

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION  
THE MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION

CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE – PROFESSIONAL PROJECT OPTION

The professional project option is intended for graduate students who desire to extend their academic education by engaging in the development, enactment, and assessment of an applied communication experience. The uniqueness of each student's professional project enhances theoretical and applied learning and provides an opportunity to evaluate the scope of conceptual understanding and skills mastery acquired in the M.A. program. The professional project may involve workshops, case studies, training, creation of websites, communication assessments and completion of other projects within the context of the student's chosen area of study.

REQUIREMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL PROJECT OPTION

The professional field experience option requires the following:

Completion of 27 hours of coursework as outlined in the student's approved Permanent Program of Study. With the written approval of the faculty advisor, a student may substitute up to 6 credit hours of cognate work.

Completion of 3 credit hours of **COM 7150 Professional Project** credit to include:

- Preparation of a written professional project proposal
- Oral defense of the proposal
- Completion of the project to the specifications of the advisor and the capstone committee
- Oral defense of the professional project
- Submission of the professional project with any revisions to the School of Communication

FACULTY PROFESSIONAL PROJECT ADVISOR

Responsibility for the direction, supervision, and evaluation of the professional project rests with the Permanent advisor. The student considering the professional project option is strongly encouraged to select the individual as his/her faculty advisor who is best equipped substantively to serve as the student's advisor.

#### **THE PROFESSIONAL PROJECT ADVISOR IS CHARGED WITH:**

- Advising the student regarding relevant university and departmental policies, policies, procedures, and documentation
- Assisting the student with the development of a proposal for a professional project
- Initiating and facilitating the student's oral defense of the professional project proposal before the capstone committee
- Monitoring the student's progress and determining readiness for review
- Evaluating the completed professional project and the oral defense
- Initiating and facilitating committee meetings

#### **PROFESSIONAL PROJECT COMMITTEE**

The student and faculty advisor must choose members of the graduate faculty to serve as members of the student's professional project committee. The committee should include a minimum of three members of the graduate faculty (including the advisor). Two of the committee members must be from the School of Communication. Students may also choose additional members from allied disciplines around the University.

#### **APPOINTMENT OF A COMMITTEE INVOLVES:**

- Mutual agreement between the student and the prospective committee members
- Formal appointment of the committee members by the Director (or director designee)

The purpose of this committee is to provide the range of expertise necessary to advise the student on the professional project and to evaluate the project to ensure it represents quality work in the discipline of communication.

#### **THE CAPSTONE COMMITTEE IS CHARGED WITH:**

- Reviewing and evaluating specific components of the project
- Providing consultation during the course of the project
- Reviewing and evaluating the written project
- Evaluating the oral defense of the professional project

#### **ENROLLMENT IN COM 7150 PROFESSIONAL PROJECT CREDITS**

The professional field experience consists of 3 credit hours (COM 7150). Students typically would enroll in these credits during their final semester. **Students selecting this option should be aware that the project proposal must be approved by their capstone committee in the semester prior to enrollment in COM 7150.**

School of Communication, Graduate Handbook 2009

## GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING THE PROFESSIONAL PROJECT

### STUDENTS CONDUCTING THE PROFESSIONAL PROJECT SHOULD:

Determine topical area of interest for the professional project.

Choose a faculty advisor who has expertise in the topical area of interest.

Discuss the various project requirements as outlined in the School of Communication Graduate Handbook. The student and his/her faculty advisor should prepare a timeline that outlines the steps/dates that facilitate completion of the project by the projected graduation date.

Work with faculty advisor to determine membership of the capstone committee. This committee must include a minimum of three members of the graduate faculty (including the advisor), at least two from the School of Communication. The student is responsible for securing the commitment of all committee members. The student should complete **Form V: Request for Appointment of Capstone Committee** and submit it to the Graduate Director and Director of the School for approval.

Work with the faculty advisor to design a project and complete a proposal for review by all committee members. The proposal will typically be between 8-12 pages. The student will give committee members copies of the completed proposal to review for the oral defense of the proposal. Committee members must have a minimum of two (2) weeks to review the proposal. This proposal must be completed and approved in the semester prior to enrollment in COM 7150.

Schedule an oral defense of the proposal at the initiation and with the facilitation of the faculty advisor. This meeting will be facilitated by the advisor, who will determine the format of the meeting. This meeting may be open to all interested faculty and students or others invited by the student or committee members.

