

Interactive and New Communication Technologies

September 2002

Guidelines for the Preparation of A Proposal for a Master's Creative Project

Introduction

This document provides an overview of the creative project as a culminating work for the completion of the master's degree communication with an emphasis in interactive and new media technology.

The decision to complete a comprehensive examination, a thesis or project as the final component of the Master's degree must be made early during the student's first semester for it affects the courses in which the student must enroll and the distribution of credits. Each degree option requires a minimum of 33 credits. Only 3 hours of project work count towards the total 33-hour minimum requirement. Additional specialization may be obtained during the summer term or in an additional regular semester by either working an internship or by taking additional coursework that will serve to fill electives or complete credits earned towards core requirements.

A graduate student may elect either a creative project or thesis to represent their culminating graduate work. Creative projects are subject to a process of proposal, approval and review in the same fashion as students might expect to follow when electing to write a thesis as a culminating graduate work. Creative projects generally require successful satisfaction of the following four steps in order to be deemed as being completed and acceptable as a culminating graduate work:

1. A concept document describing the nature of the work, the audience, creative intent and themes of the project (e.g., creation of a web site for a specific health related issue, development of a CD-ROM as an educational resource, etc.), goals and objectives. The committee chair and committee members must approve this document.
2. A project plan including a detailed description of the original work. This document is to include more detail than the concept document, and should conform to the outline and descriptions below. This document must also include a detailed review of related issues and efforts as found in media and literature. The committee chair and committee members must approve this document.
3. Final report including all of the information from the project plan (as above) along with a summary and review of the project process including whether the

- project meets the intended goals. A project log should be included with this section of the final report as well as two external reviews.
4. An oral presentation/defense of the creative project for the master's committee.

Thesis project must follow specific University guidelines. These guidelines may be obtained from the Communication Office.

Why is the master's project considered the culminating work?

The philosophy of this program is to deliver both theoretical constructs and practical experience. Students who complete the course of studies should not only know *how* to complete a project, but *why* the selected tools, delivery system and interface are best for a given audience. Academic preparation leading to the completion of this program include communication theory, research, project management and project production courses in order to meet the program goals leading to the master's degree in communication.

A project is best suited for students who want to continue into a creative or management role as a communication professional. For those graduates with an entrepreneurial spirit, the program and culminating project provide an opportunity to work with experienced professionals able to assist in promoting those who plan to make their careers in some form of interactive multimedia production.

Given the rigor of the program and the expectations for the quality of interactive projects, completing a creative project is not for everyone. Students who may feel that this is the right choice for them should first consult with their advisor, a prospective committee chair and with the chair of the graduate policy committee before making a commitment to developing a proposal for a creative project.

What is a creative project concept document?

The concept document is a brief description of the work you intend to produce. Because this is the first step of your project process, it is highly recommended that sufficient time is devoted to the concept document in order to carefully prepare your ideas. Based on this brief document, the committee members should be able to visualize your intent. In order to facilitate this process, include descriptions of the project subject and genre, the intended audience, why your project is relevant, marketing goals or educational objectives, theme or creative approach and the target platform. Careful preparation of your concept document will also serve as a guide when composing a project plan.

The concept document does not guarantee your project idea will be accepted. It is advised that this document be well written and concise. Concept documents need not exceed five typewritten pages. All concept documents are evaluated in terms of the application of communication skill and interactive media development expertise derived from the student's program of study. Projects may include, but are not limited to the conceptualization, development and usability testing of a web site or multimedia CD-ROM for a corporate, non-profit or governmental client.

What is a creative project proposal?

A proposal for a master's creative project details the nature of an original work that is to be developed. The proposal contains a number of important sections and its purpose is to communicate the proposed plan for the work to the faculty of the department via the student's program committee.

Because a project plan is a roadmap to successful completion of the culminating project, a project plan includes a detailed description of the original work. This document is to include the same section as the concept document with more detail, and should also include a problem statement, detailed audience description, goals and objectives, creative themes (storyboards), media and navigation structure (flowchart), a functional specification, milestones for completion (timetable of events), proposed measures of evaluation and references. This document must also include a detailed review of related issues and efforts as found in media and literature. The committee chair and committee members must approve this document.

Project proposals are to be submitted to the committee after the concept document has been approved and prior to the commencement of production. Because this document is your roadmap to completion, your plan should have sufficient detail to allow committee members to review your plan and make amendments, suggestions, changes or request revisions in order to ensure the final project is of sufficient quality to meet the standards of the program.

