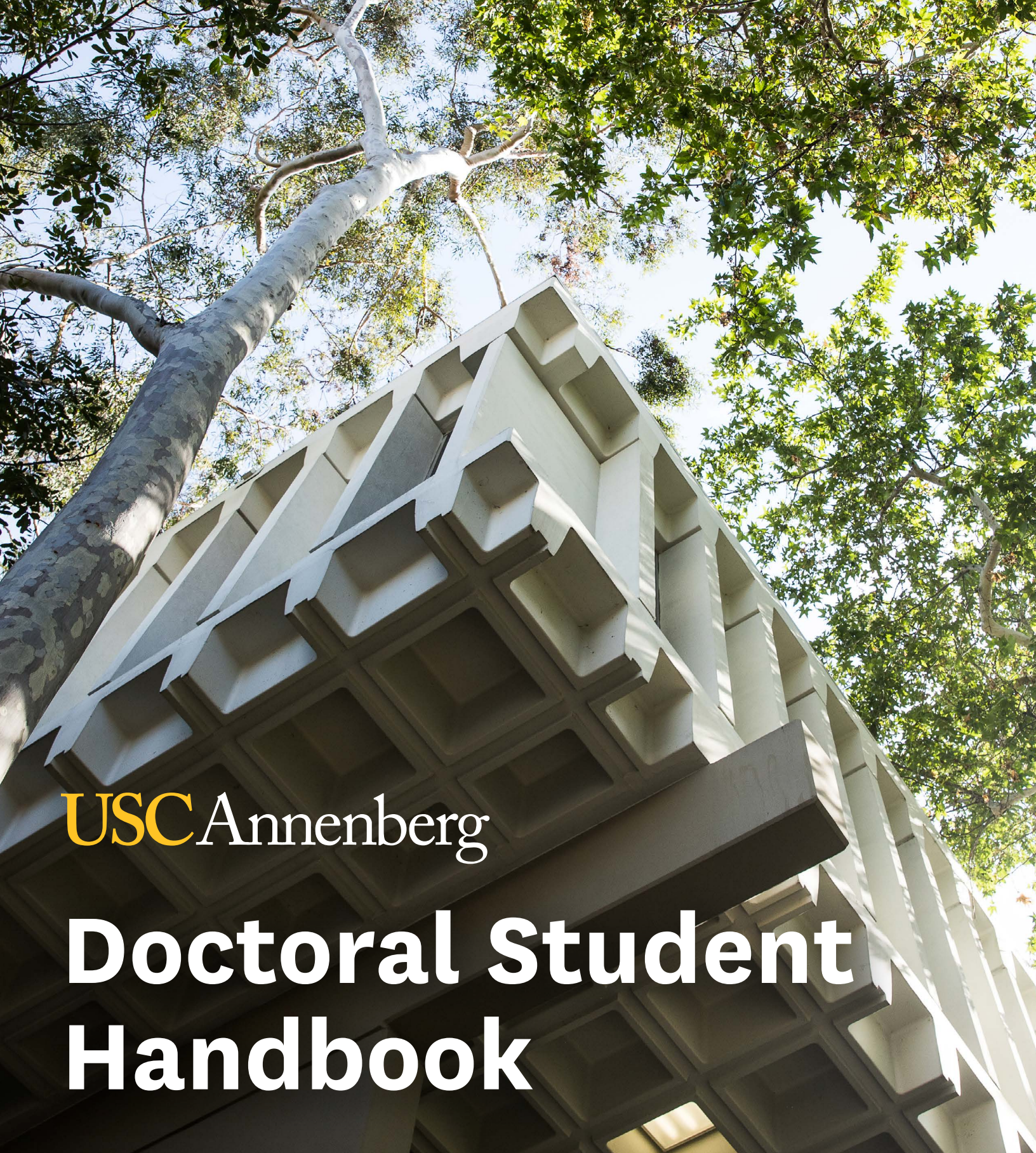


A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of a modern building with a white, grid-like facade. A large tree with green leaves is on the left, and another tree is on the right. The sky is visible through the branches.

USC Annenberg

Doctoral Student Handbook

2025–2026



USC University of
Southern California

USC PhD Program Handbook 2025-2026

Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism

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The 2025-2026 Annenberg Doctoral Student Handbook supersedes previous Doctoral Student Handbooks. A student's curricular requirements are linked to the Handbook in use at the time of acceptance to the program. Any student may elect to adopt program requirements detailed in later versions where indicated. Students may use either the requirements from their entry year or from a later year, but they cannot combine the two.

I. Introduction

Introduction to the Annenberg School

Welcome to the Annenberg School of Communication!

The Annenberg School at USC was created in 1971 by an endowment from Walter H. Annenberg and continues a long tradition of communication study at USC. In 1880, the year it was founded, the University offered a course in elocution. A College of Oratory was established in 1895 and became the School of Speech in 1921. Its first master's degree was awarded in 1924. The first doctoral degree in speech was conferred in 1935. The School, eventually placed within the USC College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, became known as the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences.

The present configuration came together between 1994 and 1996 when the Annenberg School merged with the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences to become the new School of Communication. The School of Communication, together with the School of Journalism, constitutes the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism.

The Annenberg doctoral program has evolved to combine and sustain USC's excellence in inquiry, research, teaching, and scholarship in the field of communication.

Introduction to the Graduate School

The mission of the USC Graduate School is to provide a distinguished educational experience at the graduate level for an outstanding and diverse student body, to support and celebrate graduate student achievements, and to lead in establishing and communicating policies, standards, and processes related to graduate education.

Purposes of the PhD Program Handbook

Graduate student success is the result of a collaborative effort among students working at their highest levels, faculty dedicated to high-quality mentorship, and staff who coordinate and advise. One of the most important ingredients in this cooperative effort is a shared understanding about what is required and what resources and support systems are available.

This document serves as a roadmap for PhD students. It offers a review of expectations for students and for the faculty and administrative staff who support them. The handbook provides three types of information: 1) guidance on program requirements, including university and departmental policies, resources, and expectations; 2) practical advice for common challenges at USC; and 3) information about relevant support services and professional development opportunities.

We hope that the handbook serves as a valuable resource for PhD success, providing students with the information to complete their programs while maintaining academic momentum and personal well-being.

The handbook includes policies and practices noted in the university's catalogue, collective bargaining agreement, and other sources. It does not fully address the terms of the collective bargaining agreement, which is available for your reference [on the Graduate School's website](#).

The PhD at USC

The Doctor of Philosophy at USC is a full-time, in-person program. It is a rigorous course of study that requires original research, professional maturity, sustained intellectual focus, and academic discipline. Students are expected to devote full-time study to this degree and not undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year, from the end of August through mid-May.

The PhD in Communication does not require students to take summer courses, though some students may choose to enroll in one or two courses, particularly directed research, or independent study.

II. Curriculum and Program Milestones

Program Curriculum Overview

The Annenberg School's MA and PhD degrees are awarded under the jurisdiction of the USC Graduate School.

PhD in Communication

The student is required to complete a minimum of 68 units of graduate coursework (normally 17 courses) plus a minimum of 4 units of required dissertation registrations (COMM 794a and COMM 794b at 2 units each), totaling 72 units. Six specific courses (COMM 525, 526, 550, 552 plus a minimum of two dissertation writing courses, COMM 794a and b) are required of all students. Additionally, students must pass the qualifying examination, write an approved dissertation prospectus, and write and defend a dissertation.

PhD Course Requirements

The Core Curriculum (16 units)

The core curriculum consists of four seminars required of all first-year doctoral students, two in theories and two in methods:

- COMM 525 Humanistic and Social Scientific Approaches to Human Communication I
- COMM 526 Humanistic and Social Scientific Approaches to Human Communication II
- COMM 550 Quantitative Research Methods in Communication
- COMM 552 Qualitative Research Methods in Communication

Satisfactory completion of the core curriculum during the first year is necessary to be successfully screened and permitted to continue in the program.

Primary Area of Concentration (12 units)

Students specialize in one of seven [concentrations](#) by completing a minimum of three courses (12 units) in one of the following areas:

- Groups, Organizations & Networks
- Health Communication & Social Dynamics
- Information, Political Economy & Entertainment
- Media, Culture & Community
- New Media & Technology
- Political Economy of Global Communication
- Rhetoric, Politics & Publics

Minor Area of Concentration (8 units)

Students must minor in a second concentration by completing a minimum of two courses (8 units) in one of the seven concentrations above.

Cognate Area (8 units)

Students must take a minimum of 8 units of cognate courses in a related field at USC outside the Annenberg School such as American Studies, Psychology, Political Science, Cinema, Computer Science, etc.

Elective Courses (24 units)

These units may be taken inside the School of Communication or in related fields in other departments at USC. A maximum of 12 credits from previous graduate work may be applied to the degree with approval from the program director.

Dissertation (4 units minimum)

Students must enroll in at least two semesters of COMM 794 after passing the qualifying exam.

A full list of current COMM courses can be found in the [USC Catalogue](#).

MA in Communication

This option may only be selected if a doctoral student wishes to leave the doctoral program with an MA degree prior to the qualifying exam, rather than continuing in the program toward a PhD.

Permission to take an MA degree with thesis or comprehensive exam can be obtained only by application to both the student's advisor and to the Director of the Doctoral Program.

Individuals seeking the Master of Arts (MA) in Communication are expected to acquire and demonstrate a general knowledge of human communication, including humanistic and social scientific approaches.

The program, arranged in consultation with the student's advisor and the Director of the Doctoral Program, provides two options: a degree with comprehensive examination or degree with thesis.

- A degree with a comprehensive exam requires a minimum of 32 units (normally 8 courses), including core courses COMM 525, 526, 550, and 552, and four electives.
- A degree with thesis requires successful completion of the four core courses listed above, three electives, and four units of COMM 594ab Master's Thesis.

No more than two approved 400-level courses may be applied to a student's MA program and a maximum of four semester units with grades B or better may be accepted to transfer from another institution of higher learning. The minimum acceptable GPA for successful completion of the MA is 3.0.

Most students who opt to graduate with an MA-only choose the comprehensive exam option:

- A student's MA committee must be comprised of a minimum of three faculty members from the School of Communication.
- Two committee members write questions; the third serves as reader.
- The student is expected to write on two days for a total of six hours (three hours each day). This is a closed book exam. The two committee members writing questions provide them to the PhD Academic Advisor, who will send them to the student on their first day of writing.
- The student may start writing on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday.
- Each response should be approximately five pages long/around 1,600-1,700 words.
- The two written responses are read by the three committee members, who then confer to determine if the student has passed.
- The student does not have to do an oral defense of the MA exam.

If a student chooses this path and has their MA degree conferred in spring, they will be ineligible for PhD funding during the following summer, as they will no longer be an enrolled student at USC. (i.e., if an MA degree is conferred in May 2026 without plans to continue in the PhD program in the fall, the student will not receive any funding in June or July 2026.)

First-year Screening

The department or program will screen students at the end of the first year of the program. Students must pass this procedure to continue in the PhD program. If students fail the screening procedure, they will be dismissed from the PhD program without a written warning. Students who fail the screening are entitled to appeal pursuant to the Academic Dismissal Appeal procedure set forth in Section III of this Handbook.

Student progress in the Annenberg PhD program is carefully monitored by the Communication faculty. Screening of first year doctoral students is focused primarily on academic performance and achievements broadly defined (coursework, intellectual engagement, scholarly presentations, publications, etc.). The screening process is conducted by a committee that includes the faculty who taught that year's core courses, the Director of the School of Communication, and the Director of the Doctoral Program.

To be screened, first year Communication PhD students must have completed no fewer than 16 units, including the four required core courses: COMM 525, 526, 550, and 552. After screening, students will be either permitted to continue or required to discontinue the program. Students may only pass screening and enter the second year of the program once they have completed all coursework in which they have enrolled. Letters reporting the official results of the screening process will be sent to both students and their mentors by the Director of the Doctoral Program in early summer.

Each spring, all students are asked to submit an Annual Activity Report and an updated CV. The report should include accomplishments for the year, graduate assistant activities, research/conferences, and plans for the upcoming year.

These materials will be evaluated by the Director of Doctoral Studies and by each student's mentor/advisor. Students are expected to discuss progress and plans with their advisors before submitting the Annual Activity Report.

The USC Career Center provides tips on writing a CV [on their website](#).

Qualifying Exam

The qualifying examination is designed to assess a student's readiness to undertake independent research for their dissertation. It is comprehensive and, in most programs, includes both written and oral parts.

Before taking the qualifying examination, the student must have met all of the University's and program's requirements for the PhD degree, except the dissertation. The student must have a GPA of at least 3.0 on all USC coursework available for graduate credit and the approval of their qualifying exam committee to proceed to the exam.

In the Annenberg School, the qualifying exam is usually taken in the second semester of the third year and no later than the first semester of the fourth year, following completion of all required coursework, including removing all grades of incomplete (IN).

If not otherwise enrolled, a student must enroll in GRSC 800abz Studies for the Qualifying Examination during the semester in which they take the qualifying examination. Students are allowed to enroll in the GRSC 800abz courses a maximum of three times, first in GRSC 800a, followed by GRSC 800b, and, only if necessary, GRSC 800z.

Because two semesters of preparation for the qualifying examination should be sufficient, students enrolling in GRSC 800z must obtain a D-clearance from the Graduate School. In addition, the student will receive a warning letter from their program outlining academic expectations and a path toward completing the PhD in a timely manner.

If the student's written examination is satisfactory, the student may proceed to the oral portion of the exam. The student must complete the oral portion within 60 days of submitting the completed written portion to the qualifying exam committee. If additional material is to be covered in the oral portion, the committee should notify the student of the content expectations in advance.

Qualifying Exam Committee

The qualifying exam committee is responsible for supervising the student's preparation for the exam and for the fair and timely administration and evaluation of the written and oral parts of the examination.

The qualifying exam committee is composed of five members. The committee chair and at least two additional members must have an appointment in the student's program.

The Annenberg School also requires that at least three members of the committee must be tenured or tenure track, including the chair, who must be tenured.

An outside (non-School of Communication) member from a different PhD-granting department at USC is strongly recommended but not required. A faculty member from the School of Journalism may serve as an outside member. For outside faculty, the judgment of qualification to serve will be made by the dean of the school of the outside member's primary appointment.

The committee may include an external member, which is a faculty member from an institution other than USC. This is different than an outside member. To obtain approval for an external committee member, the student must first petition this with a clear, detailed summary that explains the need for the inclusion of this committee member. This, along with the faculty member's CV, should be sent to the committee chair and the Director of Doctoral Studies, with a cc to the PhD Academic Advisor. The final approval will be made by the committee chair and the program director.

It is acceptable to appoint co-chairs for your committee. At least one co-chair must be tenured.

Any faculty member who serves on a PhD qualifying exam and dissertation committees must have a professional profile that demonstrates academic impact on the field in significant, measurable ways.

The full qualifying exam committee is typically formed at least six months prior to the start of the qualifying exam. This gives students and faculty time to discuss and define examination areas, develop reading lists, and formulate questions. The committee must be formally established at least thirty days prior to the start of the written exam. It is recommended that the student obtains approval and submits these forms in the semester prior to the exam.

The [Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee](#) form establishes the committee for the qualifying exam. The form requires the signatures of each committee member, the department chair or program director, and the dean or the dean's designee.

With the permission of their advisor and committee, students may, in some cases, take their exams concurrently during the semester in which they are completing their coursework.

Changes in Qualifying Exam Committee

The [Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee](#) form must be completed whenever there is a change to a qualifying exam committee.

Changes to the qualifying exam committee must be made well in advance of the qualifying examination. Informal substitutions for the qualifying examination's written or oral parts are not permitted. Changes in a qualifying exam committee are not permitted between the written and oral portions of the examination. Modifications made without the prior approval of the dean of the degree program are not recognized and may invalidate the examination.

The examinations must be scheduled when it is possible for all committee members, including the outside member, to participate. All qualifying exam committee members may participate remotely.

