Ph.D. in Information Systems and Communication (ISC)

School of Informatics, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Student and Faculty
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Ph.D. Handbook

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Handbook Overview

The Student and Faculty Ph.D. Handbook for the Information Systems and Communications (ISC) program is designed to provide an organized reference to the policies and procedures of the doctoral program for all doctoral students and faculty. Every effort has been made to present this information in a clear and concise way.

The School of Informatics, Humanities and Social Sciences (SIHSS) at Robert Morris University reserves the right to modify the curriculum or to make changes in policies and procedures, and to update this handbook as it deems necessary. Such changes shall become effective when the administration publishes said changes.

Program Description

Information Systems and Communications (ISC) is a 3-year, executive-style, interdisciplinary Ph.D. program designed to meet the needs of working executives and professionals who wish to excel in leadership roles in industry and educators who wish to pursue university-level teaching positions.

The ISC Ph.D. addresses the challenges and complexities of our increasingly technological, Internet-connected, and data-driven society by preparing leaders and educators to conduct research, make decisions, and solve problems through integrative perspectives drawn from the fields of information systems and communications. The program attracts students who are eager to lead in this critical nexus of technology and society through research and academic experiences that cross traditional disciplinary boundaries.

The successful completion of all coursework in the program, passing of a qualifying examination, and the successful defense of a dissertation to the satisfaction of a dissertation committee are required for the conferral of the Ph.D. ISC degree.

Doctoral students in the program research a variety of topics and problems, but some key areas of research include:

- Cybersecurity & Information Privacy
- Cultural and Social Impacts of Communication & Technology
- Adoption and Utilization of Emerging Technologies
- Online Communities & Social Media
- Human Communication & Technology
- Data Analytics, Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning
- Knowledge Management

Program Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the program, ISC graduates will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an advanced level of knowledge in key content areas of information systems and communications and an awareness of emerging technologies and contemporary issues in these fields.

2. Critically analyze the social and cultural impacts of communication and information technology on individuals, organizations, and society.

3. Apply critical thinking and the ability to critically evaluate current research in content areas related to information systems and communication.

4. Demonstrate professional level oral and written communication skills to disseminate contemporary issues, theories, and research findings in information systems and communications in both professional and academic settings.

5. Design, write, and defend an original scholarly dissertation to advance research in the fields of information systems and/or communications using current best practices.

    5.1 Identify and frame contemporary research problems in information systems and communications.

    5.2 Apply current theories of information systems and communications to address research problems in information systems and communications.

    5.3 Conduct and write a thorough review of literature in the area of information systems and communications.

    5.4 Determine an appropriate research methodology, including data collection and analysis techniques, to address a research problem in information systems and communications.

    5.5 Collect and analyze data using current best practices to produce valid and reliable results that make a valuable contribution to the literature in the fields of information systems and communications.

Program Delivery

Cohort Model
The program is administered using a cohort model. A cohort is formed by an incoming class of students in the first year of the program. Students advance through the program as a cohort, taking all courses together as a group and building professional and personal networks.

Blended Learning Format (Residency + Online)

The blended learning format features face-to-face on-campus residencies that allow high levels of engagement with faculty and other students. The online component adds flexibility and reduces the amount of classroom time and travel required for the program.

On-Campus Residencies
- 5-day residencies - 1 in Fall semester (late August) and 1 in Spring semester (early January)
- 3-day weekend residencies - 1 in Fall semester (October) and 1 in Spring semester (March)

Online Component
Outside of residencies, students will engage with faculty online, in a combination of synchronous meetings (6 hours per course, scheduled over 3 Saturdays per semester) and asynchronous activities.

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

Each new cohort accepted into the Ph.D. in Information Systems and Communications (ISC) program enrolls in the Fall semester of the year (August start date). For consideration to be enrolled, an applicant must meet the minimum requirements described in this section and follow the admission process.

Admission Requirements

Applicants must meet the following minimum requirements for admission to the Ph.D. ISC program:

1. Master's degree from an accredited institution
2. Minimum graduate GPA of 3.0
3. Submission of an online application to the program and all required application materials
4. Completion of a personal interview with the Doctoral Program Director and doctoral admissions committee

In order to maintain a reasonable cohort size, acceptances for each academic year are limited. Admission is based upon students' academic ability and fit of the degree. The applicant should note that the Doctoral Program Director's decision to admit students to the doctoral program is informed by the recommendation of the doctoral admissions committee. This committee is comprised of doctoral faculty members and the recommendation is a collective professional judgment of the faculty that represents their determination of the likelihood of the applicant's success in the program. Thus, an applicant is not automatically admitted to the program on the basis of meeting the minimum admission requirements. Meeting minimum admission requirements only establishes eligibility for further consideration.

Admission Process

All applicants to the Ph.D. in Information Systems and Communications program must submit:

- A completed online application to the program (www.rmu.edu/apply)
- Official transcripts of all undergraduate and graduate course work
- Three (3) letters of reference from individuals in professional or academic communities who are familiar with the applicant's work
- A current resume that includes all education, professional work experience, certifications, and other relevant information
- An academic writing sample (this can be an academic paper previously completed for a Master's degree program, a publication, or in lieu of either of the first two options, a 4-5 page essay focusing on a problem related to information systems or communications experienced or observed in the workplace)

In addition to these required application materials, applicants must participate in a personal interview with the Doctoral Program Director and Doctoral Admissions Committee.

International students applying to the program must also provide results from a test of English language proficiency. (IELTS – minimum score of 7.0, TOEFL – minimum score of 80, Duolingo English Test – minimum score of 120)

ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDELINES

Curriculum Overview

The Ph.D. in Information Systems and Communications (ISC) program includes 60 credits of coursework:

- 27 credits of interdisciplinary content courses in information systems and communications
- 21 credits of research methodology courses
- 12 credits of directed studies focused on dissertation writing

The program culminates in a dissertation describing original research in ISC. In addition to coursework, the successful proposal and defense of this dissertation are primary requirements for the degree.

Program Milestones

In addition to 60-credits of coursework taken during the three years of the program, the Ph.D. ISC program includes three milestones:

- Students take a qualifier exam at the end of the first year of study. In this exam, we assess the student's ability to apply critical thinking from an interdisciplinary perspective and to demonstrate proficiency in research writing. Upon passing the exam, the student is admitted into doctoral candidacy. The qualifier exam is

discussed further in a later section of this document.

- The dissertation proposal is defended at the end of the second year of study. The dissertation proposal is discussed further in a later section of this document.

- At the end of the third year of study, students defend their dissertations in a public meeting announced to the University community. A successful defense, determined by a committee vote, is necessary for program completion. The dissertation is discussed in Chapter 5.

