Approval of Topic

Permission to do a Thesis or Professional Project must be granted by the supervisory committee selected by the student and the Associate Director for the Planning Program via a student-initiated proposal. 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. As such, it is reserved for a limited number of students who can demonstrate (via the proposal) the appropriateness and value of this option to their professional education. Likewise, participating faculty should be aware that this option requires a serious obligation and commitment of time. These are always individual student efforts. Professional projects and theses are typically prepared individually with guidance from a faculty advisory committee.

Generally, students willing to do a thesis/professional project must show that they have had or will acquire training in the applicable research methodology. Those students planning to do a professional project must show that the proposed project will contribute significantly to their professional objectives and support the objectives and needs of a professional planning organization, private sector firms, and institutions. The thesis will involve six credit hours and the professional project will involve five credit hours, typically during the final year of the MUEP degree.

The Thesis

A thesis is a creative, scholarly and original 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 or problems, 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 provides guidance throughout the research process. The thesis must meet the Committee's standards for quality and scope and the format requirements mandated by the Graduate College. The thesis results must be presented in an oral defense.

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:
1. Defining and understanding urban planning problems or opportunities;
2. Developing new knowledge and planning methods or strategies to address urban planning problems and opportunities;
3. Understanding the structure and function of urban systems.
The Professional Project

The professional project involves the application of advanced planning methodologies to a specific, real-world planning problem or development and must be prepared with a particular client in mind. A project typically includes a literature review, a problem definition, the review, evaluation, selection and application of appropriate methodologies, a problem solution, discussion of conclusions, and an abstract. The student's Professional Project Advisory Committee reviews the project. It must meet the Committee's standards for quality and scope. There is no requirement for an oral defense of the project, but all committee members must approve the project for acceptance. 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 and for a client. The Professional Project must be submitted to and accepted by a professional planning "client". The "client" Committee member must be approved by the Graduate College.

Student Responsibility

The student is responsible for knowing and meeting all deadlines, submitting the applicable proposal, establishing a Thesis Committee or Project Advisory Committee, preparing the thesis or project in an acceptable way and organizing and announcing the oral defense for the thesis. Successful completion of the thesis or professional project is a requirement for graduation for students selecting these options.

Thesis Committee

The thesis committee is composed of three faculty advisors, two of which must be MUEP regular faculty members. A MUEP faculty member must also serve as chair or co-chair of the Committee. The thesis committee is expected to help the student focus on a topic that meets the student's and program's academic goals and is feasible. Both the student and the Committee must clearly understand their mutual expectations with respect to the amount of work to be done. A student starts the thesis by discussing a potential thesis topic with faculty members and selects a thesis advisor who is interested in working with the student on a specific topic. A short proposal is written by the student and approved by the faculty thesis advisor. Two other Committee members are selected together by the student and Thesis Committee chair. The Committee approves the thesis proposal. The proposal then goes to the Director of the Planning Program for signature and then filed with the School.

Professional Project Committee

The Project Advisory Committee is composed of at least three advisors, two of who must be MUEP regular faculty members (one serving as chair or co-chair) and at least one planning professional from the client's planning office. The Committee is expected to help the student focus on the topic that meets the student's academic goals and is practicable. Both the student and the committee must clearly understand their mutual expectations with respect to the amount of work to be done. The project ultimately is approved by the committee and is submitted to a "client". The client's representative serves as the third member of the committee.
Format

The thesis must conform to the style used by the Arizona State University Graduate College Thesis/Dissertation Format Manual. The style for professional projects may follow that requirement or may vary with the consent of the Professional Project Advisory Committee. In either case, two copies must be provided to the MUEP Program. It is also customary to present a copy to each thesis committee member and Professional Project Advisory Committee member.

Verification of Completion

Completion of the thesis or professional project must be verified in writing. A Thesis/Professional Project Completion Form must be signed by all thesis committee or professional project advisory committee members and submitted to the Graduate Coordinator no later than the first day of final examinations of the term in which the student expects to graduate.

Process

Students contemplating a thesis or professional project should discuss possible topics with and seek support from faculty members. It is the responsibility of the student to recruit faculty members who are willing and able to serve on the thesis committee or professional project advisory committee. The decision to serve on a thesis committee or professional project advisory committee rests with the faculty member; there is no guarantee that faculty will be available for each proposal. The process of planning for the thesis or professional project typically starts during the end of the student's first year in the program and the work is done typically during the second year of the program.

Copies of the thesis/professional project proposal must be submitted to the Director of the Planning Program. Normally, a proposal will be submitted by the end of the student's first year. In the event that a student's summer research/professional work has the potential of becoming a thesis or professional project, a student may submit a proposal no later than the second week of September in the fall semester.

The Professional Project Advisory Committee selected by the student and the Associate Director for the Planning Program will be required to sign the proposal. Upon approval, the student may begin thesis or professional project work.

The Thesis Committee or Professional Project Advisory Committee provides appropriate guidance to the student, monitors progress, assigns grades for the six (6) or five (5) credit hours, and approves the thesis or project.