A Guide to Professional Project Proposal and Execution

Manship School of Mass Communication

July 2021

<div align="center">

Manship School of Mass Communication

Policy on Master's Degree Professional Project

</div>

The professional project of the Manship School of Mass Communication is designed as an alternative to the thesis for those master's degree students who have consciously structured their programs to develop their skills in preparation for careers in some mass communication discipline. It is presumed that this means the student has used his or her class alternatives for professional reasons, i.e., the selection of two classes under the clusters available to focus on print or broadcast journalism, public relations or advertising and use of the electives for additional professional classes.

The Process

Students will be expected to declare their intention to pursue a professional project as early as possible, but no later than the beginning of the second year of study. Students will initiate this declaration by meeting with the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research to select and appoint a Graduate Advisory Committee. This committee will be comprised of a major professor (chair) and two other faculty members. For details and guidelines on selecting your committee, please refer to the "Graduation Advisory Committee" section in the Manship Master of Mass Communication Policies and Procedures Handbook.

With guidance from the Graduate Advisory Committee, especially the chair, students will prepare a detailed proposal that will outline in detail the project to be completed as well as complementary research project. This will be presented for approval of the committee. Once this proposal has been approved, the student will conduct the project, under faculty guidance. Upon completion of the project, the chair will schedule a committee meeting, during which the student will discuss and defend the professional output of the proposal as well as the research component. Approval of the project must be achieved no later than one month prior to the commencement exercises in which the student expects to graduate.

To receive academic credit for a professional project, the student must register for MC8002. A total of at least six hours must be accumulated to meet degree requirements.

The Proposal

The proposal will be comprised of two principal parts. The first is a detailed outline of the project itself, including presentation of readings that support and/or complement the purpose and value of the project; a specific statement of the process to be used, including principal sources of information; a detailed statement of the goals to be achieved; a summary of expected findings; and a statement of possible sources of publication, broadcast, or other form of implementation. In addition, it is expected that the student will conduct an original research project, either as a means of collecting information to be used in the professional project or as complementary research that supplements or enhances in some way the professional project. To this end, as part of the proposal, the student should present a brief, but thorough, outline of that research, possibly including statement of the problem, literature review, research questions, method(s) to be used and a statement of the relationship between the professional project itself and the research component.

The Project

The project itself is to be a work of professional excellence. It may be, for example, an investigative article (or in-depth series of articles) designed for publication in a print medium. It may be a radio or television documentary. It may be a public relations or advertising campaign, including all materials to be used in the campaign; it may be a comprehensive and carefully done Web site. It may be a political communications campaign of some form. Details are provided later in this document through specific examples of how such projects may be accomplished.

All standard materials and techniques available to the professional mass communicator should be utilized by the student in preparation of this project. Most of the information presented should be from original sources, i.e., interviews, documents or professional observation and evaluation. The goal will be to present a finished product that is suitable for professional use, complete with an original research contribution. If special equipment is required, the student must

accept the responsibility of gaining access to such equipment. The Manship School cannot guarantee that equipment will be available or provided.

The Defense

Once the student and the committee chair are satisfied with the project and the research, the chair will schedule a meeting of the committee to review the final product. The full product and research report should be given to committee members no later than two weeks prior to the scheduled defense. To initiate the defense, the student will make a formal presentation, including presentation of the product itself, a full explanation of the processes used to compile the information and prepare the product as well as a brief discussion of the research project.

Each committee member will be given an opportunity to question the student. The committee will then determine whether the product and research report are acceptable. It will make one of three decisions: (I) Pass; (2) Acceptable but requiring additional work or revision; or (3) Fail. In a case in which the committee requires additional work, the chair will assume responsibility for overseeing that work and determining whether it is necessary that the committee conduct a second review. In the case of a fail, the student will be required to wait for at least three months before another defense may be scheduled.

Before graduation, the student is expected to provide a completed final product with all paperwork for storage in the Manship School library. This should be presented to the associate dean for graduate studies and research.

Examples of Professional Projects

The actual components of a professional project depend upon the subject of the project itself, professional requirements and the student's interests and abilities. The following sections provide examples of how projects may be organized and what content they may contain. Students must work closely with their chairs and committees to determine the precise for these projects will take.

Since the Manship School emphasizes conversion in its curriculum, one exception to these examples maybe a proposal that utilizes portions of specifically selected media. For example, a journalism project may include carefully planned use broadcast, print and Internet. It is possible that advertising and public relations may be combined into one major campaign. Again, students should discuss this possibility carefully with their chairs and committees.