It is critical that you submit a document outlining your milestones (see appendix) before starting development and production of your project.

Final note: It is very unwise to undertake work on the actual project before the above steps have been completed. A creative project that has not been approved (and any related work) may not be acceptable to one or more committee members who must first approve your documentation.

What topics must be covered in a proposal for a creative project?

Overview

This part of the proposal is an executive summary of what the document contains. It should be no more than two pages, double-spaced. This section contains the same information as the concept document, refined to fit as a lead in section to your completed proposal.

Background and Problem Statement

The major body of the document begins with any background that needs to be understood and helps in understanding what the project will produce and how this is relevant to marketing, training, business or educational goals. It also explains the

nature of the problem and how the creative work fits into the overall marketing, training, business or educational environment.

Target Audience

The success of professional projects hinges on how well the developers understand and communicate directly to the intended audience. This section should be an insightful overview of your intended viewers.

Why is the selected media appropriate? Why does the design you are proposing work best for your audience (be prepared to cite specific examples from communication theorists). This section should give the committee a clear understanding of the theoretical underpinning of why you have chosen your delivery system and why this is appropriate for the target audience.

Technology Assessment

Professional productions occasionally require a complete analysis of the technology and why the target audience is most likely to be using this media when engaging the end product. This analysis is an important step in the determination of the appropriate target platform and system requirements for the end product.

Formal Statement of Objectives

This section is brief, no more than a few paragraphs and is often written in bullet format. It sets forth in clear and concise terms the specific objectives of the project, detailing the objectives for each section of the creative work in order to propose specific measures for evaluation. While time may not permit implementation of post-project evaluation, establishing measurable objectives remains the hallmark of a professional project.

Product Design

This section outlines the creative aspects of the project such as the genre and metaphor, characters, music, look and feel, story, action, game design, interactivity and color scheme. In this section offer relevant reasons why this project can truly be regarded as "creative" and how the end product will be different from those that already exist. Your design should clearly articulate a cohesive and appropriate environment for the target audience.

Functional specification

A functional specification is a detailed projection of the media elements, graphics, script and characters to be developed for the project. Complete functional specifications also outline graphics placement, button behaviors, general design, colors, dialog, game designs and navigation. Consider the following a general outline for the final functional specification:

- A. flowchart
- B. detailed outline by section (i.e. color, media elements, behaviors)
- C. storyboards showing layout and design

- D. button and icon design
- E. font specs
- F. character development (where applicable)
- G. dialog or scripts
- H. game design

Prepare sufficient detail in this section so that a production team would be able to create your project, matching your vision, with not other input.

Review of Related Issues and Efforts

This section is a literature review of similar products in the same or similar genre. Your lit review should include comparisons of objectives, audience or communication problem. These comparisons provide evidence that shows how the work is different and unique. To complete such a review, relevant publications and other sources must be systematically examined.

This review should include examples, or discussions of selected efforts to create similar products. A full review is submitted as part of the project report itself and it must include all prior writings or descriptions that focus directly on the creative topic, product or procedure under development. Most important to this section is to describe in detail where your end product fits into the universe of similar efforts and media technologies based on your discoveries in your technology assessment.

The intention of this section is to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the issues and background of the intended project domain, what others have done and how the proposed project represents something different. This section should make reference to the theories and findings in your audience analysis

Time Schedule

A timetable should be submitted with the proposal that identifies when various parts or stages of the project will be completed. This timetable is essential because it keeps the student focused on the idea that there are deadlines that must be met. Keep in mind that the program committee must be allowed ample time to review and evaluate the project and to indicate where they want changes made.

Notes and References

The proposal should provide full references to all writings cited or discussed in the review of related issues and efforts. The purpose here is to show that the student did a solid job of researching the background and prior works related to the project. This should appear at the end of the proposal.

Project review

After a professional project has been completed, the master's candidate should compose a review of the production process. Include this section in order to account for alterations, specific production problems that necessitated changes in the product feature set and other circumstances encountered that contributed or detracted to the

process. In order to fulfill the requirements of this section, your project should have review sheets (see example in appendix) from three independent sources, preferably from industry experts.

Note: Developing a proposal is an iterative process that often includes negotiations between the student and the program committee. It is a process of refinement until the committee feels that the student is actually ready to start with a high probability of success.

All project documents, including literature review and references, should be prepared in accordance with the current edition of *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Nonsexist language should be used.