Listing of Courses

All students are required to complete 60 credits in the Ph.D. ISC program. The listing of courses is as follows (all courses are 3 credit hours unless otherwise noted):

Interdisciplinary Content Courses (27 credits)
ISCM 8110 Theories in Action in Information Systems and Communication
ISCM 8120 Information Systems and Communication in Cybersociety
ISCM 8140 Information Technology and Online Social Behavior
ISCM 8150 Theory Development and Knowledge Management for ISC
ISCM 8160 Rhetorical, Semiotic, and Ethno-cultural Foundations for ISC
ISCM 8220 Data Analytics: Managerial Perspectives
ISCM 8310 Economics of Information Systems and Technology in the Digital Age
ISCM 8320 Information Security and the Law
ISCM 8330 Contemporary Issues in ISC

Research Methodology Courses (21 credits)
ISCM 8130 Introduction to Research Process for ISC
ISCM 8180 Literature Review
ISCM 8210 Advanced Research Design for ISC
ISCM 8230 Quantitative Research Methods I for ISC
ISCM 8240 Qualitative Research Methods for ISC
ISCM 8250 Quantitative Research Methods II for ISC
ISCM 8380 Analyzing and Interpreting Data

Dissertation Advising Directed Studies (12 credits)
ISCM 9100 Dissertation I – Research Topic Development (2 credits)
ISCM 9200 Dissertation II – Proposal Completion & Defense (2 credits)
ISCM 9300 Dissertation III – Data Analysis & Research Findings (4 credits)
ISCM 9400 Dissertation IV – Completion & Defense (4 credits)

Course descriptions for each course are provided at the end of this section.

Program Schedule

The following is the 3-year course plan for the cohort-based program of study, outlining all courses and directed studies required each semester. This course plan must be followed by all students; courses cannot be taken out of order. All courses in the program are 3 credit hours. Directed studies are either 2 credit hours or 4 credit hours, as marked.

Year 1 (20 credits)	
Fall (9 credits) ISCM 8110 Theories in Action in ISC ISCM 8120 ISC in Cybersociety ISCM 8130 Intro to Research Process for ISC	**Spring (11 credits)** ISCM 8140 IT and Online Social Behavior ISCM 8160 Rhetorical, Semiotic, and Ethno-cultural Foundations for ISC ISCM 8180 Literature Review ISCM 9100 Dissertation I – Research Topic Development (2 credits, directed study)
Year 2 (20 credits)	
Fall (9 credits) ISCM 8220 Data Analytics: Managerial Perspectives ISCM 8230 Quantitative Research Methods I ISCM 8240 Qualitative Research Methods	**Spring (11 credits)** ISCM 8150 Theory Development & Knowledge Management ISCM 8210 Advanced Research Design for ISC ISCM 8250 Quantitative Research Methods II ISCM 9200 Dissertation II – Proposal Completion & Defense (2 credits, directed study)
Year 3 (20 credits)	
Fall (10 credits) ISCM 8380 Analyzing and Interpreting Data ISCM 8320 Information Security and the Law ISCM 9300 Dissertation III – Data Analysis & Research Findings (4 credits, directed study)	**Spring (10 credits)** ISCM 8310 Economics of Information Systems & Technology in the Digital Age ISCM 8330 Contemporary Issues in ISC ISCM 9400 Dissertation IV – Dissertation Completion & Defense (4 credits, directed study)

Required Semester Course Load

Doctoral students must adhere to the program schedule outlined, registering for the courses and number of credits stipulated in the program schedule each semester.

A doctoral student who is not able to complete a course may not be able to progress to the next course in the program schedule, and may need to consult with the Program Director to discuss options for a leave of absence. See the Leaves of Absence policy later in this document for further details.

Doctoral students who fail to successfully register (e.g. have not resolved academic or financial obligations) each semester, and are not on an approved Leave of Absence, will be administratively withdrawn from the program, per University policy.

Blended Course Delivery

The Ph.D. ISC program utilizes a blended course delivery model (on-campus residency + online). For both Fall and Spring semesters, all courses students take will follow this model and have a residency component and an online component.

On-Campus Residencies
- 5-day residencies - 1 in Fall semester (late August) and 1 in Spring semester (early January)
- 3-day weekend residencies - 1 in Fall semester (October) and 1 in Spring semester (March)

Online Component
Outside of residencies, students will engage with faculty online, in a combination of synchronous meetings (6 hours per course, scheduled over 3 Saturdays per semester) and asynchronous activities.

Instructional Hours

The instructional hours for courses that use the blended course delivery model (all are 3 credits) are broken down as follows:

Instructional Hours	Face-to-Face On-Campus Residency Sessions	Synchronous Online Meetings	Asynchronous Online Activities	Total
3 credit course	15 hours	6 hours	21 hours	42 hours

Typical 5-Day Residency Schedule

A typical 5-day residency schedule* (late August and early January) is as follows:

5-Day Residency Schedule					
	Day 1 (MON)	**Day 2 (TUE)**	**Day 3 (WED)**	**Day 4 (THU)**	**Day 5 (FRI)**
8:30-10:00	Opening/ Orientation	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	**CLASS**
10:00-10:15	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
10:15-11:45	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	**CLASS**
11:45-1:00	Lunch Break	Lunch Break	Lunch Break	Lunch Break	Lunch Break
1:00-2:30	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	**CLASS**
2:30-2:45	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
2:45-4:15	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	**CLASS**
4:15-4:30	Break	Break	Break	Break	
4:30-6:00	**Colloquium****	**Joint Session / Event**	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	
6:00-7:00	**Joint Session / Event**				

*Note that this schedule is subject to change. In addition, the class sessions listed are divided between 3 courses during the semester. For semesters where you have less than 3 courses scheduled, some of the class sessions will be replaced with open time for dissertation research and meeting with your Dissertation Advisor.
**Colloquium is a joint session that typically include announcements, speakers, or other activities

Typical 3-Day Weekend Residency Schedule

A typical 3-day residency schedule* (October and March) is as follows:

3-Day Weekend Residency Schedule			
	Day 1 (FRI)	**Day 2 (SAT)**	**Day 3 (SUN)**
8:30-10:00		**CLASS**	**CLASS**
10:00-10:15		Break	Break
10:15-11:45		**CLASS**	**CLASS**
11:45-1:00		Lunch Break	
1:00-2:30		**CLASS**	
2:30-3:00		Break	
3:00-4:30	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	
4:30-4:45	Break	Break	
4:45-6:15	**CLASS**	**CLASS**	

*Note that this schedule is subject to change. In addition, the class sessions listed are divided between 3 courses during the semester. For semesters where you have less than 3 courses scheduled, some of the class sessions will be replaced with open time for dissertation research and meeting with your Dissertation Advisor.

Typical Online Synchronous Class Schedule

Three Saturdays during the Fall semester and three Saturdays during the Spring semester are designated for online synchronous meetings (6 hours per course, per semester). A typical Saturday schedule for online synchronous meetings* is as follows:

Online Synchronous Class Schedule	
	SATURDAY
8:00-10:00	**CLASS**
10:00-10:15	Break
10:15-12:15	**CLASS**
12:15-1:00	Lunch Break
1:00-3:00	**CLASS**

*Note that this schedule is subject to change. In addition, the class sessions listed are divided between 3 courses during the semester. For semesters where you have less than 3 courses scheduled, fewer sessions will be scheduled.

Course Descriptions

ISCM 8110 Theories in Action in ISC (3 credits):
This foundational course establishes the context by which scholars have developed and applied theories and application of theories in information systems and communications which attempt to describe incremental developments, innovations, communication practices, impact and applications of technology within organizations and society in the early 21st century. Theoretical application will be analyzed first at the individual level and enhanced to include individuals within the organization to finally organizations and their adaptation to technological innovation. Through a series of readings, case study analyses, and application exercises, students explore the information centric attributes (behavioral and technological) of the information age organization and the information infrastructure required to support it. Focus is on information systems theory, problem analysis and strategy, and framing as modeling techniques. Research topics are introduced and developed.