A student may not change committee members after failing the qualifying examination the first time. The same faculty must reexamine the student on the same subject matter. If a faculty member is unable to serve on the committee, the dean of the degree program must be notified in writing in advance of the rescheduled exam to approve the change. The faculty replacement must be approved by the dean of the degree program, and the student must file a change of committee form well in advance of the exam.

Committee changes should be discussed with your advisor with requests and notifications made in a timely fashion.

Written Qualifying Exam

The open book exam should take between 10 and 14 consecutive days. Regardless of how you manage your own writing schedule, all students will have a maximum of 14 consecutive days to complete the exam. Students must communicate the dates of written exam in advance to the PhD academic advisor.

Students may write at home or at another location of their choosing. Answers should be typed and conform to an appropriate professional style manual ([APA](#), [MLA](#), etc.) specified by the committee.

Students may start writing on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday.

Oral Defense of the Qualifying Exam

Students are responsible for scheduling the oral defense of their written exam at a time convenient for all members of their committee. The oral defense is normally conducted within two weeks of the completion of the written exam. The Graduate School requires that the defense be completed within sixty days of the beginning of the written exam. The written exam must be passed before the oral defense can take place.

The defense typically lasts two hours. Committee members ask questions that focus on the student's written answers but may cover any topic relevant to the field of communication. A successful defense requires a unanimous decision by the committee.

For the PhD qualifying examination defense, all committee members may participate remotely. Remote participation of committee members should be indicated in writing on the Report on Qualifying Examination.

Outcomes of the Qualifying Exam

There are three possible results of a qualifying exam:

- A. Pass and proceed to candidacy based on a favorable vote by a majority of committee members.
- B. Fail, with the option to retake either specific sections of the exam or the whole exam, at the discretion of a majority of the committee. The student should not be required to repeat parts of the qualifying examination passed on the first administration. The retaking of a failed qualifying examination or any portion of a qualifying exam must occur between one and six months from the date of the first examination. If not otherwise enrolled, the student must be enrolled in GRSC 800abz Studies for the Qualifying Examination in the term in which any portion of the exam is repeated. If a student will retake the exam, a new Request to Take the PhD Qualifying Examination form must be obtained from the PhD Academic Advisor and submitted at least thirty days prior to the re-examination. Students may not take the qualifying examination more than twice.
- C. Fail, resulting in dismissal from the program. If a majority of the committee concludes that the written portion of the exam is so weak that the oral portion cannot compensate for it, the student does not proceed to the oral portion, and the exam is failed. The committee may provide the option of a retake but is not required to do so. If a majority of the committee determines that a retake is not warranted, the student will be dismissed from the program.

A student may not take the comprehensive or qualifying examination more than twice and must be appropriately enrolled at USC during the semester in which any such examination is taken or retaken. A student who fails the qualifying examination a second time will be dismissed from the degree program at the end of the semester in which the second examination was taken. No exceptions are permitted.

Report on the PhD Qualifying Exam

Upon the successful conclusion of the qualifying exam, the committee will certify on the Report on the PhD Qualifying Examination that: (1) the exam was appropriately rigorous; (2) the student's performance on the exam was at the doctoral level; and (3) the entire qualifying examination process was fair and in keeping with USC's academic and ethical standards.

The report should be submitted to the PhD Academic Advisor directly after the oral defense, regardless of the outcome (successful or unsuccessful).

Advancement to Candidacy

Graduate students are officially advanced to candidacy for the PhD degree when they have completed the residency requirement and passed the written and oral portions of the PhD qualifying examination.

Students who successfully complete the qualifying examination will be awarded an MA in Communication.

Application for the PhD

After advancing to candidacy, students must contact their academic department or program to initiate an online degree check that will be transmitted to the Degree Progress Department. Degree Progress counselors will prepare a Degree Audit Report (STARS Report) listing any remaining requirements. Programs must apply all appropriate courses in the Student Information System for the degree to be conferred.

Prospectus Defense

The dissertation prospectus is a document that articulates the dissertation project, methodology, justification, and outline of chapters. The prospectus should be completed in a process that runs parallel to, or in conjunction with, the qualifying exam. During the semester prior to taking the qualifying exam, a student will work with their advisor to choose [one of three options](#):

1. The prospectus will be distributed and discussed with the committee before the qualifying examination.
2. The prospectus will be handed in with the written portion of the qualifying exam and then discussed as part of the oral defense. *For this option, the prospectus must be approved by the quals committee for students to pass their qualifying exam.*
3. The prospectus will be distributed and examined no more than 90 days after the defense. If the student completes the qualifying exam during the spring semester such that the 90-day deadline falls during summer recess, the prospectus must be submitted within 90 days and then defended and approved by the committee no later than the end of the third week of the fall semester.

A student must have an [approved prospectus on file](#) to be considered for a standalone teaching assignment.

Please see the Annenberg Writing Coach's [website](#) for additional tips and guidelines on preparing the prospectus.

Dissertation

A dissertation is an original contribution to knowledge in the field and a demonstration that the PhD candidate has sufficiently mastered the field to pursue independent research and scholarship. A dissertation represents the individual candidate's research and writing. In fields where collaborative research has become the norm, the candidate is the sole author of the dissertation. When a paper included in a three-paper dissertation has co-authors, the dissertation candidate must specify their contributions to the research and delineate the contributions of their colleagues.

Dissertations are required to be written in English. Exceptions require the approval of the Vice Provost for Academic Programs or their designee before beginning the work. The exceptions will be granted only when there is scholarly justification.

The Annenberg School requires the dissertation to be written in either [APA](#) or [Chicago](#) style.

Students should ideally devote, at a minimum, their full fifth year of support to the dissertation's completion.

After passing the qualifying exam, students must register for two units of COMM 794 each fall and spring semester until the dissertation has been approved. A minimum of four dissertation units of COMM 794 are required.

Dissertation Format

In addition to the traditional dissertation format, students in the Annenberg School may consider these options. Please consult with your committee chair and the Director of the Doctoral Program when making your choice.

Three-Paper Format

A student may choose to present a dissertation that consists of three original papers. Students choosing this alternative format are expected to reflect this choice in their prospectus, after discussion with their advisor and agreement from their dissertation committee.

Each paper must constitute a substantive contribution to the respective field of study and is expected to be of publishable quality (papers accepted for publication or for conference presentation will be automatically considered to meet this requirement). Only papers in which the student is the first author and has completed the vast majority of the intellectual and technical effort (or for cases where the scope of work is substantially larger, that the student's contribution is the equivalent to the first case) will be accepted. The dissertation committee will determine if a paper is acceptable as a dissertation chapter.

The three papers are expected to be thematically related and demonstrate mastery in a particular field of study. In addition, students are required to present an introductory chapter that situates the three papers in a larger scholarly conversation and a conclusion chapter that outlines the key contributions of the dissertation to current knowledge. Overall, the expectation is that this format will represent at least equivalent effort compared to the traditional dissertation format.

Multimodal Format

A student may choose to present a dissertation that consists of a multimodal project, combining media production work (e.g., a video essay, a documentary film, a podcast, a computer game, a mobile app) with a substantive written component. The balance between the media work and the written component will vary from project to project. Students choosing this dissertation format are expected to reflect this choice in their prospectus, after discussion with their advisor and agreement from their dissertation committee.

The media work will be judged based on the argument it constructs and the evidence it mobilizes as well as its technical competency in its chosen medium. Only projects in which the student is the primary creator and has completed the vast majority of the intellectual and technical effort (or for cases where the scope of work is substantially larger, that the student's contribution is the equivalent to the first case) will be accepted. The written component, of which the student must be first author, will situate the work in a larger scholarly conversation, provide documentation for claims made in the media work itself, and provide a rationale for why this work makes an important and original contribution to the field.

Both components are expected to be of publishable quality work accepted for publication, festival screening, conference presentation or equivalent venue will be automatically considered to meet this requirement). The dissertation committee will determine if a media work or a paper fulfills the

requirements outlined above. Overall, the expectation is that this format will represent at least equivalent effort compared to the traditional dissertation format.

Dissertation Committee

The dissertation committee is appointed as soon as possible after the qualifying examination has been passed and a dissertation topic approved. The committee must be appointed at least one month before the dissertation defense. The [Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee](#) form establishes the dissertation committee. The form requires the signatures of each committee member, the department chair or program director, and the dean or dean's designee. The completed form is filed in the student's home department or program, and a signed copy is provided to the student.

The dissertation committee is composed of at least three and no more than five members. The committee chair must have an appointment in the student's program. All committees must have a majority of members from the student's home program.

PhD students may take advantage of the full array of faculty expertise available at USC. This includes the expertise of tenured, tenure-track, and RTPC (i.e., research, teaching, practitioner, clinical) faculty. A USC faculty member from outside the student's home program is referred to as an "outside member." The committee may also include a faculty member from an institution other than USC, referred to as an "external member."

An outside (non-School of Communication) member from a different PhD-granting department at USC is strongly recommended but not required. A faculty member from the School of Journalism may serve as an outside member. For outside faculty, the judgment of qualification to serve will be made by the dean of the school of the outside member's primary appointment.

The committee may include an external member, which is a faculty member from an institution other than USC. This is different than an outside member. To obtain approval for an external committee member, the student must first petition this with a clear, detailed summary that explains the need for the inclusion of this committee member. This, along with the faculty member's CV, should be sent to the committee chair and the Director of Doctoral Studies with a cc to the PhD Academic Advisor. The final decision will be made by the chair and the director.

The Annenberg School requires the chair of the dissertation committee to be tenured. It is acceptable to appoint co-chairs for your committee. At least one co-chair must be tenured.

Any faculty member – external, outside, or from the student's home program – who serves on PhD dissertation and qualifying exam committees must have a professional profile that demonstrates academic impact on the field in significant, measurable ways. The judgment about these qualifications will be made using the following guide:

- For faculty within the student's home program at USC and external faculty members (who are professors at universities other than USC), the dean, or dean's designee, of the school that houses the student's PhD program will assess a professor's qualification to serve.
- For outside faculty (who are professors outside the student's program but internal to USC), the judgment of qualification to serve will be made by the dean or dean's designee of the school/college of the outside faculty member's primary appointment.

In both cases, the CV of the external member must be uploaded to the Thesis Center along with the appointment of committee form and will become part of the official record. Judgments of demonstrated impact will be based on evidence: for example, peer-reviewed publications in major journals and presses, grant funding, and exceptionally influential practice in a given field, taking into account the person's total career, current stage of career, and any changes in performance in a more recent period.

Faculty who are evaluated based on criteria other than those noted above will not normally be considered appropriate members of PhD and qualifying exam committees, except with the explicit permission of the Vice Provost for Academic Programs acting on the advice of the school dean.

Emeriti faculty appointed to a qualifying exam committee when they were full-time faculty at USC may continue to serve on the dissertation committee as "internal" committee members until the student has graduated. Similarly, a former USC faculty member who was appointed to the qualifying exam committee while they were a full-time faculty member may continue to serve on the dissertation committee as an internal committee member until the student graduates.

Defense of the Dissertation

After passing all required courses and the qualifying examination, and after meeting all other requirements, the candidate must write and defend the dissertation. The doctoral dissertation must be an original contribution to scholarship or scientific knowledge. The dissertation defense assesses whether this standard has been met.

While the oral examination is open to the general university community, only the members of the dissertation committee have the authority to recommend acceptance of the dissertation. Their recommendation must be unanimous.

For the dissertation defense, some committee members may participate remotely. The committee chair and the student must be present in person unless the relevant dean and the Vice Provost for Academic Programs provide express written permission for remote participation.

If you are requesting remote participation for your dissertation defense, please notify the PhD Academic Advisor at least one month prior to the defense date so she can request approval from the Graduate School.

Final Approval of the Dissertation

After the dissertation defense has been completed, and the committee determines that no further edits or revisions are required of the dissertation manuscript, each member of the committee electronically certifies on the Approval to Submit Defended and Final Copy of Doctoral Dissertation that: (1) the defense was appropriately rigorous; (2) the student's dissertation makes an original and substantial contribution to its field of study; and (3) the defense process was fair and in keeping with USC's academic and ethical standards. This includes adherence to departmental formatting requirements. No changes can be made to the manuscript's content after the *Approval to Submit* form is complete. The Approval to Submit form is electronically available through [Thesis Center](#), the Graduate School's online thesis and dissertation processing system.

The dissertation committee must unanimously agree for the student to pass the defense.

Dissertation Submission

Doctoral dissertation manuscripts must be submitted to the Thesis Center on the [Graduate School website](#). At the time of submission, all manuscripts should be formatted and edited according to the style determined by the student's department or program. Students have three months from the date the committee chair signs the electronic *Approval to Submit* form to complete any required formatting corrections in the Thesis Center. After the Graduate School has approved the dissertation manuscript, a copy is sent to the USC Libraries. All dissertations will be made available digitally via the USC Libraries.

Completing the Dissertation

The Graduate School provides a [schedule for completing the dissertation](#) on its website. Students must submit complete documentation and finish all corrections to the manuscript before the degree can be conferred. Upon completing all requirements, the official USC transcript will serve as evidence of the degree until the student receives their diploma.

Conferral of the PhD

Participation in USC commencement exercises is restricted to students who have a scheduled dissertation defense of June 1 or earlier. Participation in the 2026 Annenberg PhD hooding ceremony and the Annenberg School's 2026 satellite commencement ceremony requires that a student has a scheduled dissertation defense of June 1, 2026, or earlier. A student may only participate in the hooding ceremony once.

The actual degree conferral date is based on the deadlines met by a student. Degrees are conferred by the University three times per year: in May (spring), August (summer), and December (fall).

Graduate Certificates at USC

Doctoral students at USC may wish to obtain a graduate certificate in a related field in addition to the PhD. Please see individual department websites for more information.

[Digital Media and Culture](#) // School of Cinematic Arts, Division of Media Arts + Practice

[Gender and Sexuality Studies](#) // Dornsife, Gender and Sexuality Studies

[Latinx and Latin American Studies](#) // Dornsife, Center for Latinx & Latin American Studies

[Science and Technology Studies](#) // Dornsife, Center on Science, Technology, & Public Life

[Visual Studies](#) // Dornsife

III. Making Good Progress

Student progress and success reflect the combined effort of students, faculty, staff, and the university. This section provides information on access to and systems for mentoring and advising, as well as opportunities for professional development and academic expectations.

Mentoring and Advising

When new students enter the Communication PhD program, they are assigned a faculty mentor, as well as one or two student buddies. Faculty and peers help new students adjust to life in Los

Angeles and at USC. They can help with answers about housing, areas of study, administrative processes, and research foci.

All first year PhD students are formally advised by the Director of the Doctoral Program until their successful completion of the screening process. The Director's advice is both substantive, assisting students in defining and refining their course of study, and technical, ensuring that students are satisfying program requirements in a timely manner. The Director's approval is required for first year students to transfer credits, obtain d-clearance, and for assorted other petitions.

Faculty mentors assigned to first year students will acquaint and guide them through the initial year. Mentors will meet with students on a regular basis and will assist in making decisions on course selection, research groups, conferences, and publications.

First year students are strongly encouraged to acquaint themselves with the faculty as a whole, with an eye toward choosing their advisor and future committee members.

Following successful screening at the end of the first year, the primary advising responsibility shifts to the student's advisor. Students are required to officially select an advisor by the end of the fall semester of their second year.

Primary technical advising responsibility remains with the Director of the Doctoral Program.