For the Thesis track:

The thesis track is considered essential for students with career goals in advanced research or academic fields. Students choosing this track are expected to conduct primary research related to the Interactive Media field, and expected to defend that research in the form of a Thesis Document as required by Florida State University. This track is for those who are considering careers in Academic fields and want to prepare for the completion of a Ph.D., or who are considering careers in professional media research with organizations such as Nielsen-NetRatings.

How long is a creative project proposal?

There is no set limit. Each of the above sections should be concisely stated without excess verbiage. To keep excess length in check, keep in mind that the proposal is a plan explaining what will be produced and how. Most creative projects can be submitted with a project production plan of 15 - 25 pages in length, and an additional 5 - 10 pages for a review of related projects.

What are the procedures for getting the proposal approved?

1. Before beginning to develop a proposal, it is best to discuss the general idea with your committee chair. With the initial guidance from your committee chair, work towards completing a concept document. The committee chair may not agree that the project is sufficiently original or otherwise meeting the requirements of a master's degree creative project.
2. If your committee chair agrees that the concept document represents a viable master's degree project, a full proposal should be drafted for the committee to review. Once the committee chair has accepted the proposal, the remaining two committee members should review the proposal. Committee members may also request changes. Additional changes corrections or revisions should be incorporated with the assistance of the committee chair.

3. When the project proposal has been completed and the title page signed by all three committee members, production of the final product may begin. As the product takes shape, students may elect to revise sections of the project. Students should demonstrate their progress as work-in progress according to the timetable submitted at the beginning of the project to the committee chair.
4. When a pre-release version of the project has been completed, it should be given to the committee chair for initial review. Final changes and corrections may be requested prior to formal submission of the project plan and creative work to the committee.
5. The committee reviews the final creative project and the project plan document and make any final comments. Upon acceptance of the creative work, graduate candidates schedule a meeting with the committee to formally defend their creative work.
6. All final paperwork is submitted to the Chairperson of the Graduate Policy Committee for final approval.

A copy of the style for the title and signature page of the proposal is attached to this document. A copy of the Acknowledgement of Deadlines is also attached.

What is contained in the final creative project submission?

When the project has been completed, a full written report must accompany a CD-ROM. The paper accompanying the finished product should be presented using the cover sheet (appendix) and have attached a completed license agreement and three independent review sheets. Projects submitted with insufficient documentation or that are in complete will not be accepted. A date for a project defense will be set once all of the materials have been submitted, accepted for review and corrections (or alterations) have been made.

The final project submission should accompany the final project paper. Both the paper and the CD ROM are to be packaged together to facilitate committee review. The CD must contain the finished product files, both in executable format and in source format. For example, either web sites that utilize Flash or Director-based CD ROM products should have both the shipping version and the source files contained on the final submission CD ROM. The directory structure of your final CD ROM submission should resemble the following:

CD ROM

Application

(final project files, shipping version, protected or compressed files)

Production

(final project files, Director or Flash source, Photoshop files)

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Appendix

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A Proposal for a Creative Project

To Be Titled

THE TITLE OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT HERE

by

Student Name Here

To Be Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of

MASTER'S OF SCIENCE IN MASS COMMUNICATION
WITH AN EMPHASIS IN INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION

(Date of Proposal Here)

Approved _____
Program Committee Chair

Date: _____

Approved _____
Program Committee Member

Date: _____

Approved _____
Program Committee Member

Date: _____

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Acknowledgement of Deadlines

There are a number of important deadlines that each student must meet if he or she is to graduate on time. First, the student must consider the planned date of graduation. The College of Communication honors three graduation dates, one each in the Fall, Spring and Summer. See a University Schedule for the specific dates of the near terms.

These dates are the base lines for determining when the completed initial drafts of the Creative Project must be in the hands of the Master's Program Committee. They also determine when final copies and approvals of the creative project must be submitted and assigned. Starting with the planned date of graduation, the student can determine the specific day and date when the following are due. The student has taken sole responsibility for making those determinations and commits to the following dates below. The statements of affirmation below witness to the acceptance of all the requirements and corresponding deadlines related to the successful completion of a master's project.

1. I will make a complete concept document of my creative project to my committee chair at least at the beginning of my final semester (15 weeks) prior to graduation to allow time for review, change requests and approval.

For me, the last date to do this will be: _____

2. I understand that members of my program committee may also request changes. I will submit a complete project plan of my creative project to my entire program committee at least 10 weeks prior to graduation so that my work can be reviewed and changes requested.
3. I must submit a completed and approved version of my creative project and written report to the chair of the graduate policy committee at least two weeks prior to graduation so that my work can be reviewed for approval or changes.
4. I understand that in the case of insufficient quality or rigor in my creative project, changes to my creative project may be so significant as to delay my graduation date.

