PROJECT: YOUR SECOND SEMESTER
You may produce a high-quality professional project instead of a thesis for completion of the master’s degree requirements in the School of Journalism. The professional project option is not available to dual-degree students in Journalism and Latin American Studies.

According to the UA Graduate College, you should choose your project topic and select your committee by the end of your second semester in the master’s program. 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 proposal in conjunction with JOUR 508 (Journalism Theory & Practice), which you should take in your first (fall) semester, and JOUR 589 (Survey of Research Methods), which you should take in your second (spring) semester.

A project must be a substantial and original body of work on a significant topic that demonstrates your 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, photography, audio, documentary video and/or multimedia. A successful project must be of publishable quality.

Filling out the Responsible Conduct of Research form
The first step is to fill out the Responsible Conduct of Research form in GradPath. You can’t open any of the other required forms until you complete this form. To see the form, click Create New. Make sure you’ve read the General Information section. Then, in the Certified section, read the statement and check the box.

This form does not require any approvals. Once you submit it, you can immediately access the Master’s Plan of Study. To return to your forms page, click the Return button.

Filling out the Master’s Plan of Study (MPoS)
Next, complete the online Master’s Plan of Study (MPoS), which must be approved by the director of graduate studies and your committee chair (“major advisor”) and filed with the Graduate College. This 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 find your committee chair and specify the semester you plan to graduate.

The MPoS identifies (1) courses you intend to transfer from other institutions, (2) courses already completed at UA that you intend to apply toward your graduate degree and (3) additional courses to be completed to fulfill your degree requirements. The Graduate College will charge your student account when you file your MPoS. All deficiencies must be satisfied before it is approved. If you change your graduation date, you won’t be billed again.

As stated by the Graduate College, “In conjunction with his/her major professor, 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 you know 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 the School of Journalism and the Graduate College. More information is available here: https://grad.arizona.edu/gsas/degree-requirements/masters-degrees#plan-of-study

To complete the form, go to GradPath. 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. Be sure to include all past and planned coursework.

Generally, journalistic interviews are not considered scientific “human subject research,” but you should check with your chair to make sure your project does not need approval from the UA Institutional Review Board. Journalism’s IRB representative can also help with this process. More information is at http://orcr.vpr.arizona.edu/

The MPoS should be completed by the end of your second semester. Generally, students work on their project proposal over the following summer and defend it in the fall (third) semester. If approved, students complete their project during their final (fourth) semester.

If you need to change the semester you plan to graduate, please email the journalism school’s liaison in the Graduate College Degree Certification office.

If you need to change your MPoS, it’s easy to go back into GradPath and do so.

**Forming a project committee**

By the end of your second semester, you must also fill out the Master’s/Specialist Committee Appointment form in GradPath.

As you begin shaping your project proposal and committee, talk with the director of graduate studies about ideas for faculty members with expertise in your topic area. Think about which faculty members you would like to work with and who have the background and skills you will need to help you complete your project. Besides a chair, you will need to ask two other faculty members to serve on your committee.

Your chair is your main point of contact. Your chair must approve your topic. Your chair will help guide your proposal and see you through completion of your project. Your chair is usually someone you have had as a professor. Select someone with whom you have a mutually respectful relationship, someone who is interested in your area of study and can contribute to your work. Your chair does not have to be experienced in every aspect of your work. Other committee members can contribute experience in some areas.

Your chair can help you select committee members who can contribute to your work. Make sure they will be available to serve on your committee when you intend to do your work. Ask potential committee members about future plans, such as fellowships, sabbaticals and Fulbrights. This is especially important if you plan to work on your project during the summer, as many faculty hold a nine-month appointment and are not available then.

Beyond approving your project proposal and final project, the role of members varies from committee to committee. You may have selected one member for his or her expertise in photography or videography; you can rely on that person for help in that area. Another member might have expertise in the subject matter or geographical area. Based on discussions with your
chair, you may submit draft chapters to all members, or you may submit them only to your chair and have other members read only your revised chapters.

In any case, discuss the role of your committee members early in the process. Your chair can help you determine a way to make the committee function smoothly. In addition, committee members should be told up front what you expect from them. Your entire committee reads your project proposal and finished project and attends the defense of each one.

Meet regularly with your chair to discuss your progress and plans at all stages of your project. Be proactive! If you want to discuss a particular topic or need a resource to aid your research, ask! Check with your chair to determine how often you'll meet and whether you'll confer via face-to-face meetings, phone calls, email exchanges or a combination.

You may change your chair at any time. Be sure that the faculty member you choose to work with agrees to be your new chair and that the original chair is notified of any changes. In addition, please amend your Master's/Specialist Committee Appointment form in GradPath.
**PROJECT PROPOSAL: YOUR THIRD SEMESTER**

The project proposal is a 15- to 25-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 professional 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 agree 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 its success. The clearer and more specific your proposal, the smoother and less stressful completing your project will be. For a sample project proposal, please contact the director of graduate studies.

**PREPARING YOUR PROJECT PROPOSAL**

**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. Here are examples: “The Wall: A multimedia exploration of the effect of the U.S. Homeland Security’s Mexico-Arizona wall on borderland communities” or “Foreclosed: A documentary about the housing crisis in Tucson.” You may revise your title as your project becomes more refined, but a well-considered title will help you 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. Although the introduction is the first section in your project proposal, it is best to write it after you have finished the rest of the proposal.