Academic Advising and School of Communication Administration

Director of the Annenberg Doctoral Program

The Director is a member of the faculty and is responsible for the overall operation of the program. The Director develops long-term programs and policies and presents them to the faculty for discussion and approval. The Director also administers the day-to-day functions of the program, including:

- Advising all first-year students until after they have been screened and moved from first-year mentor to advisor
- Consulting with students about their academic programs
- Reviewing and approving student requests and progress
- Chairing the following committees: PhD Admissions, PhD Curriculum, and PhD Screening
- Coordinating reports for the faculty

[Professor Hernan Galperin](#)

213-821-1320

hgalperi@usc.edu

Graduate Advisor, PhD in Communication

The PhD Academic Advisor provides academic support to doctoral students and serves as a liaison

between students and other University departments. The Advisor maintains and supervises administrative procedures pertaining to academic progress, including:

- Graduate student records
- D-clearance and registration
- General petitions and forms for qualifying exams, dissertations, and committees

Anne Marie Campian
ASC 307A
213-740-0903
campian@usc.edu

Academic Program Associate

Responsible for finances and student aid, including fellowships and graduate assistantships; School of Communication curriculum updates; doctoral program administration; coordination of program policy for the doctoral program; School of Communication newsletter; ARS scheduling. Oversees the following items for PhD students:

- Stipend payments
- Fellowships
- GA assignments
- Health insurance/health center access
- Over 50% GA petitions
- Parental leave petitions
- Health leave
- Travel and dissertation expenses
- Web profile updates
- Admissions coordination
- Curriculum coordination

Sarah Holterman
ASC 305D
213-740-2538
holterma@usc.edu

Director's Office, School of Communication

[Gordon Stables, Director of Schools](#)
stables@usc.edu
213-740-2759 / ASC 305C

Allyson Arguello, Academic Program Associate
aarguell@usc.edu
213-821-0462 / ASC 305D
Course scheduling and TA access

Billie Shotlow, Senior Faculty Affairs Coordinator
shotlow@usc.edu
213-821-2718 / ASC 305A
Faculty affairs, including job searches and promotions

Front Desk/Student Workers
commdir@usc.edu
213-740-3951 / ASC 305
Parking reservations for guests

Financial Services, School of Communication

Fabian Ledesma, Financial Planning and Analysis Manager
fledesma@usc.edu

Vinh Nguyen, Budget/Business Analyst
vinhn761@usc.edu

Payroll, School of Communication

Wendy Arima, Workday Client Specialist
wendy.arima@usc.edu

Cinthia Torres, Home Department Payroll/Personnel Tech
cinthiat@usc.edu

Citizenship and Life at Annenberg

All students are expected to participate in the intellectual life of the Annenberg School. Each year, there are many opportunities for scholarly and professional development. Students are expected to attend public lectures and events, consistent with fulfilling academic and teaching assignments.

Announcements about events will be made via the commgrad mailing list.

Annenberg Research Seminar (ARS)

Colloquia and research seminars are scheduled for most Mondays at noon in ASC 207. Job talks and other public events are held at this time and doctoral students will sometimes be asked to present their work. Students should plan to attend, consistent with other course and assignment obligations.

Meet the Faculty

The department will arrange panels with faculty members to discuss their research. While all students are welcome, these sessions are geared toward first year students as a way to become familiar with Annenberg faculty.

Professional Development

Events focusing on professional development will be held throughout the year. Topics will be developed in consultation with ACGSA. Past topics have included: qualifying exam preparation, job interviewing, prospectus writing, publishing, the Institutional Review Board and human subjects research, meetings of professional associations, and grants.

Graduate Writing Coach

The School of Communication provides a writing coach who is available to all Communication graduate students, including PhD students. The coach holds in-person and online office hours, during which he meets with students individually. He also presents workshops and organizes PhD-specific writing groups and boot camps.

Troy Mikanovich
ASC 305
mikanovi@usc.edu

Schedule an appointment and access other writing resources [here](#).

Doctoral Student Website Profiles

All Annenberg School of Communication doctoral students have a profile on the [Annenberg website](#). For updates and changes to your bio and/or photo, please contact the Academic Program Associate.

Annenberg Communication Graduate Student Association (ACGSA)

The Annenberg Communication Graduate Student Association (ACGSA) is the student organization for doctoral students in Communication. ACGSA is a registered USC student organization and has access to funds through the Graduate Student Government (GSG), USC's graduate student assembly.

The general principle of the graduate student association is to promote collegiality and to support community among fellow students and in the School generally. ACGSA officers are elected each spring for the following academic year, apart from the First Year Representative, who is elected by the new cohort within a few weeks of the beginning of the fall semester. Officers meet regularly with department faculty and staff.

2025-2026 ACGSA Board

PRESIDENT

Zahraa Badr // zbbadr@usc.edu

Organizes and directs meetings, proposes and administers the budget, organizes student office and makes desk assignments, ask as intermediary to the faculty along with the faculty rep.

VICE PRESIDENT & GSG REPRESENTATIVE

Daniela Kent // kentdani@usc.edu

Represents ACGSA to the GSG, records and reports minutes of meetings, assists the president.

TREASURER & FACULTY REPRESENTATIVE

Elaine Jeon // elaine.jeon@usc.edu

Manages ACGSA checking account, coordinates GSG funding, collects dues, handles disbursements. Attends monthly faculty meetings and reports minutes to ACGSA, acts as intermediary to the faculty along with the president.

TECHNOLOGY REPRESENTATIVE

Kirsten Crowe // kcrowe@usc.edu

Acts as a liaison to Annenberg's tech support staff.

TA/RA REPRESENTATIVE

Magdalayna Curry // magcurry@usc.edu

Coordinates requests for teaching and research assignments each semester.

POST-QUALS REPRESENTATIVE

Pratik Nyaupane // nyaupane@usc.edu

Represents students who have passed qualifying exams and entered the dissertation stage.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

Bumju Jung // bumju.jung@usc.edu

Advocates for international students; works to prevent and solve specific challenges facing international students. Point person for international student concerns.

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE TASK FORCE REPRESENTATIVE

TBD

Serves as doctoral student representative on Annenberg's Community and Culture Task Force.

FIRST YEAR REPRESENTATIVE

TBD

Represents the first-year cohort. Vote on during the first month of the fall semester.

ACGSA Listserv

ACGSA has its own listserv that is limited to ACGSA members. No faculty, staff, or non-doctoral students can send or receive email from it. Messages on this list should be considered to be confidential communication among the PhD students and should not be forwarded or shown outside the community without approval of the sender. At the same time, everyone using the system must recognize that the computers are not themselves secure systems.

Students are not required to subscribe to the list but should note that ACGSA conducts a large part of its regular business in discussions via the listserv. Students who choose not to subscribe need to be aware that they are opting out of an important mode of participation in the scholarly community life.

Commgrad Listserv

This is the mailing list for current PhD students that Annenberg faculty and staff will use to contact all students. As a currently enrolled student, you are automatically subscribed to the list with your

USC email account. Please check your USC email account on a regular basis to ensure that you don't miss any important information from the department.

PhD Student Offices and Access to Facilities

Offices for doctoral students are in the Garden Level West of the ASC building.

3502 Watt Way
Suites G4 & G6
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0281

All PhD students in the School of Communication should have keys to access the building and a USC identification card to access the PhD student offices. Contact Annenberg TechOps in ANN L103 to obtain an ASC key and have your card programmed for access. You can also have them program the card to open classrooms for TA and AL positions.

Individual desk assignments are made by ACGSA.

USCard

You can obtain an ID card from [USCard Services](#). ID cards are used to enter the PhD offices, classrooms, some parking structures, the USC gym, and to access USC Libraries. Please make sure to get your card soon after arriving on campus.

Security

Classrooms and offices must be locked when not in use. Undergraduates and other non-PhD graduate students should not be left alone in the PhD offices if there are no doctoral students present. Do not leave your belongings unattended on campus, even for a short amount of time.

If you need an Annenberg classroom unlocked, contact TechOps at 213-740-5297.

Desk Assignments

PhD student desk space is allocated based on seniority and standing in the program. In general, every effort will be made to make desk space available for any doctoral student who is frequently on campus. Depending on the size of the doctoral student population at any given time, this may require that some people share a desk. First year doctoral students should expect to share desks.

The ACGSA board makes desk assignments at the beginning of the academic year; students should indicate their preferences at that time. Continuing students will remain at the same desk unless they express a desire to change. New students will not have an initial opportunity to request a specific desk but may change locations if another student is willing to swap.

Kitchen

All food-related appliances (refrigerators, microwave, coffeemakers, etc.) in the Garden Level West kitchen belong to the PhD students. Please note that the School custodial staff does not clean or maintain the appliances—students are responsible for care of appliances.

General Maintenance and Supplies

The custodial staff regularly vacuum the floors and empties the trash cans in the PhD student

offices. Please note that while trash in the kitchen will be emptied daily, trash cans in the cubicles and work areas will be emptied once per week. If you are throwing out food, please do so in the kitchen trash can.

Large items for disposal that don't fit inside trash cans should be clearly marked for disposal. The custodians do not clean desks or equipment of any kind. PhD students are responsible for the general tidiness of the offices, the appliances, and personal areas.

The physical plant of the School (plumbing, electrical, telephone lines, computers, etc.) is overseen by Annenberg TechOps. The furnishings in the student offices (desks, bookcases, chairs, phones, office supplies, etc.) fall under the School of Communication Director's Office.

For questions or concerns about the PhD offices, please contact an ACGSA board member.

Telephones

PhD students share telephones in their offices. Doctoral students serving as TAs with office hours are expected to answer their phones during those office hours. Campus phone numbers all have a 213-area code and a prefix of either 740 or 821. When calling a campus number from another on-campus phone, you will use a five-digit extension number. This consists of the final five digits of the full number.

USC Email

All correspondence from both USC and the Annenberg School will be sent to the student's USC email address. Log in [here](#) to access your USC mail and affiliated Google Apps.

USC Business Cards

The School of Communication provides USC business cards for current PhD students. You will be sent a link at the beginning of your first year and the cards will be ordered by the School of Communication office.

Once you have passed your qualifying exam, you may apply for new business cards to change your title from "PhD Student" to "PhD Candidate."

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity depends on our collective commitment as a university community. Reporting academic integrity issues helps reinforce academic standards and preserves the value of USC degrees. If faculty suspect academic misconduct on any work that a student submits (in final or draft form), they are required to submit a report to the Office of Academic Integrity (OAI).

Information about the university's academic integrity policies is available in the [USC Student Handbook](#) and the [Office of Academic Integrity](#).

Because PhD students have already earned a bachelor's degree and are enrolled in advanced academic training, they are held to a higher standard of integrity in all academic work. This standard reflects the heightened ethical expectations of advanced scholarship, the student's potential role as a mentor and instructor to others, and the impact of their conduct on the broader research and academic community.

OAI is responsible for investigating and adjudicating academic integrity violations. If OAI determines, by a preponderance of the evidence, that a PhD student has committed an academic integrity violation, there is a presumption that dismissal from the academic program without conferral of the degree is the appropriate outcome. This presumption applies regardless of whether the violation occurred in coursework, research, examinations, or instructional settings.

In such cases, doctoral students are not entitled to a Review Panel under the general disciplinary process. Instead, the findings and determination of responsibility will be referred directly to the student's academic program. The program will issue a decision letter that includes outcomes and any additional information relevant to the student's academic standing. No prior written warning is required to support dismissal under this policy. The program's decision will be provided to OAI for record-keeping, and a transcript notation indicating program dismissal for academic integrity reasons will be entered.

PhD students may not appeal the findings or sanctions through the general academic integrity appeal process. Instead, their sole opportunity to challenge the finding or rebut the presumption of dismissal is through the Academic Dismissal Appeal process described in the Student Handbook.

PhD students are expected to familiarize themselves with the full list of academic integrity standards and examples of violations outlined in the USC Student Handbook, including but not limited to plagiarism, cheating, unauthorized collaboration, falsification, misrepresentation, and misuse of instructional materials. Ignorance of policy or lack of intent is not a valid defense.

In cases where a student has registered for a course on a Pass/No Pass (P/NP) basis and an academic integrity violation has occurred, a penalty letter grade will be assigned when a grading option exists. A Pass or No Pass determination is only issued in these circumstances when a letter grade cannot be issued. A student may not withdraw from a course in which they committed or were accused of committing an academic integrity violation.

Students are expected to abide by the generative AI policies included in course syllabi. Violating these policies will be considered a potential violation of academic integrity.

Satisfactory Progress, Academic Warning, and Dismissal

Students are expected to maintain satisfactory progress towards their degree. If a student has a question or concern about their progress, they should consult with their faculty advisor or PhD program coordinator.

If a student fails to make satisfactory progress, the department chair, program director, or school/college dean will notify them in writing. Written letters should a) explain how the student is falling short of the satisfactory progress standard and b) include specific benchmarks describing how the student can succeed in the program within a reasonable timeframe. Warning letters are sent as early as possible so the student can take advantage of the recommended actions.

Students who do not meet the established benchmarks may be dismissed.

There are several guideposts that indicate good progress in the PhD in Communication program, including:

- A student is required to complete a minimum of 68 graduate units before taking their qualifying exams. They will then take a minimum of 4 units of dissertation registrations, totaling 72 units. To complete the required 68 units of graduate course work, students are normally expected to take three courses (12 units) per semester.
- The qualifying exam should be taken during the second semester of the third year or first semester of the fourth year.
- By the end of the fall semester of the fourth year, a student must have completed the following items: qualifying examination process completed; dissertation chair and committee selected; and dissertation prospectus successfully completed. If these items are not completed by the end of the fall semester of the fourth year, a student may no longer be considered to be making satisfactory progress toward degree.
- Removal of any grades of IN within University-mandated timelines.

If a student is not making good academic progress toward degree, they may receive a warning letter from the department which will indicate steps they need to take to remain a student in good academic standing within the PhD program. Students are encouraged to work closely with their advisors and other faculty members to monitor academic progress.

Academic Dismissal Appeal

The [USC Student Handbook](#) includes information on how to appeal a dismissal. The Graduate School Dismissal Appeal provides the final consideration of a student's dismissal from a graduate program when the dean of the relevant school has upheld the dismissal. This does not include students who have not met the conditions for continuing registration or those who have violated the Student Code of Conduct. The Graduate School will schedule the appeal once the student provides written verification of dismissal and states in writing that they want to proceed with the appeal within 30 days of the dismissal. For more information, please visit the Graduate School [website](#).

IV. Academic Policies and Procedures

Unit Requirement

The minimum number of units for a doctoral degree at USC is 60, including at least four units of 794ab Doctoral Dissertation. At least 24 units must be completed at USC (excluding Doctoral Dissertation 794).

The PhD in Communication requires a total of 68 units of coursework. A maximum of 12 units may be transferred from previous graduate course work with approval and applied to the PhD degree. In addition to the 68 units of coursework, the PhD in Communication requires a minimum of four units of COMM 794 enrollment. Students must enroll in COMM 794 every fall and spring semester until the dissertation is submitted to meet the University's continuous enrollment requirement.

Enrollment Status

To be considered full-time, a doctoral student must be enrolled in at least six units of 500-level and above coursework each semester. Most students enroll in 12 units to make timely progress toward their degree; 16 units constitute the maximum load. Students wishing to carry more than 16 units must have prior permission from the degree-conferring unit; such permission will be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

There are two exceptions to this six-unit requirement:

1. A student who has completed all coursework for the doctoral degree will be considered full-time during the semester in which the student is preparing for the doctoral qualifying examination, provided the *Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee* form has been completed and submitted to the program and the student is enrolled in GRSC 800abz, Studies for the Qualifying Examination.
2. Doctoral students who have been advanced to candidacy, that is, who have completed all coursework and have passed the qualifying examination, will be considered full-time when enrolled in 794 Doctoral Dissertation.

The Annenberg School considers 12 units per semester to be a full load. The University's Graduate Assistantships and Fellowships provide a maximum of 12 units of tuition coverage per semester.

Enrollment Information for F-1 and J-1 International Students

F-1 and J-1 international students on student visas who are not enrolled in either GRSC 800abz or 794 must be enrolled in at least six units or receive authorization from the [Office of International Services](#) to enroll in fewer than the minimum units. International student with questions about their registration should consult the Office of International Services.