ISCM 8120 ISC in Cybersociety (3 credits):
This course focuses on cybersociety, which evolved from Shannon & Weaver's information theory where information is "transmitted" to the second media age of the Internet (or "Internet as emancipation"). Computer-mediated communication's technological, societal, and organizational evolution, impact, immediacy, and integration into daily life has altered how individuals perceive information, generate information, and interpret information. Hypermediacy, or fixations with mediums themselves, facilitate the study of different mediums and their potential integration, uses, abuses, and practicality within individual, group, organizational, and community experiences. Students will explore the transmission and ritual views of media. Readings, case study analyses, and reaction papers will guide learning in this course.

ISCM 8130 Introduction to Research Process for ISC (3 credits):
This course teaches students to understand a doctoral research process by assessing an organizational or community context to identify needs or problems, frame those needs or problems as a problem statement, and formulate research questions or hypotheses. It provides an overview of a dissertation topic, its delimitations, purpose, anticipated outcomes, anticipated results, and recommendations supported by sufficient sources to write a dissertation. The course will help students to write the first draft of their dissertation proposal to be revised and fine-tuned further in the dissertation process. Topics covered include: identifying a relevant research problem, articulating clear research questions or hypotheses, applying appropriate theories in ISC, and building an argument to support the purpose and significance of the study. Methodological approaches are not the focus of this course. Throughout the course, students refine their ideas by writing and presenting them to peers and faculty. The course also provides a review of APA format.

ISCM 8140 Information Technology and Online Social Behavior (3 credits):
Online technologies have fundamentally changed the way humans communicate, socialize, and work today. This course explores concepts of computer-mediated communication and analyzes the role of social media and other online communities in society. Historical discourses of digital technology and the evolution and structure of social media and online communities will be discussed. Topics addressed include digital sense of self, credibility and trust in online social systems, digital reputation management, ethical online behavior, ethics in social media management, co-creation of digital media content, data privacy issues, and the attention

economy. Students will use information systems theories such as social capital theory, social identity theory, social comparison theory, and uses and gratifications theory to analyze online social collaboration and behavior issues. Students will utilize communication theories in relationship and crisis management to explore ways in which reputation management, grounded on the foundational concepts of audience, ethical communication, and decoding and encoding of information, can be used to evaluate problems observed in digital media.

ISCM 8150 Theory Development and Knowledge Management for ISC (3 credits):
This course covers principles and theories of knowledge management (KM), including underpinnings of the creation, representation, preservation, dissemination, and utilization of knowledge in both academic and organizational contexts. It introduces IT-based approaches to knowledge in the KM field and covers foundational concepts such as the differences between data, information, knowledge, and wisdom, as well as the challenges of managing knowledge, including communications and cultural issues. It emphasizes both industrial relevance and academic rigor in knowledge creation and management and discusses the role of theory in achieving academic rigor. It provides advanced knowledge in theory development and practice, centered on the use of knowledge in information systems and communications (ISC) research. It demonstrates how to create and manage knowledge with conceptual and theoretical modeling techniques and the application of these techniques in ISC research.

ISCM 8160 Rhetorical, Semiotic, and Ethno-cultural Foundations for ISC (3 credits):
This course focuses on the complex relationships among information systems, and human communications and behaviors. By using rhetorical, semiotic and ethnographic approaches this course describes and analyzes systems of meanings, contextualizes information systems or informational situations, and grounds for informing actions and objects. The course explores four major questions: (1) What are the ethno-cultural, sociological, and psychological effects of the rapid development of technological innovations historically on information systems and communications for decision-making and problem solving? (2) What are the implications of living in a culture that values technology as a solution to most of its problems for digital natives and digital immigrants? (3) How does rhetoric, semiotics and ethnography clarify the technology-human communication interface and provide a foundation for systems of meanings for different generations in multicultural settings? (4) How and what do humans communicate in face-to-face and mediated communications? Topics include: situated rhetoric, ethno-cultural analysis and semiotics as a bridge between rhetoric and ethnography, hate speech leading to hate acts (speech act theory), language and action affairs, and frames and semantic (meaningful) structures.

ISCM 8180 Literature Review (3 credits):
This course gives students the dedicated time and support for completing the dissertation proposal literature review for their selected topic, building on and modifying the decisions made about the topic in the Research Process course, ISCM 8130. This course's final paper will serve as the full draft of the dissertation proposal parts Chapter 1: The Introduction and Chapter 2: the Literature Review. This includes (1) demonstrating the ability to select interdisciplinary relevant literature, confirming and disconfirming, that enables students to understand and weigh the arguments, claims, contexts, methods, theories, findings, and implications of what is known about the topic, (2) engaging in intellectual debates with various authors and colleagues to further develop understanding of topics and research processes, (3) grasping and articulating the limitations of and gaps in the knowledge base, and (4) organizing and assembling a coherent argument of their own for conducting their research.

ISCM 8210 Advanced Research Design for ISC (3 credits):
This second-year course provides students with the knowledge and guidance to prepare a methodology chapter for their dissertation and to become researchers in information systems and communications. Students explore typical, current, and emerging research designs relevant to the field, while gaining a depth of understanding in specific approaches that can be used for their own dissertation research. The course enables students to write and argue for a study methodology including sections focused on research design and process, sampling, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, limitations, and research ethics. Students learn to critically examine the methodologies of published studies, their peers' proposals, and their own proposals to identify assumptions, examine suitability of approaches, and ensure the soundness of research. Through iterative cycles of writing, presenting, and feedback with the instructors, advisors, and peers as the audience, students refine their methodology chapters in preparation for their dissertation proposal defense.

ISCM 8220 Data Analytics: Managerial Perspectives (3 credits):
This course introduces theories, concepts, techniques, and applications of data to support a wide variety of management tasks and decision-making, from performance evaluation to trend spotting and policymaking. Students will explore various systems for data analysis such as multivariate data analysis, data mining (web and text mining), data warehousing for information use and transfer, cloud computing, and crowdsourcing in order to create data-based or knowledge-based and decision support systems for personal and organizational decision making. Topics include descriptive analytics and statistical modeling, predictive analytics, large-scale data analytics, prescriptive analytics, operations analytics, data models and analytics in communication, data governance, metadata analysis, multimedia analytics, and how to deal with the limitations of big data and data analytics. Future trends and emerging technologies are introduced that may impact analytics, and decision support. Upon completion of this course, students can effectively communicate with data scientists within an organization, and better inform the business and understand data and the process of the data analytics lifecycle.

ISCM 8230 Quantitative Research Methods I for ISC (3 credits):
This course provides students with practice using quantitative methods to evaluate, adapt, improve, or verify the effectiveness of information or communications systems and technology in an organizational or other social setting. As such, the course surveys traditional social science research methodologies–survey methods, experiments, content analysis, and evaluation research and examines their application in today's research environment. Course includes readings and discussions, demonstrations, case analysis, analysis of archival data, panel and individual presentations.

ISCM 8240 Qualitative Research Methods for ISC (3 credits):
This course serves an introductory and exploratory course focused on qualitative research theories, methods, and analysis techniques to interpret qualitative data. Students learn how to (1) determine an approach to inquiry based on underlying assumptions, worldviews and theories, and, (2) how to design a qualitative research project for a specific purpose. The class teaches students to review and analyze literature to determine well executed studies, analyze different methods presentation of content and comprehend what a publication review process will involve. Additionally, students will explore how to formulate and link literature with research questions and the appropriate research methods. Finally, students will explore how to bracket their biases so as to design and conduct research ethically. Different data collection tools,

such as in-depth interview, participant observation, qualitative surveys, and focus groups as well as how to analyze data collected from these techniques leading to reporting the results.

