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.


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.
Thesis Proposal

The Thesis track differs from the Professional Project track in that the student pursues academic educational objectives as opposed to the professional objectives of a project. Students who believe they may someday want to pursue a Ph.D. are encouraged to choose this path.

The purpose of the thesis proposal is to inform your committee chair and committee members what you intend to do, what it will accomplish or add to the field, and how you intend to do it. It also provides a detailed guide for the thesis itself and must demonstrate long-term, sustained research and writing activity.

A thesis requires a substantial commitment of time, focus and effort. Students should plan to devote the equivalent of at least one semester of full-time academic work to complete it, once it has been approved.

A well-executed proposal is essential to ensure that all committee members and the student are in agreement regarding what the thesis will involve and how it will be conducted.

The following elements should make up your thesis proposal:

1. **Introduction.** This is where problems or issues in the field are discussed and the rationale for the thesis is established. Students apply the theories and concepts learned in core graduate classes to a research issue or problem. This section provides a general background of the topic, establishing its relevance, and clearly stating the research problem/questions to be addressed. Explain why the research is needed, the contribution it will make to the field, and the specific questions or issues your thesis will address.

2. **Literature Review.** Essential in any research project is a general survey of related, relevant research, published and unpublished, that has a bearing on your research questions. This likely will make up the biggest section of your proposal and thesis. An explanation of earlier research helps fit the project into the current context of the field. A discussion of the theoretical basis/bases for your work should be included here and should guide the reader from its theoretical origins to the most recent findings in the field. At the end of this section, you state how your work will replicate previous studies to help extend our understanding of the research problem/issue or will fill a gap in the existing research literature.

3. **Research Questions and/or Hypotheses.** Regardless of the research method or category—historical, descriptive, experimental—one or more research questions and/or hypotheses about the topic should be developed. A hypothesis is a clear, concise statement of conjecture about a problem that expresses a relationship between variables. Research questions should be used if the thesis is exploratory in nature, with inadequate previous research findings to predict variable relationships, or if the research results are not testable.

4. **Method.** Specify in detail how you will answer your questions/test your hypotheses and why this is the best method to use. Define your terms/variables and any other words that have a special meaning in your study. Words may be defined in two ways: dictionary or operational. Both types of definitions may be used. (A dictionary definition defines a word by using other words; an
operational definition assigns meaning by specifying the activities or operations necessary to measure the variable.)

EX:

**Dictionary definition:** Intelligence is the capacity to understand facts and propositions and their relations and to reason about them.  
**Operational definition:** Intelligence is a specific score on a specific test designed to measure intelligence.

Discuss what sampling frames will be used and how your samples will be selected. Explain how data will be collected, what instruments (e.g. questionnaires) will be used, and how they will be analyzed. Describe any primary and secondary sources to be researched and how they will be found/obtained.

5. **Bibliography.** Attach a complete list of the works and interviews used to develop your proposal.

6. **Appendices.** Include a copy of your instruments and/or interview questions and a proposed timeline that includes securing and analyzing your data and completing/defending your thesis.

*When in doubt about any aspect of your proposal, consult your committee chair.*
Completed Thesis

Incorporates all the elements of the project proposal, but updates the methods section to reflect the past nature of the activity, along with a findings section that includes the research results and a discussion section that analyzes the findings in light of previous and future research and acknowledges any problems with or shortcomings of the study.

Specifically, the following sections should be included in your thesis, which will be distributed to your committee at least two weeks prior to your defense and which, in its final form, will be submitted electronically to the university in conformance with their thesis guidelines/requirements.

1. Title page with signature lines for your committee members
2. Abstract
3. Any acknowledgements
4. Table of contents
5. List of tables
6. List of figures
7. Introduction
8. Literature review
9. Research questions and/or hypotheses
10. Method
10. Findings (answers to your RQs and/or Hs)
   - figures/charts/tables
   - statistical analyses charts/tables
11. Discussion and implications
   - analysis of findings; what do they mean?
   - limitations of study
   - future research implications
12. Appendices (as relevant)
   - instruments
   - interview questions
   - experiment materials
   - IRB approval form
   - participant consent form
13. Bibliography