Immigration regulations require F-1 and J-1 student's physical attendance for classes during each fall and spring semester of their program. If the summer term is the student's first or last semester at USC, then physical attendance for classes is also required.

No more than one online class (up to 3 units) per semester can be counted towards the full course of study for an F-1 or J-1 student. If you only need to be registered in one course to complete your degree program during your final term, it must be in-person.

794ab Doctoral Dissertation

794ab Doctoral Dissertation confers full-time enrollment status on students who have been admitted to candidacy. Students are expected to be enrolled in 2 units of 794 each semester, except summer sessions, for a minimum of two semesters, until all degree requirements are completed.

Students are expected to complete and defend their dissertation in less than five semesters of 794. No more than eight units of 794 will be applied toward the PhD degree.

Concurrent Enrollment

If a student is simultaneously enrolled elsewhere, they may not transfer credits to USC without advance permission from the dean of the school that hosts the USC degree program. Failure to

obtain permission will invalidate coursework taken during periods of unauthorized concurrent enrollment.

Transfer of Credit

The Degree Progress Department in the Office of Academic Records and Registrar determines whether coursework taken elsewhere is available for transfer credit. The faculty of the student's degree program determines whether such credit is applicable toward a specific graduate degree, subject to approval by the dean of the degree-conferring unit. The faculty will decide by the end of the second year.

Students entering the PhD in Communication program with a master's degree may, with permission, apply part of their previous graduate course work to the PhD degree. A maximum of twelve units may be applied. Submit the [PhD Transfer Credit Petition](#) form to the PhD Academic Advisor.

Request a [Graduate Transfer Credit Report \(GTCR\)](#) from the University. Official transcripts are required to complete this evaluation. After the GTCR is complete and eligible transfer work is made available on your student record, contact the PhD Academic Advisor.

Students who enter the PhD in Communication program after earning a master's degree at the Annenberg School of Communication may exceed this limit, subject to the approval of the Director of Doctoral Studies.

Before making transfer credit requests, students should meet with their advisors to map out required areas, requests for substitution, and strategies for completing requirements.

PhD Credit for Annenberg Master's-Level Courses

Students who wish to apply Annenberg master's-level courses for PhD credit must negotiate a [contract](#) with the instructor in advance, certifying that course materials are appropriate for doctoral status.

Doctoral students will generally be required to complete additional work for the course above and beyond that required of master's students, such as an appropriate research paper. Students normally may count no more than two such courses toward their doctoral degree requirements, and no more than one in their concentrations.

COMM 610 and COMM 620 Courses

COMM 610 Studies in Rhetorical Theory offers a rotating selection of courses under the areas of rhetorical theory and criticism. A maximum of 12 units of COMM 610 may be applied to the program.

COMM 620 Studies in Communication Theory provides a rotating selection of courses that offer students of advanced, specialized interest areas in communication theory and research. A maximum of 12 units of COMM 620 may be applied to the program. Two of the three courses may be applied to a concentration; the third is an elective.

Independent Study and Directed Research

Students may take a maximum of 8 units of COMM 675 Independent Study and/or COMM 790 Directed Research.

COMM 675 Independent Study

Students must prepare a [detailed syllabus](#) with a full-time faculty member of the School of Communication and have it approved by the Director of Doctoral Studies and the Director of the School of Communication.

A student enrolled in COMM 675 is expected to produce a final paper that critically examines the existing literature in a relevant field of study. A student completing this type of work should enroll in 2 units of COMM 675. The student is expected to meet with the supervising faculty member at least once every other week during the enrolled semester.

COMM 790 Directed Research

Students must prepare a [research proposal](#) with a full-time faculty member of the School of Communication and have it approved by the Director of Doctoral Studies and the Director of the School of Communication.

A student enrolled in COMM 790 is expected to complete significant primary research resulting in a final paper that contributes new knowledge to a relevant field. A student completing this type of work should enroll in 4 units of COMM 790. The student is expected to meet with the supervising faculty member on a weekly basis.

If you plan to enroll in COMM 675 or COMM 790, you must submit the form with proposal/syllabus to the PhD Academic Advisor no later than three weeks prior to the start of classes in order for the proposal to be reviewed. If submitted later than that, enrollment cannot be guaranteed.

Continuous Enrollment

Students are considered to be pursuing advanced degrees only when formally enrolled. PhD students must be enrolled at USC for fall and spring semesters each year until all degree requirements have been satisfactorily completed within the time limit.

Summer enrollment is not required by the Annenberg School. Some students may choose to enroll in 4 or 8 units during the summer, often independent study or directed research.

Enrollment in graduate-level course work is necessary to meet the continuous enrollment requirement. Graduate students who fail to register are no longer considered to be enrolled in a graduate degree program. After an unauthorized absence, formal readmission is required. Students who have been granted an official leave of absence do not need to apply for readmission following the approved leave. However, students who fail to return at the conclusion of any form of leave without obtaining an approved extension violate the continuous enrollment policy.

A doctoral candidate who has passed the qualifying examination must enroll each fall and spring semester in 794 Doctoral Dissertation until the dissertation has been approved. Students are expected to complete and defend their dissertation in less than five semesters.

Some courses with no academic credit, including 794z, require payment of tuition.

Grade Point Average Requirement

At no time should the overall GPA drop below 3.0. A minimum grade of C (2.0) is required in a course to receive graduate credit. Work graded C- or below is unacceptable for subject or unit credit toward any doctoral program.

Pass/No Pass Coursework

Graduate students may elect to enroll in courses on a pass/no pass basis with department or program approval. However, coursework taken on a pass/no pass basis cannot be applied toward a graduate degree. Students should consult their academic advisors before enrolling in any course on a pass/no pass basis.

Incompletes

An incomplete (IN) is assigned when work is not completed because of a documented illness or another emergency occurring after the 12th week of the semester (or 12th week equivalent for any course scheduled for less than 15 weeks).

If a student receives an incomplete, the instructor will fill out the Assignment of an Incomplete (IN) and Requirements for Completion form [link], which will specify the work remaining to be done, the procedures for its completion, the grade in the course to date and the weight to be assigned to the work remaining to be done when computing the final grade.

One calendar year is allowed to complete an IN. If the IN is not completed within the designated time, the course is considered “lapsed,” the grade is changed to an “IX” and will be calculated into the grade point average as 0 points. Courses offered on a Credit/No Credit basis or taken on a Pass/No Pass basis for which a mark of Incomplete is assigned will be lapsed with a mark of NC or NP and will not be calculated into the grade point average.

Completing the IN within the one-year period should be the student’s highest priority. A student may petition the Committee on Academic Policies and Procedures (CAPP) for an extension of time for the completion of an IN. Extensions beyond the specified time limit are rarely approved if the student has enrolled in subsequent semesters.

In all cases, a petition for an extension of time to complete an IN must have departmental approval and include a statement from the instructor explaining what is needed to complete the course and why the instructor believes the student should be given additional time for completion.

Annenberg PhD students who receive a grade of IN will receive a warning letter from the department outlining expectations for completion. If the IN is not completed within the University’s designated time, the student may be dismissed from the program. The qualifying exam may not be taken until all grades of IN have been completed.

See the [USC Registrar’s website](#) for complete details on University policies regarding incompletes.

Audited Courses

Students who wish to audit a course at USC must register for the course on Web Registration and select the Audit grade option. Audited courses will not receive credit and will not appear on the USC transcript or grade report. However, tuition is charged, and students should check with their school or program to determine if auditing courses is an option. As noted in the USC Student Handbook, attending a course without being officially registered in it is prohibited.

If you wish to audit a course, please contact the Academic Program Associate to determine if it will be covered by your tuition award.

Time Limit for Degree Completion

Progress is measured from the beginning of the first course at USC applied toward a specified degree, and all requirements for that degree must be completed within a specified time. The university's time limit for completing the doctoral degree is eight years. For students who earned an applicable master's degree within the five years before admission to the doctoral program, the time limit for completing the doctoral degree is six years from the date of admission to the doctoral program. Approved leaves of absence (up to two years or four semesters) are not counted in the time allowed to complete degree requirements.

Extensions may be granted in extraordinary circumstances. If granted an extension, the dean of the degree-conferring unit will allow registration for the specified extension period.

Leaves of Absence, Sick Days, and Bereavement

Students in good standing and making satisfactory progress toward a degree who must interrupt studies for compelling reasons may petition for a leave for a stated period, usually one semester. A leave must be requested before the drop-add deadline and approved by the dean of the degree program, the committee chair, and the department chair or program director. The request should include a plan for academic progress upon return. During the leave period, a student is not entitled to assistance from the faculty or use of university facilities.

If granted, the leave is recorded on the student's transcript, and the leave period is not counted in the time allowed to complete degree requirements. A leave of absence may be allowed for one semester at a time, up to a maximum of four semesters. Students who fail to apply for a leave of absence or for whom a leave has been denied (or has expired) are subject to policies governing continuous enrollment and readmission.

International students should consult with the Office of International Services before considering a leave of absence.

To start the leave of absence process, please contact the Academic Program Associate.

Parental Leave for PhD Students

PhD students are eligible for a one-semester paid [parental leave](#) if they:

- Are pregnant or are the primary caregiver of their newborn child or adopted child under six years of age
- Have completed at least one semester in the PhD program and are making good progress

- Were admitted with a Multi-Year Funding Offer (MYFO) letter that includes a four or five-year “package” consisting of support through any combination of teaching assistantship, research assistantship, and fellowship
- F-1 and J-1 international students must additionally qualify for a [medical reduced course load](#) (RCL) if they plan to remain in the U.S. while taking parental leave

Parental leave may be taken during the semester in which the child is born or adopted, or in the semester immediately following. A student on an approved parental leave will receive tuition, fees, and a stipend. The Graduate School provides the base stipend. Schools and programs provide the tuition, fees, and a top-off the base stipend to the level specified in the student’s Multi-Year Funding Offer letter.

Students should enroll in GRSC 804 to ensure continued access to health insurance and the monthly stipend. While on parental leave, students are not eligible for federal financial aid. Students with loans should consult with the Office of Financial Aid before beginning parental leave. F-1 and J-1 international students should consult with the Office of International Services to discuss parental leave and ensure there are no unforeseen issues related to their visa status.

Students interested in taking parental leave should consult with the staff graduate advisor in their department or program. The program will submit a petition to the Graduate School and will be asked to provide a copy of the initial funding letter, a statement as the primary caregiver, and one of the following:

- Verification of pregnancy signed by a US doctor (available at USC Student Health Center), or
- Birth certificate for the infant child, or
- Statement of adoption from an adoption agency

To start the parental leave process, please contact the Academic Program Associate.

Health Leaves for PhD Students

Health Leaves are administered by [USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) (CSI) in consultation with the student’s program and the Graduate School, pursuant to the university’s Student Health Leave of Absence Policy.

PhD students interested in a health leave should meet with a CSI health leave coordinator to develop an individualized health and academic plan. These plans are developed through an interactive process involving the Health Leave Coordinator, the student, the academic unit, and the Graduate School.

F-1 and J-1 international students are eligible to request a health leave. They must meet with an advisor in the Office of International Services (OIS) before finalizing plans for the health leave. Students can either return to their home country or, if a doctor recommends, remain in the U.S. for medical treatment. The student should request the health leave through a CSI health leave coordinator, who works with the student, their healthcare provider, and the Office of International Services (OIS) to determine the necessary steps to approve the leave request.

A paid health leave, including tuition, fees, and at least the minimum stipend, is available for one semester. A second semester covering tuition and fees may be available if necessary. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs must review and approve additional health leaves beyond two semesters.

To start the health leave process, please contact the Academic Program Associate.

Sick Days and Bereavement Leave

Graduate Assistants may use up to five days of sick leave per Academic Year due to illness or to care for a family member. Students may also have up to five days of bereavement leave per Academic Year for the loss of a family member.

Contact the Academic Program Associate regarding sick days and bereavement leave for GA assignments.

Readmission

A PhD student who leaves the university without obtaining a formal leave of absence, or otherwise violates the continuous enrollment policy, is not automatically readmitted. A student wishing to apply for readmission to a graduate degree program must first obtain the recommendation of the department chair or program director and submit an Application for Readmission to the dean of the degree program.

If the student's cumulative GPA is below 3.0 or if readmission is sought after more than two years of an unapproved absence, the Application for Readmission must be sent to the Graduate School for approval.

The readmission approval process must be completed by the first day of classes for the term in which the resumption of graduate studies is sought. Approvals to be readmitted are based on the academic merits of the student's request and the likelihood of academic success and completion of the degree. If readmitted, the student will be subject to all of the current University Catalogue requirements for the degree in effect at the time of readmission. Individual exceptions to the Catalogue year require the approval of the dean of the degree program. Students seeking readmission after an absence of more than 10 years may be required to reapply to the university.

A student may not be readmitted into a terminated program of study. The student must either be subject to retroactive enrollment or admission to the new program of study with the corresponding catalog requirements.

V. Funding and Financial Support

PhD students at USC benefit from fellowships, assistantships, and scholarships administered by the Graduate School and various academic units.

Graduate Assistant (GA)

GA is an overarching term used to describe Teaching Assistants (TA), Research Assistants (RA), and Graduate Assistant Lecturers (AL). GA appointments include tuition, fees, and a stipend at or exceeding the university's minimum rate. A 50% GA appointment requires an average of 20 hours per week, which is considered "full-time" for a graduate student, as the remaining 20 hours per

week should be dedicated to coursework and scholarship leading to the degree. A 33% GA appointment requires an average of 13 hours per week, while a 25% appointment requires an average of 10 hours per week.

GA appointments are confirmed through an official offer letter generated via the university's TARA system or the Dornsife Student Database. The offer letter should be sent to the student at the beginning of the academic year or the start of a semester. These letters must use the standard Graduate School-approved template and detail the length of the appointment, the time commitment, the department's expectations, and benefits. Ideally, the offer letter should include the total stipend the student will receive, including top-offs. The student should sign the letter, which will be shared with the appropriate financial staff and archived by the department or program.

The university requires TAs, RAs, and ALs to be enrolled in a minimum of 6 units every semester or in equivalent full-time courses such as GRSC 800abz or Dissertation 794.

Fellowships

Fellowships provide financial support to PhD students pursuing their degrees. A fellowship is equivalent to a 50% appointment as a Graduate Assistant and includes tuition, fees, and a stipend at or exceeding the university's minimum rate.

PhD students with a fellowship are expected to commit 20 hours per week to their research. PhD students receiving fellowships may not undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year from mid-August through mid-May. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs will review exceptions to this policy through the Graduate School's Petition system. Students on fellowships may not receive funding as GAs simultaneously.

All Annenberg PhD students are funded as Annenberg Fellows during their first year in the program. Students may also apply for advanced fellowships offered by the Graduate School once they have advanced to candidacy. If a student receives an advanced fellowship, the year of funding replaces one year of GA funding. It does not provide an extra year of funding unless it is received in the student's sixth year.

External Fellowships

PhD students are encouraged to seek external fellowships and support that encourage intellectual independence and enhance a student's record. The USC Graduate School provides a variety of resources to support PhD students seeking funding, including information sessions, boot camps, and proposal review workshops. Students who receive one of several designated national awards may be eligible for stipend top-offs from the Graduate School.

PhD students applying for external fellowships that are "institutionally limited," meaning that there is a limit placed on the number of students who can apply, or whose applications require the approval of a university official, should contact the Graduate School well in advance of any deadlines.

If a student receives an external fellowship, the year of funding replaces one year of GA funding. It does not provide an extra year of funding unless it is received in the student's sixth year.

If you have applied for or been awarded an external fellowship, please notify the Academic Program Associate.

Finding External Fellowships

The Office of the Provost provides an [Awards and Fellowships Database](#).

