



# Communications and Media Studies

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## CMS SENIOR PROJECT GUIDELINES

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### • WHAT IS A CMS SENIOR PROJECT?

The CMS Senior Project is an original project required of CMS students to complete an interdisciplinary minor in Mass Communications and Media Studies, Film Studies, or Multimedia Arts. The project, intended to draw together the communications and media studies experience at Tufts, should deal with important and substantive issues in the field of communications. The project may take different forms, from a traditional scholarly research paper, critical analysis, or thesis, to other formats, such as a film, video, magazine or newspaper series, program treatment, recorded sound, live performance, computer program, website, or other interactive or audio-visual form. All projects, however, require a written component.

The project may be undertaken for either a half credit or a full credit, except Multimedia Arts Senior Projects, which must be taken for a full credit. You and your project committee should determine the amount of credit at the beginning of the project. Credit for the project is given at the end of the spring semester (EXP194CS). Seniors graduating in the fall semester will receive credit at the end of that semester (EXP194CF).

### • WHO SHOULD ADVISE MY SENIOR PROJECT?

A committee of two to three faculty members advises the senior project. This committee should be formed no later than the end of the fall semester of senior year. You should select faculty who have some interest in and competence relative to the proposed topic. In some instances, one committee member may be a faculty member from another university, a Tufts alum who is working in a relevant field, a site supervisor from an internship, or an appropriate communications/media professional (such as someone teaching a relevant course in the Experimental College, a filmmaker, a professional journalist, etc.). One committee member is designated as the Project Director. The Project Director must be a Tufts faculty member. CMS Director Julie Dobrow must approve the project committee.

The Project Director is the main advisor for your project. It is your responsibility to keep in constant contact with the Project Director and insure that she or he is in agreement with you about your project and that she or he provides the necessary core advising. You should also work out with the Project Director a time-line for completing the project. Of course, all committee members advise and approve your project, and you should make sure that committee members are informed about the scope and direction of the project throughout the course of the year. Communication between you and your project committee is the key to success. It is critical that you stay in touch with all committee members! Ultimately, the responsibility for your successful completion of a senior project rests in your hands, not the committee's. Julie Dobrow is always available to discuss your project and any problems you might have with your project committee. Hosea Hirata, the Film Studies Coordinator, Karen Panetta and Howard Woolf, the Multimedia Arts Co-Directors, are available to discuss issues about film studies projects and multimedia arts, respectively.

### • WHAT FORMS DO I NEED TO FILE, AND WHEN DO I NEED TO FILE THEM?

There are two forms you'll need to turn in during this year:

1. CMS Information Sheet (early in September, to CMS Director)
2. CMS Interdisciplinary Minor Completion form (early May, after defense, to CMS Director)

### • HOW AND WHEN DO I GO ABOUT BEGINNING A SENIOR PROJECT?

You should discuss ideas for projects and prospective project advisors with Professors Dobrow, Hirata, Panetta and Woolf. You are strongly encouraged to begin this process as early as possible, and at the latest, at the beginning of your senior year. An idea sparked by a class taken in any semester, something you read, see, or hear in media, or an internship experience can all begin the process of identifying an idea for a senior project. For students doing the senior project, the CMS Senior Colloquium is a required course in which you will define and refine the topic of your project.

After narrowing ideas for the project and selecting an appropriate Project Director in the fall semester of your senior year, you will work in the Colloquium and with your advisor to outline a feasible project. In this way, you will be able to work with your project committee to set reasonable and realistic expectations and deadlines for the project.

#### ✿ WHAT IS THE CMS SENIOR COLLOQUIUM?

Each CMS senior planning to do the senior project is required to attend the CMS Senior Colloquium in the fall semester. The Colloquium is designed to assist seniors in framing their projects, finding appropriate faculty advisors, developing a literature review and methodology, and setting reasonable parameters for the senior projects. Students doing the Colloquium earn a half credit, pass/fail (EXP 190C).

#### ✿ WHAT FORMS DOES THE SENIOR PROJECT TAKE?

##### *The Written Project*

The written project deals with a problem in the field of communications and media studies or film studies. What constitutes a "problem" in communications is usually negotiated between the student and his or her committee members. However, a "problem" is always one which is not trivial and which will contribute to the field in some way. Generally, written projects fall into one of the following categories: critical analyses of media, cultural studies, case studies, historical studies, empirical studies (i.e. content analyses, surveys, ethnographies), theoretical-philosophical studies, or management, institutional, and planning studies.

How long should a written senior project be? A **half-credit** project should be approximately **25 to 30 pages** and a **full-credit** project should be approximately **50 to 60 pages**. All written senior projects must use proper citation and include a bibliography with a complete list of all sources used.

