WRTC Graduate Capstone Guidelines

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Faculty Adviser Role

The faculty adviser plays a critical role in facilitating the professional development of the student. Offering guidance and support, the adviser becomes a role model and identifies appropriate academic development opportunities while also providing individualized advice regarding career development and guidance.

Faculty advisers, thus, serve as mentors; they model good citizenship in all areas of academic life including scholarship, teaching and service. The adviser also facilitates all communication between the student and committee members. However, the student is ultimately responsible for maintaining regular communication with advisers and program administration, completing all academic and administrative paperwork in a timely manner, and developing an appropriate schedule for completion of the program.

Advisory Committee Makeup

The student forms the advisory committee in consultation with her or his faculty adviser after a thesis topic or internship area has been identified. The Advisory Committee shall serve as the student’s Thesis/Internship Committee and Comprehensive Assessment Committee.

The student’s adviser serves as chair of the advisory committee. For the thesis, at least two additional faculty members with graduate teaching privileges are required to complete the advisory committee; one of these faculty members must be in the school of WRTC. For the internship, at least one additional member should be a faculty member. WRTC recommends that the second additional member be from an industry related to the internship. Advisory committee members should have the background and interest necessary to counsel, direct, and evaluate the specific student capstone project undertaken. Faculty members from other disciplines may serve on WRTC Thesis Advisory Committees provided that they have graduate instructor status. Participation as an advisory committee member is voluntary on the part of the faculty member.

Plan of Study Development

Each student must complete a written graduate plan of study and submit it the Director of Graduate Studies by the end of the first year in the program. Together, the faculty adviser and the student develop the plan of study, describing coursework the student intends to complete. The plan of study is designed to insure that the student will complete the appropriate coursework to provide knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for successful completion of the intended capstone project.

Thesis/Internship and Comprehensive Assessment

The thesis or internship serves as the WRTC graduate capstone experience. Thus, a successful thesis/internship project requires students to apply the skills and knowledge acquired from previous experiences in WRTC in a clear, focused and rigorous independent project.

In order to complete the capstone project successfully, each student should meet with his or her adviser to create a timeline for the project. This timeline should specify when the student will complete relevant tasks and submit written drafts of required documents to the adviser, as well as when the adviser will provide feedback on completed/submitted work. It is the student’s responsibility to complete tasks and create high quality drafts of written documents in a timely fashion. It is crucial that the student meets the specified deadlines; if a student deviates from the timeline, the student cannot expect the adviser to adjust his/her schedule.

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1 If the student uses an individual from industry as a committee member, the individual may not also serve as the client.
2 For those students with an assistantship, the TGS will pay tuition for 6 hours of thesis/internship. If students drop WRTC 700/701 after registering for it, they may have to assume responsibility for tuition payment upon subsequent registration. Students may not enroll in more than 6 credit hours of WRTC 700/701. If the student does not complete the capstone within this time, the student must continue to enroll in WRTC 699 until the student’s capstone committee approves the capstone.
Thesis Proposal

Early in the third semester (mid-September) is the target date for completing the Thesis Proposal. However, each student should consult with his or her adviser to determine (a) whether individual circumstances suggest that a later submission date is appropriate and (b) the extent to which later approval could impact completion of the capstone and the student’s anticipated graduation date.

The Thesis Proposal provides evidence that the student is prepared to undertake and complete the thesis. A successful Thesis Proposal accomplishes the following:

- demonstrates a need and purpose for exploring and writing about a relevant issue in the subfields of writing, rhetoric, and technical communication;
- responds to a gap in disciplinary knowledge by citing relevant scholarship in writing, rhetoric, and technical communication and from other fields, if appropriate;
- engages source material that enlightens the student’s own ideas;
- shows a mastery of writing skill and rhetorical strategy appropriate to the subject matter, chosen modality (scholarly article, traditional thesis, multimodal presentation, etc.) and rhetorical situation.

The student writes the proposal under the supervision of the adviser. The expectation is that the thesis proposal will result from an iterative process where, in order to develop a high quality document, the adviser provides feedback on drafts of the proposal. The proposal should be prepared according to a professional style agreed upon by the student and chair. It should specify clearly what the student proposes to do for the thesis project, as well as a timeline for completion, so that the student and the committee can discuss the details and arrive at definite decisions about the feasibility and quality of the proposed research.

A thesis proposal will at minimum include:

- an Introduction that reviews relevant literature and presents the rationale for the proposed research question(s);
- a Method(s) section that describes the proposed subjects/participants, apparatus and/or materials, and procedures and;
- a Data Analysis and Interpretation section that describes how the data will be analyzed and interpreted in light of the literature reviewed and proposed research question(s).

