigency** of your dissertation contextualized and situated within relevant research literature;
- the **research question or questions** the dissertation will address; and
- brief **chapter outlines**.

You may also be asked to provide a **sample of data analysis** you expect to use throughout your dissertation in an appendix.

### Prospectus Meeting Steps

1. Work with your advisor(s) to identify when to have your prospectus meeting, then schedule a meeting with your committee.
2. Notify the GPC ([writgpc@umn.edu](mailto:writgpc@umn.edu)) of when you plan to have the meeting. The GPC can assist with room reservations for in-person and hybrid meetings, if desired.
3. No fewer than two weeks before the presentation, you must give your advisor and other committee members a copy of your prospectus.
4. Complete your portion of the [Dissertation Prospectus Form](#) and send it to your advisor(s) in advance of the meeting.

After your advisor(s) approve the prospectus and sign the Dissertation Prospectus Form, submit the completed form with a copy of the first page of the prospectus to the GPC ([writgpc@umn.edu](mailto:writgpc@umn.edu)). The GPC will add the documents to your departmental file and the prospectus milestone to your student record.

# The Dissertation and Defense (Final Oral Exam)

## Expectations for the Dissertation

As the Graduate School describes, a doctoral dissertation is based on original research that makes a significant contribution to knowledge. An effective dissertation demonstrates your ability to conduct an independent, original study on researchable questions using methods and systematic analysis appropriate to those questions and to articulate conclusions that may have implications for the advancement of theory.

Writing a dissertation is the culmination of the PhD degree. Think of it as a long-form response to an important question (or small group of related questions) that can be answered through research and original analysis. The courses you take, the faculty you decide to work most closely with, and the advisor(s) you select should ideally be chosen with the dissertation in mind.

A dissertation in the RSTC program needs to be on a topic significant enough to justify a sustained study, but defined narrowly enough to allow for command of the relevant literature and for an original contribution. Dissertations are usually about 150-200 pages in length, although many good dissertations written by students in the program have been shorter and longer. See the [Dissertations & Placement](#) page on our website for a list of dissertations titles written by students in the RSTC program. You can view dissertations submitted by former RSTC PhD students through the [University Digital Conservancy](#).

Research and writing for the dissertation take place over approximately two years. During that time, you will conduct research, produce two or more chapters per semester, and work on revisions. You are encouraged to develop chapters into journal articles and present your in-progress work at conferences along the way. This can help you hone your arguments, address gaps in your research, and develop your CV.

It is important that you and your advisor(s) work closely together throughout the complicated processes of framing, writing, and revising your dissertation. For example, your prospectus can be a starting roadmap for deciding how to conduct your research, the order in which you will draft the chapters, and when those chapters might be ready for review by your advisor and other members of your committee. You should seek support throughout your dissertation research and writing process from your advisor(s), fellow students, peers in other departments, and colleagues in the discipline at other institutions. The University also offers many useful tools to support dissertation writing. See the Dissertation section of the RSTC Student Hub for recommended resources.

## Timing the Final Steps of Dissertation Review and Oral Defense

We encourage you to begin planning for your final oral examination (also called the dissertation defense) the semester before you intend to defend. Review GSSP's [Degree Completion Steps](#) to help you prepare and access some of the required online workflows. A [timeline of required and recommended steps](#) is available to help you and your committee plan for the tasks described in this section of the handbook.

## Dissertation Committee

You will write your dissertation with the help and guidance of your advisor(s) and committee members. Usually, the faculty member(s) who advised you through the preliminary examinations serve as dissertation advisor(s). Likewise, examination committee members typically continue to serve on the dissertation committee. However, you can make adjustments to your committee membership if your project and/or professional needs change as you progress through the program.

### Committee Roles & Composition

We encourage you to discuss the defense process, roles, and expectations with your committee members early in the process. The composition of the committee must meet the [Graduate School's requirements](#) for committee membership and roles. The doctoral preliminary and final oral examination committees must consist of at least four members, including the advisor(s). Committees must adhere to the following requirements:

- At least three members (including the advisor) must be from your major field.
- At least one member must represent a field outside the major.
- If you have declared a minor, at least one member must represent the minor field.
- Members cannot satisfy the requirement with respect to more than one field.

If you are considering a committee member from another institution, or have a committee member who is leaving the University (retiring or moving to another institution), you should contact the GPC as soon as possible. The GPC can help you obtain CLA approval and affiliate status for that committee member. Affiliate status lasts up to three years. If you have an external committee member who served on your preliminary exam committee, work with the GPC to confirm their affiliate status is still active or request that it be renewed.

