

**UA SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM
PROFESSIONAL PROJECT PROPOSAL GUIDELINES
FOR THE MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM***

Students may produce a high-quality professional project instead of a thesis for completion of the master's degree requirements in the School of Journalism. According to the UA Graduate College, you should choose your final project topic and select your committee by the end of your second semester. That means you should start thinking about your project topic almost as soon as you arrive on campus—these two years will fly by. Generally, master's students develop their professional project proposals in conjunction with JOUR 589: Survey of Research Methods, which you should take in your second (spring) semester. The professional project option is unavailable to dual-major students.

The project must be a substantial and original body of work on a significant topic that demonstrates the student's competence as a journalist. Key skills include gathering, synthesizing, analyzing and presenting information to an audience in an ethical manner. You may work in any journalistic medium or combination of media: print, still photography, video, audio, documentary film, online, or multimedia. Students should enroll in JOUR 909 for three to six credits, to be determined in consultation with their committee chair. A successful project will be of publishable quality.

Graduate College Master's Plan of Study (MPOS)

The first step in the final project process is to complete the online Master's Plan of Study (MPOS), which must be signed by the Journalism director of graduate studies and your proposed committee chair ("major advisor") and filed with the Graduate College. This two-page document is essentially a contract among you, the School of Journalism, and the Graduate College specifying which courses you will take to fulfill the master's degree requirements. It also requires you to state a professional project title (insert where it states "Thesis Title") and find your committee chair.

The Plan of Study identifies (1) courses you intend to transfer from other institutions; (2) courses already completed at UA; and (3) additional courses to be completed to fulfill degree requirements. The Graduate College will charge your student account when you file your MPOS. All deficiencies must be satisfied before it is approved.

As stated by the Graduate College, "each student is responsible for developing a Plan of Study as early as possible during the first few months in residence, to be submitted to the Graduate College no later than the second semester in residence." The sooner the Plan of Study is submitted, the sooner the student knows whether the proposed coursework is acceptable under Graduate College policies. Students who wait too long to submit the Plan of Study sometimes unexpectedly have to alter their coursework late in their degree program and may have to take additional courses. You will not be able to graduate without a Plan of Study that is approved by Journalism and the Graduate College. More information is available here:

<http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/mpos>

To complete the form, go to: <http://grad.arizona.edu/>

Click on My Grad College, log in, and click on Forms. Scroll down to “Master's/Specialist Students” and click on “Master's/Specialist Plan of Study.” Fill it out online, including all past and planned coursework; it will generate a two-page document. One page lists your coursework.

The other page requires your chair’s signature in two places: Under No. 7, which certifies your project complies with all “Responsible Conduct of Research” regulations, and under No. 8a, as “Major Advisor.” Generally, journalistic interviews are not considered to be scientific “human subject research,” but you should check to make sure your project does not need approval from the UA Institutional Review Board. See Professor Shahira Fahmy, Journalism’s IRB representative, for help with this process. More information is available here:

<http://orcr.vpr.arizona.edu/>

You sign at the bottom. Bring both signed pages to the Journalism DGS, who will sign it, make copies, and deliver the MPOS to the Graduate College.

Changes to an approved MPOS may be submitted to the Graduate College in three ways: (1) on the Change of Program form (downloadable from the Graduate College website); (2) by e-mail directly from the major advisor to the degree auditor (if acceptable to the degree auditor in the Graduate College Degree Certification office); or (3) on the “Completion of Degree Requirements” form submitted when students defend their final projects.

The MPOS should be completed by the end of the second semester. Generally, students work on their project proposals over the following summer and defend them in the fall. If approved, students will complete the professional project in their fourth and final semester.

Professional Project Committees

You should consult with faculty with expertise in your topic area as you begin shaping your proposal. Think about which faculty member you would like to work with—and who has the background and skills you will need to complete your project. Ask that faculty member to chair your committee, and find two other faculty members to serve on the committee. Your chair usually is someone you have had as a professor.