Individual adviser(s) may have additional requirements.

Once the adviser provides approval to do so, the student distributes the completed proposal to all committee members for review and schedules a thesis proposal defense meeting (typically lasting 1 hour) not less than two weeks after the proposal is distributed to members of the committee. The student should not make changes to the proposal after distributing it to the committee.

Members of the committee read the thesis proposal prior to attending the proposal meeting. During the thesis proposal meeting, the student makes a brief presentation during which he or she should: demonstrate foundational knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to the project; interact professionally with the audience; and competently field questions about the project and the written document. Once the student has answered all questions, he or she leaves the room while members of the committee discuss the document and the student’s presentation, and decide whether they approve the proposal, approve the proposal with specified revisions discussed in the meeting, or reject the proposal.

In all cases, the committee will provide the student formative feedback regarding the quality of the written document and oral presentation to aid the student in preparing the thesis and completing the thesis oral defense, which serves as the program’s comprehensive assessment. If the committee rejects the proposal, they will make specific recommendations for remediation and the student may be required to make substantial changes to the document, schedule another proposal meeting, or both in order for the committee to approve the thesis proposal.
Thesis and Comprehensive Assessment

Once the data are collected, the student analyzes the data and writes the thesis under the supervision of the adviser. As with the proposal, several drafts of the thesis are usually required. The expectation is that the thesis will result from an iterative process where, in order to develop a high quality document, the adviser provides feedback on drafts of the thesis.

There are two forms the thesis project may take; this will be decided upon by the time of the proposal. The thesis may be a traditional thesis incorporating research on a specific topic. Alternatively, the thesis may conform to a publication model. This model may contain a variety of items—for example, two journal length articles, a conference presentation, and a reflective statement—agreed upon ahead of time by the student and adviser.

Once the adviser provides approval to do so, the student distributes the complete thesis to all committee members for review. A thesis defense meeting (typically lasting 1-1½ hours), which serves as the program’s Comprehensive Assessment, is scheduled not less than two weeks after the student distributes the thesis. The student must not edit the thesis after distributing it to the committee.

Members of the committee read the thesis prior to attending the thesis defense meeting. During the meeting, the student makes a brief presentation during which he or she should: demonstrate foundational knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to the project; interact professionally with the audience; and competently field questions about the project and the written document. Once the student has answered all questions, the committee will ask the student to leave the room while the members of the committee (a) discuss the thesis and the student’s presentation, (b) complete the Comprehensive Assessment Scoring Rubric, and (c) decide whether to approve the thesis as written (rare), approve the thesis with specified revisions discussed during the meeting (common), or reject the thesis. After the defense meeting is over, the chair of the thesis committee should submit the completed Scoring Rubrics from the committee members and a completed Comprehensive Assessment Results form to the Director of Graduate Studies.

If the committee rejects the thesis, they will make specific recommendations for remediation and the student will need to make changes to the document until it is acceptable. Once the committee approves the thesis, the committee members should complete new Comprehensive Assessment Scoring Rubrics and the chair of the thesis committee should submit these Rubrics to the Director of Graduate Studies.

In the event a student fails the comprehensive assessment, the student may request a re-assessment. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, the re-assessment must occur within six months of the date of failure. Only one re-assessment will be allowed. Cases involving extenuating circumstances must be raised or supported by the graduate program faculty and presented in writing to the dean of TGS for approval. Members of the committee must complete new Comprehensive Assessment Scoring Rubrics based on the student’s performance during the re-assessment and the chair of the internship committee should submit these Scoring Rubrics and a new completed Comprehensive Assessment Results form to the Director of Graduate Studies. If a student fails the second comprehensive assessment, his or her participation in the graduate program will be terminated.
Internship Proposal

Early in the third semester (late-September) is the target date for completing the Internship Proposal. However, each student should consult with his or her adviser to determine (a) whether individual circumstances suggest that a later submission date is appropriate and (b) the extent to which later approval could impact completion of the capstone and the student’s anticipated graduation date.

The Internship Proposal provides evidence that the student is prepared to identify, obtain and complete an internship relevant to the student’s future goals. A successful proposal accomplishes the following:

- provides a clear rationale for choosing the field the student wishes to complete the internship in;
- identifies appropriate organizations to serve as potential clients for the internship;
- proposes internship outcomes that logically follow from working in the proposed field;
- includes documents that show a mastery of writing skill and rhetorical strategy appropriate to the subject matter, chosen modality (textual, visual, digital or multimodal) and rhetorical situation.