### Steps for Assigning Your Committee

Declare your committee at least one month before your defense. See the [Quick Start Guide](#) for detailed instructions.

1. Consult with your advisor(s) on committee member selection.
2. Review [GSSP's committee policies](#).
3. Consult the [Faculty Role List](#) database to confirm that committee members meet University requirements to serve on your committee.
4. Initiate [GSSP's online workflow](#) to declare your committee.

## Manuscript Review & Final Oral Examination

We encourage you to start discussing plans for completing and defending the dissertation early in your final semester in the program. With your advisor(s)'s approval, work with all members of your committee to identify an approximate date for the defense.

You must complete several steps in a specific order in the weeks leading up to the defense date. We recommend that you work backward to identify deadlines for each step. See [this timeline](#) for an overview.

## **Preliminary Scheduling of the Defense**

Approximately two months before you plan to defend your dissertation, work with your full committee to set a date and time for the oral examination. We recommend [Doodle](#) to coordinate your schedules. Remind your committee members that the oral defense will be contingent on them completing the Reviewer's Report form.

At least one month before your final oral exam, complete our departmental [dissertation defense scheduling form](#). The information that you provide on this form will be used to promote the public portion of your defense. The GPC will reserve your defense time on the department's calendar. This avoids potential scheduling conflicts with other departmental programming.

## **Manuscript Review and Reviewer's Report Form**

Committee members must read the dissertation manuscript and certify it is ready for defense before the final oral examination can be formally scheduled with GSSP. This is a formal step in the dissertation defense process and requires your committee members to submit a Reviewer's Report form within two weeks of receiving the dissertation manuscript.

There are two parts to this step, and both should be initiated at the same time at least two weeks prior to your planned defense date:

1. Initiate the Reviewer's Report form (accessible through GSSP's [Degree Completion Steps](#) for PhDs); and
2. Send your full dissertation manuscript to your committee.

GSSP will send automated reminders to reviewers. You will receive a notification each time a committee member submits their results in the Reviewer's Report workflow.

## **Schedule Your Final Oral Examination with GSSP**

After your Reviewer's Report form has been fully processed, GSSP will notify you when you are cleared to formally schedule your final oral examination. Plan to [schedule your final oral exam](#) in the online system at least one week prior to the defense to allow time for processing.

GSSP will audit your student record to confirm you have met all degree requirements. GSSP will notify you and the GPC of any steps that you must complete before taking your final oral examination.

Once GSSP completes its review, you will receive an automated confirmation that you have met the requirements needed to defend your dissertation. Click on the link provided

in the notification email to release the Final Exam form to your committee chair. This step should be completed at least one day prior to your defense.

## **The Final Oral Examination or “Defense”**

Your final oral exam has two parts: 1) a public defense and 2) a final oral examination with your dissertation committee.

### ***Public Defense***

During the public defense you will present your dissertation’s approach and major findings to a public audience. A public presentation is required by the Graduate School and is open to members of the department and other interested parties, including, if you wish, your family and friends. For this reason, your advisor(s) will ask you to prepare a formal presentation (typically lasting 20-30 minutes) that summarizes your dissertation.

During the public defense, your defense chair ensures that the discussion among you, the audience, and the committee flows smoothly. Audience members can ask questions for about 15-30 minutes and then are asked to leave. The public defense portion of your dissertation defense should be scheduled for 60 minutes.

### ***Final Oral Examination with Committee***

At the conclusion of the public defense, you and your committee will continue the final oral examination privately. Committee members will ask additional questions about your work.

After approximately 45 minutes, your committee will proceed to evaluate your dissertation defense and determine an outcome. You will be asked to leave the room while the committee deliberates and votes on the outcome.

Committee deliberations and voting proceed as follows:

- **Initial vote:** The chair of the defense asks all members to vote “pass” or “fail.” This vote is taken secretly and is written.
- **Discussion:** After the initial vote, the full committee discusses and deliberates the outcome of the oral exam.
- **Second and final vote:** Following the committee’s discussion, a second and final verbal vote is taken on whether the student passed the examination. There are two outcomes for the final vote: “pass” or “fail.” If a majority vote is pass, the chair will complete the online Final Oral Examination Report workflow.

The committee chair completes the Final Exam form following your defense. You will receive official notification of the committee's final decision by email from GSSP.

