Professional Project Guidelines for the School of Journalism and Mass Communication

A project must be a substantial and original body of work on a significant topic that demonstrates a student’s competence as a mass communication graduate student. Key skills include gathering, synthesizing, analyzing and presenting information to an audience in an ethical manner. Work may be produced in any mass communication medium or combination of media: print, still photography, video, audio, documentary film, online, or multimedia. If the student has declared a concentration, the project should focus on applying the material learned in the concentration courses.

A project involves the completion of a professional creative product. Applied research to address practical questions (i.e. how to carry out a digital advertising campaign) may be involved. A project contributes to the professions via applied research and/or creative accomplishment. The project is the culmination of a student’s studies here and should reflect what he/she has learned in the program. A project is much more than a class assignment and requires as much research as a thesis. A project may take many forms, though all projects must be noteworthy for substance and professional quality. A written proposal is also required for a project and must be approved in writing by the committee before beginning the final project.

Projects completed by students have included: documentary films and videos, photo essays, feature or investigative article series, handbooks for professionals (e.g., the result of synthesizing and translating scholarly research), or advanced digital projects.

While projects do not always constitute original research, they nonetheless require research — i.e., research that contributes to content substance and delineates the project’s unique contribution to the professions. This research, as well as the project work itself, certainly involves methodologies — e.g., of interviewing, of library research, of examining similar projects, and of carrying out the project. Therefore, each project must be accompanied by a written report that describes or documents the research involved, the methodological procedures used, and lessons learned in the process.

Preparation for Project/Enrollment in Project. During the fall or spring semester prior to a student’s last semester of enrollment, a student should work with a project chair to develop the project and create the project proposal. The student will not enroll in MC 5307 until his/her last semester, but the project proposal work should be conducted the semester before.

Enrollment in Project During Summer Session: Students may not enroll in MC 5307 during the summer. However, a student may work on project proposal if the project chair has agreed to mentor the student during the summer months. No official committee meetings will take place during the summer session.

Project Chair and Project Committee. The project committee will consist of three members of the Texas State graduate faculty. Students will consult with their project chair to select the other members of the committee. The project chair should be a faculty member teaching in the concentration area if the student has a concentration. At least two members of the project committee must be members of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. One
member may be a graduate faculty from another department if that faculty’s expertise directly contributes toward the student’s research. The Graduate Advisor and the outside-faculty member’s department chair must approve the outside committee member. The project advisor and committee should be selected prior to completing the project proposal. [See Committee Section of the SJMC Handbook]

**Role of Project Chair:** The project chair will be responsible for working with the student one-on-one to develop the project proposal and oversee the final project. This means the project chair should be willing to read multiple drafts of the proposal as well as visit and mentor a student through project ideas. The project chair will make sure to work with the student to identify other committee members. The project chair will email committee members to set up the project proposal meeting, update the committee on the project’s progression, set the meeting time for the final project comprehensive exam, and prepare all the paperwork needed for the proposal and defense meetings (the student should not do this). The project chair will meet the internal project guidelines set by the SJMC Graduate Advisor at the start of each semester.

**Role of Committee Members:** The committee members may share expertise with the project chair, but the committee members should complement each other. The committee members should provide feedback and answer questions prior to the project proposal meeting. The project chair may ask the student to meet with the committee members for advice/feedback while the proposal is being developed as well as the final project.

**Beginning A Project.** The topic is a student’s choice. Students may develop ideas through courses, conversations with faculty, their own interests, etc. Talk with faculty and other students to determine whether the idea is feasible. Students should have a working idea by the start of the term preceding the term a student enrolls in project. Students will work with their project chair to write their proposal.

**The Project Proposal.** Before beginning the project, a detailed, written proposal must be submitted, defended, and approved by the project committee. The proposal should specify the objective(s) one will address and how the research requirements will be met. The proposal will be shared with the committee members at least two weeks prior to the proposal meeting. The project chair will distribute copies of the proposal to the other members of the committee and set a meeting time to discuss the proposal. At this meeting, the internal SJMC proposal agreement will be completed. For the proposal meeting, only one committee member can participate remotely. The other two faculty members should be physically present at the proposal meeting. If a student’s project includes human subjects, he/she will obtain IRB approval after the proposal meeting has been held.

**Project Proposal Guidelines.** Generally, students will include what they want to study or the problem to be addressed, how to approach it, and why it should be studied. A hypothesis may be stated and/or goals, review relevant literature and contextual information, explain methodologies or procedures to be followed, and describe what the final product will look like. Proposals vary in length and will contribute to the content of the finished project.
**Project Proposal Structure**

The organization of a project proposal typically parallels that of a thesis proposal, including the following:

I. **Introduction.** This is where problems or issues in the professional field are discussed and the rationale for the project is established. Apply the theories and concepts learned in core graduate classes to a professional problem, issue, or challenge. The introduction should clearly state the professional objectives of the project. A page or two should be sufficient.