The UA Graduate College requires that master's committees include at least two tenured or tenure-track UA faculty members. If the third member is not tenured or tenure-track, Journalism’s DGS must submit a “Special Member Request Form” to the Graduate College. One member also may be from outside the School of Journalism. Occasionally, a committee may have four members.

PREPARING THE PROFESSIONAL PROJECT PROPOSAL

The project proposal is an approximately fifteen- to twenty-five-page document that describes what you plan to do, how you plan to do it, when you will do what—and why. It is the blueprint for this long-term, multipart project that you will be working on for several months. The proposal also serves as a kind of contract between you and your committee that establishes what work you have agreed to do in exchange for the committee’s final project approval. A major purpose of the project proposal is that you and your committee agree from its earliest stages on

the criteria for judging your project's success. The clearer and more specific your proposal, the smoother and less stressful completing this major project will be. For a sample project proposal, please contact the graduate program coordinator at 520-621-9616.

Tentative title

The main title should be catchy, while the subtitle following a colon should describe your topic more specifically. The title should be clear enough that your audience knows what to expect. Examples are: "The Wall: A Multimedia Exploration of the Effect of the U.S. Homeland Security's Mexico-Arizona Wall on Borderland Communities" or "Foreclosed: A Film About the Housing Crisis in Tucson." You may revise your title as your project becomes more refined, but a well-considered title will help keep your focus on the main idea of your project.

Introduction

The most important part of the introduction is a clear, coherent statement of purpose. What is your topic? Why is it important? The introduction should contain a brief overview of the topic, possibly including any important background information. An anecdote that segues into the broader topic you plan to address can be an effective way to introduce a topic.

Background: Review and Analysis

This section of your proposal will allow you to demonstrate that you are thoroughly familiar with how others, both reporters and scholars, have approached your topic in the past, and to make a case for why your project is a useful or necessary "next step" that will further the public's understanding of the issue your project will address.

This is the most substantial and lengthy section of your proposal. It shows your audience and your committee that you are aware of what has been published or produced over time by other journalists or scholars regarding your topic. The review and analysis section has several purposes: it demonstrates that you have informed yourself about the topic, are aware of what works on your topic already exist and, based on that information, allows you to show how you intend to contribute new, original information on the topic. The background section, which can easily run at least ten pages, will serve as an important part of your final project.

Your review and analysis should include material from all media including the popular press (newspapers, consumer magazines, books), Web sites, television, photography, video and film. It should also include information about relevant material that has been published in scholarly journals and government or institute reports.

The background section is more than an annotated bibliography. To write this section effectively you will need to read or view the material and synthesize its main arguments or observations. You also will analyze how the authors and producers used the media to tell the story or convey their intended message. Analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of various pieces will help you shape your project, because it will give you ideas for new angles or perspectives on the topic. It also will help you avoid writing material or producing media that others already have done.

You can search for previous works on your topic in UA library databases such as J-STOR, LexisNexis, and Historical Newspapers-ProQuest. You will learn how to use these databases

among others in JOUR 508: Journalism Theory & Practice and JOUR 589: Survey of Research Methods. You can obtain articles or books not available at the UA library or its databases through interlibrary loan. Your project committee chair will be able to guide you to other sources for this background section. You and your chair will decide upon a citation style for your project.

The final section of the background section should identify gaps in the literature or media that your project will attempt to fill. This is where you specifically describe what topic you intend to research and what work you will produce. What new material or perspective will you contribute to the literature or media on the subject? Explain its significance.

Journalistic Method

In this section, you will describe the techniques and approaches you will use to explore your topic. What course work, skills, or professional or personal experience qualify you for this project?

What medium will you employ? Who is the intended audience? What databases will you use? Which agencies, institutions, corporations, or individuals will you consult as sources? Discuss your strategy for gathering and verifying information.

Availability of resources is an important consideration in completing a successful project on schedule. Where are your sources? Are they accessible? Will you need to travel? Where will the funding come from? Will you apply for grants? Which ones? Finally, where do you intend to publish or show your work?