Complete the oral defense of the proposal. All members of the committee will respond to the proposal during the course of the oral defense of the proposal. Following the oral defense of the proposal, the committee must vote on the acceptability of the project. The committee shall vote by simple majority to either approve or disapprove of the proposal. Committee members may vote to abstain.

### THE ORAL DEFENSE OF THE PROPOSAL WILL RESULT IN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES:

- Accept the proposal
- Accept the proposal with revisions
- Reject the proposal

The advisor and student should submit **Form VI: Defense of Capstone Proposal** to the Graduate Director.

When a proposal is acceptable to the committee members or has been revised concurrent to committee specifications, the student may complete the project under the guidance of the faculty advisor. A proposal that is rejected must be rewritten and the student must orally defend the new proposal following the steps outlined above. Note: The student and the faculty advisor must be aware of and comply with all necessary HSIRB approvals before initiation of the project.

### ON COMPLETION OF THE PROFESSIONAL PROJECT

Submit the completed project to the committee. The student will give committee members copies of the completed project to review for the oral defense. Committee members must have a minimum of two (2) weeks to review the professional project.

Schedule the oral defense of the completed project at the initiation and with the facilitation of the faculty advisor. The advisor will determine the format of the meeting and will facilitate the meeting. This meeting must be open to all interested faculty and students or others invited by the student or committee members. The committee members and the advisor will conduct the oral defense. All members of the committee will evaluate and respond to the project during the defense.

Complete the oral defense. Following the oral defense of the final project, the committee must determine the acceptability of the project. The committee will consider both the student's written and oral performances in making its decision. The committee's deliberations and vote are to be held in private. The committee shall vote by simple majority to either approve or disapprove of the project. Committee members may vote to abstain.

#### THE ORAL DEFENSE WILL RESULT IN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES:

- Accept the completed project
- Accept the project with revisions
- Reject the project

A professional project that is rejected must be rewritten and the student must orally defend the revised project.

When a completed professional project is acceptable to the committee members or has been revised in accordance with committee specifications, the student must submit **Form VIII: Results of Capstone Experience** indicating the final outcome of the defense to the Graduate Director and Director of the School of Communication. A final version of the professional project must be submitted to the School of Communication.

## GRADUATION CHECKLIST FOR MASTER'S STUDENTS PROFESSIONAL PROJECT CAPSTONE OPTION

*The following activities should be completed prior to or during the semester listed.*

### YEAR ONE: FALL SEMESTER

- \_\_\_\_\_ *Meet with temporary advisor.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *In consultation with temporary advisor, prepare tentative program of study; discuss capstone options.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Complete one course in Communication Research Core (COM 6010).*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Complete one course in Communication Foundations Core.*

### YEAR ONE: SPRING SEMESTER

- \_\_\_\_\_ *Select permanent faculty advisor (Form I) and in consultation with your advisor, complete Form II: Permanent Program of Study.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Submit Forms I and II to Director of Graduate Studies for approval.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Continue progress on Communication Foundations Core, Communication Research Core.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *In consultation with your professional project advisor ( typically your permanent advisor), select committee members and secure their willingness to serve.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Prepare and submit Form V for committee approval to the Director of Graduate Studies in the School.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Conceptualize professional project in consultation with your project advisor.*

### YEAR TWO: FALL SEMESTER

- \_\_\_\_\_ *Register for COM 7100 (3 credits).*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Develop project proposal in consultation with project advisor.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *For April graduation, apply for graduation by December 1.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Set professional project proposal defense meeting (optional – open meeting).*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Hold proposal defense and file Form VI with Director of Graduate Studies.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Secure HSIRB approval prior to conducting professional project if indicated.*

## YEAR TWO: SPRING SEMESTER

- \_\_\_\_\_ *Register for COM 7150 (3 credits) by submitting Form XII.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Complete Communication Foundations core requirement.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Complete Communication Research core requirement.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Complete elective course requirements.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *For June graduation, apply for graduation by February 1.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Give completed final draft of professional project to committee for review at least two weeks prior to final defense meeting.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Set and publicize final project defense meeting (open meeting).*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Hold final professional project defense. Following the defense, submit Form VI to Director of Graduate Studies.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Submit committee approved professional project with appropriate paper work to School of Communication (one to advisor and one for school records) by deadlines for graduation.*