##### *The Creative Project*

The creative senior project also deals with important issues in the field of communications and media studies, film studies or multimedia arts, but may be delineated in many different and non-traditional ways. For example, you might write a pilot for a television series, develop storyboards for an innovative communications campaign, write a magazine series, mount a display of advertising, design a website or a video animation, or produce a music video. The possibilities are endless. Regardless of the form it takes, the creative project should address significant issues in some area of the communications field. While these issues can be addressed in the content of the creative project itself, an accompanying written essay reflecting on the significance of the creative project in expanding your understanding of media and society is required of all creative projects. In addition, all creative projects need to have a brief literature review, which provides context for the specific project, and a diary of process section, which documents the specific creative decisions you make along the way that ultimately shape the project. The **written requirement** for creative projects should be approximately **15 pages**. **Creative projects are a full credit**, unless otherwise negotiated with your committee. All MMA senior projects must be taken for a full credit.

#### ✿ WHAT DOES A COMPLETED CMS SENIOR PROJECT LOOK LIKE?

Because CMS Senior Projects may be highly individualized and creative, there is no set format for them. However, to receive credit for a CMS Senior Project, you must have the following components in your projects:

1. Acknowledgements
2. Problem Statement
3. Project Significance
4. Literature Review/Context Section
5. Method/ diary/ production log
6. Results (e.g. creative work or results of an empirical study)
7. Self-reflective Statement
8. Bibliography

ALL projects must include a written essay. A research project entails a single paper that incorporates all of the six components listed

above. A creative project entails a creative work plus a written essay that covers a problem statement, project significance, context section, diary, and self-reflective statement. Because CMS Senior Projects may be so varied in form and style, the following brief discussion will give you some guidance as to how to incorporate the six required components into your project.

- *Problem Statement*

This section will detail what it is you decided to explore in your project. In research-based projects, the problem statement is usually a straightforward narrative about what particular problem was selected. For example, the problem statement could begin: "This project examined images of gender in primetime television..." You would go on to discuss what you meant by images of gender. There is no set way of discussing the problem; you will need to decide on how formal you wish your use of language to be, and discuss this with your advisor.

For creative projects, the problem statement will usually be found in the written essay accompanying a film, magazine article, CD-ROM, etc. Once again, the task is to inform your readers about what you decided to do as well as set forth your goals for the project. For example, the problem statement could begin: "My CMS Senior Project was a 30 minute video documentary about eating disorders at Tufts. I wanted to gather information and present it in an entertaining, yet compelling format..." OR "My CMS Senior Project was a screenplay. I was interested in how a screenwriter uses autobiography in the creation of the fictional characters and plot of his or her creative work..."

- *Project Significance*

This section informs your readers about why the particular problem you selected was important. There are many reasons a problem might be significant.

A problem may have social, cultural, political or economic significance. The research on gender roles on TV could be significant for all these reasons, as would the video documentary on eating disorders. Recent events can demonstrate how a problem is important and topical. A news report about inequity of male/female roles on TV, or a new fall show purporting to break traditional gender stereotypes, show the significance of addressing gender roles on TV. The untimely death of someone because of eating disorders, or a new study out about eating disorders on college campuses, shows the significance of this problem. Many creative projects can be significant in how their subject matter highlights the politics or economics of the media industry. For example, a screenplay featuring Latino and Asian-American characters can be significant because it works against the rules, i.e. industry politics and economics of network television that have excluded these type of characters from primetime television.

A problem can be significant because it raises theoretical, methodological, or creative issues. It can also be significant because it re-examines a topic in a new way. The gender roles topic might use feminist theory, or use a research method not commonly used, such as cognitive mapping - this would be significant. The video documentary might refer to a new theory about eating disorders, or use personal stories in a way not usually shown with this type of topic - this would be significant. Finally, a topic might be significant in addressing creative or aesthetic issues like the relationship between personal biography and creating fictional works in film or video.

Finally, a problem can be significant in personal ways. You might have wanted to take on the gender roles topic because you love TV, but hate the way women and/or men are portrayed, or maybe you really want to go on to become a writer for TV and want to do it better. You might have decided to do the video documentary because you had a dear friend in high school who suffered from an eating disorder, or you know someone at Tufts who does. The question of autobiography and fiction might be important to you personally because you are concerned about how screenwriting can help you think through your personal life through fiction. Personal reasons are as legitimate as other types of reasons for making a problem significant, but you are expected to address more than just personal reasons for the significance of your project. Sometimes students decide to put this type of information into the self-reflective component of their projects, and that's fine, too.

- *Literature Review/Context Section*

The literature review/context section is an important piece of your CMS Senior Project. It serves to give your project some background and context as well as to demonstrate that you have seriously addressed your problem by reading what others have thought or researched about it. For paper based projects, the literature review serves primarily to place your work in the context of what others have researched/written about on the same or similar topics; for creative projects, the context section may delve into literature about the specific topic of your work and/or the genre in which you are working. A literature review section for creative projects places your project within some kind of larger context, such as researching the tradition of a particular type of filmmaking you are doing (like documentary, reality tv show, etc.), looking at what other filmmakers have written about this genre, what critics have discussed about it, etc.

