

WEST VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY

MEDIA STUDIES GRADUATE PROGRAM

POLICIES AND GUIDELINES FOR

GRADUATE THESIS AND PROJECT

PROPOSALS

AY 2011-2012

FALL 2011

September 16	Last day to apply for December 2011 Graduation
November 4	Thesis/Project Proposal deadline for students wishing to register for Thesis/Project I in spring 2012 (All signatures are necessary for final proposal to be approved)
November 11	Last day to submit completed project/thesis to Media Studies Coordinator (<u>must be approved by Project/Thesis Director</u>)
November 14-18	Thesis/Project Proposal Conferences scheduled
November 18	Coordinator will notify all December graduation applicants of Project/Thesis defense date
November 18	Thesis Project Fee (\$120) due at cashier's office
Nov. 28-Dec. 2	Thesis/Project Defenses scheduled
December 9	Deadline for final project/thesis (w/changes and corrections) to be filed in department office to be checked and approved
December 18	Fall 2011 Commencement

SPRING 2012

Feb. 10	Last day to apply for May 2012 Graduation
April 2	Thesis/Project Proposal deadline for students wishing to register for Thesis/Project I in summer or fall 2012 (All signatures are necessary for final proposal to be approved)
April 11	Last day to submit graduate project/thesis to Media Studies Coordinator
April 18-27	Thesis/Project Proposal Conferences scheduled
April 18	MS Coordinator will notify all December graduation applicants of Project/Thesis defense date
April 20	Thesis Project Fee (\$120) due at cashier's office
April 23-27	Thesis/Project Defenses scheduled
May 4	Deadline for final project/thesis (w/changes and corrections) to be filed in department office to be checked and approved
May 13	Spring 2012 Commencement

THE THESIS/PROJECT

BASIC INFORMATION:

All graduate students must prepare a thesis or a professional project, which must demonstrate evidence of originality, appropriate organization, clarity of purpose, critical analysis, and accuracy and completeness of documentation in some area of media studies. The thesis or graduate project is a multiple semester endeavor that often adds as much as a year to a student's program of study. Interested students are encouraged to begin exploring ideas and working toward the thesis or project goal early in their program of study. Examples of previous students' projects/theses will be made available in the Department's thesis/project library.

Students are expected to demonstrate the ability to conduct research or produce a significant, original project in a discriminating and disciplined manner. The thesis topic should be one that will further the student's knowledge and ability in the specialty by demonstrating skill as a researcher or media professional. The outcome should be an effort that serves as a foundation for the pursuit of independent work when the graduate program is completed. Students who pursue the creative project option must execute a project, the scope of which is defined by the student in collaboration with a committee of three faculty members, and prepare a written document to accompany the project. The project may take the form of a production created for the broadcast or electronic media, a script for such a production, or another type of product that employs the broadcast or electronic (digital) media. **Note: Projects must be accompanied by extensive written work that describes and supports the work (this is explained in detail later in this document).**

All thesis/project students must have completed at least 18 credit hours and have an approved thesis/project proposal before registering for MS 698/699 (Thesis/Project). The research, writing, and evaluation process for this approved proposal may take a full semester or more. Students will conduct the research and write the proposal independently, working with the advice and guidance of their academic advisor or proposed thesis/project director. Typically the proposal is written outside of a class, as a not-for credit project. (Beginning in the fall 2010 semester, all new students will be required to take MS 502 – Graduate Research and Writing. Students will have the opportunity to write sample proposals in the course.) Thesis/Project proposals are presented to and evaluated by the Department thesis/project Proposal committee in a meeting with the student convened for that purpose.