Example: Internet project

A student may pursue an Internet project as the professional project to fulfill the requirements for the master's degree. The project should meet the following requirements:

1. Covers a topic of social significance and with important political, economic, cultural or social implications
2. Provides adequate elaboration and justification in support of the topic
3. Shows depth in covering the issue (for example, examining multiple aspects)
4. Contains research to collect original information from primary sources
5. Exhibits analytical capacity and the competence in solving complicated problems
6. Utilizes efficient means to present the project on the Internet, including Internet writing, audio, video, info graphics, photos and appropriate interactive elements
7. Demonstrates competence in using technological devices for the Internet
8. Demonstrates competence in applying principles of visual communication

The final product could be a live Web site with multiple sections and pages published on the Internet or a CD containing all information presented in the format accessible through a Web browser.

Example: Political Communication project

A political communication professional project may consist of several major research undertakings and reports, each linked to the other as part of an integrated marketing plan for a candidate or a cause (referendum, ballot initiative, or public lobbying). The "candidate" project below may be adapted to the latter.

Candidate Project

The professional project entails all the elements that political consulting firms and a candidate or potential candidate's staff would assemble as part of a plan to assess the feasibility of a run for office. Budget limits preclude a master's student from conducting some of these steps beyond the planning stage, but all require substantial research and preparation. The components of the candidate-related project may include:

1. Candidate Profile (real or fictitious)
    a. Biography
    b. Family description
    c. Political history
    d. Resume
    e. Catalogue of major "image" strengths
    f. Catalogue of known positions on major issues
    g. Self-oppositional research
    h. Summary of positive and negative attributes for a candidacy
2. Profile of Race and Region (must be real)
    a. Describe office candidate will run for
    b. Describe area
        i. Location
        ii. Geography
        iii. Population
        iv. Demographics
        v. Sociographics
        vi. Psychographics
        vii. Major local issues
        viii. Political parties and constituencies
        ix. Voting history (minimum of 20 years)
3. Profile Opposition (real or fictitious, estimated or actual)
    a. Oppositional research

    b. Summary of positive and negative attributes for a candidacy

        i. General

        ii. Relative to our candidate

        iii. Opportunities for comparative advertising

4. Survey & Focus Group Research Plan

    a. Polling (Survey) Plan

        i. Objectives for a benchmark survey of voters

        ii. Questionnaire for a benchmark survey of voters

        iii. Rationale for choosing target populations for survey

        iv. Budget for survey

    b. Focus group plan

        i. Objectives for focus groups

        ii. Major questions

        iii. Moderator's introduction

        iv. Budget for focus group

5. Message Plan

    a. Key themes of campaign

        i. Justification

        ii. Description

        iii. Sample key phrases, slogans, and imagery

6. Media & Marketing Plan

    a. Overall objectives as related to Message Plan

    b. Target segments in community

        i. Who (workers, core, leaners, swing, lean-aways, naughts)

        ii. How best to reach

    c. Television Plan

        i. Description of kinds of spots (as related to Message Plan and Candidate and area)

        ii. Sample script

    d. Radio Plan

        i. Description of kinds of spots (as related to Message Plan and Candidate and area)

        ii. Sample Script

    e. Print Plan

        i. Description of kinds of print ads for newspapers and printed material for mailing or door drop-off (as related to Message Plan and Candidate and area)

        ii. Sample ad and leaflet

    f. Internet Plan

        i. Description of Website key components (as related to Message Plan and Candidate and area)

        ii. Description of e-mail uses in coordinating workers and viral marketing to voters

    g. Campaign Events (as related to Message Plan and Candidate and area)

        i. Justification for voter and free media attraction

    h. GOTV P!an

        i. Main targets for volunteers

        ii. Main targets for core, leaners, swing, lean-aways, naughts

        iii. Contact plan

        iv. 72-hour election plan

7. Fundraising plan

    a. Estimated costs of overall campaign

    b. Major and minor targets

Example: Television Journalism project

A master's student may pursue a television news documentary or set of stories surrounding a topic of public relevance and importance. The project should meet the following requirements:

1. Covers a topic of social significance and with important political, economic, cultural or social implications

    a. Plan should include justification of topic, potential stakeholders (sources), context, depth of coverage to be completed, communities to be included, diversity, multiple aspects/perspectives to be covered.

