

A Guide to the Advancement to Candidacy Form

ICR students are expected to formulate their own programs of study and to submit them to the Program Evaluation Committee for approval. The committee meets once every semester. Optimally, students will make their initial submission in their second or third semester in the program—that is, when roughly half their coursework is completed or in progress. This will allow the committee’s input to shape the remainder of the student’s program.

ICR’s program emphasizes maximum flexibility. The Program Evaluation process is the only point at which the department scrutinizes the student’s own choices. The committee, in keeping with the interdisciplinary commitments of ICR, usually confines its judgment to basic requirements, although it will sometimes offer additional advice. In this regard, the committee may supplement the guidance of the student’s chosen adviser, who will bear the primary responsibility for seeing that the student makes wise choices.

The purpose of this document is to explain the standards and philosophy behind the program evaluation process. It can be used as a guide to filling out the standard program submission form. Roman numerals correspond to sections on the Application for Advancement to Candidacy Form.

Note: this form should be filled out in collaboration with student adviser. It requires the adviser’s signature. If student has yet to select an adviser, the DGS can provide consultation and signature.

I: Self-explanatory.

II: Self-explanatory.

III: Dissertation topic.

The form asks the student to briefly describe a dissertation topic. It is not expected that the topic be fully developed--it will reach that stage only when the student formally proposes the dissertation during the prelim exams. The committee needs to know, however, what area the student will study and what approaches the student intends to use. One of the committee’s tasks is to certify that the student will have taken the appropriate courses to enable the completion of the dissertation. For instance, should the student propose a dissertation that involves legal research, the committee will expect the student to have taken or proposed courses in the appropriate areas of the law. If a student proposes a dissertation that involves ethnographic research, likewise, the committee will expect to see appropriate methodological courses. It is not the committee’s task to judge whether the dissertation topic is interesting or unwise--only that the student has constructed a program that will allow one to complete it.

IV: Personal statement.

Useful as background information, this statement simply explains how you’ve arrived at your interest in communications and media research. As with any statement of this nature, it is best to be practical and concise. It is not required that one bare one’s soul.

V: Proposed program of study.

Section V is the heart of the proposal. It includes expectations and requirements that students might find mysterious. The most frequently marveled at mysteries are:

Major and Minor areas.

There is no defined list of available major and minor areas. It is up to the student to define one's own major and minor. The major will usually be broadly defined--Media and Culture, for instance, or Political Economy. The minor might be more focused--The Press in Latin America, or Advertising Research Methods--or it might be extremely broad, a catch-all category for otherwise disparate courses. The committee will accept any serious major or minor, as long as the student has adequately explained it.

The committee may ask the student to alter the major or minor, or to shuffle courses around to make them more coherent. The committee may also ask the student to change the proposed list of courses--for instance, it sometimes happens that a student will not have optimally exploited the resources of the university in a particular area. Often this input will come in the form of a non-mandatory suggestion. In such cases, the committee customarily defers to the judgment of the student and one's adviser. The cover of the form notes that changes in the proposed list of courses must be reported to the committee. The committee is aware that listed courses are not always offered in a timely fashion, and that the courses listed as "proposed" (as opposed to completed or in progress) will sometimes not be available.

Research methods.

ICR requires that students take at least one quantitative and one qualitative research methods courses. Students are expected to acquire a research capability in the tradition they have chosen. For the other research tradition, a rough familiarity will suffice. Qualitative scholars should be able to read studies that employ a quantitative methodology, and should be able to tell whether that work is sound or intelligent. ICR offers a broad overview course in each tradition. Often students will take the ICR overview in the research tradition that they have chosen NOT to pursue, and will take more in-depth courses in their chosen research tradition. Historically, the committee has been broad-minded in its acceptance of methods courses.

A special area of concern is language. The committee asks the student to explain whether the student's research interests require familiarity with a foreign language. Obviously, someone proposing an ethnographic project in Venezuela should have fluent knowledge of Spanish and or of the appropriate indigenous languages. Because most students propose research that requires no language skills other than English, the department does not have a language requirement per se.

Overview courses.

ICR strongly recommends that a student take at least two broadly defined courses. The form describes these as overview courses. There are three rationales behind this requirement. First is the simple need for some breadth in a doctoral program. The requirement is meant to protect a student from the temptation to take courses in only a specialization that reasonable scholars might find narrow. Second is the pragmatic need for the student to have potential teaching areas when entering the job market. Third, and most

nebulous, is a sense that the student have a broad familiarity with the contours of the field the student will work in. For most students, this field will be Communications and Media. As with every other requirement, the committee will make judgments with the particular needs of the student in mind.

A non-exclusive list of overview courses is available. Other courses are also acceptable as fulfilling this requirement. As a general rule of thumb, students can expect that the broadest course that any particular ICR faculty member offers will be considered an overview course. Specialized courses that ICR faculty and others offer will be more questionable. There is no rule of thumb about courses offered by other departments.