THE PROPOSAL:

To clarify the **proposal** process: Here are the steps you need to take before you submit your proposal to your Thesis/Project Director and the Graduate Coordinator:

- 1) Early on in your career as a graduate student (i.e. your very first semester), you should begin thinking about possibilities for your thesis or project. Remember: If you intend to finish your M.A. degree with two years, your deadline for submitting your thesis/proposal will be April of your second semester!
- 2) Identify your director and make sure he/she has consented to be your primary advisor for your project or thesis. Your director **must** be a tenured, tenure-track or term member of the media studies graduate faculty. Non tenure-track faculty may serve as co-directors with a tenured faculty member with permission of the Graduate Coordinator. (Note: "thesis/project advisor" is used interchangeably with "thesis/project director".) Your director should (a) have a high interest in your project/thesis; (b) help narrow the scope of your project thesis; and (c) guide your research, writing, and execution. The director/student relationship is long-term and is not to be entered into casually by either party. It's important to establish a clear understanding of commitment from the start. However, it is the responsibility of the student to maintain contact with the thesis/project director (and with members of his/her committee) during the process of completion. **It is expected that the bulk of the thesis/project director's commitment will be during the two terms the student is enrolled in Thesis/Project I and II.** That is why it is extremely important for you to maintain contact with your director and to make satisfactory progress. Note: Students are allowed to choose two "co-directors", but the process of interacting with two faculty members can be complicated and students should think carefully whether or not this arrangement is workable.

3) Identify your project/thesis committee. Your committee will consist of your director (who must be a WVSU full-time, tenure track, tenured, or term faculty member) and at least two additional full-time faculty members, one of whom **must** be on the Media Studies graduate faculty. (The other faculty member does NOT have to be Media Studies graduate faculty member. In fact, we encourage you to find your third committee member from outside the program. Your advisor may strongly recommend a particular faculty member for your committee, especially if your thesis project involves disciplines that cross traditional academic boundaries. (Ex.: If you are doing a documentary project on a particular aspect of West Virginia history, your director will probably recommend that you include a history professor on your committee.) The Media Studies Program Coordinator appoints the committee members upon the request of the student's thesis/project director and sends written notification to the student, committee members, and Dean. (Unless there are problems with your choice of committee members, the Program Coordinator usually appoints the faculty you have selected.)

4) Determine (with your director) whether or not your thesis/project will need approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). In general, all theses and projects involving human participants or animal subjects are subject to federal regulations and University policy. Appropriate approval from the **IRB** must be obtained depending upon the nature of the proposed research. Approval must be obtained **BEFORE** their thesis/project proposals can be approved and prior to initiation of research. In addition, remember that all participants (including actor/performers) must complete proper release forms prior to the beginning of rehearsals or production activities. You should include a sample release form in your proposal. A familiarity with the rules and regulations as governed by the IRB application is recommended. For further questions, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs.

5) Write your proposal. The proposal consists of a cover page, an abstract, the body of the proposal, a bibliography, and appendices as necessary. The cover page should contain the following information:

- Your full name.
- The date of submission of the thesis/project proposal to the department.
- The degree sought.
- The tentative title of the thesis/project.
- A place for the name and signature of the student's thesis/project director
- Places for the names and signatures of the members of the thesis/project committee.
- A place for the approval of the program coordinator.
- A place for the approval of the Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities

A sample cover page is included at the end of these guidelines.

Your second page should be your abstract – a one to two paragraph concise summary of the project/thesis.

The bulk of your proposal should be a detailed explanation of exactly what your thesis/project will entail, what are you trying to accomplish (i.e. research questions), what your methodology will be, what your timetable is, what sources you have and will be consulting. Your director may ask you more specific questions to address in your proposal as well. The proposal should include a selected bibliography pertinent to the subject. This should include (if appropriate) books, journals, films, videos, etc. A good proposal ought to convince your director (and the media studies faculty) that you are capable of executing the project/thesis you are planning.

6) Give your proposal to your director. He/she will give you written comments and, most likely, will ask for at least one (if not two, three or four) additional drafts. **Do not wait until the week before the proposal deadline to submit it to your director – it takes time to review a draft carefully and to respond in detail.** Some faculty have their own specific rules regarding proposal drafts and deadlines. Check with faculty months before proposal deadlines!