ISCM 8250 Quantitative Research Methods II for ISC (3 credits):
The goal of this course is to introduce the advanced statistical methods such as ANOVA, ANCOVA or regression analysis. The course is designed to give a thorough overview of each method and the examples of the studies where this method can or cannot be applied. The students will continue learning the concepts of quantitative analysis by defining and calculating correlations, variance, covariance, and other concepts. The students will enhance their knowledge of sampling by working with groups and interpreting the between-group and within-group effects. They will use SPSS and other tools to prepare the data, run the tests and interpret the test results. Finally, the students will use their knowledge of quantitative methods both in designing their own research and in reviewing the research methodology used by others.

ISCM 8310 Economics of Information Systems and Technology in the Digital Age (3 credits):
This course focuses on utilizing the tools of economics to examine the complexities of defining costs and benefits in making decisions about information technology (IT) and IT investments. To that end, the course will examine the core concepts of the economics of information systems (IS) and contemporary themes and research topics. Students are introduced to commonly used methodologies of economics such as econometrics, cost-benefit analysis, supply and demand, game theory, and system net benefits. The course also introduces basic economic ideas involving information economics, economics of digitization, the role of market structure on information based economies, the economics of information security, and public policy.

ISCM 8320 Information Security and the Law (3 credits):
This course explores complex legal issues involved in information technology. Students consult and then develop case studies to examine the legal context of information technology in organizational and societal settings. Topics include: suitability, potential problems, limitations of information security and privacy issues. The course also reviews management and legal constraints and the treatment of information technology by consumer groups, trade associations, and regulatory initiatives. This course is designed to enable students to concentrate on the legal issues and challenges that the changes in technology have created. Crimes such as identity theft, fraud, software protection, property rights violations and online stalking will be explored. This course will examine how laws have expanded and changed to account for the increase of crimes in the digital age.

ISCM 8330 Contemporary Issues in ISC (3 credits):
This course explores contemporary issues and topics in Information Systems and Communications (ISC). The issues and topics are selected from current research by various professional and research associations in ISC, including but not limited to artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing, quantum computing, cybersecurity, health informatics, gender gaps in ISC, cross-cultural research in ISC, technical communication, and emerging trends and innovations in information systems and communications. Students are expected to explore, review, discuss, and evaluate the contemporary issues and solutions in ISC from peer reviewed publications.

ISCM 8380 Analyzing and Interpreting Data (3 credits):
This course is designed to enable students to analyze and interpret data that they have collected for their dissertation. The course does not cover the technical details of quantitative/statistical data analysis or qualitative/coding data analysis. Rather, it focuses on taking the results from such analyses and reporting them in a way that adequately conveys the findings and the researcher's interpretations of those findings. Attention is given to the best ways to represent different types of findings, to include narrative descriptions as well as tables, figures, and infographics. Students will be taught the structure and necessary elements that should be included in the results/findings chapter (typically Chapter 4) and the discussion chapter (typically Chapter 5) of a dissertation. Emphasis will also be given to best practices for writing the discussion chapter, including elements that should be included in a scholarly discussion of findings, such as recommendations, key findings, theoretical implications, practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research. The aim of this course is to aid students in writing their results/findings chapter and the discussion chapter of their dissertation. Students who have not successfully collected data before entering this course may be required to use sample data for class assignments.

ISCM 9100 Dissertation I – Research Topic Development (2 credits):
This course aids doctoral students to further refine their dissertation research topics developed in ISCM8130 Introduction to Research Process in collaboration with their newly selected Dissertation Advisor. The course will be conducted one-on-one with the doctoral student and Dissertation Advisor with no scheduled class time. Advising sessions may utilize face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous communications. During the course, Dissertation Advisors will assist doctoral students with strategies for focusing their research area and refining their research problem, purpose, research questions/hypotheses, rationale for the study, and other components of Chapter 1: Introduction of the dissertation.

ISCM 9200 Dissertation II – Proposal Completion & Defense (2 credits):
This second-year course is designed to help students to work on the final version of their dissertation proposal under the supervision of their Dissertation Advisor. The course will be conducted one-on-one with the doctoral student and Dissertation Advisor with no scheduled class time. Advising sessions may utilize face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous communications. During the course, Dissertation Advisors will provide strategies to assist writers in revising, editing, and completing Chapter 1: Introduction, Chapter 2: Literature Review, and Chapter 3: Methodology of their Dissertation Proposal for a formal defense.

ISCM 9300 Dissertation III – Data Analysis & Research Findings (4 credits):
This course is designed to help doctoral students focus on issues of data analysis for their individual dissertations. The course will be conducted one-on-one with the doctoral student and Dissertation Advisor with no scheduled class time. Advising sessions may utilize face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous communications. During the course, Dissertation Advisors will assist doctoral students with strategies for data analysis, interpretation of results, and methods for organizing and writing Chapter 4: Results / Findings of the dissertation.

ISCM 9400 Dissertation IV – Dissertation Completion & Defense (4 credits):
This course is designed primarily to provide assistance to doctoral candidates as they move through the process of drafting and completing their dissertations. The course will be conducted one-on-one with the doctoral student and Dissertation Advisor with no scheduled class time. Advising sessions may utilize face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous

communications. During the course, Dissertation Advisors will provide strategies to assist writers in completing Chapter 4: Findings/Results and Chapter 5: Discussion of the dissertation, organizing and editing the entire manuscript, and preparing it for final defense and publication.

QUALIFIER EXAMINATION REQUIREMENTS

Doctoral students will take the Qualifier Examination at the end of their first year of study in the program. In this exam, the student's ability to apply critical thinking from an interdisciplinary perspective and to demonstrate proficiency in research writing will be assessed. The procedures for the exam will be announced during the Spring semester of the student's first year.

The faculty of the program determine the content of the Qualifier Examination and conduct the grading of the examination and shall collectively be the sole judges of said grading. The grading is done through a blind grading process (student names are removed). Students who pass the Qualifier Examination are admitted to doctoral candidacy in the program. Students who fail the exam, but are in good academic standing, may retake the exam one time. If they fail a second time, they will be dismissed from the program.

DISSERTATION REQUIREMENTS

Dissertation Overview

The dissertation is an original piece of academic research which must address a research problem and research question(s) or hypotheses and represents the student's ability to conduct an academic research study using current best practices. Each student must write and orally defend a dissertation to the satisfaction of the dissertation committee.

The dissertation must focus on a topic related to information systems, communications, or both, in order to be considered relevant for the Ph.D. ISC program. The student must pass the dissertation defense and submit all necessary edits and paperwork to their Dissertation Advisor before the Ph.D. ISC degree will be conferred. Publication of the dissertation is at the discretion of the Dissertation Advisor and the Program Director.

Students will first write a dissertation proposal and defend said proposal to the Dissertation Committee. If the student passes the proposal defense, work on the dissertation can move forward. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study is required before any data can be collected.

The final written dissertation should include sections which describe the purpose of the research, the problem or question investigated, the theoretical underpinnings of the research, the methodology/design of the research, the results and analysis of the research, and a discussion of the entire research study including limitations. All work submitted for review at this stage should reflect students' original work and be in strict conformity with the current edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* which students receive in the first semester of the program.