## **Editing, Formatting, and Depositing the Dissertation Manuscript**

Soon after the oral exam, your advisor(s) will outline any revisions that you must make. These revisions range from tidying up typographical errors to revising or clarifying parts of your dissertation. Once those changes have been made to your advisor(s)’s satisfaction,

your advisor will approve the dissertation using the online workflow (initiated when you deposit your dissertation).

The Graduate School will only accept dissertations that are formatted according to the specifications outlined on their website and submitted with the required forms (see [Thesis Formatting and Submissions](#)). These guidelines are general and applicable to all doctoral candidates. Check with your advisor for referencing style and editing conventions in the RSTC fields. Generally, APA or MLA are acceptable.

Electronically [submit your dissertation to the Graduate School](#) by the last day of the month in which you plan to graduate. Your degree will not be conferred until the dissertation is on deposit and you have applied to graduate (see [Graduation & Commencement](#)).

Per UMN policy, dissertations must be electronically submitted via ProQuest and will be deposited in the [University Digital Conservancy](#). The deposit agreement is one of the [forms you will complete as part of the submission process](#). If you wish to delay the release of a dissertation to the public for publishing or other purposes, you should submit a Thesis or Dissertation Hold Request as part of this process. A thesis or dissertation can be held for a maximum of four years.

## Degree Progress

As articulated throughout this handbook, there are many steps involved in completing a PhD. This section of the handbook articulates the primary steps involved in each year of the program.

### Degree Requirements

The PhD program has **five** degree requirements:

1. Complete 43 course credits and 24 thesis credits;
2. Have an approved graduate degree plan on file in GPAS;
3. Complete the written and oral preliminary examinations;
4. Complete a dissertation prospectus; and
5. Complete and defend your dissertation.

A general overview of the [degree completion steps](#) is available from GSSP.

### Time to Degree

Students admitted directly to the PhD have five years of funded time to complete the program; students in the MA-to-PhD option have six years of funded time to complete the program. The sections below provide a timeline and standard cadence for timely program completion. Adhering to these timelines ensures you complete your degree within your funded years in the program. Faculty and staff in the Department of Writing Studies are committed to supporting your efforts at maintaining satisfactory progress during your time in the program.

### Example Degree Timeline: Direct-to-PhD

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

#### Year 1

##### **1. Enroll in Introduction to Writing Studies Pedagogies & Practicum courses.**

Enroll in Introduction to Writing Studies Pedagogies & Practicum courses: WRIT 5531 and 5532. These courses are designed to both support students' pedagogical development as writing teachers as well as acclimate them to the curriculum of our First-Year Writing program. If you completed your MA in the RSTC program you will take WRIT 5531 and WRIT 5532 during your first year of the MA program. If you were admitted directly to the RSTC PhD program (and completed your MA at another institution), you will take WRIT 5531 and WRIT 5532 during the first year of your PhD program.

## **2. Register for WRIT 8888 thesis credits.**

Students entering the program should always “top off” their enrollment with WRIT 8888 thesis credits to register for a total of 14 credits per semester. These credits are required and give students credit for the independent research and scholarship developed throughout RSTC coursework.

## **3. 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. You will submit your curriculum worksheet in the spring of your first year. See [Planning & Tracking Your Degree Coursework](#) for more information.

## **4. Start thinking about preliminary exams and the dissertation topic early.**

You are encouraged to strategically plan coursework to align with your planned examination areas and dissertation research goals.

## **5. Develop a 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 PhD 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.

## **6. Develop independent research and begin writing for publication.**

Publishing research and scholarship is a central part of being an academic. If you are pursuing a PhD with the goal of becoming a researcher or academic, we encourage you to conduct independent or collaborative research and publish journal articles during their studies. Your advisor and other faculty are available to support you in shaping and placing your research in relevant academic journals.

## **7. Complete your annual progress report (APR) in the spring.**

Complete your APR through the online workflow. See [Satisfactory Degree Progress and Annual Progress Reporting](#) for more information.

## **Year 2**

### **1. Officially select your Degree Advisor.**

The GPC will send you a form to officially select your Degree Advisor(s). See [Advising](#) for more information.

### **2. Complete your coursework.**

You should take three courses each semester to complete your coursework in spring term. Continue topping off your enrollment with thesis credits (WRIT 8888).

### **3. *Submit your GPAS planner.***

Work with your advisor(s) and the GPC to submit your GPAS in the fall of your second year. See [Planning & Tracking Your Degree Coursework](#) for more information.