Develop a timeline and describe the steps in the project and when you will complete them.

Limitations

Set parameters for the scope of your investigation. Justify those limits. For instance, a series on treatment of AIDS patients may be limited to Tucson hospitals because it is beyond your means to travel to Phoenix or elsewhere. Project parameters may include timelines, demographic populations, and geographic regions.

Bibliography

The bibliography should formally cite sources you intend to use in your final project as well as those discussed in your background section. Discuss with your chair which bibliographic style is most appropriate for your project.

Deadlines

Set deadlines with your committee for when you will submit outlines, drafts, other preliminary work, and finished pieces and include them in the proposal. Note that even drafts of all work should meet professional standards: spelling and mechanical errors are unacceptable in graduate-level work.

Description of End Product

The final project option allows you to devise creative means of storytelling to explore an issue that intrigues you through your choice of media. Although project parameters are much wider than those of a thesis, projects are expected to be as intellectually demanding as a thesis. Students also may produce a hybrid work that combines a journalistic project with a scholarly research article. Projects for six credits, of course, should reflect twice as much effort as three-credit projects.

Close communication with your chair is key to a successful project. As it is the culmination of months of work, the end product's scope and quality should reflect a high level of intellectual endeavor, creative thought, and journalistic skills. You will work closely with the chair to shape a project that challenges your abilities and enables you to experiment with journalistic genres and technological innovations. The project should be good enough to be published or produced, and your chair may require that you attempt to do so. It should be something you will be proud to show to a prospective employer. The proposal should include an outline of the various parts of your intended final product. You and your proposed chair should establish the expected length, depth, and form of the end products and describe them in the proposal.

Originality, depth, multi-sourcing, compelling writing, and excellent technological quality are among characteristics of a final project that meets acceptable standards for graduate-level work. The following examples are just a few ideas for suitable projects.

- A series of in-depth investigative newspaper articles combining computer-assisted reporting skills with personal interviews to explore the effects of southern Arizona home foreclosures on individuals, the community, and the state.
- A substantial documentary film exploring the lives of day laborers in Tucson.
- A web site on Somali refugees in Tucson that includes video presentations, Soundslides shows, text articles, and interactive features that not only put a face on individual refugees but also illuminate the political issues that forced them from their home and the cultural and economic issues they face here.
- A hybrid project that combines a photograph portfolio depicting Tucson's Mexican-inspired mural art and artist profiles with a scholarly historical investigation tying it to the social, political, and artistic role of murals in Mexican culture.
- A lengthy, in-depth, multi-sourced magazine article investigating Arizona immigration issues on the scale of a *Vanity Fair* or *New York Times Magazine* feature.

For inspiration, you might look at annual collections such as the *Best Reporting of 2---* or the *Best Magazine Stories of 2---* for ideas on shaping your project. The Pulitzer Prize web site is another place where you can find examples of excellent journalism. You can browse its winning works at:

<http://www.pulitzer.org>

Other online sites for inspiration that showcase excellence in journalism include:

Multimedia

<http://www.mediastorm.org>

<http://www.multimediamuse.org/>

<http://www.socialdocumentary.net/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/nyregion/1-in-8-million/index.html>
<http://www.digitalmedianewsroom.com/>
<http://www.nytimes.com/pages/multimedia/index.html>
<http://www.centerforinvestigativereporting.org/blogpost/20080506webbyawardsrecognizethebestonlinejournalism>
http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=178562

Long-form Print Journalism

<http://www.esquire.com/features/page-75/greatest-stories>
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/25/opinion/25brooks.html?_r=2&ref=opinion

Nieman Reports also provides information on “how to do” multimedia projects at:

<http://nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=101973>
<http://nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100937>

Project Proposal Defense

When your chair decides that your proposal meets the requirements, you will send copies to the other committee members. They may request revisions or additional material. After all agree the proposal is ready for approval, the chair will schedule a mutually agreeable date and time for the proposal defense. You should reserve a room with the main office and post fliers announcing it. Your brief presentation is followed by committee questions and comments. If approved, all sign the school’s “Professional Project Proposal Approval Form” and give it to the DGS. All receive a copy of original, which is placed in your file.