7) Once your director has approved your final proposal, you'll need to have him/her sign the signature page (where it says "Director") and submit a copy to the graduate coordinator. The graduate coordinator will review the proposal for content and format and may ask you to complete another draft. Once he/she approves and signs

off, you should make five copies of the final proposal and submit them to the department secretary.

8) After the copies are submitted, the graduate coordinator will then schedule a **proposal meeting**. This meeting will include you, your thesis/project director, the two other members of your committee, and the Media Studies Graduate Thesis/Project Proposal Committee. Meetings will be scheduled during regular business hours and you are required to attend. You will, essentially, present your proposal to the committee and answer any questions they may have.

9) Within one week of this meeting, you will receive official notice of the committee's decision. There are three possible outcomes: a) Approval (with no conditions); b) Provisional Approval (you will be asked to clarify aspects of your proposal in writing by a certain date); c) Non-Approval.

10) Once you receive official approval or provisional approval, you may register for Thesis I.

NOTE: STUDENTS WHO WISH TO REGISTER FOR THESIS/PROJECT I IN THE SPRING 2012 SEMESTER MUST HAVE THEIR PROPOSALS SUBMITTED BY NOVEMBER 4.

STUDENTS WHO WISH TO REGISTER FOR THESIS/PROJECT I IN THE FALL 2012 SEMESTER OR SUMMER 2012 TERM MUST HAVE THEIR PROPOSALS SUBMITTED BY APRIL 2.

NEXT STEPS (AFTER YOUR PROPOSAL HAS BEEN APPROVED AND YOU HAVE REGISTERED FOR THESIS/PROJECT I):

Students must maintain good progress (defined by the thesis/project advisor in consultation with the student) on the thesis/project during each semester they are enrolled in MS 698 (Thesis/Project I) or 699 (Thesis/Project II) and this will be reflected in a grade of IP (In Progress, Passing) on the student's semester grade report. Students who receive a grade of U, unsatisfactory, may not continue on their current thesis/project. Normally in such cases students should switch to a different option (thesis or project) and begin the proposal process again. Under special circumstances, with the support of a faculty advisor, students may appeal this rule and may be allowed to continue in their original track.

Please read carefully: All graduate students are expected to be enrolled in consecutive regular semesters (i.e., fall and spring semesters) until the degree program is completed and the degree is awarded. Students who have completed Thesis/Project II for 3 credits must continuously register for Thesis/Project II for 1 credit until the degree is awarded. The graduate student who is not enrolled will not be permitted to use WVSU facilities or equipment. **Students who wish to use WVSU facilities or equipment during the summer, must be registered for Thesis/Project I or II during the summer term. Students must be registered during the semester they wish to graduate. Students who cannot enroll in a given semester **must apply for a leave of absence** in order to remain in good standing. **A student who does not return to enrolled status at the end of an approved period of leave is no longer considered to be pursuing the degree.****

A student who leaves the university without obtaining a formal leave of absence from graduate study is not automatically readmitted. The recommendation of the program and the approval of the college dean, based on the academic merits of the student's request, are required. If readmitted, the student will be subject to all of the current requirements for the degree in effect at the time of readmission.

Students enrolled in the thesis/project courses are expected to meet regularly with their thesis project director during the course of the semester. At a minimum, there should be a mid-semester review of the work completed and an "end of the semester" review as well. Students are encouraged to involve all members of their committee at all stages of the process and to regularly send them completed drafts of chapters or scripts, DVDs of edited or unedited video and or other materials that demonstrate progress towards completion.

Guidelines for Film/Video Project Proposals

Students wishing to produce a film or video for their culminating creative project these are expected to demonstrate a high degree of technical and aesthetic achievement. Although there is no prescribed length for these major artistic projects, the following should be used as guidelines when writing your proposal:

For live-action (narrative or documentary) projects, the length of the completed work should be 15-35 minutes. Note: 15-20 minute films/videos tend to be more acceptable for festivals. Students wishing to produce film/videos LONGER than 35 minutes must get special permission from the Graduate Studies Coordinator.

For animation projects: 5-15 minutes.