    b. Shooting plan for video, source interviews, natural sound

    c. Anticipated use of graphics

2. Provides adequate elaboration and justification in support of the topic

3. Shows depth in covering the issues (for example, examining multiple aspects)

4. Contains research to collect original information from primary sources

5. Exhibits analytical capacity and the competence in solving complicated problems

6. Presents a well-told, well-organized and concise story or stories

    a. Use of narrative structures evident

    b. Quality of video

    c. Quality oflighting

    d. Quality of natural sound

    e. Quality of writing and voice track

    f. Effective use of sound bites

    g. Effective use of graphics

    h. Evidence of quality interviewing

    i. Quality and effectiveness of editing

    j. Quality and effectiveness of writing

    k. Scripts in appropriate television news format (EZ News)

    l. Flow

    m. Pacing

    n. Quality and effectiveness of on-camera talent work

    o. Effective and well-thought out organization and presentation of information

7. Demonstrates technical competence with all relevant field, studio and editing equipment.

8. Time and structural guidelines (this must be approved by the committee prior to beginning the coverage):

    a. 30 minutes of coverage, for example, one 30-minute documentary; five stories of at least 6 minutes each in length; 2 stories (6 minutes each) and 10 stories (I :30 to 2

minutes each); or another combination of stories that add up to approximately 30 minutes and contains at least two longer format pieces

   b. final project should be presented to the committee on VHS tape or other format that is pre-approved by the committee (DVCam or DVD)

9. Final video project should be accompanied by a written reflective paper on the project. This is the equivalent to a discussion section in a thesis.

Example: Print Journalism project

A professional project in print journalism will result in production of an in-depth article or series of articles on a major social issue. It maybe written in magazine or newspaper style and should be structured for a specific medium, either local or national. Among considerations to be made are the following:

1. Selection of a subject of significance
   a. Major issue of the day
   b. Detailed statement of goals to be achieved
   c. Background reading that supports the significance
   d. Precise question to be answered
2. Context/content
   a. Why is this a problem?
   b. To whom?
   c. Why is it important?
   d. What's the history?
   e. What needs to be added to current knowledge?
   f. Perspectives to be covered?
   g. What are financial implications?
3. Sources
   a. Interviews
      i. Officials
      ii. Experts
      iii. Impacted citizens

      iv. Seek multiple points of view

      v. Sources must be named (see chair for exceptions)

  b. Documents

      i. Governmental

      ii. Historical

      iii. Scientific evidence as appropriate

  c. Observation

      i. Detailed description

      ii. Analysis

  d. Original research

      i. Surveys

      ii. Others

4. Development of the human angle

  a. Include affected citizens from the "community"

  b. Cases or examples of impact on people

5. Illustrative material

  a. Photographs

  b. Charts

  c. Graphs

  d. Other sidebar material

6. Writing quality

  a. Technical perfection

  b. Precise, complete, accurate

  c. AP Style

  d. Effective use of direct quotations

  e. Conduct discussion/dialogue

7. The publication

  a. Description

  b. Detailed rationale

Example: Advertising project

An advertising professional project should result in a campaign plan for an existing client. It is the student's responsibility to find a real client with whom to work. The student must have sufficient access to the business or organization to allow him/her to identify key problems and opportunities. The plan must entail primary and secondary research and may include these components:

1. Executive Summary

2. Table of Contents

3. List of Tables

4. Situation Overview

    a. Introduction

        i. Brief statement of client's marketing goals.

        ii. What are the key issues/questions your campaign will address?

    b. The Industry

        i. Outline trends in the industry

        ii. economy's impact on industry

        iii. seasonality of sales

        iv. trends in marketing within the industry

    c. The company

        i. Structure of company/organization

        ii. Competitive analysis

            1. sales and market share

            2. comparison of product features

            3. advertising expenditure analysis

        iii. Past and current marketing/advertising approaches

            1. research that measures campaign effectiveness

    d. Target audience

        i. How will you define targets for product/service?

    ii. Provide specific demographic and psychographic profiles of each of your targets.

    iii. What are consumers' current perceptions of product/service, as compared to competitors?

5. Integrated Communications Plan

    a. Explain the hierarchy of effects (visuals are good) and break down your objectives

    b. Show how various promotional elements (advertising, direct marketing, sponsorships and promotional events) will hit each segment of the target. Again, visuals are good.

    c. Development of the creative concept.

        i. Explain testing of various concepts.

        ii. How does the chosen concept speak to each segment of your target

        iii. audience?

        iv. What elements will ensure campaign consistency (tagline, logo, visual elements)?

        v. How does it build on past advertising?

        vi. Examples of creative executions

    d. Detailed sponsorship, promotions and specialty advertising plans

6. Media Plan

    a. Separate objectives for each segment of the target

    b. Separate media strategies and tactics

7. Budget Summary

8. Detailed plan to evaluate the campaign's effectiveness

9. Appendices