### **4. *Start preparing for your preliminary exams.***

Plan your exam window and your committee membership. See [Preliminary Exams](#) for more information on the exam timeline.

### **5. *Complete your APR in the spring.***

Complete your APR through the online workflow. See [Satisfactory Degree Progress and Annual Progress Reportings](#) for more information.

## **Year 3**

### **1. *Complete your thesis credits.***

You are required to take 24 thesis credits. Once you complete your coursework, thesis credits, and the preliminary exams, then you reach [Advanced Doctoral Status](#) and should enroll in [WRIT 8444](#) for all remaining semesters.

### **2. *Complete your preliminary exams.***

We recommend taking your preliminary exams in the first exam window following completing your coursework. You must complete your preliminary exams within three semesters of completing coursework, including the summer term. See [Preliminary Exams](#) for more information on the exam timeline.

### **3. *Complete and present your dissertation prospectus.***

Plan to hold your dissertation prospectus meeting the semester after you complete your preliminary examinations. You must complete your prospectus meeting within a year of completing your preliminary examinations to maintain satisfactory progress. Once completed, submit your signed Dissertation Prospectus Form to the GPC. See [Dissertation Prospectus](#) for more information.

### **4. *Complete your APR in the spring.***

Complete your APR through the online workflow. See [Satisfactory Degree Progress and Annual Progress Reporting](#) for more information.

### **5. *Start preparing for your job search.***

Upon completion of preliminary exams and the dissertation prospectus meeting, you should discuss your plans for a job search — academic, alternative academic, industry, or otherwise — with your advisor(s).

## Years 4 and 5

### **1. Enroll in WRIT 8444 each semester.**

After completing your coursework, 24 thesis credits, and preliminary exams, enroll in WRIT 8444 for the remaining semesters. You must submit the [WRIT 8444 enrollment form](#) each semester.

### **2. Complete your dissertation prospectus if you haven't already done so.**

You must complete your prospectus meeting within one year of completing your preliminary examinations to maintain satisfactory progress. Once completed, submit your signed Dissertation Prospectus Form to the GPC. See [Dissertation Prospectus](#) for more information.

### **3. Submit dissertation chapter drafts and other deliverables to your advisor(s) each semester.**

Work with your advisor(s) and other committee members to routinely share and receive feedback on your dissertation progress. See [The Dissertation and Defense \(Final Oral Exam\)](#) for more information on dissertation deliverables.

### **4. Complete your APR each spring.**

Complete your APR through the online workflow. [Satisfactory Degree Progress and Annual Progress Reportings](#) for more information.

### **5. Prepare for and enter the job market.**

If you are making significant progress on the dissertation and are seeking an academic position, we encourage you to participate in the academic job market in the final two years of your program. Going on the academic job market in the second-to-last year of the program is often referred to as a "soft search" in which candidates apply to a smaller pool of jobs to gain experience on the academic job market. The RSTC program provides developmental support for job search preparation including professional development workshops, panels with alumni, and example materials.

If you are not planning to pursue an academic job, we recommend conducting informational interviews with professionals working in areas of the workforce in which you are interested. You might also consider pursuing a professional internship to help prepare you for the non-academic job market. The application timeline for non-academic positions is typically much shorter than the timeline for academic positions, therefore, it is recommended to wait until you are nearing the final months of your degree to begin applying for non-academic positions.

### **6. Schedule and complete your dissertation defense (i.e., the final exam).**

Work with the GPC to schedule your public defense the semester you will take your final oral examination. Dissertation defense milestones include declaring your final exam committee, releasing the Reviewer's Report Form to your committee members, scheduling

your exam with GSSP, completing the final exam and associated result forms, and formatting and depositing your completed manuscript.

### **7. Apply to graduate.**

You must officially apply to graduate after completing the dissertation. See [Graduation & Commencement](#) for more information.

## **Example Degree Timeline: MA-to-PhD**

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

### **Year 3**

#### **1. Register for WRIT 8888 thesis credits.**

Students entering the program should always “top off” their enrollment with WRIT 8888 thesis credits to register for a total of 14 credits per semester. These credits are required and give students credit for the independent research and scholarship developed throughout RSTC coursework.

#### **2. Officially select your Degree Advisor.**

The GPC will send you a form to officially select your PhD Degree Advisor(s). See [Advising](#) for more information.