Below are some external fellowships Annenberg doctoral students have applied to or received in the past:

[American Association of University Women \(AAUW\) Fellowship](#)
[Center for Engaged Scholarship Dissertation Fellowship](#)
[Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship](#)
[Ford Predoctoral Fellowship](#)
[Fulbright Research Grant](#)
[Haynes Lindley Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship](#)
[Josephine De Karman Fellowship](#)
[Korea Foundation Fellowship for Graduate Studies](#)
[Mellon ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellowship](#)
[MIT Diversity Predoctoral Fellowship](#)
[NSF Graduate Research Fellowship](#)
[Open Technology Fund Information Controls Fellowship](#)
[Soros Fellowship for New Americans](#)
[SSRC Dissertation Proposal Development Program](#)
[SSRC Just Tech Fellowship](#)
[Trudeau Foundation Scholarship](#)

Tuition Benefits

A 50% TA, RA, or AL appointment and a fellowship include tuition remission up to 12 units per semester and six units of tuition remission for the summer following the fellowship.

A 33% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 10 units per semester of the appointment and five units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

A 25% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 8 units per semester of the appointment and four units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

TAs, RAs, and ALs who wish to use tuition units for coursework outside their home program must obtain written approval from their faculty advisor, program director, and the dean of the school. If students do not have prior authorization, they may be responsible for covering the cost of these units. The tuition allowance is non-transferable from semester to semester and will be applied to the student's account in the amount appropriate for the courses they take.

Contact Academic Program Associate for any questions regarding tuition remission.

Tuition Refund Insurance

Students should opt out of Tuition Refund Insurance when their tuition is being covered as part of

an assistantship or fellowship. If a student has already accepted Tuition Refund Insurance but would like to decline, they can do so [here](#). Students should opt out of Tuition Refund Insurance before late fees are assessed.

Tuition Refund Insurance is not mandatory and is not covered by GA or fellowship funding packages.

If you do not opt out of Tuition Refund Insurance by the end of the third week of the semester, you will be responsible for the charges on your account, including any late fees that may accrue.

Stipend Distribution

The first stipend of the academic year will generally be available in August. To receive the stipend, students must be registered for classes well in advance of the start of the fall semester. Students are encouraged to work closely with the staff in their programs to ensure their stipend is processed appropriately.

Students switching from Graduate Assistant appointments to a fellowship or vice versa should be aware that the stipend schedules and distributions are different. However, they should still receive the university's mandatory stipend for the academic year.

Stipends are processed through Payroll. Students are highly encouraged to sign up for direct deposit through Workday. Instructions on how to sign up for direct deposit can be found [here](#). Students who do not sign up for direct deposit will have their stipends mailed to the current address listed in myUSC. International students must also have an up-to-date Glacier account to receive their fellowship stipend.

Stipends are not processed on the same day every month. Students on fellowship should expect the stipend early in the month, while students receiving stipends for GA appointments will receive the stipend towards the end of the month.

Stipends are not considered late until after the 26th of the month.

Annenberg Stipends 2025-2026

In the Annenberg School, PhD students in their first through fifth years receive a total annual stipend of \$41,715.

For first year students, this is a full fellowship from the Graduate School. For second through fifth year students, this is a combination of GA funding from Annenberg (\$32,715 paid August 2025 through May 2026) plus fellowship funding from the Graduate School (\$9,000 paid August 2025 through July 2026). Sixth year students and above who are funded as GAs do not receive any fellowship funding from the Graduate School and so receive the University's minimum GA stipend of \$41,200 paid August 2025 through May 2026.

The University posts pay schedules online:

- [Fellowship Schedule 2025-2026](#)
- [GA Payroll Schedule 2025](#)
- GA Payroll Schedule 2026 (to be posted on Payroll Services website prior to January 2026)

2025-2026 Fellowship Stipend Calendar

These dates are valid for both first year Annenberg PhD students and advanced Annenberg PhD students who are receiving full fellowships from the University. Dates are for both international and domestic students. The total annual stipend amount for 2025-2026 is \$41,715.

Monthly fellowship stipends are processed on the first Wednesday of the month and should be paid via direct deposit by the first Friday of the month.

Month	Amount of Stipend	Checks Paid By
FALL 2025		
August 2025	\$3,476 fellowship	8/8/25
September 2025	\$3,476 fellowship	9/5/25
October 2025	\$3,476 fellowship	10/3/25
November 2025	\$6,952 fellowship**	11/7/25
December 2025		
SPRING 2026		
January 2026	\$3,476 fellowship	1/9/26
February 2026	\$3,476 fellowship	2/6/26
March 2026	\$3,476 fellowship	3/6/26
April 2026	\$3,476 fellowship	4/3/26
May 2026	\$3,476 fellowship	5/8/26
SUMMER 2026		
June 2026	\$3,476 fellowship	6/5/26
July 2026	\$3,479 fellowship	7/3/26

*First year students may receive their August 2025 stipend after this date, depending on when direct deposit was set up.

**The Graduate School pays out November and December fellowship stipends in one payment in November to ensure that all students receive their final fellowship stipend of the calendar year prior to Winter Break.

2025-2026 GA + Fellowship Stipend Calendar

During their second through fifth years of the program, Annenberg PhD students are funded as 50% GAs during the academic year and receive fellowship funding year-round from the Graduate School. The total annual stipend amount for 2025-2026 is \$41,415.

- GAs are paid for half of August and half of May. GA appointments begin in the middle of August and end in the middle of May.
- Monthly fellowship stipends are processed on the first Wednesday of the month and should be paid via direct deposit by the first Friday of the month. Monthly GA stipends are paid on the 26th of the month (or the closest weekday prior, should the 26th fall on a weekend or holiday).

These dates are valid for all PhD students being funded as Annenberg GAs in years two through five, both international and domestic.

Month	Amount of Stipend	Checks Paid By
FALL 2025		
August 2025	\$750 fellowship \$1,817.50 GA	8/8/25 8/26/25
September 2025	\$750 fellowship \$3,635 GA	9/5/25 9/26/25
October 2025	\$750 fellowship \$3,635 GA	10/3/25 10/24/25
November 2025	\$1,500 fellowship \$3,635 GA	11/7/25 11/26/25
December 2025	\$3,635 GA	12/24/25
SPRING 2026		
January 2026	\$750 fellowship \$3,635 GA	1/9/26 1/26/26
February 2026	\$750 fellowship \$3,635 GA	2/6/26 2/26/26
March 2026	\$750 fellowship \$3,635 GA	3/6/26 3/26/26
April 2026	\$750 fellowship \$3,635 GA	4/3/26 4/24/26
May 2026	\$750 fellowship \$1,817.50 GA	5/8/26 5/26/26
SUMMER 2026		
June 2026	\$750 fellowship	6/5/26
July 2026	\$750 fellowship	7/3/26

*The Graduate School pays out November and December fellowship stipends in one payment in November to ensure that all students receive their final fellowship stipend of the calendar year prior to Winter Break.

2025-2026 Sixth Year and Above GA Stipend Calendar

If an Annenberg PhD student is funded as a GA any year after their fifth year, they will not receive Graduate School fellowship funding during those years and will not be funded during June or July. They will be paid at the current University stipend minimum. For the 2025-2026 academic year, that is \$41,200/year. If only funded for one semester (fall or spring), the stipend is \$20,600 per semester.

GA funding past the fifth year is not guaranteed.

GAs are paid for half of August and half of May. GA appointments begin in the middle of August and end in the middle of May.

These dates are valid for all students being funded as Annenberg GAs in years six and above, both international and domestic.

Month	Amount of Stipend	Checks Paid By
FALL 2025		
August 2025	\$2,288.88 GA	8/26/25
September 2025	\$4,577.78 GA	9/26/25
October 2025	\$4,577.78 GA	10/24/25
November 2025	\$4,577.78 GA	11/26/25
December 2025	\$4,577.78 GA	12/24/25
SPRING 2026		
January 2026	\$4,577.78 GA	1/26/26
February 2026	\$4,577.78 GA	2/26/26
March 2026	\$4,577.78 GA	3/26/26
April 2026	\$4,577.78 GA	4/24/26
May 2026	\$2,288.88 GA	5/26/26

Summer Support

During the summer semester (mid-May through mid-August), students receiving support as Graduate Assistants (RA, TA, and ALs) with a 50% appointment and PhD students with fellowships may work additional hours beyond the 20-hour maximum, up to an average of 40 hours per week in other on-campus or off-campus roles.

Students who have received offers of full-time employment off-campus during the summer semester may not simultaneously hold positions as Graduate Assistants or PhD Fellows.

Students who wish to decline summer support from USC in favor of full-time off-campus employment or internships will be asked to confirm their decision in writing. This information will be archived in the student's Advise USC file. International students should review the Office of International Services website for information about [Curricular Practical Training](#).

Students who serve as TAs, RAs, and ALs during the summer receive a stipend and tuition remission proportional to the appointment. The health center fee will also be provided, and the student will have access from the first day of the appointment until the end of the summer. (The spring coverage period for the USC student health insurance includes January through the end of the summer as well.)

Students who are invited to campus for any other sponsored academic purpose, such as a professional development institute, receive access to the student health center from the first day of the academic event until the end of the summer.

Mandatory Fees, Health, and Dental Insurance

Graduate Assistant appointments and fellowships include tuition, a stipend at the university's minimum rate or higher, health and dental insurance, access to the student health center, the Student Programming Fee, Norman H. Topping Student Aid Fund Fee, and the Transportation Fee.

Students who will not be in Los Angeles for the fall and/or spring semester should contact the health insurance office to see if they need to register for satellite health insurance. Students can visit the Student Health website for more information about student health insurance.

Parking and Transit Benefits

PhD students may participate in USC's Student [U-Pass program](#). The Transportation Fee is included in both the GA and Fellowship funding package each semester.

USC offers PhD students a limited number of permits for 2 or 3 days a week (partial week permits). These passes are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Permits are subject to availability at either UPC (150 campus permits total) - Shrine, Figueroa, and Grand, or HSC (50 campus permits total) - Valley and Lot 71.

Support for Conferences

Annenberg provides conference travel funding to PhD students in their first through fifth years. Each student is provided with up to \$1,000 per fiscal year (July 1 – June 30).

To be eligible for travel support, students must be active participants in a qualifying conference: delivering competitively selected papers and posters; participating on competitively selected panels; serving as program discussants, etc.

Students must have advisor approval for their travel and conference participation AND financial approval from the Annenberg dean's office prior to making travel plans.

Please see Appendix for details on how to start the approval process and submit a reimbursement request.

Travel and professional development grants may also be available through USC's [Graduate](#)

[Student Government](#) and the Graduate School. If you are eligible to apply for a Graduate School PhD Fellow travel grant, you will be notified when the application period opens each semester.

Professional Association Membership Support

Annenberg pays the membership fees for all doctoral students (during years one through five) to belong to the ICA and the NCA. You will receive purchase codes from the department each fall to renew your membership via the ICA and NCA websites.

While the school will pay for registration fees for approved conferences (provided that the student meets the participation requirements and has sufficient funds available), it will not pay for membership fees for other professional organizations.

Summer Funding Opportunities

Summer Educational Fellowship

Annenberg PhD students may apply for financial support to participate at a summer educational institute or workshop. Funding is competitive and not guaranteed to all students. In the past, students have attended programs such as the Annenberg-Oxford Media Policy Institute, the Oxford Internet Institute, and the University of Michigan's Summer Program in Quantitative Methods. Students are required to provide a one-page summary and evaluation of their experiences at their Summer Institutes. Summer Educational Fellowships are paid as taxable stipends.

Summer Research Fellowship

Annenberg PhD students may apply for financial support to conduct a summer research project. Proposals are judged competitively, and funding is not guaranteed. Every funded student is required to provide a final written report that explains the research conducted and provides the substantive findings of the work. These reports are generally 12-20 pages (including references), double spaced. Students are also asked to present their work during an ARS session. Summer Research Fellowships are paid as taxable stipends.

Students may only receive a summer research/education fellowship twice during their tenure at Annenberg. A student may not receive a summer research/education fellowship at the same time as an STS summer research fellowship or a COMPASS fellowship.

Summer research and educational fellowships opportunities are dependent on funding availability.

Dissertation Research Support

All students who have passed their qualifying exams and have successfully defended the prospectus for their dissertations are eligible to receive up to \$3,000 in funding for approved dissertation-research expenses.

Once a student has passed quals, they should submit a [Dissertation Research Funds Application](#) (signed by their advisor) to the Academic Program Associate, who will obtain Annenberg dean's office financial approval. This form is not binding, but it is expected to be a well-thought-out plan.

Dissertation funding is limited to expenses related to the research and writing of the dissertation only. You may not use dissertation funding for University fees, including but not limited to dissertation submission fees and regalia rental fees, or for travel to conferences for the sole

purpose of presenting “dissertation-related” work. Any travel must be related to the research and writing of a student’s dissertation.

Approval of dissertation expenses is always at the discretion of the Director of the Doctoral Program, the Director of the School of Communication, and the Annenberg dean’s office. As with travel expenses, dissertation expenses are reimbursed via the online Concur system and must be approved by the Dean’s office.

Electronic Equipment Purchases

Any purchase of electronic or other equipment using Annenberg School of Communication funds must be approved in writing by the student’s advisor, by the Director of the Doctoral Program, and the by Dean’s office.

All equipment purchased with Annenberg funds is the property of the USC Annenberg School of Communication.

All equipment purchased using Annenberg School funds must be tagged as Annenberg property by [Annenberg TechOps](#). In the case of computers and other electronic equipment, TechOps must certify that the equipment conforms to all USC security and safety requirements. Please contact TechOps to fulfill this requirement.

All equipment purchased with Annenberg funds must be returned to the School when students have completed the tasks for which the equipment was purchased. At the very latest, equipment must be returned by the time of the dissertation defense or when the student leaves the school for any other reason.

Other Types of Support

Schools and programs may offer scholarships and awards in addition to the GA appointment or fellowship. Scholarships are distinct from fellowships, as they do not include tuition or fees, and the dollar amount does not need to meet the university’s minimum stipend requirement. Scholarships are often merit-based and do not require students to be engaged in research or teaching-related activities. Schools and programs may also provide stipend top-offs to PhDs to supplement the university’s minimum stipend or a stipend received from an external funder.

General Awards are credited to students' accounts after all other awards (such as tuition) have been processed. If this creates a credit balance, the excess funds will be automatically sent to the student's bank account, provided they have set up [eRefund](#) information in their student account and have no recent checks pending, no ACH payments in process, and no active payment plans. If students have not set up eRefund information, the credit will remain in their account to cover future charges while they remain enrolled. If students do not enroll in the following fall or spring term, once the settlement deadline passes, the university will contact them to verify their mailing address and send a physical check for any remaining balance.

PhD students may occasionally be hired as hourly Graduate Student Workers. The duties of Graduate Assistants (TA, RA, and AL) should be distinct from activities performed by hourly graduate student workers.

Collective Bargaining Agreement

Graduate students at USC are represented by the Graduate Student Workers Organizing Committee-UAW Local 872. All graduate students enrolled at USC who are employed as Teaching Assistants, Assistant Lecturers, Research Assistants, or internally-funded Fellows in STEM programs are considered part of the union. The Collective Bargaining Agreement is available on the Graduate School [website](#).

VI. GA Appointments and Responsibilities

Eligibility

To be eligible to serve as a Teaching Assistant (TA), Research Assistant (RA), or Graduate Assistant Lecturer (AL), students must:

- have been admitted to a graduate degree program with regular graduate standing
- be enrolled full-time
- be in good academic standing with a GPA of no lower than 3.0
- be verified by their home program to be making satisfactory academic progress toward the degree
- have met the university's standards for proficiency in the English language

The university requires TAs, RAs, and ALs to be enrolled in a minimum of 6 units every semester or in full-time equivalent courses such as GRSC 800abz or Dissertation 794.

Students should plan to be in Los Angeles each August to coincide with the start date of their GA appointment (which is earlier than the start of Fall classes).