II. **Approach.** Describe and explain the approach and timeline for completion. This should include at least the following elements:

- A detailed description of the work to be done for the project, including location where the project will be carried out. The area of specialty or emphasis for the project.
- The specific beginning and ending dates of the project.
- An explanation of the timeline/work schedule of the project. Plan to devote the equivalent of one semester of full-time academic work to complete the project.
- How the project could be published, disseminated, or delivered to its intended audience. Publication is not a requirement but is a desired outcome.
- Identify the potential client, organization, or established media outlet that would consider publishing, distributing, or broadcasting the work.
- Specify the material that will be included in the final project report that demonstrates physical evidence that the project was completed (e.g., websites, published or unpublished articles, videos, handbooks, etc.).

III. **Methodology or Procedures.** Describe the procedural decisions and plans that will enable one to carry out the project. Obviously, different types of projects will require very different kinds of procedures. A student doing applied research (e.g., for an advertising or public relations campaign) may use essentially the same methods as a student carrying out a social scientific thesis. Creative projects will involve completely different types of procedures and methodologies depending on the project. The methodological decisions involved in planning and writing a work of literary nonfiction, for instance, will be very different than for making a video documentary. This section of the proposal should include the following:

- Clear statement of the subject (which institution, individual or issue will be the topic?) and what questions the project intends to explore or answer.
- How these questions are relevant to the project and will contribute to the professional field.
- Procedural decisions and plans to carry out the project.
- A statement of how the project will be formally assessed. This could be a professional in the discipline, a client, a professional organization, etc. This will be in addition to the assessment of the project committee.

IV. **Description of the Completed Project.** Describe what the completed project will look like.
Format for proposal: Use APA style (http://guides.library.txstate.edu/writing-citation-style-guide/apa) throughout the proposal.

Final Semester - Enrolled in MC 5307 Project
Students will research, create, write, and revise the professional project during the semester with advice and direction from the project committee. Students must meet and report on their progress as directed by the project chair (at least every two weeks). All formal feedback is funneled through the project chair to ensure consistency. Make sure to provide copies of the final draft of the professional project and written report to the project chair for comments throughout the semester. Once the project is complete and the project chair and student think it is ready to defend, the project chair will distribute the project to the other members of the committee at least two weeks prior to the scheduled comprehensive exam defense. The project chair will also set the meeting time. For the project defense, only one committee member can participate remotely. The other two faculty members should be physically present at the defense.

Project Report. Before the comprehensive exam defense is scheduled, students must write a final report that incorporates all the elements of the project proposal, as well as significant documentation of the project itself, and a contextual essay evaluating the outcomes and or success of the project objectives. The report should contain:

- Title page.
- Table of contents.
- Introduction.
- Elements from your original project proposal (with description of any changes from original).
- IRB application/approval (if necessary).
- The professional project (chronological description).
- Evidence of the project (such as articles, URLs, printouts, DVDs, query letters, correspondence with clients, etc.).
- Discussion and conclusions.
- Contextual essay evaluating the outcomes of the project objectives.
- What did you learn from the project?
- What worked in the project and what didn’t?
- Suggestions for changes in the future; e.g., what would you do differently?
- Attach any materials that you cite in the body of the report as appendices.

The report should be sent to the committee with the final project at least two weeks before the scheduled oral defense.

After the Comprehensive Exam Defense/Defense of the Project. Students need to make corrections and resubmit their final projects and reports to their project chair for approval. Committee members can either sign the Master’s Comprehensive Exam paperwork at the oral defense, or they can wait until the requested changes have been made. That’s the committee’s discretion as long as they adhere to the deadlines set for fall/spring graduation. Students will submit their finished projects and reports with a signed approval to the School of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduate Advisor. Projects are not subject to Graduate College approval.
Steps in the Professional Project Process

Semester/s Before Project Begins (no credit):

**Ideas.** Student forms a general idea for professional project.

**Concept.** Based on research and coursework conducted during the first two semesters, student develops the idea into a concept for a professional project proposal.

**Chair.** Student seeks out graduate faculty member whose area of expertise is most closely related to the potential proposal (should be in the area of the concentration if a student has a concentration). Student requests the faculty member to chair professional project.

**Proposal Development.** Student develops and writes the proposal. Chair provides guidance and supervision as required to help the student develop the full proposal.

**Committee.** Student, with guidance of the Chair, selects committee members. Student discusses project proposal prior to it being finalized.

Project Semester (3 Hours):

**Proposal.** Proposal meets the guidelines as defined by the committee and student. All committee members must agree that the proposal is ready to defend.

**Proposal Defense.** Chair coordinates with the committee members to establish a date/time to meet for the student’s proposal defense.

**Professional Project.** Student researches, writes, and revises the professional project and report as directed by the Chair and with suggestions from the committee members.

**Professional Project Finalized.** Student provides copies of final draft of the professional project and project report to the Chair for comments and ultimate distribution to the committee members at least two weeks before a scheduled defense date.

**Defense Date.** Chair establishes a date and time for the final defense. This date should be at least two weeks after the project has been distributed to the committee.

**Professional Project Defense.** Student defends the professional project to the committee. Committee approves, approves with corrections, or (in extremely rare cases) denies the project.

**Corrections.** Student makes any corrections and submits final to the Chair for approval. Committee members sign the Master’s Comprehensive Exam Form if it was not signed at the defense.

**Publishing.** Student submits project to the School of Journalism and Mass Communication graduate advisor and provides committee chair with one copy of the professional project.