

***Policy and Guidelines***  
**for Writing an**  
**Urban + Regional Planning**  
**Thesis or Professional Project**

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Master of Urban Planning graduate students are required to complete a capstone, integrative academic experience for the MUP degree. This requirement may be filled in one of four ways, each of which involves 6 credit hours.

1. UP 631 - Physical Planning Studio
2. UP 634 - Integrative Field Experience
3. UP 733 - Thesis
4. UP 734 – Professional Project

The Urban + Regional Planning Curriculum Committee grants permission to do a thesis or professional project in response to a student initiated petition.

*Students contemplating a thesis or professional report should be aware that this option requires extraordinary initiative and effort, and may require a time commitment beyond that of the more typical course requirements. Students who choose these options have a higher probability of a delayed graduation than students in UP631 or UP634. Therefore, it is reserved for students who can demonstrate (via the petition) the appropriateness and value of this option to their professional education. Theses are always individual student efforts; professional projects typically are prepared individually as well, though small-group professional projects will also be considered.*

Common to all the capstone requirements is their “integrative” nature; that is, they rely on knowledge and skills developed across the urban and regional planning curriculum, rather than in a single course. Generally, thesis students must show that they have had, or will acquire, training in the applicable research methods and that they have, or will acquire, the integrative experience provided by UP631 or UP634. Students intending to do a professional project must show that they have, or will acquire, the integrative experience provided by UP 631/634, and that the proposed project will contribute significantly to their professional objectives. An information session on all capstone options will be held towards the end of each Winter semester.

Normally, the thesis or project will involve three credit hours for each term of the second program year, for a total of six credit hours. It is possible to register for all six hours during a single semester.

Both theses and professional projects share a common set of expectations including the following:

- Mastery of planning knowledge and an appropriate set of methods;
- The ability to think critically about an urban planning problem and apply appropriate analytic techniques in exploring the problem;
- Experience in writing a scientific or technical report and receiving client, faculty, and peer evaluation of the final product.

### **The Thesis**

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A thesis is a creative, scholarly work developed from independent research. The research usually includes a literature review to delineate a problem or gap in knowledge, statement of objectives, formulation of hypotheses, explanation of methods, collection and analysis of data, report of results, discussion of conclusions, and an abstract. The student's thesis committee reviews the thesis, and it must meet the committee's standards for quality and scope.

The major objective of the thesis is to give students the opportunity to develop their creative abilities in one or more of the following areas:

- Defining and understanding urban planning problems or opportunities;
- Developing new knowledge and planning methods or strategies to address urban planning problems and opportunities;
- Understanding the structure and function of urban systems.

## **The Professional Project**

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The professional project involves the application of advanced planning approaches to a specific, real world-planning problem and is prepared with a particular client or community partner in mind. Professional projects normally work with one faculty member and one real-world community partner who serves as a member of the committee supervising the project. In exceptional circumstances where it is unreasonable to find an actual client, the professional project may be prepared for a hypothetical client under the supervision of at least two faculty. The professional project should include a review of relevant literature and should exhibit attributes of urban planning, as opposed to being a narrow technical exercise. That is, the project should deal with the formulation of policy goals, and should consider multiple constituencies. Professional projects are not normally based exclusively on the implementation of predefined techniques, such as the calibration of a measurement that is required by governmental regulation or analysis of census data. At the same time, the students and their clients should strive to ensure that the professional project represents a real-world intervention, rather than a purely speculative report on a policy or design option that has no chance of materializing. One optional suggestion is to gauge professional projects to policy options that are 2-3 years off. This avoids the pitfalls of a project that is too immediate and hence narrowly defined, and a project that is well beyond the policy horizon. The student's advisory committee reviews the project, and it must meet the committee's standards for quality and scope. Project results should be publishable as a project or technical report.

The major objective of the professional project is to give students the opportunity to develop their creative abilities in planning and problem solving in a real world setting.

## **Responsibility**

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The student is responsible for knowing and meeting all deadlines, submitting the applicable petition, establishing an advisory committee, and preparing the thesis or project in an acceptable way. Successful completion of the thesis or professional project is a requirement for graduation for students selecting these options.

There is not a single deadline for proposing a professional project. Two preferred options are:

1. The final curriculum committee meeting of the student's second semester, normally held during the third week of April. Proposals to be considered for this meeting should be submitted by the second Monday of April.
2. The first curriculum committee meeting of the student's third semester, normally held during the third week of September. Proposals to be considered by this meeting should be submitted by the second Monday of September.

For students planning on proposing during the first meeting of September, it is advisable to speak with an advisor before leaving for the summer. Proposals for theses and professional projects are also considered during meetings of the curriculum committee later in the Fall semester.