Types of GA Appointments

Research Assistant

RAs are responsible for the accuracy, validity, and integrity of the research on which they are contributing. The quality of the research reflects on the student, the faculty supervisor, and the university. Deliberate falsification of research results may result in dismissal from the university. RAs must maintain the confidentiality of the faculty mentor's professional activities and research before presentation or publication, in accordance with existing practices and policies in the area of research activity. In the publication and presentation of research produced as an RA, the student must acknowledge the contributions of the faculty supervisor and other members of the research team. RAs should assume responsibility for making proper use of the intellectual, instructional, and physical environment in which they are conducting research. The nature of some research projects may require that the RA be available during holiday periods or semester breaks. Students and their faculty supervisors should discuss expectations and time off before the appointment is accepted.

Teaching Assistant

The responsibilities of TAs are carried out under the established supervision of the departmental faculty. The duties of TAs may include the following: reading course texts and materials, assisting during lectures, leading discussion sections or lab meetings, holding office hours each week,

responding to student concerns, grading course assignments and exams, leading and monitoring lab exercises, participating in regular meetings with supervising faculty and other TAs, designing and leading review sessions, serving as a liaison between the instructor and students, upholding the university's policy on academic integrity, and assisting with the management of the course details. The [Center for Excellence in Teaching](#) is a good resource for support and information.

As with faculty at USC, TAs are evaluated by their students. TAs should review evaluations at the end of each semester, after grades have been submitted. TAs are encouraged to keep a record of student feedback for their teaching portfolio.

Graduate Assistant Lecturer

Students in the PhD in Communication program may apply for Assistant Lecturer (AL) assignments to serve as the primary instructor for an undergraduate course once they have passed the qualifying exam and submitted their approved prospectus.

Assignment as AL is subject to the number of courses available each semester; a student's record of achievement as a TA; and a student's experience and ability to teach specific topics.

Students applying for AL positions are expected to have served as a TA in an undergraduate course with discussion sections.

A call for AL applications will be sent to the commgrad list each semester.

Students serving as an AL in the summer will be compensated with a separate summer GA stipend in addition to their base annual stipend.

Fifth Year Spring Assistant Lecturer

Students in their fifth year of the Annenberg PhD program may apply for the opportunity to design and teach their own course. Students must be making timely progress to the degree, have an outstanding record of coursework, and have strong student evaluations and faculty recommendations. As with all AL appointments, students must have passed the qualifying exam and submitted their approved prospectus.

Students applying for these AL positions are expected to have served as a TA in an undergraduate course with discussion sections and to have taught at least one existing COMM course as an AL.

Each year, one student will be chosen to design and teach a COMM 400 Seminar in Communication course in the spring of their fifth year. During that semester, the student will be funded as a 50% AL. We will also offer an additional stipend of \$500 to assist with the development of the course. A call for applications will be sent out during the fall semester each year.

Preparing to Apply for AL Assignments

Things to consider if you plan to apply for an Assistant Lecture position in your fourth or fifth year:

- Assignments are made based on available courses in each semester, as well as a student's experience as a TA and their ability to teach on specific topics or areas of study. Ideal candidates will have varied experience as TAs (including leading discussion sections) and will identify classes which match their own subject matter expertise.

- Make sure to get varied experience in your second and third years as a TA, both as a grader and as a discussion section leader. It is important to get experience in the classroom as a TA (especially leading sections) before applying to teach a standalone. Request TA assignments that will allow you to accomplish this. Try not to request the same TA course every semester.
- Discuss with your advisor the pros and cons of fellowships. While they can be extremely helpful, receiving a fellowship means that you will not be able to TA during the duration of the award.
- A handful of standalones are offered to PhD students each semester. These are existing COMM undergraduate courses and will be announced with the call for applications each semester. Teaching opportunities are always dependent on School of Communication course needs.
- If you wish to apply to create and teach your own course during your fifth year, please work with your advisor and/or other faculty members to develop a syllabus. Review the undergraduate curriculum and course schedule to see what is being offered. What will appeal to upper level undergraduate Comm majors? Does your idea for a class overlap with existing courses? Something new, innovative, and topical will appeal to undergrads. Think about the course title, too!
- Students who are particularly interested in teaching may want to complete additional training through the USC Center for Excellence in Teaching's [Future Faculty Teaching Institute](#).

TA Training

All GAs must complete TA training at the start of the second year of the program. The School of Communication will hold two mandatory TA training sessions each year, both in person. One will be held the week before classes start in mid-August and one will be held a few weeks into the fall semester. TA training is facilitated by the Associate Dean for Excellence in Teaching. All students are also encouraged to attend pedagogy workshops throughout the year.

International Teaching Assistant Exam

Before beginning any GA assignment, international students are required by the University to pass a test of spoken English language proficiency. The [International Teaching Assistant \(ITA\) Exam](#) is administered by USC's American Language Institute. If not approved by USC, students will be asked to take supplementary ALI courses.

Reduced Workload Exception (Qualifying Exam Semester)

Work responsibilities are reduced by half, to a 25% assignment, for the term in which Annenberg PhD students are preparing to take their qualifying exams. The student will still receive 50% position compensation. Students should be sure to arrange this exemption carefully, as it may only be used once. It must be used during the academic year in which a student takes their qualifying exam and may not be used after the qualifying exam has been completed.

Expected Effort

A graduate student's first responsibility is to their doctoral research and studies. For this reason, GA awards cannot exceed 20 hours per week for a 50% appointment or 10 hours per week for a 25% appointment, averaged over a semester. Students receiving a 50% GA appointment may not

undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year from mid-August through mid-May. Students receiving a 25% GA appointment during the academic year may be eligible for part-time, off-campus employment.

F-1 and J-1 International students with a 25% GA appointment may be eligible for part-time [Curricular Practical Training](#) (CPT), if they meet the CPT eligibility requirements, and if academic department signs off on the CPT request. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs reviews exceptions to this policy through the Graduate School's Petition system.

Over 50% GA Petition

During the fall and spring semesters, domestic students with a 50% GA position may petition the Graduate School to work an additional 5 hours per week on campus. Due to visa work restrictions, international students may not work any additional hours when assigned a 50% GA position.

Domestic students are limited to a maximum of five hours of work per week on top of a 50% GA position. You must resubmit a petition every semester in which you work over 50%, even if you have been previously approved for the same position.

Contact the Academic Program Associate to start the Over 50% GA petition process.

Appointment Periods

Semester	Approximate Start Date	Approximate End Date
Fall	August 16	December 31
Spring	January 1	May 15
Summer	May 16	August 15

Financial Support

All TA, RA, and AL appointments include tuition units, health insurance, access to the student health center, and a stipend. Each year, the Provost sets the base stipend for TAs, RAs, and ALs. Schools, programs, and PIs may offer appointments with higher amounts.

Tuition Remission

The tuition allowance is non-transferable from semester to semester and will be applied to the student's account in the amount appropriate for the courses s/he takes. Students should contact the program of appointment if the tuition is not credited to their account.

A 50% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 12 units per semester of the appointment and six units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

A 33% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 10 units per semester of the appointment and five units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

A 25% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 8 units per semester of the appointment and four units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

Contact the Academic Program Associate for questions about tuition remission.

Non-Annenberg Tuition and Lab Fees

Some schools at USC, including the School of Cinematic Arts, the Marshall School of Business, the Viterbi School of Engineering, and the Gould School of Law, charge more per unit for tuition than Annenberg. Some courses also charge lab fees.

Tuition for courses outside Annenberg will be covered as long as the course will be applied toward your degree or if the course is necessary for your degree or dissertation (i.e., a language or programming course).

If you plan to take a class outside of Annenberg, notify the Academic Program Associate when you register so adjustments can be made to your account before you receive your bill.

Annenberg Technology Requirement and Fees

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes.

The \$250/semester Annenberg Student Access Fee (Technology Fee) is waived for doctoral students. If you have registered for a Communication master's course (CMGT, PUBD, DSM, some 500-level COMM courses open to master's students), please check your account at the beginning of the semester. If you have been charged this fee, please notify the Academic Program Associate and it will be reversed.

Tuition Refund Insurance

Students should opt out of [Tuition Refund Insurance](#) when their tuition is being covered as part of an assistantship or fellowship. If a student has already accepted Tuition Refund Insurance but would like to decline, they can do so [here](#). Students should opt out of Tuition Refund Insurance before late fees are assessed.

Tuition Refund Insurance is not mandatory and is not covered by GA or fellowship funding packages.

If you do not opt out of Tuition Refund Insurance by the end of the third week of the semester, you will be responsible for the charges on your account, including any late fees that may accrue.

Payroll Set Up and Direct Deposit

Direct deposit is the recommended method of receiving your stipends. Students who do not sign up for direct deposit in the [Workday system](#) will have paper checks mailed to their current address in OASIS. Students are responsible for maintaining current contact information in OASIS.

To set up direct deposit in Workday:

1. On the Workday home page, click **Pay** (a blue wallet icon).
2. Select **Payment Elections**.
3. Click **Add**.
4. In the **Account Information** section, enter **Account Nickname** (optional), **Routing Transit Number**, **Bank Name**, **Bank Identification Code**, **Account Type**, and **Account Number**. Click **OK**.

5. You will see a message that your changes have been saved and you will see the new account on the next screen. You can add additional bank accounts by repeating steps 3 and 4. You can also edit or remove any existing accounts.

Payroll for Incoming Students

Incoming PhD students will receive instructions from the department during the summer prior to their start.

First Year Domestic Students

While funded on fellowship, domestic students are Domestic Scholars. You will receive an email from the Workday system, prompting you to log in to complete onboarding. Sign up for direct deposit in Workday.

First Year International Students

While funded on fellowship, international students are NRA (Non-Resident Alien) Scholars. You will receive an email from the Workday system, prompting you to log in to complete onboarding. Sign up for direct deposit in Workday. Once you are in LA, you must meet with the Annenberg business office to present your Glacier and I-9 documents in person.

Payroll for Continuing Students

By May 1, 2026, all first-year students must fill out I-9 paperwork to be set up in USC payroll for their GA assignments, which will start in August 2026. This will enable a smooth transition into second year GA assignments and prevent the delay of fall stipend payments.

First year students will receive a reminder after spring break with instructions on in-person appointments with the Annenberg Payroll and Personnel Coordinator. All students should make sure to do this prior to leaving campus for the summer.

Second - Fifth Year Domestic Students

Domestic students are both Domestic Scholars (for fellowship stipends) and Graduate Assistants (for GA stipends) in years two through five. Students must meet in person with the Annenberg business office at the end of their first year to be set up as a GA in the Workday system and confirm their direct deposit information in Workday.

Second - Fifth Year International Students

International students are both NRA Scholars (for fellowship stipends) and Graduate Assistants (for GA stipends) in years two through five. Students must meet in person with the Annenberg business office at the end of their first year to be set up as a GA in the Workday system and confirm their direct deposit information in Workday.

GA-related Warning and Dismissal

PhD students serving as a GA may be disciplined, suspended or discharged for absenteeism; lateness; failure to adhere to stated course or research deadlines; failure to aid in the preparation of course or research materials; failure to hold sections, labs, or office hours; failure to grade, failure to perform assigned lab duties, willful abandonment of teaching or research assignments; failure to comply with applicable policies. Students and their faculty supervisors should discuss

expectations and time off before the appointment is accepted. Discipline will only be for just cause and each case will be taken very seriously, recognizing that the Collective Bargaining Unit also may need to be involved.

When possible, a conference meeting will be held with the student and their supervisor before a suspension or discharge. The student may request to have Union representation present at the conference meeting. The University will notify the student and the Union in writing of the issuance of discipline or any investigative leave.

VII. Tax Information

Taxable Income and Withholding

General tax information for PhD students is available on the [Student Financial Services](#) website. USC staff cannot provide tax advice. We strongly advise students to contact the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or consult with a tax professional for tax-related questions.

International Student Considerations

International students may wish to consult the [Office of International Services](#) (OIS) website, which offers general information about tax exemptions, tax-related forms, and access to Sprintax, a tax preparation software. OIS cannot advise on tax-related issues. Students should consult with a qualified tax professional for individual assistance.

Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN)

The ITIN is a nine-digit number issued by the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to individuals who are not eligible to obtain a social security number (SSN). The ITIN is used to file taxes and is not a form of work authorization. First year international students will need to apply for an ITIN as they receive payments from the university (first year fellowship stipends). Please see instructions on the [OIS website](#).

Social Security Number (SSN)

Prior to the start of the second year, international students must apply for a social security number. A hard copy GA offer letter will be provided to all first-year international students for this purpose in the spring semester. USC's Employer Identification Number (EIN) is 95-1642394.

Graduate Students Supported by Fellowships

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) provides information regarding the tax treatment of fellowship awards. The IRS also provides information regarding the 1098-T form. Some education-related items that are included in your fellowship may not be taxable, for example, tuition remission. Other items, such as living expenses including room and board, transportation, and entertainment, are generally considered taxable.

While receiving a fellowship, domestic students will not receive a W-2 form. However, according to the IRS, you must report all taxable amounts, whether or not you received a Form W-2. If you have taxable income from your fellowship, you may need to make estimated tax payments. For more information, see Pub. 505, Tax Withholding and Estimated Tax, and the IRS help on estimated taxes.

International students (non-resident aliens for tax purposes) on fellowship receive their stipends through University Payroll Services. The stipend may be treated as taxable income by the IRS. Therefore, the university may be obligated to withhold income taxes. The amount of this tax withholding depends on the individual's circumstances, including their total stipend and the status of the tax treaty between their home country and the United States. Tuition remission provided to an international student on fellowship is not taxable.

Graduate Students Supported by Graduate Assistantships

The stipends provided via the University Payroll Services to domestic and international students who are serving as TAs, RAs, and ALs are treated as taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service. Therefore, the university may be obligated to report the income and withhold income taxes. The amount of this tax withholding depends on the individual circumstances of the student, including the total stipend, the instructions provided by the student on Form W-4, and, if an international student, the status of the tax treaty between their home country and the United States, as well as Form 8233. Tuition remission provided to a TA, RA, or AL is not reportable or taxable.

Students Hired as Graduate Student Workers (Hourly)

The payment that domestic and international students receive as hourly graduate student workers is treated as taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service. The amount of this tax withholding depends upon the individual circumstances of the student, including the total amount paid per pay period, the instructions provided by the student on Form W-4, and, if an international student, the status of the tax treaty of their tax residence country and the completion of IRS Form 8233.

VIII. Health Insurance and Health Center Access

The [Engemann Student Health Center website](#) provides information about the USC health insurance, on-campus medical services, student counseling services, and wellness. Students can also make appointments through the website. The Engemann Student Health Center is used primarily by students based at UPC.

When students register for classes in the fall and spring, they will be automatically charged for health insurance and access to the Engemann Student Health Center. Coverage for students registered for Fall 2025 begins on Monday, August 18, 2025. Spring health insurance continues over the summer, meaning that USC PhD students in good standing receive twelve months of uninterrupted health coverage.

To have access to the Engemann Student Health Center over the summer, you must enroll in GRSC 802 prior to the start of the summer semester. A reminder will be sent from the department in late spring.

Insurance coverage for dependents is not included in the Annenberg funding package. USC does not offer coverage for dependents under student health insurance.

If you ever choose to waive your student health insurance, you must complete a waiver form. Please scroll down on [this page](#) and click on the red Insurance Waiver button.

While GA and Fellowship funding packages include insurance coverage, they do not pay for individual visits to the Engemann Center/any other health care provider or for any related charges for procedures and tests.

Health Funding Package

Your funding package as a GA or Fellow covers your [USC-Aetna](#) health insurance premium (including vision care), your Delta Dental premium, and your USC Student Health fee, which allows you to utilize the Engemann Center as your primary/initial source of health care. You are covered year-round; there is no gap in coverage between academic years as long as you are in good standing and properly registered.