The student develops the proposal under the supervision of the adviser. The expectation is that the proposal will result from an iterative process where, in order to develop a high quality document, the adviser provides feedback on drafts of the proposal. The proposal should be prepared according to a professional style agreed upon by the student and adviser. It should specify clearly what the student proposes to do for the internship project, as well as a timeline for completion, so that the student and the committee can discuss the details and arrive at definite decisions about the feasibility and quality of the proposed internship.

An internship proposal will include at minimum:

- an introduction that presents the rationale for the proposed field the student wishes to work in;
- a job market analysis that emphasizes potential jobs;
- examples of relevant assignments the student has completed in courses;
- a review of the work the student has already completed in the program with a discussion of a few key texts that have guided them;
- and proposed outcomes from completing the internship.

Individual advisers may have additional requirements.

Once the adviser provides approval to do so, the student distributes the completed proposal to all committee members for review and schedules an internship proposal defense meeting (typically lasting 1 hour) not less than two weeks after the proposal is distributed to members of the committee. The student should not make changes to the proposal after distributing it to the committee.

Members of the committee read the internship proposal prior to attending the proposal meeting. During the internship proposal meeting, the student makes a brief presentation during which he or she should: demonstrate foundational knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to the internship; interact professionally with the audience; and competently field questions about the internship and the written document. Once the student has answered all questions, he or she leaves the room while members of the committee discuss the proposal and the student’s presentation, and decide whether they approve the proposal, approve the proposal with specified revisions discussed in the meeting, or reject the proposal.

In all cases, the committee will provide the student formative feedback regarding the quality of the written document and oral presentation to aid the student in preparing the Internship Portfolio and completing the internship oral defense, which serves as the program’s comprehensive assessment. If the committee rejects the proposal, they will make specific recommendations for remediation and the student may be required to make substantial changes to the document, schedule another proposal meeting, or both in order for the committee to approve the internship proposal.

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3 If the student holds an assistantship (GA), then the GA provider and internship client must be discrete entities. Additionally, if the student is employed fulltime, then the employee’s workplace and internship client must be discrete entities.
Internship Portfolio and Comprehensive Assessment

As the internship nears completion, the student reflects on the internship experience and creates the portfolio under the supervision of the adviser. As with the proposal, several drafts of the internship portfolio are usually required. The expectation is that the portfolio will result from an iterative process where, in order to develop a high quality document, the adviser provides feedback on drafts of the portfolio.

The portfolio may include:

- key literature review;
- ethnographic observations;
- professional correspondence;
- drafts of work completed during the internship;
- reflective report;
- and job calls specific to the student’s interests and goals

The student and adviser will determine the required contents of the portfolio during the internship.

Once the adviser provides approval to do so, the student distributes the complete internship portfolio to all committee members for review. A portfolio defense meeting (typically lasting 1 hour), which serves as the program’s Comprehensive Assessment, is scheduled not less than two weeks after the student distributes the portfolio. The student must not edit the internship portfolio after distributing it to the committee.

Members of the committee read the portfolio prior to attending the portfolio defense meeting. During the meeting, the student makes a brief presentation during which he or she should: demonstrate foundational knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to the internship; interact professionally with the audience; and competently field questions about the internship and the portfolio. Once the student has answered all questions, the committee will ask the student to leave the room while the members of the committee (a) discuss the document and the student’s presentation, (b) complete the Comprehensive Assessment Scoring Rubrics, and (c) decide whether to approve the portfolio, approve the portfolio with specified revisions discussed during the meeting, or require substantial revisions to the portfolio. After the defense meeting is over, the chair of the internship committee should submit the completed Comprehensive Assessment Scoring Rubric from the committee members and a completed Comprehensive Assessment Results form to the Director of Graduate Studies.

If the committee requires substantial revisions to the portfolio, they will make specific recommendations for remediation and the student will need to make changes to the document until it is acceptable. Once the committee approves the portfolio, the committee members should complete new Comprehensive Assessment Scoring Rubrics and the chair of the internship committee should submit these Rubrics to the Director of Graduate Studies.

In the event a student fails the comprehensive assessment, the student may request a re-assessment. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, the re-assessment must occur within six months of the date of failure. Only one re-assessment will be allowed. Cases involving extenuating circumstances must be raised or supported by the graduate program faculty and presented in writing to the dean of TGS for approval. Members of the committee must complete new Comprehensive Assessment Scoring Rubrics based on the student’s performance during the re-assessment and the chair of the internship committee should submit these Scoring Rubrics and a new completed Comprehensive Assessment Results form to the Director of Graduate Studies. If a student fails the second comprehensive assessment, his or her participation in the graduate program will be terminated.