The Dissertation Advisor and Committee

Committee Membership

Each doctoral student will have a Dissertation Advisor assigned by the Program Director. The Dissertation Advisor, together with two additional doctoral faculty members, will comprise the Dissertation Committee. An optional fourth member of the Dissertation Committee can include another RMU faculty member from any area of the University with expertise in some aspect of the dissertation or a faculty member or professional not affiliated with RMU but who has expertise in some aspect of the dissertation. All faculty on the committee will be voting members of the Dissertation Committee at both the proposal defense and the dissertation defense.

In addition, one peer reader selected from the student's cohort should be added to the committee. The peer reader will be listed as such on the title page of the dissertation document, but is not a voting member of the Dissertation Committee.

The steps for establishing a Dissertation Committee and the Responsibilities of Dissertation Committee members and Responsibilities of the Dissertation Advisor follow in the next sections.

Establishing the Dissertation Committee

The steps in establishing a Dissertation Committee are as follows:

1) In the Spring semester of Year One, students will be asked by the Program Director to identify up to five members of the doctoral faculty preferred to serve as their Dissertation Advisor. The Program Director will review these preferences as well as the dissertation topic area and matches to the expertise/interest areas of the doctoral faculty. Based on this review, the Program Director will then assign each student a doctoral faculty member as their Dissertation Advisor. The Program Director will make reasonable efforts to satisfy a student's request by assigning a Dissertation Advisor from the student's preferred list; however, the student cannot be guaranteed a particular advisor.

2) The student and Dissertation Advisor will refine the dissertation topic together. To improve the focus and refine the topic, the student and doctoral Dissertation Advisor should take into consideration the following:

   a) The topic should be of interest to the student and tied to a relevant problem or question in information systems and/or communications.
   b) The topic should be researchable, which means that an appropriate research design can be employed to address the research questions/hypotheses posed by the student.
   c) The research topic should be sufficiently focused and narrowed in order to be completed within the third year of the program.

3) The student and Dissertation Advisor together will then invite two doctoral faculty to become members of the Dissertation Committee. Members of the committee must include at least two doctoral faculty members in addition to the advisor, but might also include an additional RMU faculty member from any area of the University with expertise in some

aspect of the dissertation or a faculty member or professional not affiliated with RMU but who has expertise in an aspect of the dissertation.

4) Finally, the student should select one peer reader from the cohort. Peer readers help to enrich all students' overall academic experience, expand all students' expertise, provide support for students through the dissertation process, and provide feedback on iterations of the proposal and dissertation, but the peer reader is not a voting member of the Dissertation Committee.

5) Once the Dissertation Committee is constituted, the Dissertation Advisor will submit the committee membership to the Program Director who records the members of the official committee by February 1 of the student's Second Year in the program.

6) If a Dissertation Committee member needs to be replaced, the process is outlined in the Replacement of Committee Member Policy and Replacement of Dissertation Advisor Policy in the ISC Program Policies section of this document.

Responsibilities of the Dissertation Committee Members

It is the responsibility of the Dissertation Committee members to:

1) Review and evaluate the dissertation proposal to determine and accept:
   a) The timeliness and relevance of the problem or question and its connection to information systems and/or communications;
   b) The appropriateness of:
      i) the background research/literature review and theoretical underpinnings to justify the study;
      ii) the research design/methodology;
      iii) and the feasibility of proposed data collection and data analysis techniques.
   c) The effectiveness of:
      i) the written organization and style;
      ii) the use of Standard Written English;
      iii) and the use of proper APA documentation and style, as required by the program.

2) Participate in the oral proposal defense to determine if the candidate has written a proposal for a research study that is acceptable based on current best practices in research and standards and requirements set forth by the program.
   a) If, at the time of the proposal defense, the Dissertation Committee members feel that the written organization and style, the use of Standard Written English, or the use of proper APA documentation are not acceptable, the committee may recommend to the student that an editor is needed. In such a situation, the student is responsible to procure and work with an editor for the remainder of the dissertation process.

3) Review and evaluate iterations of the written dissertation to determine and accept:
   a) The appropriateness of:
      i) the background research/literature review and theoretical underpinnings to justify the study;
      ii) the research design/methodology;
      iii) the data collection and data analysis techniques;
      iv) the reporting of results/findings;

       v)   and the discussion/interpretation of the results/findings.
  b) The effectiveness of:
      i)   the written organization and style;
      ii) the use of Standard Written English;
      iii) and the use of proper APA documentation and style, as required by the program.

4) Participate in the oral dissertation defense to determine if the candidate:
  a) demonstrates an understanding of the background research/literature review and theoretical underpinnings used to justify the study;
  b) demonstrates an understanding of the research design/methodology;
  c) demonstrates an understanding of the data collection and data analysis techniques;
  d) is able to organize and present the results/findings of the dissertation in a clear, concise and coherent fashion;
  e) and is able to discuss interpretations of the results/findings and their theoretical and practical applications;
  f) and is able to clearly articulate the overall contribution to the literature made by the research.

5) Attend both the oral proposal defense and the oral dissertation defense in the modality chosen by the student. If the student chooses to defend in person on RMU's campus, then all committee members are also expected to attend the defense in person. If the student chooses to defend online, then all committee members are also expected to attend the defense online.

Responsibilities of the Dissertation Advisor

In addition to the responsibilities of Dissertation Committee members, it is also the responsibility of the Dissertation Advisor to:

1) Work with the student to complete all requirements of the following courses, which are delivered as directed studies, one-on-one between the Dissertation Advisor and student:
  a) ISCM 9100 Dissertation I – Research Topic Development (2 credit hours, taken in Spring 1)
  b) ISCM 9200 Dissertation II – Proposal Completion & Defense (2 credit hours, taken in Spring 2)
  c) ISCM 9300 Dissertation III – Data Analysis & Research Findings (4 credit hours, taken in Fall 3)
  d) ISCM 9400 Dissertation IV – Dissertation Completion & Defense (4 credit hours, taken in Spring 3)

2) Set up clear guidelines for communication with the student at regular intervals to be used throughout the advising process. Plan to utilize residency times when the student is on campus for face to face meetings as much as possible.

3) Lead the Dissertation Committee and coordinate all meetings and communications required among committee members and between the committee and student.

4) Determine when the student is ready for both the proposal defense and dissertation defense, note the modality of the defense (in person or online) requested by the student,

and notify support staff and the Program Director to schedule those defenses with the student, all committee members, and the peer reader.

5) Supervise the student's application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at RMU to conduct the dissertation research, to be submitted after the student passes the proposal defense.

6) Coordinate completion of the proposal defense and dissertation defense signature pages and return them to the Program Director and support staff in a timely manner after each defense.

7) Ensure that the student completes any revisions requested by the Dissertation Committee at the proposal defense and dissertation defense.

8) Complete the Dissertation Completion Checklist and return to the Program Director and support staff in a timely manner after the student has finished all work on the dissertation and advisor has completed all items on the checklist, which include:
   a) Verification that the student satisfactorily completed any necessary revisions to the dissertation required after the final defense
   b) Verification that a plagiarism check through "TurnItIn" was completed
   c) Verification that the student satisfactorily met all APA specifications for the current version in use by the program
   d) Verification that grades were submitted to the Program Director for all dissertation advising courses (the final advising course should remain "incomplete" until all revisions are completed by the student, and then a grade should be submitted once they are complete)
   e) Verification that a final copy of the student's dissertation was submitted to the Program Director
   f) Certification that the dissertation is ready for publication (or notice that publication is not permitted, with an explanation)

The Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation proposal shall describe the purpose of the research study, the problem or question to be investigated, a review of the relevant literature, the methodology/research design to be implemented, the proposed plan of data collection and data analysis, procedures for the protection of human subjects when appropriate, and the possible contribution the dissertation may make to the fields of information systems and/or communications. If the student passes the proposal defense, work on the research can move forward. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study is required before any data can be collected.