ALL Film/Video projects proposals must include the following

- Synopsis or Summary of the project
- Production Concept (Students should be able to defend the project in terms of film history, criticism, theory, and aesthetic choices)
- Literature Review (Students should include an annotated bibliography of the films, videos, and written work that have influenced their choices) – For more details, see the “Review of Literature” section of this document.
- Preliminary Script (narrative) or treatment (documentary)
- Proposed Budget
- Proposed Pre-Production, Production, and Post Production Schedule

Final versions of all of the above material should also be included when the project is completed, in addition to the film/video itself. These written materials will constitute the “bound” portion of the student’s project. Additional written material that must accompany the final project includes:

- A section on Marketing Concepts (who is the intended audience and demonstrate how the film/video is ready for the market)
- A Narrative that describes the challenges the student has faced as well as what he or she has learned.
- A production notebook which includes a detailed account of all aspects of production. This could include such elements as research completed, location scouting, notes on the writing process, lists of crew and collaborators, etc.

Your proposal should contain an outline of the written material that will accompany the project (i.e., how the written material will be organized.). It is recommended that you include (for example) a sample table of contents that will give your committee an idea of how you intend to organize your written materials.

Students wishing to produce special advertising or marketing commercial, info-mercials, and/or training films/videos that are less than 15 minutes in length will be expected to submit other ancillary materials in addition to ALL of the requirements described above upon completion of the project. Your proposal should (again) outline how these written materials will be organized when completed. These materials might include:

- A series of 15 second – 30 second video PSA's and/or commercials
- Radio PSA's;
- Print Advertising Copy (a specific thematic campaign) with at least 5 examples;
- Poster for the Video
- A sample newspaper insert (4 pages) that promotes the project
- Examples of Press Releases
- Social Networking campaign
- Comprehensive website to include media (video/audio).
- Other materials as recommended by the thesis/project director and committee.

Remember: The written materials that are described in this section will accompany the final project upon completion. You are NOT expected to include them in your proposal, however you should include them in a sample table of contents that should be in the proposal.

Guidelines for Screenplay Thesis Proposals

Pre-thesis requirements

The thesis screenplay should become at least the second acceptable screenplay the student has written. Prior to submission (2 weeks minimum) of the thesis proposal, the student should present to his/her proposed thesis advisor an acceptable feature-length screenplay written prior to the thesis proposal. (It is expected that the student wishing to write a screenplay for his/her thesis has successfully completed the graduate screenwriting course.)

The feature-length narrative screenplay that you submit as an example of your work may, in fact, be the result of successfully completing work in the Graduate Screenwriting course. Or, it may be satisfied by a screenplay written in another course or out of academia. This work must be deemed to be of acceptable quality by the thesis advisor before the student may proceed to the formal thesis proposal.

Include in your proposal:

- A brief synopsis of proposed screenplay. You will expand this section of the proposal with a longer treatment later in the proposal. Include here (briefly):
- Literature Review (see the next section of this document for what this entails)
- Theme (what will the movie say?)
- Plot (general chain of events that provide story infrastructure)
- Characters (Who are the primary characters, what is their problem/need?)
- Mise-en-scene (what is the environment(s) that the story exists in? How will you use location as “character?”)
- Images (what will be unique in the “pictures” you create to tell the story?)
- Write the 1 – 3 sentence “tagline” that best sums up your story and that can be used as the quick-pitch for the project.
- Statement of vision
- Briefly explain “why” you think this script should be written. How will this work contribute to the field of cinema? How is the idea (theme) and/or approach (structure/form) unique, or how does it bring new light to the familiar?
- Express the uniqueness (“voice” and “vision”) that you intend to bring to the screenplay.
- Who are you? (In a short essay tell who you are and how the art of screenwriting, and this proposed screenplay in particular, will aid the evolution as you as an artist/professional, and as a human being.)
- Research and Development (In a few paragraphs describe the major influences (writers and works) on your thesis. You will expand this portion of the proposal in the bibliography Section where you will cite specific books, screenplays, individual screenwriters, and films used in the development of this work. Within the context of the work (i.e., personal, historical, political) explain the types of research that you will conduct to aid in the creation of the screenplay.
- 5-15 page script treatment.
- Supplemental support materials (at discretion of thesis advisor)
- Design the poster. If this screenplay were to make it to the screen, create the poster/box art that would best sell the product. Note: You will not be judged on graphic art skill.
- You may also include additional supportive materials such as storyboards, production design materials, or other production plans.