By signing this document, I hereby confirm that I understand the above requirements and agree to abide by them.

Date: _____ 20 ____

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AGREEMENT TO LICENSE MEDIA

I. INTRODUCTION

This is an Agreement between _____ (Licensor), owner of certain digital video media, and, Florida State University (Licensee), for the purpose of specifying the conditions under which Licensee will use the digital media.

II. DEFINITIONS

Digital media shall mean Macromedia Director, Macromedia Flash files or web site materials produced on any media converted to digital format suitable for display through the internet.

CPU shall mean a single computer or central processing unit.

Web Server shall mean a single computer or central processing unit dedicated to serving web pages for public viewing through the Internet.

III. LICENSE GRANT

Licensor hereby grants to Licensee, and Licensee hereby accepts, subject to the terms and conditions set forth in this Agreement, a non-exclusive and nontransferable license to use digital video media as set forth in this Agreement. The term " license" as used in this Agreement shall mean and include:

- a. the right to use the licensed digital media in executable form for public viewing only on one web server located at the licensee's location;
- b. the right to use and copy digital media for Licensee's internal operations at the licensed locations;
- c. the right to make backup copies of digital media; and
- d. the right to perform the audio and visual aspects of artist's work through the Internet.

In accepting the corporate license granted by Licensor, Licensee agrees that it shall not:

- a. transfer or allow the transfer of copies of digital media except as allowed by current technology;
- b. use Program on CPUs at locations other than Florida State University locations; or
- c. make copies or make use of Program or User's Manual except as expressly set forth in this Agreement.

IV. LIMITATIONS

This license agreement is nontransferable, and does not grant the licensee with the right to edit, sell, lease, or sublicense the licensor's work.

Any rights not expressly granted to Licensee are retained by Licensor, including the right to copy, sell, perform, or distribute the digital media licensed by the licensor.

V. TERM OF LICENSE

The term of this Agreement shall commence as of the last date this Agreement is executed by Licensor and Licensee and shall continue until terminated as outlined in Section VI. Thereafter, the Agreement shall automatically be renewed for successive terms and shall continue in effect unless earlier terminated as provided below.

VI. TERMINATION OF AGREEMENT

In the event of a material default by either party or such party's agent or representative, of any provision of this Agreement, the other party may terminate this Agreement upon 30 days written notice.

Upon termination of the Agreement, the Licensee's shall either remove all licensed copies of Program, and all backups from the web server. This obligation shall survive the termination of this Agreement.

VII. COPYRIGHT AND PROPRIETARY INFORMATION

Licensee acknowledges that digital video media constitute valuable property of Licensor and that all title and ownership rights in Program and related materials remain exclusively with Licensor.

Licensor reserves all rights with respect to Program all applicable laws for the protection of proprietary information, including, but not limited to, trade secrets, copyrights, trademarks and patents.

Except as otherwise provided in this Agreement, Licensee shall not cause or permit within the technical control of the licensee, unauthorized copying or reproduction for any purpose whatsoever, without the prior written permission of Licensor. This restriction shall continue to bind Licensee and its agents and representatives beyond the termination of this Agreement.

Licensor acknowledges that they have the authority to grant a license for all visual and audio portion of their material.

VIII. LIMITATION OF WARRANTIES

Licensee accepts Program "As Is", "with all faults", and in lieu of all other warranties and conditions, expressed or implied, including, but not limited to, those for merchantability and fitness for a particular purpose.

Licensor accepts no responsibility for the operation or performance of the Digital video media. The entire risk of use and consequences of use of the program falls completely on the Licensee and shall Licensor not be liable in any respect for any claims loss or injury alleged to have resulted from use of or in reliance on digital video media. In this respect, Licensee shall completely indemnify and defend for any such claim, loss or injury as provided below.

Licensee acknowledges that it has read the foregoing disclaimers of warranty and limitation of liability and understands that Licensee assumes the entire risk of use of the program.

IX. INDEMNIFICATION

Licensee shall indemnify and defend against any and all claims, including claims by third parties or employees of Licensee, which arise directly or indirectly out of Licensee's use or operation of digital video media.

Licensor shall not be liable for any incidental or consequential damages suffered by Licensee through the use of digital video media. whether or not such damages were disclosed to, or reasonably foreseen.

Licensee
Florida State University

Licensor

DATE

DATE

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION, FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Interactive and New Communication Technologies

Outline for external review reports