All work submitted for review at this stage should reflect students' original ideas, indicate knowledge of the topic and the research in the field, and adhere to the technical details of the APA manual in use by the program which is used for all written work in the program. When the Dissertation Advisor believes the written dissertation proposal is ready to be defended, a proposal defense date will be set through the Program Director and support staff. A proposal defense date should be set through the Program Director and support staff with at least 14 days notice.

The Proposal Defense

Each student must orally defend their written dissertation proposal to their dissertation committee by May 31 of Year 2. If a student does not defend by May 31 of Year 2, registration for the fall classes will be delayed until an exception is approved by the Program Director and the SIHSS Dean. An extended delay may constitute the need for a leave of absence or dismissal from the program.

Dissertation Committee Members should receive the final written proposal from the student at least 14 days prior to the proposal defense.

The proposal defense should take about an hour. The peer reader should take careful written notes of any changes or corrections required by the committee which should be provided to the student. At the conclusion of the proposal defense meeting, the student and the peer reader will leave the room while the committee deliberates. The Dissertation Committee will convene briefly and recommend in writing that the dissertation proposal be:

1) Approved as Presented;
2) Approved with Revisions;
3) or Not Approved.

In cases of "approved with revisions," the Dissertation Advisor will confer with the student, provide a written list of required revisions and establish a time schedule for completion. The committee will sign off on the proposal that day. The student must complete the requested revisions within the time schedule provided in order to continue making progress on the dissertation.

In the case of a proposal "not approved," the Dissertation Advisor will summarize the committee's reasons for rejection in writing. The student may attempt one more proposal defense at a later date. If the proposal is rejected a second time, the student will not be permitted to register for the fall, and will be delayed one or more years to finish with a subsequent cohort (which may incur additional tuition charges), or be dismissed from the program, per a review by the Program Director.

The Dissertation Advisor is responsible to submit a complete, signed copy of the Proposal Defense Signature form and an electronic copy of the proposal document to the Program Director at the conclusion of the proposal defense. A copy of the results will be kept on file.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

The student must submit an application to the RMU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and receive approval from the IRB before starting to collect any data for the dissertation. An IRB application cannot be submitted until after the student has passed the proposal defense. The appropriate time to submit the IRB application is just after the proposal defense has been passed; data collection should begin after IRB approval is received. Note that pilot or field testing can be done prior to IRB approval, but all data collected as part of a pilot or field test is for testing purposes only and ineligible to be included in the final data set used for the dissertation research.

The Dissertation Advisor is responsible to supervise the student's application to the IRB. If any part of the research design changes after initial IRB approval, the student must submit the changes to the IRB to apply for an addendum to their application.

The IRB approval letter should be kept on file and also included as an appendix in the final dissertation document.

The Dissertation Defense

When a final dissertation draft has been completed to the satisfaction of the Dissertation Advisor, a defense will be scheduled by the Dissertation Advisor through the Program Director and support staff, with at least 14 days notice. The Dissertation Committee members must receive a final defense draft of the dissertation at least 14 days prior to the defense.

Students defend their written dissertations in a public defense meeting announced to the RMU community. The successful defense of the dissertation, indicated by a vote of the Dissertation Committee members, is a necessary component for program completion.

The dissertation defense must be completed by April 15 of the student's Third Year in order to participate in commencement activities or have the degree conferred in that year. See the Participation in Commencement Policy in this document for further details.

If a student will not graduate in the Third Year and must continue working on the dissertation past this point, the student must register for an independent study with their Dissertation Advisor in each subsequent semester until the dissertation and degree requirements are completed. This must be accomplished within the program's time limit. See the Degree Conferral, Continuous Dissertation Policy, and Time Limit sections of this document for further details.

The dissertation defense should take about an hour. The peer reader should take careful written notes of any changes or corrections required by the committee which should be provided to the student. At the conclusion of the dissertation defense meeting, the student and the peer reader will leave the room while the committee deliberates. The Dissertation Committee will convene briefly and recommend in writing that the dissertation be:

1) Approved as Presented
2) Approved with Revisions;
3) or Not Approved.

In cases of "approved as presented," the student will receive the appropriate grade in the final dissertation advising course, ISCM 9400 Dissertation IV – Dissertation Completion & Defense.

In cases of "approved with revisions," the Dissertation Advisor will provide a written list of required revisions. When selecting this outcome, the committee is approving with the understanding that the level of revisions required can feasibly be completed by the student by August 1, which is the deadline for this situation. The committee will sign off on the dissertation that day, however, the Dissertation Advisor will not sign off on the final dissertation checklist for the program and will not provide a grade in the final dissertation advising course, ISCM 9400 Dissertation IV – Dissertation Completion & Defense, until the revisions have been

completed to the Dissertation Advisor's satisfaction. The student must complete the requested revisions as soon as possible, and before the start of the subsequent Fall semester (per the University's Early Walk policy). See the Participation in Commencement Policy later in this document for further details. If a student fails to complete all revisions to the Dissertation Advisor's satisfaction before the start of the subsequent Fall semester, the student will be required to enroll in a one-credit independent study with the Dissertation Advisor. See the Continuous Dissertation Policy later in this document for further details.

In the case of a dissertation "not approved," the Dissertation Advisor will summarize the committee's reasons for rejection in writing. The student may attempt one more dissertation defense at a later date. If the dissertation is rejected a second time, the student will be dismissed from the program.

The Dissertation Advisor is responsible to submit a complete, signed copy of the Dissertation Defense Signature form to the Program Director at the conclusion of the proposal defense. A copy of the results will be kept on file. The Dissertation Advisor should complete all items on the final dissertation checklist and return that completed form only once the student is completed finished (including all revisions).

ProQuest (UMI) Publication

After a student's degree has been conferred, and the student has received approval from the Dissertation Advisor to publish the dissertation (this is indicated by the Dissertation Advisor on the final dissertation checklist form), the Program Director and support staff will provide the student with instructions and a link to the ProQuest (UMI) Publication web site for the program.

The student should submit (upload) the final dissertation document to ProQuest (UMI). Once uploaded, the submission will be reviewed by the RMU SIHSS account administrator. If any formatting changes are required that were not previously identified by the Dissertation Committee, they will be requested at this time.

Students can then choose the publication options for their dissertation. As part of the publication process, students are required to purchase two (2) printed copies of their dissertation for RMU. One will be kept in the RMU library and one will be kept in the doctoral program library housed in Wheatley Center. Some students also choose to optionally purchase a printed copy for their faculty advisor. All copies for RMU and/or faculty advisors should be addressed to Dr. Jamie Pinchot, Ph.D. ISC Program Director, Wheatley Center, Robert Morris University, 6001 University Blvd, Moon Township, PA 15108. Students can additionally purchase as many personal printed copies of their dissertation as they wish. The student is responsible for all publication costs.

Once the publication is approved, the printed copies of the dissertation will be printed and mailed by ProQuest. The dissertation will also be published electronically in the ProQuest database under the provisions selected by the student.