**Background: Review and analysis**
This section of your proposal will allow you to demonstrate that you are thoroughly familiar with how 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.

The background section 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 background section demonstrates that you have informed yourself about the topic and are aware of what works on your topic already exist. Based on that information, the background section allows you to show how you intend to contribute new, original information on the topic. This section, which can easily run at least 10 pages, will serve as an important part of your final project.

Your background section should include material from all media, including the popular press (newspapers, consumer magazines, books), websites, 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 JSTOR, LexisNexis and ProQuest Historical Newspapers. You will learn how to use these databases and 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 chair can 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 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**
Professional projects involve 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.

In this section, 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? If so, where will the funding come from? Will you apply for grants? Which ones? Finally, where do you intend to publish or show your work?

**Description of end products**
The professional project 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.

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 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 data 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 website on Somali refugees in Tucson that includes video presentations, audio slideshows, 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 photo 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 and ideas on shaping your project, you might look at annual collections, such as the *Best Reporting of 201–* or the *Best Magazine Stories of 201–*. The Pulitzer Prize website is another place where you can find examples of excellent journalism. You can browse its winning works at [http://www.pulitzer.org](http://www.pulitzer.org)

Other online sites that showcase excellence in journalism include the following:

**Multimedia**
[http://www.socialdocumentary.net/](http://www.socialdocumentary.net/)
[https://www.revealnews.org/](https://www.revealnews.org/)

**Long-form print journalism**

**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 certain time periods, demographic populations or geographic regions.
Schedule
Develop a timeline by describing the steps in your project and when you will complete them. Set deadlines with your committee chair for when you will submit outlines, drafts, other preliminary work and finished pieces. Include the schedule in your proposal.

Note that even drafts of all work should meet professional standards: Spelling and mechanical errors are unacceptable in graduate-level work.

Bibliography
The bibliography should formally cite the 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.

DEFENDING YOUR PROJECT PROPOSAL
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 that the proposal is ready for approval, you will schedule a mutually agreeable date and time for the proposal defense. You should reserve a room with the main office. 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 director of graduate studies. The original is placed in your file. You can find a copy of the “Project Proposal Approval Form” at the end of this handbook.
PROJECT: YOUR FOURTH SEMESTER

COMPLETING YOUR PROJECT
After the proposal approval, 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 spending many hours gathering and verifying information in the library, in the field, on the phone and at the computer.

Writing and producing 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 questions about any professional, technical or ethical issues you encounter. Should you encounter any roadblocks—and journalists undoubtedly will—seek your chair’s advice.

Final project
Your final project includes the title page, signed project approval form, gratitude (optional), acknowledgments (optional), table of contents, introduction, backgrounder (review and analysis), journalistic method, limitations/challenges, reflective essay (see below) and references. Basically, it’s your revised project proposal plus the reflective essay.

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

Registration and tuition
You must be registered as a UA student the semester you defend your project. Sign up for 3 units of JOUR 909 (Master’s Report). Dual-degree students must take 3 credits of JOUR 909 and 3 credits from the other master’s program.

If you do not complete JOUR 909 (Master’s Report) during the semester, you may continue enrollment for 1 credit in summer or 3 credits in fall or spring.

Journalism faculty members generally are not available for 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 3 credits of JOUR 909 the following fall.

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/policies-and-codes/code-academic-integrity
https://journalism.arizona.edu/student-handbooks

Formatting your project
Make sure your project follows the proper format. See the following:
Scheduling your defense
When you and your chair agree that your project is ready, schedule a date and time for your defense with your chair, then make sure all committee members are available. Figure on a two-hour block for your defense. It probably won’t take that long, but it’s good to have a cushion so you don’t feel rushed.

Send a copy of your project to your committee members at least two weeks before the thesis defense date. If you schedule your defense after classes are over, make sure (1) all your committee members are available and (2) you have enough time to make revisions before the date you must complete all requirements for your degree. For deadlines, see https://grad.arizona.edu/gsas/degree-requirements/important-degree-dates-and-deadlines

As soon as you have a date and time when your chair and committee members are available, reserve a room with the main office. Inform the director of graduate studies, the graduate coordinator, your chair and your committee members of the date, time and room number.

Promoting your defense
Your defense is a public event. Make flyers with your name, title of your project, name of your chair and committee members, date, time and room number. Give flyers to the administrative assistant, who will post them around the third floor. Also send a copy of your flyer to Michael Chesnick so he can publicize the event on social media and in kudos.

Invite your friends, family and other graduate students to attend this grand occasion!

A few days before the defense, email a reminder to the director of graduate studies, the graduate coordinator, your chair, and your committee members.

Preparing for your defense
Work with your chair on a 20- to 30-minute presentation of your project. If you’re showing a PowerPoint, for example, see if your chair would like to review it beforehand. You might also want to do a dry run with your chair.

DEFENDING YOUR PROJECT
Bring a copy of the school’s Final Approval Form, which is at the end of this handbook. Print the form or pick up a copy from the graduate coordinator. After you, your chair and your committee members sign the form, give it to the director of graduate studies to sign.

The candidate usually brings something to drink and a snack. Nothing fancy. About 20 people usually attend a defense.

Go to the room early. Make sure the projector is working and your PowerPoint, video or website is ready to go. You don’t want to be stressed by technology.