USC-Aetna Student Health Plan (includes vision care through EyeMed)

Fall 2025	8/18/25 through 1/11/26	\$1,224
Spring/Summer 2026	1/12/26 through 8/14/26	\$2,298

USC Student Health Fee

Fall 2025	8/18/25 through 1/11/26	\$700
Spring 2026	1/12/26 through 5/23/26	\$700
Summer 2026	5/24/26 through 8/14/26	TBD

Student Dental Insurance

Fall 2025	8/18/25 through 1/11/26	\$72
Spring/Summer 2026	1/12/26 through 8/14/26	\$120

Accessing Medical Care

Visit USC Student Health Services for non-emergency care. This is where you will receive primary care. Make an appointment online (for both routine medical care and for illness) through the [My Student Health Record \(MySHR\)](#) portal or call 213-740-9355 to speak with a medical professional.

Once you've seen a medical professional at Student Health Services and it is determined that you require additional care, you will be given a referral.

Student Health Services will make every attempt to refer you to a USC Designated Tier 1 Provider; you should verify this, as well.

Accessing Vision Care

Students enrolled in the USC Student Health Insurance Plan automatically have vision coverage through [EyeMed](#).

Accessing Dental Care

Students have dental coverage through [Delta Dental PPO](#). You can visit any licensed dentist but will usually pay the lowest out-of-pocket costs when you choose a PPO network dentist.

The USC Student Health Fee

The health fee covers most medical services at the USC Student Health Center, but there are some additional fees for tests, immunizations, medications, and other services. These additional fees

are the student's responsibility and are not covered by your funding package. Please see the [Student Health website](#) for various fees.

Bringing an Existing Insurance Plan to Campus

If you have employer-based insurance (through parent/spouse/partner) that meets the minimum requirements of the university, or you would like to consider a separate plan, you may opt to waive the student health insurance plan. To request this waiver, please scroll down on [this page](#) and click on the red "Insurance Waiver" button.

If you waive your insurance, please notify the Academic Program Associate.

IX. Academic Calendar

Holidays

PhD students with graduate assistantship (GA) appointments will observe the [academic holiday schedule](#). If a student serving as a GA is unable to observe a holiday due to the obligations of their appointment, they will be provided with an alternative day off instead of the missed holiday during the same semester, with the advance agreement of their designated faculty supervisor and, as needed, the Director of Graduate Studies.

X. Resources, Support, and Problem Resolution

Childcare Fund

[A childcare subsidy of up to \\$1,800](#) is available per semester for each child under the age of six. The subsidy is considered taxable income and is subject to reporting on the appropriate forms. The student is solely responsible and liable for any tax liability resulting from the subsidy provided to the student or their dependent.

If a student has a loan, particularly Direct Loans, the Childcare grants could reduce the student's loan eligibility. Students should contact the Financial Aid Office to confirm.

International students should note the following:

- To remain eligible for this grant, students must maintain valid F-1 or J-1 status, and their dependents must maintain F-2 or J-2 status.
- This grant cannot be used as proof of funding for bringing dependents (spouse and/or children) to the U.S. under F-2 or J-2 status. Information regarding proof of funding for dependents is available on the Office of International Services [website](#).
- J-1 students who receive this grant must request a new DS-2019 with updated funding information by submitting a Financial Update Request through the [Trojan International Portal](#). Once processed, a new DS-2019 will be issued.
- Students in F-1 status on post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) or STEM OPT Extension, as well as J-1 students on post-completion Academic Training, are not eligible to apply for or receive this grant.

Childcare Fund Eligibility Criteria

The student must be a graduate student worker in the union bargaining unit in the semester in which the provider expense was incurred. Applicants must furnish supporting documentation as reasonably requested by USC. Eligible childcare providers include:

- A licensed childcare center
- A licensed family childcare provider
- A licensed after-school program
- A daytime summer camp program
- An in-home provider with a Social Security or Tax I.D. number. An in-home provider cannot be a spouse, relative, child under age 19, or anyone who lives in the same household as the student. Nannies and nanny shares are covered if the caregiver has a valid Social Security number or Tax ID Number.

Funds are not available for overnight camp, team registration fees, extracurricular activities, or club sports. The program's primary intent must be to provide childcare while the parent is working. Summer programs can be considered a childcare program if they meet the requirements above.

Applications are processed in the order received. Applications will not be accepted or processed when funds for the academic year have been exhausted. More information is available on the [Graduate School Website](#).

Short Term Hardship Grant

Short-term hardship grants are available to students with dependents. Grants are subject to a cap of \$2,500 per graduate student worker per semester. Grants may not be used for expenses that are covered by another fund or account. The grant is taxable income and is therefore subject to taxation and reporting on the appropriate forms. The student is solely responsible and liable for any tax liability resulting from the grant.

Short Term Hardship Eligibility

The student must be a graduate student worker in the bargaining unit in the semester in which the provider expense was incurred. The student must have a dependent, and they must furnish supporting documentation as reasonably requested by USC.

Hardships may include, but are not limited to, events resulting from a sudden or unexpected illness, imminent loss of housing, loss of property due to natural disaster, or medical, dental, and vision expenditures not covered by any other source.

If the dependent is covered by a health insurance plan, unanticipated emergency or short-term out-of-pocket expenses are not covered by the insurance plan. If the dependent is not covered by a health insurance plan, unanticipated emergency or short-term out-of-pocket medical expenses incurred by the Graduate Student Worker.

Applications are processed in the order received. Applications will not be accepted or processed when funds for the academic year have been exhausted. More information is available on the [Graduate School Website](#).

Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund

[Awards](#) are distributed to Annenberg students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full-tuition expenses, but rather serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

[Awards](#) will be distributed throughout the year via an application process to Annenberg students pursuing extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities not covered by tuition.

Resources for International Students

The Office of International Services (OIS) supports F-1 and J-1 international students, helping them maintain immigration status, navigate complex immigration regulations, and succeed academically and personally. Key services include immigration advising, travel advising, and guidance on employment rules, such as on-campus work, CPT, and OPT.

With expertise in F-1 & J-1 immigration regulations, OIS advisors collaborate with government agencies and university departments to ensure students comply with their visa requirements while at USC.

For more information, please visit the [OIS website](#).

OIS advisors are available for [one-on-one meetings](#) daily via Zoom - no appointment is necessary:

- Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays: 1 PM-3 PM
- Tuesdays & Thursdays: 10 AM-12 PM
- J-1 advisors are available Tuesdays, Wednesdays, & Thursdays

International Student Considerations

First Year

- **I-20:** Newly admitted international students will be issued an I-20 by the [USC Graduate Admission office](#).
- **Immigration Status Verification:** International students may not register for their first semester of classes until arriving in the US and completing the [Immigration Status Verification \(ISV\) process with OIS](#).
- **ITIN:** The ITIN (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number) is a nine-digit number issued by the IRS to individuals who are not eligible to obtain a Social Security Number (SSN). The ITIN is used to file taxes and is not a form of work authorization. You will need to apply for an ITIN as a student who receive payments from the university in the form of a check. [Please see instructions on the OIS website](#).
- **US Bank Account:** International students should be sure to set up a [US bank account](#) prior to their first semester of funding.
- **Degree Verification:** All graduate students must verify that they have been awarded a bachelor's-level degree from an accredited institution in the US or an equivalent degree from an institution outside the US. International degrees [must be verified by IERF](#). The

University does not accept verification from any other company. Please follow the instructions found on the Degree Progress website.

Summer After First Year

- **International TA Exam:** International students must complete [the International TA Exam \(ITA Exam\)](#) at the USC American Language Institute (ALI) prior to the start of the second year.
- **Social Security Number (SSN):** Before starting employment as a GA in the second year of the program, international students must obtain a Social Security Number. [Application process can be found on the OIS website](#). Hard copy GA letters will be provided by the department during the spring semester of the first year.

Change to Domestic Student for Tax Purpose

- F-1 and J-1 students and their dependents are usually considered Non-Resident Aliens (NRAs) for tax purposes [for their first five years in the US](#).
- After those five years, students generally are considered to be Resident Aliens for tax purposes. This means that their stipends will be paid as if they were domestic students. This is ONLY related to payment process and taxes and does NOT change a student's immigration or visa status.
- If a student was in the US on an F-1 visa prior to starting the PhD program, the move from NRA to RA could happen before or during their time at Annenberg.
- For questions on status for tax purposes, contact OIS.

Lactation Support

PhD students have access to spaces for expressing and storing breast milk. Rooms on the UPC and HSC campus are listed [here](#).

American Language Institute

Many international students are from countries where English is not spoken as a native language. The [American Language Institute \(ALI\)](#) provides classes and other resources to assist international undergraduate and graduate students in improving their English and adapting to an American university program. Before they can be cleared to begin teaching at USC, all international Teaching Assistants are required to take part in a training program run by ALI.

Contact the Academic Program Associate if you wish to enroll in an ALI course above your 12 units of tuition.

Center for Excellence in Teaching

The [Center for Excellence in Teaching \(CET\)](#) is the university's think tank for innovative teaching. As a faculty-led initiative, CET draws upon the talents of experienced faculty to promote a commitment to excellence in teaching, learning, and scholarship. CET provides training and resources to improve teaching at USC, including supporting faculty and Teaching Assistants as they devise new courses and develop enriching out-of-class activities. CET offers seminars and lectures throughout the semester on a variety of topics.

Library Resources

[Accessibility Training for Teaching Assistants at USC](#)

Organized and developed by a collaboration between the Undergraduate Student Government (USG), Graduate Student Government (GSG), and USC Libraries as a resource for accessibility training for teaching assistants.

[Chimene Tucker](#) is the USC Librarian for the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. cetucker@usc.edu

Accommodations

The University provides reasonable accommodations to PhD students who are disabled or become disabled and need reasonable accommodations to perform the essential functions of their job. More information is available from USC's [Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#).

Graduate Student Government

The mission of GSG is to enhance the graduate and professional student experience by serving as the face of the student body. GSG is responsible for managing student resources efficiently, providing a voice for the student community, building a community that fosters interdisciplinary exchanges, and informing students about their rights, resources, and opportunities. Elected officers, senators who represent all schools and departments, and special interest committees tackle issues specific to graduate and professional students and provide venues for interaction beyond the academic realm. An Executive Board of 29 officers is selected every spring by the GSG senators and outgoing executive board members. The Executive Board oversees the daily operations of GSG and works closely with the Senate to promote graduate and professional student interests within the USC administration and academic departments.

More information is available from the [Graduate Student Government](#) website.

Other Support

[Campus Support and Intervention \(CSI\)](#)

CSI connects with members of the USC community when they need support in achieving their academic, professional, and personal goals.

(213) 740-0411

uscsupport@usc.edu

[CARE-Support Center \(CARE-SC\)](#)

CARE-SC (formerly RSVP) provides an advocate team for 24/7 response in situations of gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking). All services are confidential and covered through the Student Health Fee.

24/7 Services

Call 213-740-9355 for 24/7 confidential advocate services, including arranging transportation to a specialized SART center for medical care and forensic exam.

SART/Forensic Exams

A confidential CARE-SC Advocate can arrange free Lyft transportation to a SART (Sexual Assault Response Team) Center for a forensic exam and additional care services and can go with you. USC works with the Santa Monica Rape Treatment Center at UCLA Santa Monica Medical Center. Full list of resources can be found [here](#).

Counseling and Mental Health

Provides counseling and support for all students.
(213) 740-9355 (WELL)

Department of Public Safety (DPS)

The University Park Campus DPS emergency line is 213-740-4321 or extension 04321 from an on-campus phone. The non-emergency line is 213-740-6000 or extension 06000 from an on-campus phone. If you sign up for [TrojansAlert](#), you will receive emergency messages via text and email. DPS also provides access to the [LiveSafe app](#). DPS operates the University's centralized [lost and found service](#). If you plan to ride a bicycle, scooter, or skateboard on campus, [register it](#) for free with DPS.

Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity

KCLC offers outreach, programming, and individual coaching services to USC students and departments to promote a campus-wide understanding of learning differences and their potential to facilitate creativity and academic excellence.

(213) 740-7884

kortschakcenter@usc.edu

Office of Civil Rights Compliance

The Office of Civil Rights Compliance (formerly EEO-TIX) manages the University's response to reports of discrimination, harassment, and retaliation involving community members.

Office of the Ombuds

Available to faculty, staff, and students experiencing University-related concerns, conflicts, or challenging situations.

(213) 821-9556 (University Park Campus)

upcombuds@usc.edu

Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS)

Provides support services for individuals with disabilities.

(213) 740-0776 (University Park Campus)

osasfrontdesk@usc.edu

Student Basic Needs

Ensures student well-being through food, housing, and economic justice.

Trojans Care for Trojans (TC4T)

An initiative within the Office of Campus Wellbeing and Crisis Intervention that empowers USC students, faculty, and staff to take action when they are concerned about a fellow Trojan challenged with personal difficulties.

Campus Groups

[Asian Pacific American Student Assembly \(APASA\)](#)
[Asian Pacific American Student Services \(APASS\)](#)
[Black Graduate Student Network](#)
[Center for Black Cultural and Student Affairs \(CBCSA\)](#)
[La CASA](#)
[LGBTQ+ Student Center](#)
[Mindful USC](#)
[Queer Graduate Alliance](#)
[Religious and Spiritual Life](#)
[Trans@USC](#)
[Yoga USC](#)

Other Useful Links

[Academic Calendar](#)
[Annenberg Graphic Identity](#)
[Brightspace Help](#)
[Citation Software](#)
[Digital Lounge](#)
[FERPA Tutorial](#)
[Financial Aid](#)
[Graduate School](#)
[Graduate Student Government](#)
[LA Times Subscription](#)
[MySHR](#)
[New York Times Subscription](#)
[Online Academic Student Information System \(OASIS\)](#)
[Office of International Services \(OIS\)](#)
[Public Transit \(U-Pass\)](#)
[Rec Sports](#)
[Schedule of Classes](#)
[Software](#)
[Student Academic Record System \(STARS\) Report](#)
[Student Life](#)
[Student Financial Services](#)
[TechOps](#)
[Thesis Center](#)
[Transportation Services](#)
[USCard Services](#)
[USC Career Center](#)
[USC Catalogue](#)
[USC Faculty/Staff Directory](#)
[USC Housing](#)
[USC Libraries](#)
[USC NetID](#)

[USC Student Handbook](#)
[Web Registration](#)
[Zoom](#)

XI. Post-Graduation

Accessing Your Dissertation

The dissertation manuscript will be available for search and download from the [USC Digital Library](#) shortly after completing all of the steps in the Thesis Center, or after any requested restriction expires.

Official Transcripts and Diploma

The Registrar's Office oversees the distribution of university diplomas and transcripts, in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Most diplomas are mailed to the permanent address on record six to eight weeks after a degree is conferred. More information is available on their [website](#).

Email and Account Access Post-Graduation

Please see [USC ITS instructions](#) on how to transfer account data and request an alumni.usc.edu email address.

APPENDIX: Using Concur for Reimbursements

Reimbursement Requirements

All reimbursement requests, for conference travel, dissertation expenses, or anything else, must ALWAYS be pre-approved by the Annenberg dean's office.

To begin the approval process, send the Academic Program Associate the following items:

- **Proof of Participation** For conferences, either forward your email acceptance or send a pdf of the page in the conference program with your name and paper.
- **Dissertation Expense Form** If you are requesting dissertation expense reimbursement, submit the form with advisor sign off.

You will be notified once financial approval has been granted by the Annenberg dean's office.

Obtain approval before booking any flights or lodging.

Please submit expenses with 60 days. Reimbursement requests must occur during the same fiscal year of the expense. If submitted after 60 days, the reimbursement will be taxed as income. This policy covers all University faculty, staff, and students. Requests must occur after travel is complete.

Per Diem

The University does not allow anyone (students, faculty, or staff) to request per diem reimbursements. You must submit individual receipts for meals. Each receipt must be listed individually in Concur.

Mileage

Students who use their personal vehicles to attend conferences may claim reimbursement at the following graduated rate:

One student in the car: 200 miles round trip limit
Two students in the car: 400 miles round trip limit
Three+ students in the car: 600 miles round trip limit

Standard University mileage reimbursement rates apply. Reimbursement for mileage is only for the distance driven between their home and the conference location; additional mileage at the destination is not eligible. You may not be reimbursed for gas.