#### **3. Work with your advisor(s) and the GPC to plan your remaining coursework and submit your GPAS.**

Your MA coursework will transfer to your PhD degree plan. MA-to-PhD students should finish their coursework this year. Some MA-to-PhD students are able to complete their coursework requirements in the fall term, but students have the option to continue coursework in the spring if necessary to meet goals, such as a PhD minor. The DGS also provides support for this planning process. You will submit your GPAS in the fall of your third year. See [Planning & Tracking Your Degree Coursework](#) for more information.

#### **4. Start preparing for your preliminary exams.**

Plan your exam window and your committee membership. See [Preliminary Exams](#) for more information on the exam timeline.

#### **5. Complete your annual progress report (APR) in the spring.**

Complete your APR through the online workflow. See [Satisfactory Degree Progress and Annual Progress Reporting](#) for more information.

### **Year 4**

#### **6. Complete your thesis credits.**

You are required to take 24 thesis credits. Once you complete your coursework, thesis credits, and the preliminary exams, then you reach [Advanced Doctoral Status](#) and should enroll in [WRIT 8444](#) for all remaining semesters.

### **7. Complete your preliminary exams.**

We recommend taking your preliminary exams in the first exam window following completing your coursework. You must complete your preliminary exams within three semesters of completing coursework, including the summer term. See [Preliminary Exams](#) for more information on the exam timeline.

### **8. Complete and present your dissertation prospectus.**

Plan to hold your dissertation prospectus meeting the semester after you complete your preliminary examinations. You must complete your prospectus meeting within a year of completing your preliminary examinations to maintain satisfactory progress. Once completed, submit your signed Dissertation Prospectus Form to the GPC. See [Dissertation Prospectus](#) for more information.

### **9. Complete your APR in the spring.**

Complete your APR through the online workflow. See [Satisfactory Degree Progress and Annual Progress Reports](#) for more information.

### **10. Start preparing for your job search.**

Upon completion of preliminary exams and the dissertation prospectus meeting, you should discuss your plans for a job search — academic, alternative academic, industry, or otherwise — with your advisor(s).

## **Years 5 and 6**

### **8. Enroll in WRIT 8444 each semester.**

After completing your coursework, 24 thesis credits, and preliminary exams, enroll in WRIT 8444 for the remaining semesters. You must submit the [WRIT 8444 enrollment form](#) each semester.

### **9. Complete your dissertation prospectus if you haven't already done so.**

You must complete your prospectus meeting within a year of completing your preliminary examinations to maintain satisfactory progress. Once completed, submit your signed Dissertation Prospectus Form to the GPC. See [Dissertation Prospectus](#) for more information.

### **10. Submit dissertation chapter drafts and other deliverables to your advisor(s) each semester.**

Work with your advisor(s) and other committee members to routinely share and receive feedback on your dissertation progress. See [The Dissertation and Defense \(Final Oral Exam\)](#) for more information on dissertation deliverables.

### **11. Complete your APR each spring.**

Complete your APR through the online workflow. See [Satisfactory Degree Progress and Annual Progress Reports](#) for more information.

**12. Prepare for and enter the job market.**

If you are making significant progress on the dissertation and are seeking an academic position, we encourage you to participate in the academic job market in the final two years of your program. Going on the academic job market in the second-to-last year of the program is often referred to as a “soft search” in which candidates apply to a smaller pool of jobs to gain experience on the academic job market. The RSTC program provides developmental support for job search preparation including professional development workshops, panels with alumni, and example materials.

If you are not planning to pursue an academic job, we recommend conducting informational interviews with professionals working in areas of the workforce in which you are interested. You might also consider pursuing a professional internship to help prepare you for the non-academic job market. The application timeline for non-academic positions is typically much shorter than the timeline for academic positions, therefore, it is recommended to wait until you are nearing the final months of your degree to begin applying for non-academic positions.

**13. Schedule and complete your dissertation defense (i.e., the final exam).**

Work with the GPC to schedule your public defense the semester you will take your final oral examination. Dissertation defense milestones include declaring your final exam committee, releasing the Reviewer’s Report Form to your committee members, scheduling your exam with GSSP, completing the final exam and associated result forms, and formatting and depositing your completed manuscript.