A complete draft should be submitted to the committee no later than three weeks before the last day of classes of the semester during which the student intends to graduate. The student should expect to revise the draft extensively based on the committee's comments. A final draft of the completed project should be submitted to the committee no later than one week before the last day of classes of the semester during which the student intends to graduate. Later submission will result in delayed graduation.

An electronic version of the completed product must be submitted to the Program Administrator.

## **Thesis or Project Committee**

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The committee is composed of two or more advisors, one of whom must be an URP faculty member, serving as chair or co-chair. The committee helps the student focus on a topic that meets the student's academic goals and is practicable. The client normally serves as the second member on professional project committees. Both the student and the committee should clearly understand their mutual expectations with respect to the amount of work to be done.

## **Format**

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The thesis must conform to the style used by the Rackham Graduate School for doctoral dissertations. The style for professional projects may follow that requirement or may vary with the consent of the advisory committee. In either case, two copies must be provided to the Urban + Regional Planning Program. Copies must be bound. It is customary to present a copy to each advisory committee member.

## **Process**

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1. Students considering a thesis or professional project should discuss possible topics with, and seek support from, faculty members. The student is responsible for recruiting faculty members who are willing and able to serve on the advisory committee. The decision to serve on an advisory committee rests with the faculty member; faculty will not necessarily be available for each proposal. The process of planning for the thesis or professional project typically starts during the student's second term in the program.

2. Normally, students will work with an advisory committee before the fall semester of the second year begins and will have a petition that the advisory committee has approved by the beginning of the fall semester. The proposal development is a process that normally involves several drafts. The student should submit the petition at least five days prior to the first Curriculum Committee meeting of the fall term. The first meeting usually occurs before the end of the third week of classes.
3. The Program Curriculum Committee will approve or deny the petition or will recommend revisions and resubmission. Committee decisions are final. A student may register for UP733 or UP734 only if the Curriculum Committee has approved the petition.
4. The advisory committee provides appropriate guidance to the student, monitors progress, and approves the thesis or project.
5. When the thesis or professional project is complete, the faculty on the advisory committee assign the grade, and the student submits an electronic version suitable for posting on the web, and a signed copyright permission form (allowing the Program to post the work on the web, if appropriate) to the Urban + Regional Planning Program administrator. In the case of a professional project, the student also normally must provide copies to the client.

## Thesis/Professional Project Petition Form Guidelines

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- I. Name of student, date of submission
- II. List of courses completed or anticipated with term and grade
- III. Thesis/Project description (3-5 single spaced pages)
  - A. Thesis
    - literature review to delineate problem or gap in knowledge
    - statement of objectives
    - formulation of hypotheses
    - research methods
    - collection and analysis of data
    - report of results
    - conclusions
  - B. Professional Project
    - problem statement—the client's/community partner's issue and the planning dilemma
    - review of existing literature on the topic, or how the problem has been approached elsewhere
    - planning significance of the problem
    - proposed approach to this planning problem.
      - methods
      - data sources
      - steps in the process
    - nature of the final product. (Note that the professional project is a *product* (e.g., report or plan) rather than a process (community organizing, running a planning process etc).
- IV. Project schedule
- V. Statement of the means for fulfilling the integrative experience requirement, and why the thesis or project is appropriate to the student's program.
- VI. Names and signatures of primary and second faculty advisors and/or client, indicating willingness to serve on the advisory committee and approval of the proposal.

THESIS/PROFESSIONAL PROJECT FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_

- Thesis
- Professional Project

Proposed Thesis/Professional Project Title: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMITTEE

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Advisory Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (Chair)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Abstract  
(150-200 words)

APPLICABLE COURSES

Number	Title	Instructor	Term Taken	Grade

**THESIS/PROJECT DESCRIPTION**  
(3-5 single-spaced pages)

## PROJECT SCHEDULE

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### STATEMENT OF MEANS FOR FULFILLING INTEGRATIVE EXPERIENCE (150-200 words)

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Petition Approved

Denied

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Advisory Committee Chair

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Signature

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Date

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Curriculum Committee Chair (or Designee) Signature

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Date

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**Confidential Review Form**  
**To be completed by the Thesis/Professional Project Advisory Committee Chair**

To the curriculum committee:

I have reviewed the thesis/professional project proposal of \_\_\_\_\_. My assessment of the proposal is below

The proposal is ready to be approved as is.	The proposal is ready to be approved after slight modifications, which I will take care of with the student	The proposal is ready to be approved after slight modifications that the curriculum committee may wish to review	The proposal will need significant modifications before it can be approved.

Confidential comments to the Curriculum Committee regarding the proposal or the student's preparation:

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Advisory Committee Chair

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Signature

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Date