

Thesis & Professional Project Options – Guidelines and Resources

In the Department of Communication, at Columbus State University, we seek to instill in each student the mindset needed to understand the nature and the rigors of scholarship, ensure that in the work we do we follow all university and academic guidelines, and that we exercise independent judgment and be intellectually honest. We wish to see you succeed, and we will motivate and guide you so that you can become the serious scholar or the accomplished professional you wish to be.

The MA in Communication – either the [Strategic Communication Management Track](#) or the [Creative Services Management Track](#) – offers students the option of presenting a thesis or a professional project in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree.

Thesis Option:

A master's thesis is intended to demonstrate that you know the background and principal works of the research area, and that you can produce significant scholarly work. While not as demanding as a PhD dissertation, an MA thesis should contain some original contribution and not merely summarize extant literature. While a minimum page/length requirement is not set, we expect the thesis to be of a substantial nature. Thesis documents could run anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 words. Please see at the end of this document links to some sample MA theses and theses topics.

A thesis is scholarly writing that reflects your ability to perform the following:

- Conduct research
- Communicate the procedures for and results of the research
- Analyze relevant literature critically
- Link the topic of the thesis with the broader field
- Verify knowledge claims and sources meticulously
- Present a detailed methodology
- Describe results accurately

Your thesis proposal should be developed in consultation with your supervisor and committee. The thesis proposal should include the following:

- A background theory or theories
- A working hypothesis or hypotheses, or research question/s

- A choice of method/s or methodology for investigating the hypothesis/research question
- A body of work for analysis
- A results and discussion section
- A bibliography

Professional Project Option:

A professional project may be any combination of professional, high-quality products, which reflect the highest technical skill of the student, and effectively meet client/message need(s). Examples may include, but are not limited to, scholarly writing that reflects your ability to perform the following:

- Conduct research & create an in-depth client/competition/market analysis
- Create a client/investor proposal which effectively communicates research-informed strategy and content goals
- Produce digital media products/campaigns
- Produce individual elements to support products/campaigns (e.g., individual advertisements, short film, podcasts, etc.)

If you choose the professional project track, you will do the required research and work that leads to a project like one of the following but not limited to them: advertising or PR campaigns, social media campaigns, documentary/narrative/serialized videos, audio podcasts, or corporate and organizational training seminars. You may complete a project where you develop a plan or case study in response to an approved partner organization's real-world communication challenge or opportunity, or an approved social, technical, or industry real-world challenge. Another option to consider would be to create a training module that could be delivered within an organizational setting that also addresses communication challenges / opportunities. Serialized (television) content that addresses a specific goal/problem/analysis is another option. Depending upon the track, the professional project could contain communication/publicity projects that include the research, content creation of marketing/communication materials, and coordinating logistics for delivering the workshop / conference, or program launch (all of this depends upon your focus area).

Examples of Video / Digital Projects could include documentary/narrative videos, where you would be required to do a full production with a script that explores some theme/issue/personality potentially in the broad area of strategic communication, public relations, social media, social or community justice, advertising, or creative endeavor and should have some theoretical framework for it. Another consideration could be commercial

video / digital work done for a client / organization. Whether the focus of your work is along documentary/narrative or commercial, you should be discussing your choice/option with your project chair before you launch on your work. This theme/issue/person should be researched in detail, in the context of your theoretical framework, and a plan developed for your documentary/narrative or commercial to explore the theme you have chosen.

You are not required to have a written thesis, but your digital (video and/or audio) work should be supported with enough written material including rationale, theoretical framework, any script/questionnaire used, and a discussion of the project process, along with a short bibliography. Ideally, the rationale, theoretical framework, bibliography / literature review builds from previous coursework.

Timeline:

A. When do you start work on the thesis or professional project?

Ans: The first semester of your work! Please make an appointment with the Graduate Program Coordinator, either face-to-face or virtually so that you can begin the discussion on the two options, your areas of interest, potential committee chairs and members, and the process to start and complete these major requirements.

B. Who should you choose as your thesis/project committee chair and committee members, and when?

Ans: In your first meeting with the Graduate Program Coordinator, you will have a chance to talk about your options; how to approach a potential committee chair or committee members for their willingness to serve as chair/members; and documents you need to submit once committee chair/members are chosen.

C. When should you begin your work on the thesis/project?

Ans: As soon as you have chosen your committee chair and members it is time to seriously get down to fine-tuning your thesis/project topic, drawing an outline, and beginning the necessary planning for doing the literature review, taking a careful look at the thesis format, collecting the data, etc. You need to download the [CSU Thesis Guide](https://www.columbusstate.edu/graduate-school/docs/thesis-guide.pdf) and go through it carefully and follow all the rules/guidelines for writing the thesis.

Resources and Links:

1. CSU Thesis Guide – Instructions for Preparation and Submission:

<https://www.columbusstate.edu/graduate-school/docs/thesis-guide.pdf>

2. Publishing Directions for Thesis and Dissertation:

<https://csuepress.columbusstate.edu/guide/1/>

3. Need help in preparing and writing your thesis? Visit the Graduate Writing Center for a variety of resources and help: <https://www.columbusstate.edu/graduate-school/graduate-writing-center.php>

4. Want to present your research at the CSU Faculty & Graduate Research Conference? --

<https://www.columbusstate.edu/graduate-school/research-conference/>

5. Have some concerns about the graduate school process, programs, resources? Connect with or become part of the Graduate Student Advisory Council:

<https://www.columbusstate.edu/graduate-school/advisory-council.php>

Sample MA Communication Theses – Including Potential Topics:

- https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/com_etd/
- https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/communication_theses/
- <https://scholarworks.umd.edu/etd-communication/>
- <https://commstudies.utexas.edu/graduate/masters-thesis-topics>