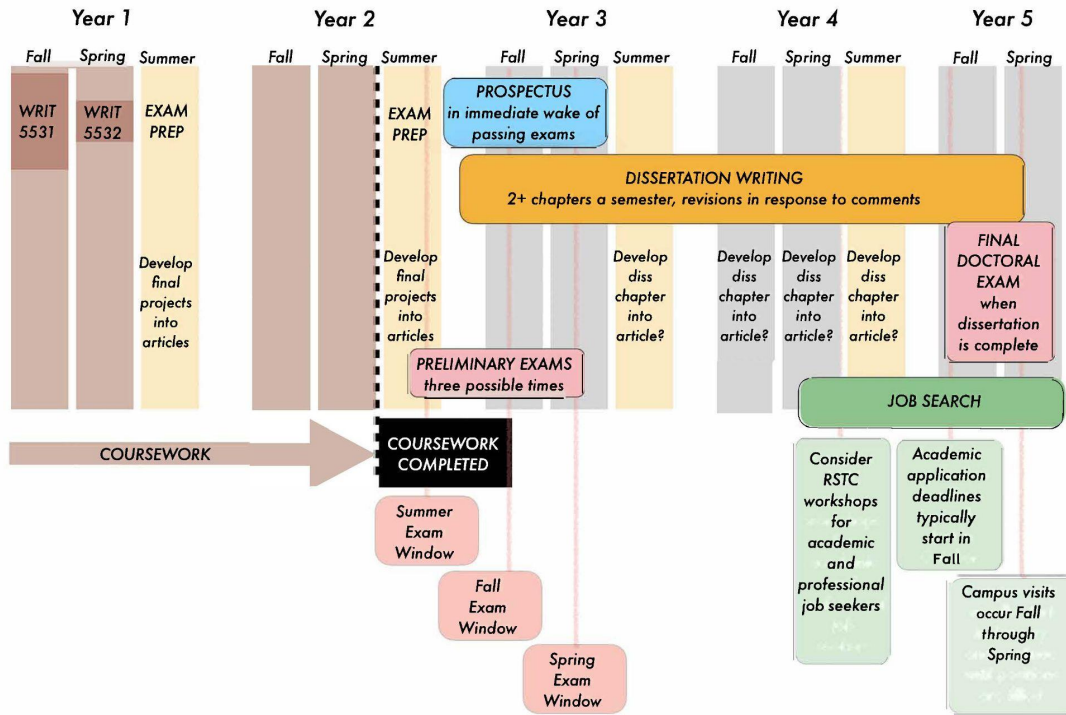
**14. Apply to graduate.**

You must officially apply to graduate after completing the dissertation. See [Graduation & Commencement](#) for more information.

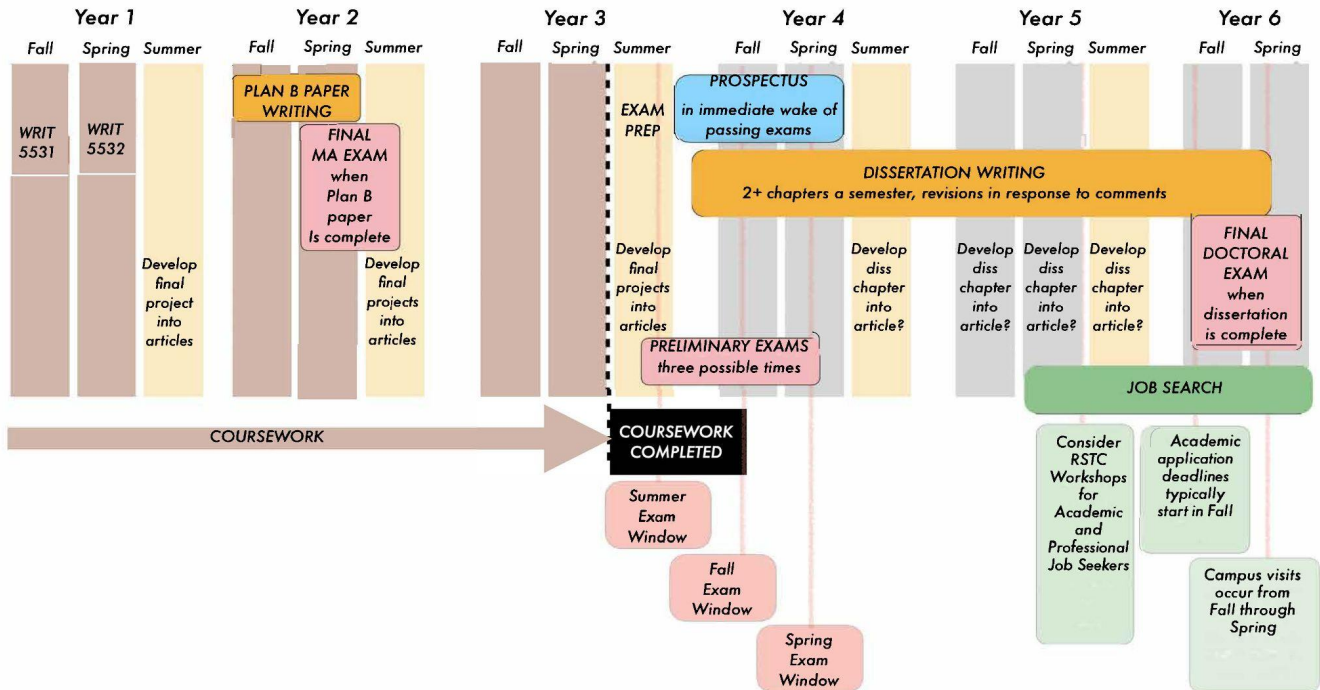
## Sample Five Year and Six Year Plans for the RSTC PhD

