STEPS IN THE
THESIS/PROFESSIONAL PROJECT PROCESS

1. **Ideas.** Student forms a general idea for MSJ thesis/professional project.
2. **Concept.** Based on research conducted during the first two semesters, student develops the idea into a single theoretically grounded concept for a thesis/professional project proposal.
3. **Chair.** Student seeks out that graduate faculty member whose area of expertise is most closely related to the potential proposal. Student requests the faculty member to be Chair of the student’s thesis/professional project.
4. **Proposal Development.** Student develops and writes the pre-proposal. Chair provides guidance and supervision as required to help the student develop the full proposal.
5. **Committee.** Student, with guidance of the Chair, selects two additional Committee members from the SOJ faculty and one “at-large” member from outside the SOJ to serve on the student’s Thesis/Professional Project Committee. For a thesis, the “at-large” member must be a graduate faculty member either from another department/school at WVU or from another college or university. For a professional project, the “at-large” member may be a professional. Student provides copies of the pre-proposal to the Chair and discusses it with the other committee members prior to its being finalized and distributed to the Committee.
6. **Proposal.** Proposal meets the guidelines stated in the SOJ handout “Components of the Thesis” or “Professional Project Proposal.” A bibliography is required.
7. **Proposal Defense.** Student coordinates with Chair and Committee members to establish a date/time to meet for the student’s defense of the proposal. All students must defend their proposals before their committee. All committee members, under direction of the Chair, must agree that the proposal is ready to defend.
8. **Graduation Application.** Student applies with SOJ to graduate in the semester in which the thesis/professional project is to be defended.
9. **Thesis/Professional Project.** Student researches, writes and revises the thesis/professional project as directed by the Chair and the suggestions obtained from the Committee during the proposal defense. All guidance from Committee members is funneled through the Committee Chair to ensure consistency.
10. **Thesis/Professional Project Finalized.** Student provides copies of final draft of the thesis/professional project to the Chair for comments and ultimate distribution to the Committee Members.
11. **Defense Date.** Student coordinates with Chair and the Committee Members to establish a date for the final defense. This date should be at least two weeks after the document has been distributed to the Committee and public notification of the defense is made. A defense date will not be scheduled until all MAJOR revisions have been made.
12. **Thesis/Professional Project Defense.** Student defends the thesis/professional project (with the assistance of the Chair) before the Committee. Committee approves, approves with corrections, or (in extremely rare cases) denies the thesis or project.
13. **Corrections.** Student makes any corrections and submits final to the Chair for approval. Chair notifies the Committee Members corrections have been made. Committee Members sign the approval sheet.
14. **EDT/Publishing.** Student submits thesis or project to Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD) for entry into its Web database and provides SOJ Chair with one bound copy of the thesis/professional project.
15. **MSJ.** Student graduates. Congratulations!

**NOTE:** Final electronic thesis should be submitted no later than mid-April to allow time for processing for May graduation.
Professional Project

The Professional Project track differs from the Thesis track in that the student pursues professional educational objectives as opposed to the academic objectives of the thesis. Students who are pursuing the MSJ as their terminal degree and do not intend to pursue a Ph.D. are encouraged to choose this path.

Although the goals of the professional project are different from the thesis, it requires the same demonstration of long-term, sustained research and writing within the student’s area of study and preparation (advertising, editorial, public relations or visual journalism). The main components of the professional project are as follows:

1. Uses the major ideas and theories from coursework applied to a professional issue, problem or process. This could be long-term investigative series for print or broadcast, a multimedia documentary, or a major ad or public relations campaign or product.

2. Requires a proposal that details the project and demonstrates preparation, including a targeted literature review that identifies the theories and concepts being applied. (See proposal guidelines)

3. Incorporates a strong quantitative or qualitative research component in the project (investigative or documentary reporting, designing a campaign, etc.), as well as in the analysis/assessment for the student’s final Professional Project Report.

4. A professional project requires a substantial commitment of time and effort. Students should plan to devote the equivalent of at least one semester of full-time academic work to complete the project.

5. Publication and/or dissemination requirement: The professional project must result in a tangible media product delivered to an intended audience.

6. Submission of a Professional Project Report that incorporates all the elements of the project proposal, as well as significant documentation of the project itself and a contextual essay assessing the outcomes, results and/or successes of the professional objectives.
Professional Project Proposal

Before the student begins his/her project, a detailed, written proposal must be submitted and approved by the student’s professional project committee. The proposal should specify the professional educational objective(s) that the student is prepared to address, and how the research requirements will be met. The proposal for a professional project should contain the following elements:

1. **Introduction.** This is where problems or issues in the professional field are discussed and the rationale for the project is established. Students apply the theories and concepts learned in core graduate classes to a professional problem, issue or challenge. The introduction clearly states the professional objectives of the project.

2. **The professional project.** Should include the following elements:
   - A detailed description of the work to be done for the project, including location where the project will be carried out. The area of journalism specialty or area of emphasis for the project, such as advertising, public relations, news-editorial, broadcast, visual journalism, etc.
   - The educational and/or professional qualifications that will allow the student to successfully complete the project.
   - The specific beginning and ending dates of the project.
   - An explanation of the timeline/work schedule of the project. Students should plan to devote the equivalent of at least one semester of full-time academic work to complete the project.
   - How the project will be published, disseminated or delivered to its intended audience.
   - Identify the actual (or potential) client, organization or established media outlet that has agreed to consider publishing, distributing or broadcasting the work.
   - Specify the material that will be included in the final project report that demonstrates physical evidence that the project was completed. (e.g., published or unpublished articles, DVDs, handbooks, etc.)
   - The name of the person who has agreed to provide regular supervision of the project and precisely how that supervision will be provided.

3. **Research component.** In addition to the professional project itself, there must be a strong analysis component. This provides the student an opportunity to examine professional practices and to contribute to their area of specialization. This section of the proposal should include the following:
   - Clear statement of the subject of the research (what institution, individual or issue will be the topic?) and what questions the project intends to explore or answer.
   - How these questions are relevant to the professional project and will contribute to the student’s professional field.
• A current, targeted literature review that discusses the theories that apply to the professional project and research question(s).
• A detailed description of the scholarly or professional research methods that will be used and their suitability for answering the research question(s).
• Potential publication sources and outlets. Conferences, media and/or professional journals.
• A statement of how the project will be formally assessed.

4. **Supervision of the project.** If the project will be supervised by someone who is not a faculty member of the School of Journalism, the student must have an agreement in writing from the on-site supervisor approved by his or her committee. This agreement specifies the nature of the supervision, the responsibilities of both the supervisor and the student, and as well as a resume of the supervisor.