If a student chooses not to publish their dissertation, they must notify the Program Director and may be asked to provide only bound copies of the dissertation for RMU, depending upon the circumstances.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

RMU Academic Integrity Policy

Academic Integrity is valued at Robert Morris University. All students are expected to understand and adhere to the standards of Academic Integrity as stated in the RMU Academic Integrity Policy, which can be found on the RMU website at **rmu.edu/academicintegrity**. Any student who violates the RMU Academic Integrity Policy is subject to penalties imposed by the instructor in the class and possible judicial proceedings that may result in expulsion from the program. Depending upon the severity of the violation, sanctions may range from receiving a zero on an assignment to being dismissed from the university. For questions about the policy, consult the course instructor or Doctoral Director.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism, taking someone else's words or ideas and representing them as your own, is expressly prohibited by Robert Morris University. Students have both a legal and ethical responsibility to cite works properly. Students who commit blatant acts of plagiarism will fail the course and may be required to present a defense to be allowed to continue in the program.

Falsification of Academic Credentials

A student admitted to a graduate degree program based in part upon a previously earned academic degree who is found to have intentionally misrepresented the degree information will be immediately dismissed from the program and barred from future graduate work at the University. A current student or a student who has recently withdrawn from the University without completing a degree who then claims to have earned said degree will be immediately dismissed from the program (if applicable) and barred from future graduate work at the University.

POLICIES

Student Civility Code

All students, during periods of residency and online learning, shall conduct themselves according to the RMU Student Conduct Code (available on the RMU website at **studentlife.rmu.edu/student-conduct**), which governs all Robert Morris University students. Repeated violations of the code may result in dismissal from the program.

Policy on Instructional Modifications for Students with Disabilities

Robert Morris University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. If a student has (or think she/he may have) a disability that would impact one's educational experience, should seek assistance from Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to schedule a meeting with the SSD Coordinator. The coordinator will confidentially discuss the student's needs, review the documentation, and determine the student's eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more about SSD and available

supports, please visit the SSD website at **rmu.edu/ssd**, email **ssd@rmu.edu**, call **(412) 397-6884**, or visit the SSD office, located in Nicholson Center, room 280.

Once a disability has been documented through the Center for Student Success, students are strongly encouraged to discuss the need for reasonable accommodations with their instructors during the first week of classes. Students with documented disabilities receive a letter from the Center of Student Success to present to all instructors describing the nature of the classroom accommodations.

Full-Time Status

Students accepted into the program are accepted as full-time students and are required to meet all coursework and residency requirements. No students in the program are allowed a part-time status or will be permitted to register for less than the full load prescribed by the curriculum, except in the case of failure to complete the dissertation within the 3-year period, in which case students will be required to register for a one credit directed study each subsequent semester, not including the summer semester, until the dissertation is successfully completed (students must complete all coursework and dissertation work within a 7 year period per the Time Limit policy).

Attendance

Doctoral students are expected to attend **all** class sessions, actively participate in class activities and discussions, and fulfill all course requirements. During on-campus residencies, students are expected to attend in person. For synchronous online class sessions, students are expected to attend remotely via Google Meet (online video meeting software), with video turned on for the duration of class (so that the student is visible to the instructor and other class members), and audio turned on whenever speaking. Audio and video equipment should be tested by the student prior to class time to ensure that both are in working order.

Remote Attendance Requests

If a situation arises where a student cannot attend class in person for an on-campus residency, the student may request to attend the residency remotely via Google Meet. In such a situation, the student must contact the Director of the program to request remote attendance as early as possible. If remote attendance is permitted, the Director will notify all of the student's course instructors for the given residency. Any student attending remotely is expected to attend all class sessions and actively participate, with video turned on for the duration of class (so that the student is visible to the instructor and other class members), and audio turned on whenever speaking. Audio and video equipment should be tested by the student prior to class time to ensure that both are in working order. Other group events that occur during the on-campus residency (outside of class) will not be available for remote attendance.

Failure to Attend

If an emergency situation occurs that will completely prevent the student from attending class, the student should contact the Director of the program as soon as possible. The Director will make a determination as to how to proceed with addressing the student's inability to comply

with the attendance requirement. Based on the determination, the Director will notify the appropriate faculty members of the situation. If it is determined that an accommodation can be made, the student will be responsible to follow-up with all instructors. The instructor has the right to assign alternate work/assignments the student will need to submit to address content missed during the absence.

Failure to attend course sessions may impact course grades, and repeated failure to attend may result in dismissal from the program.

Professionalism

Professionalism is expected of all doctoral students. This includes avoidance of disruptive behaviors (such as use of mobile phones or computers for purposes other than note taking in the classroom).

Grading, Degree Progress, and GPA Requirement

Students must complete 60 credit hours of study, spread over the three years of the program, maintaining no less than a 3.0 GPA for all courses taken.

Grading scale for doctoral courses is based on a 4.0 scale as follows:

Grade Description	Points
A Excellent	4.0
A-	3.7
B+ Good	3.3
B	3.0
C Adequate	2.0
F Failing	0.0
SP Satisfactory Progress	N/A (Incomplete)

Grading scale for doctoral directed studies for dissertation work (ISCM 9100, ISCM 9200, ISCM 9300, and ISCM 9400) will be pass/fail:

Grade Description	Grade Type
P Passing	Pass
NP Not Passing	Fail
SP Satisfactory Progress	N/A (Incomplete)

Good Academic Standing: In order for students to be in good academic standing at Robert Morris University, and in the program, they must maintain a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.00.

Academic Warning: Students with a GPA lower than 3.00 will be placed on Academic Warning. Students placed on Academic Warning will have one semester to raise their GPA to

the minimum level. Students unable to achieve a 3.00 will be dismissed from the program.

Academic Suspension: Students may be suspended from the University when three or more "C" or "F" grades are computed in the GPA. Students may not continue study while on Academic Suspension.

Students who wish to return to study after Academic Suspension must appeal their suspension by filing a request for reinstatement (with justification) to the School Dean. Further details on this process can be found in the RMU Graduate Policies section of the RMU website, under Academic Standing.

Passing Grades: A student must earn a passing grade (A, A-, B+, B, C, or P) in all required doctoral courses and directed studies in order to graduate and earn the degree.

If work is incomplete in a doctoral course, and the faculty member instructing the course deems it appropriate, an "incomplete" grade of "SP" will be assigned. In such a case, the faculty member will inform the student in writing via email of a due date by which all incomplete work must be submitted for a grade, and the email should additionally contain a list of incomplete work that is expected. This email should be sent to both the student and the Director of the doctoral program. Once the missing work is submitted, or on the due date, the faculty member will change the "SP" incomplete grade to either a passing or failing grade, as appropriate.

Note that if a student fails a course or directed study, it will need to be taken again in a later semester, as a student cannot graduate without passing all required courses and directed studies. The student will need to enroll in the repeated course when it is next offered, which for most courses will be the following year, with the next cohort. Thus, failing a course will likely result in a delay in graduation by at least one year.

Doctoral Student-Faculty Dispute Policy

1. A student who has a complaint with an individual faculty member should discuss the complaint directly with the faculty member and try to resolve it at that level.

2. A student who attempts to begin the process at a higher administrative level will be encouraged to address the issue with the faculty member first. The Program Director shall make a good faith effort to have the student confer initially with the faculty member.

3. If a student refuses to confer with the faculty member, the student is to confer with the Program Director. If such a meeting occurs, the Program Director will:
    a. Listen to the student's concerns;
    b. Inform the student that the concerns expressed will be communicated to the faculty member;
    c. After the meeting, inform the faculty member of the concerns raised by the student;
    d. If the faculty member agrees to do so, arrange a meeting with the faculty member and the student in an attempt to resolve the issue.

