

# HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

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## Nido R. Qubein School of Communication

MASTER OF ARTS IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

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## COMPREHENSIVE EXAM GUIDE\*

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

\*Last updated 1/17/20

## COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

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

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

The steps to the comprehensive exam are:

- 1) Take one additional strategic communication-related elective course (for a total of 33 hours of course work plus one-credit for practicum and one-credit for comprehensive exam).
- 2) Register for the comprehensive exam (COM 5990) in either your last or second-to-last semester of study.
- 3) A committee of three NQSC graduate faculty write a case study. Students will have **72-hours** to design a campaign that addresses the case, including the creation of a "proof of concept" media piece(s). The exam scenario will be provided at noon on the Friday before spring/fall break and due the following Monday at noon. Late exams will not be accepted.
- 4) In the weeks following the initial exam, students will prepare for the oral defense presentation and will create a final version(s) of the media piece(s) they outlined in their initial campaign plan.
- 5) Approximately three weeks after the initial exam weekend, students will complete the oral portion of the exam, which is a 1-2 hour defense of the campaign plan and materials developed. The student meets with the committee, who ask clarification and extension questions.

## **GOALS**

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

## **PROCEDURES**

Each semester the graduate director appoints a three-person comprehensive exam committee comprised of the graduate director and two additional graduate faculty from the School of Communication. This committee will write the examination scenario and evaluate the student's performance. Exam scenarios are different for each student but standardized in their general format.

### ***Before The Exam***

In the early semesters of their program, students should complete, with the help of the graduate director, a program of study that will go in their file. This plan will help students determine whether the exam option best meets their needs and will identify the appropriate course work to be taken.

Typically, by either February 1st or September 1st of the semester in which the exam will be taken, the student must submit to the chair of the comprehensive exam committee a 1-2 page statement that identifies the student's specific area(s) of expertise and professional interest, as well as a brief explanation of how the student's course work and the comprehensive exam option support the student's career goals. The exam committee will factor this information into the student's exam case scenario.

### ***The Exam***

Comprehensive exam involves:

- a) a written component (written during the 72 hour exam period),
- b) a production component (proof of concept piece developed during the 72 hour exam period and a professional quality piece)

completed before the oral defense), and

- c) an oral component (1-2 hour defense of the written portion), covering methods, theory, production, and general questions from the student's concentration area.

All materials are typed and professionally presented.

The comprehensive exam will be administered over spring or fall break. The student must take the exam on the scheduled day/s or wait until the next semester. The student can check out equipment from the School of Communication. If the student anticipates needing equipment over the 72 hour exam period, he/she should make arrangements for this prior to the start of the exam period.

The required components of the campaign include the following:

*(NOTE - The page numbers are simply a general guide to minimum expectations. Exceeding the page numbers is fine. However, if a section is less than the listed page number, the student should reread to ensure that all components are fully addressed)*

- (a) An analysis of the situation (1 page)

Identify the key issues you must address and why you think they are the key issues. Provide evidence of why these issues are important.

- (b) An analysis of target audience/s (2 pages)

Identify each audience for the campaign and explain why they are the appropriate audience/s. You must provide evidence of your research into this audience.

- (c) An overview of the campaign plan (3-5 pages)

What do you want to address in the situation and why? What do you plan to do and why? What do you hope the outcome will be and why?

- (d) A timeline of activities and events (1 page)

Be specific about what will happen when.

- (e) A theoretical framework that informs the message development for the campaign (2-3 pages)

Overview the theory (including citations), justify why it's a useful theory, and explain how it informs your campaign

- (f) A budget worksheet and justification (1-3 pages).

For this, you need to identify costs, explain why they are necessary/important, and provide evidence of the actual cost. For example, if you suggest radio spots, you need to

show proof of how much a radio spot costs in the market on the channel and at the times of your selection.

(g) An evaluation plan for the campaign (2-3 pages)

You need to explain how you will evaluate the effectiveness of your campaign. You need to (a) overview the plan, including steps and timeline, (b) include specific data collection instruments (e.g., survey questions, focus group questions, social media metrics), and overview the analysis plan.

(h) The production of a “proof of concept” media piece and plan for additional media

Show us a rough draft of your media plan. This doesn't have to be professional quality. Instead, show us the basic concept that you will be completing in the weeks that follow (see below). This could take the form of showboards, scripts, storyboards, demo photos/videos/audio, etc.

(i) The completion of a professional quality production piece (completed before the oral exam and presented to the committee). Students must have at least 10 credits of production material. The following table is a guideline for the committee's expectations for the scope of the production materials.\*

Type of Media	Credits*
Flier/event advertisement	1-2
Poster with stock images	1-2
Poster with original images	2-4
Brochure/Pamphlet with stock images	2-3
Brochure/Pamphlet with original images	3-5
Infographic	2-6
Radio PSA	4-8
Video	5-10
Other (e.g., apps, interactive elements, websites, photo installations, etc.)	Negotiable (discuss w/ committee)

\*NOTE – These credit values provide a rough guide of the range of possible points per media type. Individual credits will vary depending on the scope and technical challenge of each student's approach.

(k) The presentation/"pitch"

Your 10-12 minute “pitch” should be engaging and professional.

You will need to “sell” your plan to the committee and be prepared to answer questions. You must show your media during the pitch.

The oral part of the exam will be conducted within two weeks of the written exam. The oral portion of the exam is not open to friends and family. The oral defense should be scheduled within two days of submitting the final exam materials.

### ***Evaluation and Outcomes of the Exam***

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

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

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

### ***Additional Information***

1. You need to be enrolled for at least one unit the semester you take comps (this can be the credit for the comprehensive exam). You also need to complete your intent to graduate form in the semester you are taking comps, if you have not done so the semester before.
2. If no one on the exam committee represents the student's specialty, a fourth person can be added or substituted. Another option is that the committee will simply consult with a faculty member in that specialty before the oral defense.
3. What the faculty is looking for in a comprehensive exam response:
  - A. Ability to be a scholar—to organize, categorize, synthesize information, to make claims and defend them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY'S MASTER'S DEGREE IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION  
COMPREHENSIVE EXAM EVALUATION

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STUDENT NAME:

**COMMITTEE EVALUATION OF FINAL PROJECT\*:**

<b>Situation Analysis</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Audience Analysis</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Campaign Plan</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Timeline</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Theory Framework</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Budget Justification</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Evaluation Plan</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Media Piece</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Writing</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Proposal Design</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Presentation</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Question/Answer</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>

\*For the final determination of "pass/fail," projects must at least meet expectations in 10 of the 11 criteria; one "partially meets" is allowed. No "does not meet" is allowed. Components that do not meet expectations must be revised, reviewed, and approved as meets expectations prior to submitting the final evaluation form to the Norcross Graduate School.

**COMMITTEE DECISION:**

- Project accepted
- Project requires revision of one component. Decision deferred.
- Project not accepted

Committee Member  
Name & Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member  
Name & Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member  
Name & Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

