Faculty Guidelines for Serving on Interdisciplinary Studies Project (MAIS 798) Committees

While University faculty are familiar with the creativity, originality, and intellectual rigor associated with a master's thesis, expectations for a project may be less clear. This document is for faculty serving on a Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (MAIS) student's project committee, or who are considering such service, to provide information about what will be expected and how they should guide the student. *Thank you for your support of Interdisciplinary Studies students!*

Interdisciplinary Studies Project vs. Thesis

Producing a thesis or project is the "capstone" experience of the Interdisciplinary Studies program and should reflect students' mastery of relevant subjects and skills in their course work, experiential learning opportunities, and research. However, the medium of the traditional thesis may not be an appropriate fit for some students. The project option enables students to produce a non-traditional deliverable, but it should not be regarded as "easier" than doing a thesis. Also, MAIS projects will always, regardless of concentration or subject matter, involve a significant amount of writing.

Interdisciplinary Studies projects can be:
- A traditional research monograph that makes an original contribution to knowledge, but is smaller in scale than a thesis and/or does not rely on the collection of original data.
- The application of existing scholarship to a deliverable with a practical application, such as a curriculum, exhibit design, manual or handbook, website, dashboard or portal, business plan, or computer model.
- In rare cases and with the special approval of a student's concentration head, a project can include an original creative work, such as a documentary film, a fictional film, or a script. However, the student must have graduate-level training in the creative mode of the deliverable and include at least one professional in the field on their project committee. For example, a student who chooses to write a script as part of their capstone project should have graduate training in playwriting and include a professional playwright on their project committee.

<u>All</u> projects require research; a formal, written proposal *(see p. 2)*; and a written statement *(see below)*.

Standards for Projects

Quality: The same *quality* of work is expected for both projects and theses. A project is not meant to be an "easier" option than a thesis; it is just different.

Written Portion: Non-traditional deliverables (computer model, business plan, film, curriculum, etc.) must be accompanied by a written statement that includes a literature review and discussions of methodology, results, and the project's originality and/or significance. Often this language can be imported from the proposal with modifications related to unexpected findings, reliance on new sources, changes in methodology, etc. Every project should articulate how the student arrived at their results and what is original and/or significant about their work.

Length & Scope: The length and scope of a project should be proportional to the number of credits earned for the project (based on Carnegie credit guidelines), but the specific requirements are ultimately at the discretion of the committee.

Submission: All project deliverables must be submitted in a format (hard copy for text; CD, DVD, thumbdrive, or *permanent* URL for other deliverables) suitable for easy review and long-term storage.

Composition of Project Committees

MAIS project committees are composed of at least three members:
1. A chair who is a member of the Mason graduate faculty.
2. A member of the Mason faculty (graduate, term, adjunct, or administrative).
3. A member of the Mason faculty (any type) *or* a practitioner in the field with at least a Master's degree.

Interdisciplinary Studies Project Proposals

MAIS 797: Proposal: This required, 1-credit course is designed to facilitate the proposal writing process. Course deliverables include a complete draft of the proposal and a poster presented in a public forum that faculty committees are encouraged to attend. Students' faculty chairs must provide feedback during the course so that the proposal does not develop in a vacuum.

Committee Approval: In addition to completing MAIS 797, students must develop a final version of their proposal that is approved by the entire committee. This can happen during MAIS 797 but usually happens after the course. Students must submit the final proposal in hard copy to Interdisciplinary Studies, with a signature sheet indicating committee approval, to be registered for their project credits.

Proposal Elements: All Interdisciplinary Studies proposals include the following elements:
- A statement of the problem to be addressed by the project.
- A literature review.
- A discussion of the proposed methodology or decision-making process.
- A discussion of the expected significance of the results.
- A timeline of work.
- A bibliography or reference list.

Faculty Feedback on Project Proposals & Research

Committee Chairs: Project committee chairs play a role in the MAIS 797 proposal course, in that students notify their committee chairs that they will be registering for the course and keep them apprised of their progress. Committee chairs should provide feedback to students during the semester as they produce the various proposal elements in the course.

The Review Process: Passing MAIS 797 does not equal committee approval of the proposal. Students are instructed to factor a revise-and-resubmit process into their timelines starting at new-student orientation. Every member of the committee should feel free to delay signing off on a project proposal if they feel more work is required. The same is true of signing off on the project itself. Chairs should provide guidance to students at the start of the proposal-writing process about how they would like the circulation of drafts to other committee members to proceed.

Concentration-Specific Project Guidelines

The Interdisciplinary Studies website includes additional guidelines for students in some concentrations. Students should consult with their concentration's head to determine additional requirements regarding length, format, number of credits, a defense, or other concentration-specific concerns. Students are responsible for sharing these guidelines with their committees.

Project Formatting & Deadlines

Formatting: Projects are not handled by University Dissertation & Thesis Service. Students should consult their committees and concentration heads for formatting guidance.

Deadlines: Projects should be submitted, with a signed cover sheet (template available at http://mais.gmu.edu), to the Interdisciplinary Studies program office by the UDTS thesis deadline.

Assigning Grades (for committee chairs only)

The committee chair is the instructor of record for the student's individualized section of MAIS 798: Project and must upload a grade at the end of each semester. **The chair must not submit a final grade of S (satisfactory, or "pass") until every member of the committee has formally approved the project!**

Grade options for MAIS 798 are limited to:
- **IP:** In Progress, for when the project extends beyond a single semester. *Do not use IN (Incomplete)!*
- **NC:** No Credit, for when it is clear the student will never finish the degree.
- **S:** Satisfactory, for when the student completes the project and the entire committee approves it!