A literature review/context section generally contains several sections, and may review traditional sources gleaned from the library or Internet searches, or may contain information that comes from primary sources such as scripts, interviews, etc, or some combination. Often students will decide to organize their literature reviews with individually titled subsections.

For example, the gender roles project might have sections on: history of gender roles on television, results of other studies about gender on TV, recent reviews of shows focusing on gender issues, and how feminist theory explains gender roles on TV. The video documentary project might have a literature review with the following sections: what eating disorders are, information about eating disorders on college campuses, and how video documentary has been used to illuminate social issues. The screenplay project might have sections on essays by writers or scholars on autobiography and fiction, and examples of famous fictional works whose authors relied heavily on autobiography.

Be sure to document carefully each source you cite, whether you are using social science notation (name/date method) or footnotes, and include a full bibliography of all sources used at the conclusion of the written component of your project.

- *Method/ diary/ production log*

In this section, you will discuss how you did what you did. For research-based projects, this will include a discussion of what your sample was, how you picked it, what method you used, and how you analyzed your data. For other types of projects, you will talk about the actual process you went through to produce your project. The intent here is more to keep an ongoing diary of the decisions you make along the way that ultimately shape your project, and think self-consciously and reflectively about why you are making those decisions. You may do this in the form of a blog.

For example, the gender roles project method section would talk about selection of a sample of shows examined in the current season and why they were selected, how a content analysis was developed, and whether the data were analyzed qualitatively, quantitatively, or some combination. The video documentary diary section would delineate how the script was written, how decisions were made about what to shoot, and what the editing process was like. The screenplay project diary section would discuss how you integrated your autobiography into your fictional work and the problems, if any, you confronted in the process. Again, for creative projects, this type of discussion doesn't need to be lengthy, and is probably best presented in the written essay.

- *Results*

Simply put, this section tells what you found. For research-based projects, you tell what the result of your inquiry was, and then what you think it meant. Often, students will divide this into two separate chapters. For the gender roles study, you would tell what your content analysis revealed, and then speculate on what those results mean given the context of what you've learned about the field.

For creative projects, the results component is the actual product of what you've done in whatever format you've selected - video documentary, film script, photo essay, website, performance piece, etc.

Often, students find that they have needed to scale back from their original intentions of what they had intended to produce. This happens with all types of projects. Be sure to keep your advisors informed as you are going along with the project, so everyone is "on the same page" about what the final project will look like, and the amount of credit you'll receive for the work.

- *Self-Reflective Statement*

This section of the project is often the one with which students have the most fun. This is your chance to reflect on what the whole process has meant to you, and how your CMS Senior Project has fit into your Tufts education. There is no set format for this piece, and it can be very informal in tone. It might be possible to weave this into a non-written project, but most often, the self-reflective component takes the form of a few written pages at the end of a written piece.

Questions about the various components of a CMS Senior Project may be discussed with Julie Dobrow, Hosea Hirata, Karen Panetta and Howard Woolf.

#### ✿ WHAT DO I NEED TO DO ONCE I'VE COMPLETED MY PROJECT?

Final projects should be submitted well in advance of the end of the semester of completion (one month before last day of classes), so that any revisions can be made and approved by the project committee. After the project is completed with revisions, you must arrange with your committee members for an oral defense/discussion of the project during the last week of classes or earlier.

Steps you need to take to complete the project:

- 1) Submit first FULL draft of project to first reader/advisor for evaluation and revisions (by April 6, 2012)
- 2) Submit second draft of project to entire committee (by April 17, 2012)
- 3) Submit copy of project for CMS Award consideration (by April 17, 2012)
- 4) Defense/discussion with full committee (April 23 – May 2, 2012)
- 5) Fill out the first page of the CMS Interdisciplinary Minor Completion Form (salmon-colored form), bring it to your defense, and have your Project Director send it to Professor Dobrow (by May 4, 2012)
- 6) Come to the BIG YEAR-END CELEBRATION for CMS Minors (date TBA). Bring a copy of your project— *including the written component for audio-visual and other creative projects*— to the Senior Celebration and give it to Susan Eisenhower so we can save it in the CMS archives.

#### ✿ HOW DO I CONTACT PROFESSORS DOBROW, HIRATA, PANETTA, and WOOLF?

CMS Director Julie Dobrow, 95 Talbot Ave, ext. 74744 (julie.dobrow@tufts.edu)  
 Film Studies Coordinator Hosea Hirata, Olin Center 302, ext. 72671 (hosea.hirata@tufts.edu)  
 Multimedia Arts Co-Director Karen Panetta, Halligan Hall, ext 75976 (karen@eecs.tufts.edu)  
 Multimedia Arts Co-Director Howard Woolf, 95 Talbot Ave, ext. 73384 (howard.woolf@tufts.edu)