- And then what? As a screenplay is not a terminal product, but a means to an end, upon completion how to you intend to get it “out there” (i.e., competitions, festivals, submissions to agencies, self production, etc.)?
- Bibliography

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

All projects and theses require some form of literature review. The format of a review of literature may vary from discipline to discipline **and should be addressed in the proposal.**

A review may be a self-contained unit -- an end in itself -- or a preface to and rationale for engaging in primary research. A review is, in many cases, a required part of grant and research proposals **and often a chapter in the thesis.**

Generally, the purpose of a review is to analyze critically a segment of a published body of knowledge through summary, classification, and comparison of prior research studies, reviews of literature, and theoretical articles. **In Media Studies, a review of the literature could include written work as well as films, videos, screenplays, and web sites.**

A good proposal should convince the reader that the student has either (a) a thorough knowledge of and background in the discipline, area, or genre that he/she is working in or (b) demonstrated that he/she has a clear idea of them materials that he/she intends to review during the course of writing/preparing the thesis or project.

In the Literature Review section of your proposal, you should convince the reader that (in the finished project/thesis) you will be able to:

- Summarize major contributions of significant studies, articles, films, videos and other media to the body of knowledge under review, maintaining the focus established in the introduction.
- Evaluate the current "state of the art" for the body of knowledge reviewed, pointing out major methodological flaws or gaps in research, inconsistencies in theory and findings, and areas or issues pertinent to future study.

Note: Even documentary film projects, comprehensive web designs, animation, and marketing projects require a literature review.

FORMAT AND APPEARANCE

The student is expected to prepare the proposal in accordance with the usual practices of good English. A well-organized proposal should include:

The Cover Page, a table of contents, the abstract, and the Proposal itself.

Again, the body of the proposal will vary depending upon the subject matter and is described earlier in this document. It could/should include:

Narrative description of the thesis/project (more detailed than the abstract)

Methodology (if appropriate)

Research Questions (if appropriate)

Literature Review (required)

Timetable (required)

Budget (if appropriate)

Crew (if appropriate)

Plus all of the information required by the different theses/project formats that are described earlier in this document. Again, your director may ask you more specific questions to address in your proposal as well. The proposal must include a selected bibliography pertinent to the thesis or project. The bibliography should be written in APA style.

Sample A-I

Sample of Cover Page of Thesis Proposal

(For Project Proposal cover page, see Sample A-II)

**West Virginia State University
Graduate School
THESIS PROPOSAL FOR MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE**

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____

Email: _____

Department/Program: _____

Degree: _____

Title: _____

Medium: _____

Committee Members: [Sample:]

Name of Director: Daniel Boyd Signature: _____

Date: _____

Committee Member: Steve Gilliland Signature: _____

Date: _____

Committee Member: Marc Porter Signature: _____

Date: _____

Grad. Coordinator: Robin Broughton Signature: _____

Date: _____

Dean, Arts & Humanities: Barbara Ladner Signature: _____

Date: _____

Sample A-II

Sample of Cover Page of Project Proposal

(For Thesis cover page, see Sample A-II)

**West Virginia State University
Graduate School
PROJECT PROPOSAL FOR MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE**

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____

Email: _____

Department/Program: _____

Degree: _____

Title: _____

Medium: _____

Committee Members: [Sample:]

Name of Director: Daniel Boyd Signature: _____

Date: _____

Committee Member: Steve Gilliland Signature: _____

Date: _____

Committee Member: Marc Porter Signature: _____

Date: _____

Grad. Coordinator: Robin Broughton Signature: _____

Date: _____

Dean, Arts & Humanities: Barbara Ladner Signature: _____

Date: _____