The graphics on the next page represent the timeline and cadence articulated above.

### THE RSTC PhD – A FIVE YEAR PLAN



### THE RSTC MA-to-PhD – A SIX YEAR PLAN



## Maintaining Active Status

You will maintain active status in the PhD 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. In RSTC, the standard course credit load includes:

1. registering for at least nine credits of coursework each semester, unless you receive DGS approval to reduce your enrollment to six credits of coursework for a semester; and
2. topping off your coursework enrollment with credits of WRIT 8888 (thesis credits) to bring your total credits each semester to 14 (the flat-rate, full-time graduate tuition cost covers 6-14 credits).

Topping off your enrollment with credits of WRIT 8888 is not intended to supersede your pursuit of your academic plans. The RSTC program supports you in enrolling in more than nine credits of coursework per semester if it is necessary for goals such as pursuing a minor.

The semester after you complete your coursework, complete the balance of your required 24 thesis credits by enrolling in at least six credits of WRIT 8888 to maintain a full-time student status. For example, a PhD student who completed 20 thesis credits during their two years of coursework would still enroll in six credits of WRIT 8888 in their fifth semester to meet the required 24 credits while maintaining full-time student status.

### **WRIT 8444 – Doctoral Full Time Equivalent Status (FTE) with One Credit Registration**

After you complete 24 credits of WRIT 8888 (thesis credits), in addition to completing coursework and the preliminary exams, you become eligible for Advanced Doctoral Status (ADS), and enroll in WRIT 8444. WRIT 8444 is a one-credit registration option for eligible doctoral students who must certify full-time status to be in compliance with the requirements of the University and/or external agencies (e.g., employment as a graduate assistant; loan deferment).

Register for WRIT 8444 every semester after reading ADS and while you hold a teaching assistantship or fellowship by following these steps:

1. Complete and sign the form [Application for Advanced Doctoral Status](#) before enrolling each semester you will be eligible for WRIT 8444.
2. Send the signed form to [writgpc@umn.edu](mailto:writgpc@umn.edu) for assistance with advisor and DGS signatures.
3. Enroll in one credit of WRIT 8444 after you have received a copy of your signed form authorizing your registration.

By completing and signing the Application for Advanced Doctoral Status, you are certifying that you will be engaged in full-time dissertation research and writing. The expectation is that you will continue to make timely degree progress as established in this handbook. If extenuating circumstances will prevent you from pursuing your studies for one or more

semesters, please work with your advisor(s) and the DGS to identify the appropriate enrollment option for your situation.

## **Course Withdrawals and Leaves**

We understand that emergencies and changing life circumstances may require that you take fewer than nine course credits a semester, withdraw from a course, or take a semester (or more) away from courses.

If you need to withdraw from a course after the open enrollment period closes, contact your advisor(s), the DGS, and the GPC before withdrawing from the course. 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.

If you need to take a semester (or more) off from courses, there are options including the GRAD 999 registration status and a leave of absence (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. You cannot hold a graduate assistantship while registered for GRAD 999, nor are you eligible for financial aid. More information about this registration option is available on [One Stop](#). Please speak with your advisor(s), the DGS, and the GPC before registering for GRAD 999. **Writing Studies typically limits GRAD 999 registration to two semesters.**

### ***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:

- Administrative 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 PhD 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 PhD students is generally assessed using the following criteria:

- Timely progress in completing coursework: typically nine course credits per semester, "topping off" enrollment with WRIT 8888 credits, 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 preliminary exams, dissertation prospectus, and dissertation.