Reimbursable Travel Expenses

- Travel, including airfare, trains, buses, and rideshares
- Lodging, including hotels and Airbnbs
- Food – individual receipts required, no per diems, meals may be for student only
- Conference registration

Non-Reimbursable Travel Expenses

- Souvenirs
- Tourist attractions
- Per diems
- Any expenses for another individual, including travel, lodging, and food
- Personal travel done before or after the conference

Tips for Submitting Receipts

- Airfare receipts must include name, name of airline, travel itinerary, amount paid, method of payment, date of purchase
- For lodging, please get a receipt from the hotel when you check out. Do not submit your initial booking email. Your receipt must include name, name and location of hotel, dates of check-in and check-out, amount paid (not a pre-stay estimate on a reservation), breakdown of taxes and fees, method of payment, date of payment.
- For restaurant receipts, please make sure the following are legible on receipt: name, location, itemized list of dishes/items, date of purchase, amount paid, method of payment.
- If sharing expenses with an Annenberg colleague (lodging, meals), make sure that you each submit separate reimbursement requests for your portion of the expense.
- When ordering books or any other physical item online, submit the receipt reading SHIPPED or DELIVERED. If you submit an order notification that does not include confirmation of shipping or delivery, the request will be returned to you.
- If compensating individuals with gift cards or money, please include an overview of all payments and, if available, include receipts for each payment (i.e., gift card purchase or transfer, Venmo transaction).

If in doubt about an expense, please ask!

Using Concur for Reimbursements

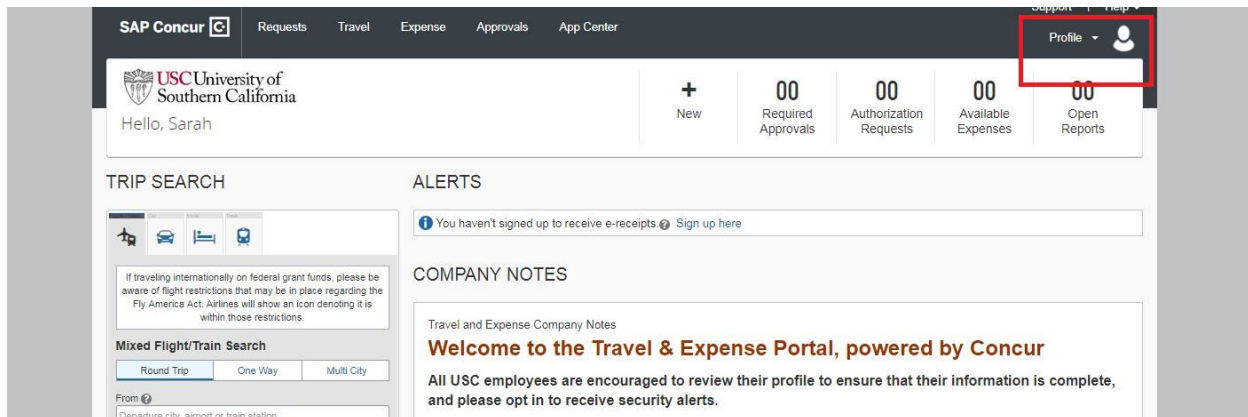
Concur is the online system USC uses for requesting reimbursements for travel and research expenses.

Logging into Concur

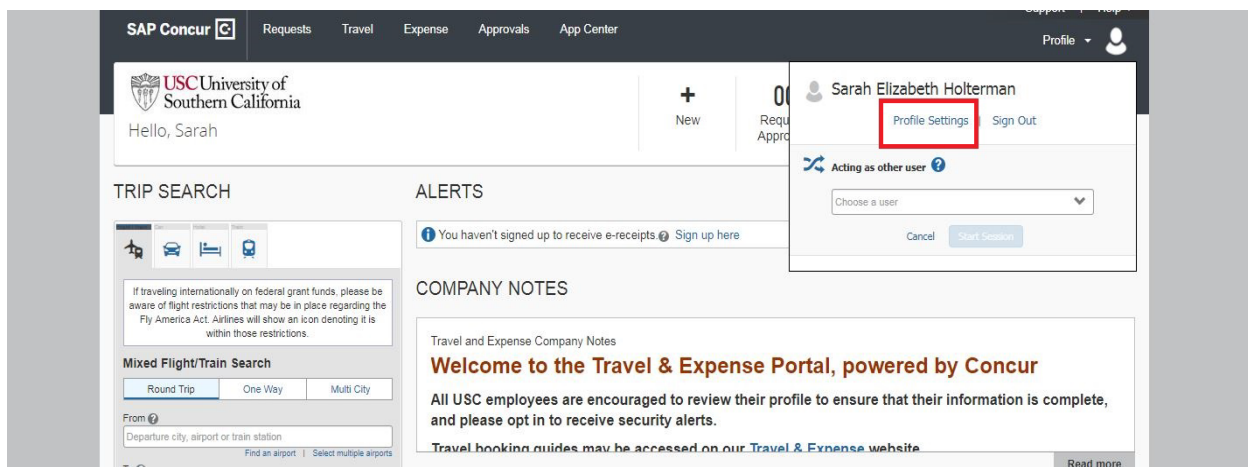
- Go to <https://usc.edu/travelportal> and sign in using your USC Shibboleth ID.
- This will take you to the Concur home page.

Setting up your Profile

- Click on “Profile” at the top right of the page.



- Click on “Profile Settings”

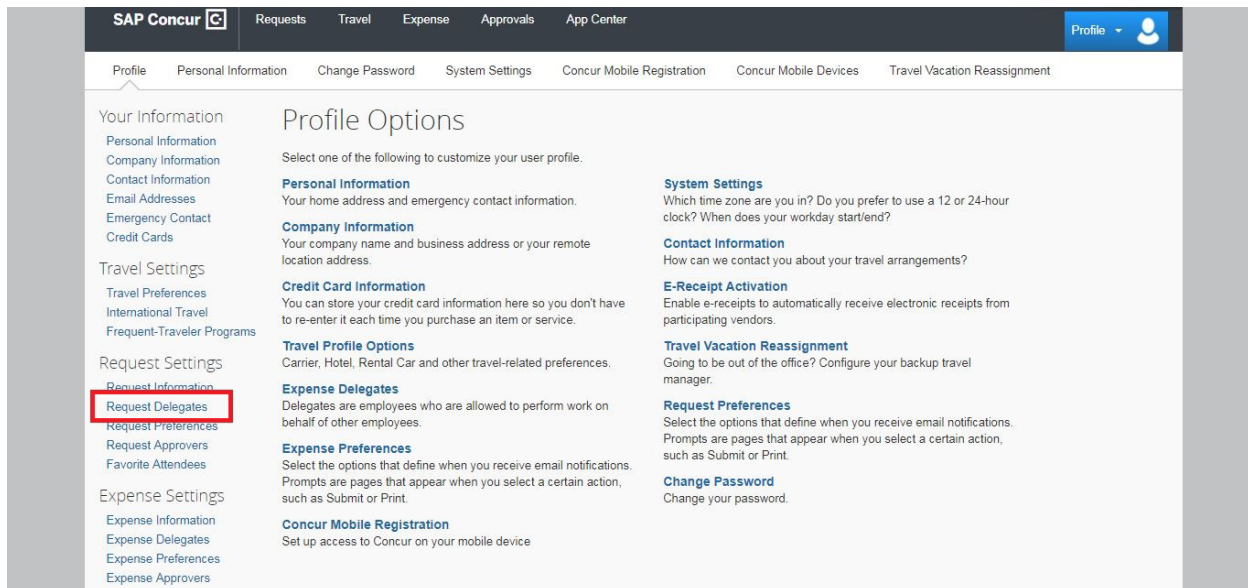


- Fill out all required sections
- Make sure to save once sections are completed!

Adding Delegates

A delegate is a USC employee you have designated as an individual who can access Concur reports on your behalf. By adding delegates, Annenberg staff will be able to assist you with your reimbursement requests.

- On the Profile Options page, click “Request Delegates” on the left side of the page.



- Add the following people as delegates:
 - Fabian Ledesma (flledesma@usc.edu)
 - Vinh Nguyen (vinhn761@usc.edu)
 - Sarah Holterman (holterma@usc.edu)
- Please check all items as seen below when adding delegates:

Request Delegates

Delegates are employees who are allowed to perform work on behalf of other employees.
Expense and Request share delegates. By assigning permissions to a delegate, you are assigning permissions for Expense and Request.

☐ Name	Can Prepare	Can Book Travel	Can Submit Reports	Can Submit Requests	Can View Receipts	Can Use Reporting	Receives Emails	Can Approve	Can Approve Temporary	Can Preview For Approver	Receives Approval Emails
☐ Gordillo, Eugenia egordill@usc.edu	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
☐ Ledesma, Fabian flledesma@usc.edu	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐

- Click SAVE once you've added the delegates.

Creating a New Report

- On the Concur home page, click on the “NEW” with plus sign.
- Then select “Start a Report.” (Make sure to select Report and not Request.)

Create New Report

Create From an Approved Request

Type of Report *

*Employee Travel

Report Name *

Trip Type *

Expense Purpose *

Detailed Business Purpose *

Traveler Type *

Business Travel Start Date *

Business Travel End Date *

Does this trip include personal travel? *

Personal Travel Dates

Company *

PPGG Type

PPGG Value

Cancel

Create Report

- Follow instructions below for Travel and Non-Travel Reports.

Travel Reports

Type of Report

Employee Travel

Report Name

Include your last name and type of expense: “Smith NCA 2025 Conference” or “Smith dissertation fieldwork San Francisco”

Trip Type

Select domestic or international

Expense Purpose

Conferences: “Professional Development/ Conference/ Training”
Dissertation Travel: “Research Support”

Detailed Business Purpose

Enter a short explanation of the expense, such as:
“Traveled to Denver, CO to present at the annual NCA conference” or “Field work in San Francisco, CA for dissertation research”

Traveler Type

Student

Business Travel Dates

Enter the start and end dates of your trip

Includes Personal Travel?

Only choose “yes” here if a portion of the trip *within the above dates* was personal travel. Choose “no” if you traveled for personal reasons before or after the above dates.

Company	This will default to USC. Do not change this.
PPGG Type	This box asks what type of funding this is (project, program, gift, grant) • For travel funded by annual travel funds, select PROGRAM • For travel funded by dissertation funds, select GIFT
PPGG Value	This box replaces what used to be called the account. • For travel funded by annual travel funds, search for PG1012752. • For travel funded by dissertation funds, search for GF1015402. • TIP: be sure you are searching as CODE not TEXT!
Cost Center	The cost center is the umbrella over the various PPGG values. • Search for CA101439 (Annenberg Doctoral Program) • TIP: be sure you are searching as CODE not TEXT!
Cost Center Approver	The individual who approves the expenses. • Search for Fabian Ledesma (his numerical code is 0107288)
Claim Travel Allowance	<u>Do not check this.</u> Leave “No, I do not want to claim Travel Allowance” selected.

Once you have entered all of these fields, click CREATE REPORT at the bottom right.

Non-Travel Reports

Type of Report	Employee Non-Travel
Report Name	Include your last name and type of expense: “Smith Rev.com dissertation transcription” or “Smith dissertation books”
Expense Purpose	For non-travel research expenses, choose “Research Support”
Detailed Business Purpose	Enter a short explanation of the expense, such as: “Transcription for dissertation writing” or “Books for dissertation research”
User Type	Student
Company	This will default to USC. Do not change this.

PPGG Type	This box asks what type of funding this is (project, program, gift, grant) • For non-travel dissertation expenses, select GIFT
PPGG Value	This box replaces what used to be called the account. • For non-travel dissertation expenses, select GF1015402 • TIP: be sure you are searching as CODE not TEXT!
Cost Center	The cost center is the umbrella over the various PPGG values • Search for CA101439 (Annenberg Doctoral Program) • TIP: be sure you are searching as CODE not TEXT!
Cost Center Approver	The individual who approves the expenses. • Search for Fabian Ledesma (his numerical code is 0107288)
Claim Travel Allowance	<u>Do not check this.</u> Leave “No, I do not want to claim Travel Allowance” selected.

Once you have entered all of these fields, click CREATE REPORT at the bottom right.

Adding Expenses to your Report

On the next page, you will be able to enter your individual expenses and receipts.

- Click on the blue ADD EXPENSE button. This will bring up a smaller window.
- Choose the TYPE OF EXPENSE from the list.
- Once you have chosen the type of expense, it will take you to a new page. On this page, complete the requested information, including transaction date, vendor, and amount. Enter the amount of the expense AND attach the receipt image.
- Save the expense.
- Do this for each individual type of expense.
- Upload your approval document. The Academic Program Associate will send you the approval memo before you submit.

Expenses

Each payment/receipt must be entered as a separate expense. If you’ve purchased five books in one single Amazon order, that is one expense. But if you’ve made ten different Amazon orders for books, you will enter ten separate expenses on the report.

Allocating Expenses

If you are asking to be reimbursed from two different accounts, you will need to allocate your expenses.

- Select all expenses—make sure that all boxes are checked.

- Click the blue ALLOCATE button at the top.
- When the new Allocate window pops up, you'll most likely want to switch it to "Amount" rather than "Percent." This will allow you to enter dollar amounts.
- Click the blue ADD button. Use the same process to search for the accounts using code, not text. You will need to add BOTH accounts here:

Allocate

Expenses: 1 | \$100.00 | [View Allocation Group](#)

Percent

Amount

Amount

\$100.00

Allocated 100%

\$100.00

Remaining 0%

\$0.00

Default Allocation

Code

USC

Amount USD

\$0.00

Add

Edit

Remove

Save as Favorite

☐	Company↑↓	PPGG Type↑↓	PPGG Value↑↓	Cost Center↑↓	Cost Center Approver↑↓	Code†	Amount USD
☐	University of Southern California	Program	Comm Phd Student Travel And Research	Annenberg Doctoral Program	Eugenia Gordillo	USC-Program-PG1012752-CA101439-2001957	50.00
☐	University of Southern California	Project	Ascj Doctoral Student Summer Fellowships	Annenberg Doctoral Program	Fabian Ledesma (On Leave)	USC-Project-PR1005707-CA101439-0107288	50.00

Cancel

Save

- Choose the dollar amounts that should be reimbursed from each account. Make sure that the full amount is 100% allocated between the two accounts.
- Click SAVE, which will take you back to your main report page.

Submitting Your Report

Once you have entered all expenses and properly allocated your expenses (if necessary), you will click SUBMIT REPORT at the top right corner of the screen.

The new report will now appear in your Active Reports page.

Troubleshooting Tip

If you're having trouble searching for a PPGG Value or Cost Center, make sure you're searching by Code. The site defaults these searches to Text and the PPGG Value and Cost Center will not come up if you're searching by Code.

Types of Expenses

Expense Purpose

When you create the report, you will be asked to select the purpose of your expense from a dropdown list. For conference travel, select Professional Development/Conference Training. For dissertation research, select Research Support.

Expense Type

For each expense that you enter, you will be asked to select an expense type from a dropdown list. Please be as precise as possible—try not to choose Miscellaneous/Other for anything. A few frequently used expense types include:

Travel & Transportation Expenses

Airfare

Hotel/Lodging

Rail/Train

Personal Car Mileage

Mileage – Personal Car

Individual Meals

Breakfast (Meal)

Dinner (Meal)

Lunch (Meal)

Travel Meals – Groceries

Registration & Dues

Conference Registration/Fees

Membership Fee

Other

Airline Fees

Booking/Service Fees

Ground Transportation (taxi, ferry, ride-share, etc.)

Medical Expenses (Immunizations, Vaccinations, etc.)

Miscellaneous/Other (*only use if absolutely necessary*)

Office/Research/Lab Supplies

Participant/Subject Fees

Printing/Photocopying