COMPLETING YOUR PROFESSIONAL PROJECT

You will work closely with your committee chair during the months in which you conduct your research and complete your professional project. This will entail spend many hours gathering and verifying information in the library, in the field, on the phone, and at the computer. The writing and production of the end product will require many more hours of work. You and your chair should consult throughout the process, and you should agree on a schedule when you will submit drafts and/or parts of the project for your chair’s review and comments. Expect to make several revisions as you proceed. Consult your chair when you have any questions about any professional, technical, or ethical issues you encounter. Should you meet any roadblocks—and journalists undoubtedly will—seek your chair’s advice.

All final projects must be accompanied by a reflective essay in which you discuss the challenges and process of creating your project. This is a first-person, somewhat informal essay that should be approximately 1,200 to 1,500 words.

Academic Integrity Policy

The final project must meet all standards of the UA Code of Academic Integrity and the School of Journalism Academic Integrity Handbook. Work found in violation of the code, including but not limited to plagiarism and fabrication, will receive a failing grade and the student will be removed from the program. You can download the handbooks here:

<http://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/policiesandcodes/studentcodeofconduct>
<http://journalism.arizona.edu/students/handbooks.php>

Project Defense

When you and your chair agree the project is ready, you must deliver copies of it to all committee members at least two weeks in advance of the project defense date. Schedule a date and time and reserve a room with the main office and post fliers announcing the defense. It involves a twenty- to thirty-minute presentation of your project, followed by questions and comments from the committee. Be prepared to answer questions about how and why you made decisions about your project.

Graduate College Requirements for Completion of Master's Requirements

A successful project defense requires that at least two members of your committee sign the Graduate College's "Completion of Master's Degree Requirements" form. The online form is accessible via logging into My Grad College at:

<https://grad.arizona.edu/gc/>

Your chair fills in the defense date and whether you passed or failed "the exam." The committee usually requires some revisions even when it approves the project, which will be noted on the form. Any changes in your course work from the MPOS should be listed in the space provided. At least two committee members must sign and date the bottom of the form. Your chair will give the completed form to the DGS or school director to sign and submit to the Graduate College. Keep a copy. The dean of the Graduate College will certify completion of degree requirements. To graduate, all other course work must be completed and your cumulative GPA must be at least 3.0.

Final Grade and Transcript: When the chair receives the final, revised project, he or she will replace the JOUR 909 "K" grade with a "P" for pass or an "S" for superior. The Graduate College must receive a copy of your official transcript with all final grades by the semester graduation deadline.

Graduate College Deadlines

Deadlines for graduating in a particular semester are online at:

<https://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/deadlines-for-graduation>

School Project Copy:

You must provide the School of Journalism with a copy of your final, revised project in the appropriate medium for the school's files.

Registration and Tuition

You must be registered as a UA student the semester you defend your final project. If you do not complete JOUR 909 (professional project) during the semester, you may take a "K" grade (for "Continuing"). You must then register for one credit in summer or three credits in fall or spring. Out-of-state students may request a tuition waiver so that they pay in-state tuition rates while they complete their final project.

Journalism faculty generally are unavailable for final project defenses during the summer except under exceptional circumstances approved in advance. If you do not finish your project in the

spring semester, plan on registering and paying tuition for another three credits of JOUR 909 the following fall.

Commencement Information

University commencement ceremony information is available here:

<http://commencement.arizona.edu/index.html>

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Convocation Recognition Ceremony information is available here:

<http://web.sbs.arizona.edu/college/node/42>

*The School of Journalism Graduate Committee would like to acknowledge that some of its recommendations are based on similar guidelines it reviewed from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri.

These guidelines are in effect beginning with the school's 2009-10 master's program cohort.