Please also refer to the example degree timelines above in addition to the above criteria for satisfactory progress.

### **Annual Progress Report (APR)**

The University requires departments to annually assess all doctoral students' progress. Progress indicators include grades, number of incompletes, and program milestones (e.g., core coursework, written/oral examinations, research design, data collection/analysis, communication of research findings in the dissertation). Personal, professional, pedagogical, and career development are also important indicators of graduate students' progress through their program.

Starting in your first year in the program, you will complete an annual progress report (APR) using GSSP's online system. You will receive an email from the GPC in spring semester followed by an automated message with a link to complete the online APR. In the system, you will upload your CV, describe your activities for the academic year, and identify academic, career, and professional development goals for the next academic year. After you submit your report, your advisor(s), the GPC, and the DGS will review the report and provide comments.

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.

### **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 annual progress reporting has been initiated.

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 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. The advisor 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.
- Not completing preliminary exams and other milestones in a timely manner.

### **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 PhD Students**

- Doctoral 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 PhD. 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.

## Graduation & Commencement

Graduation steps outlined in the [Degree Completion Steps](#) overview for the PhD. To graduate, you must apply to graduate in MyU.

One Stop Student Services provides a [Graduation Checklist for Grad Students](#). Review these steps at least two months before you intend to graduate as some steps must be completed at specific times and in the correct 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 PhD students go on to pursue a position in academia, however, many have also chosen to pursue careers in the non-profit and private sectors. RSTC graduates have found positions at 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.

In their first two years as GIs, PhD students teach primarily in the First-Year Writing (FYW) program. Starting in the third year, PhD students teach other courses for the Technical Writing and Communication (TWC) major. 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 member by evaluating student papers, meeting with students, and other duties. You must obtain permission 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 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. This four-credit course fulfills two Writing Intensive requirements. 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)**

Endowed RSTC fellowships include the James I. Brown Graduate Award in Rhetoric and the Affiliates 21st Century Summer Research Fellowship 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 substantial 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 significant [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 to search.

## 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 2023-24 fiscal year (July 2023-June 2024). 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 2023-24 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

## The 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/Cert subcommittee and the MA/PhD subcommittee. Each of these subcommittees meets independently to discuss program-specific items, however, when agenda items affecting all graduate students arise, the full committee will meet 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 Ph.D. or a Master's that is associated with a Ph.D. 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 PhD students. The department offers financial support to students who travel to a conference to give a paper or appear on a panel. Per policy, travel funding is not typically available for conference attendance only. 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. Please note that for local conferences, the department is only able to cover registration.

## Traveling for Conferences

### Funding

Funding for conference and research travel is offered in the 2023-24 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. 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](mailto:frick169@umn.edu)).

### Reimbursement for Pre-Approved TRPD Expenses

University policy requires that all requests for travel reimbursements must be submitted **within 60 days of the expense date or trip return date** or you will not be reimbursed. In order to allow time for processing, submit your request to the department within 30 days of return from travel. 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 <a href="#">Annual Progress Report (APR)</a> .
CEI	Center for Educational Innovation	Offers some of the training you will receive as a Graduate Instructor for First-Year Writing (FYW).
CLA	<a href="#">College of Liberal Arts</a>	The Department of Writing Studies is in CLA. CLA is one of several colleges at the UMN.
COGS	<a href="#">Council of Graduate Students</a>	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 <a href="#">Student Services Fee</a> 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.

Acronym	Full Name	Description
DRC	<a href="#">Disability Resource Center</a>	Works in partnership with students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University to eliminate or minimize barriers and facilitate inclusion on campus.
FYW	<a href="#">First-Year Writing</a>	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	<a href="#">Graduate Planning and Audit System</a>	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	<a href="#">Graduate Student Services and Progress</a>	The division of One Stop Student Services for graduate students. See <a href="#">Graduate Student Online Resources</a> below for details.
OIT	<a href="#">Office of Information Technology</a>	The University's central information technology unit.
ORGP	<a href="#">Office of Research and Graduate Programs</a>	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 within the Writing Studies Intranet, 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

- the RSTC Graduate Student Calendar with events, opportunities, and deadlines;
- 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 after graduation. See [Account End of Life Policies](#).