4. If an acceptable solution is not reached, the student must then document his or her complaint in writing and deliver a copy to the faculty member, the Program Director and the Dean, respectively.
   a. The Program Director will make a judgment about the student complaint. If the Program Director judges against the complaint, then the student has the ability to appeal to the SIHSS Dean.
   b. If the Program Director judges the student complaint could be valid, the faculty member will be asked to respond in writing to the complaint.
   c. The Program Director will consider the faculty member's written response and could dismiss the complaint, at which time the student could appeal to the SIHSS Dean.
   d. Alternatively, the Program Director could conclude that there is a basis for the complaint and would then schedule a conference with the student and the faculty member in an effort to resolve the issue.

5. If the issue is not resolved, the student can appeal to the SIHSS Dean.

6. If the issue is not resolved at the Dean's level, the student can appeal to the Deans' Council. The Deans' Council decision is final.

Grade Changes

All requests for grade changes must be made through the faculty member, who completes a change-of-grade form and submits it to the Program Director. Change of grade requests must be approved and signed by the faculty member, Program Director, and SIHSS Dean.

If a student disputes a grade and an acceptable solution is not reached by discussion with the faculty member, the student should put the issue regarding the grade or grading procedure in writing and deliver a copy to the faculty member and Program Director.

Discussions between a faculty member and the academic administration may occur concerning a faculty member's grading practices and final grade distribution. However, the academic administration is not authorized to change a student's grade, unless the grade was issued in an arbitrary or capricious fashion, the faculty member becomes mentally and/or physically disabled or otherwise incapacitated, dies, or for some other reason is unable or unwilling to perform the function of the grading process. The faculty member will cooperate with the Program Director for review and assessment, including, but not limited to instructional materials, grade books, exams, and syllabi.

This process is not intended to replace informal conferences between a student and a faculty member concerning the issuance of a grade.

Timely Return of Drafts

Doctoral students are expected to comply with the Dissertation Advisor's schedule for submitting drafts of the proposal, the IRB form, and the dissertation. It is the responsibility of the Dissertation Advisor to provide timely oral and written feedback to students. Under

ordinary circumstances, two weeks (14 working days) is a reasonable expectation for advisor feedback on drafts of the proposal, IRB form, and the dissertation.

Replacement of a Committee Member Policy

A student may request the replacement of a committee member by consulting with his or her Dissertation Advisor.

Dissertation Advisors may not replace committee members without first consulting the committee member in question, the student, and the Program Director. In cases of disagreement, the Advisor, in consultation with the student and the Program Director, may replace a committee member.

Replacement of a Dissertation Advisor Policy

Under unusual circumstances, a student may request of the Program Director a replacement for a Dissertation Advisor. Students should be aware that a new advisor is not obligated to accept work that was approved by the previous advisor.

To replace a Dissertation Advisor, the student must follow the following process:

1. The student should discuss any disagreements with the Dissertation Advisor and try to resolve it at that level.

2. A student who attempts to begin the process at a higher administrative level will be encouraged to address the issue with the Dissertation Advisor first. The Program Director shall make a good faith effort to have the student confer initially with the Dissertation Advisor.

3. If a student refuses to confer with the Dissertation Advisor, the student is to confer with the Program Director. If such a meeting occurs, the Program Director will:
   a. Listen to the student's request
   b. Inform the student that the concerns expressed will be communicated to the Dissertation Advisor;
   c. After the meeting, inform the Dissertation Advisor of the concerns raised by the student;
   d. If the Dissertation Advisor agrees to do so, arrange a meeting with the Dissertation Advisor and the student in an attempt to resolve any conflicts.

4. If an acceptable solution is not reached, the student must then present a written request to change Dissertation Advisor to the doctoral Program Director. If the director agrees with the student, the director will assist the student in obtaining a new Dissertation Advisor. In this case the student will be withdrawn from the Dissertation Advisor's research course, receiving a "W" grade if the course is in progress. A new enrollment will be created for the new advisor who will assign the course grade. No extra fees will be charged to the student for the change.

5. In the event that the advisor is replaced, the new Dissertation Advisor will receive full load or stipend for this advisee. If, in the opinion of the doctoral Program Director, the former advisor has performed sufficient work to be the equivalent of what is required by an advisor, the former advisor will also receive full load or stipend.

6. Either the Dissertation Advisor or the student can appeal to the SIHSS Dean, whose decision is final.

Participation in Commencement Policy

Students who have completed or who are registered to complete all Ph.D. doctoral degree requirements and who have successfully defended their dissertations (with no revisions or minor revisions) by April 15 of the third spring term are encouraged to participate in commencement exercises. Those who have not completed their course work, or who have failed their dissertation defense will not participate in commencement exercises of the same year.

Graduation Application

Students wishing to participate in the commencement ceremony must complete the graduation application and "Early Walk" form not later than 10 days into the spring semester.

Permission to Walk in Commencement Ceremony

In order to participate in the commencement ceremony, a student must successfully defend the dissertation by April 15 of their Third Year in the program, and pass the defense with a designation of either "Approved as Presented" or "Approved with Revisions."

If a student passes a defense with the designation "Approved as Presented," the student is permitted to walk in the commencement ceremony and the degree will be conferred at commencement.

If a student passes a defense with the designation "Approved with Revisions," the student is permitted to walk in the commencement ceremony with the understanding that all revisions must be completed to the satisfaction of the Dissertation Advisor by August 1. This provision is permitted through RMU's Early Walk policy (thus the need for students to submit the Early Walk form at the beginning of the semester). However, the degree will not be conferred until all revisions are completed to the satisfaction of the Dissertation Advisor. The student will receive a "blank" degree as a placeholder when walking early in the commencement ceremony.

If a student fails a defense with the designation "Not Approved," the student will be required to register for an additional one-credit independent study with the Dissertation Advisor starting in the subsequent Fall semester to continue to work toward successful completion of the dissertation and degree. The student will not be permitted to participate in commencement or walk in the ceremony. If the defense is passed successfully in the following year, the student will have the option to walk in the commencement ceremony the following year.

Degree Conferral

Upon completion of the 60 credits required for the degree and the final approval of the dissertation by the Dissertation Advisor, the Program Director and the University Registrar will evaluate a student's academic record for program completion and degree conferral.

Degrees are conferred when ALL requirements have been fulfilled. The date of the defense of a dissertation has no bearing on the degree posting. All required documents with all the proper signatures must be completed and submitted before the degree will be conferred.

Leaves of Absence

The Program Director may grant a student one leave of absence for up to two years consistent with the policies of the University. A student who takes a leave of absence may be required to join a subsequent cohort in order to complete missed courses successfully. Upon return to the program, the Program Director will determine a custom course of study for the student to ensure that they meet all program requirements. Additionally, it may be necessary to assign a student returning from a leave of absence a new Dissertation Advisor. Students should be aware that a new advisor is not obligated to accept work that was approved by the previous advisor.

Continuous Dissertation Policy

The Continuous Dissertation Policy requires all doctoral students who have not completed the dissertation, but who have completed all other required coursework and degree requirements, to register and pay the tuition fee for a 1-credit continuous directed study dissertation course led by their Dissertation Advisor each semester (not including Summer semester), beginning in the Fall semester after the 3rd year coursework is completed. This provides students the opportunity to work with their Dissertation Advisor and committee to finalize the dissertation within the degree time limit.

Time Limit

All degree requirements of the Ph.D. ISC program must be completed seven (7) years after the date of matriculation, including leaves of absence.