

## YEATES SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

### Master of Journalism

#### Major Research Project Guidelines 2020-21

**\*\*Revised Sept. 30, 2020\*\***

The Major Research Project (MRP) is the culmination of each student's work in the Master of Journalism program. It is to be a substantial and original work of journalism, showing mastery of the chosen medium. While it is not required that the MRP be published, it should be of publishable quality. Within this framework, students are encouraged to adopt innovative approaches that will reach audiences in new ways. The subject matter and methods adopted in the project should also reflect the student's awareness of journalism's important role in civil society.

An assigned supervisor will oversee each MRP. The supervisor's duties include: reviewing the YSGS Student-Supervisor Checklist with the student (both parties must sign the document following this discussion); approving the initial proposal; setting monthly consultation meetings; assessing drafts and recommending changes; and, finally, assessing the final version to ensure its readiness for outside assessment by a second reader. We will try to accommodate students' wishes in assigning supervisors but cannot guarantee that every student will get his or her first choice of supervisor.

As mentioned above, an assigned second reader will also review each project. In almost all cases, the second reader does not assess any interim drafts, but rather provides an arm's-length assessment of the final draft. Again, we will try to accommodate students' wishes in assigning second readers but cannot guarantee that every student will get their first choice of second reader.

(Note: On the rare occasion when the second reader plays a more hands-on role, it is because the project requires additional expertise in a particular subject area. For example, a student who chooses to do a video documentary on an issue involving urban politics may have a supervisor with expertise in documentary production and a second reader with a deeper knowledge of urban politics. The second reader's duties may then expand to include assessing drafts and recommending changes. In these cases, a third reader must be assigned to do the arm's-length assessment. The graduate program director, in consultation with the supervisor, will decide whether a third reader is necessary.)

#### **Extent of a Major Research Project**

In written form, an MRP should be 5,000–6,000 words in length (not including bibliography and interview source list). This could take the form of a single magazine feature article or a series of newspaper articles. To enhance these written projects students are encouraged to produce

digital elements to complement their stories, such as photos, video and interactive graphics. The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that sufficient research and interviewing have been done to support a project of this magnitude and depth.

In video, radio documentary or podcast form, it is expected that the finished work will be between 20 and 30 minutes in length.

A multimedia MRP is a focused work of narrative, explanatory or experimental journalism incorporating **at least five cohesive, complementary digital/interactive elements** that elevate the storytelling and presentation experience. Students are encouraged to employ a wide variety of multi-platform techniques, including (but not limited to) image galleries, audio and video-based components, 360-immersive video, timelines, data visualizations and interactive maps. These multi-platform elements are integral to the presentation of the story and should be thoughtfully woven throughout the piece, not merely added as afterthoughts to accompany a print story or video piece. Students must design and build (with assistance from our technical staff) a website to house their digital project, with an emphasis on clear navigation, interactivity and optimal user experience.

Whatever the journalistic platform, the student is responsible for finding compelling sources/characters through which to present the narrative, and for ensuring that they will have sufficient access to these sources for a project of this size. Whatever the form, it is strongly recommended that the work be presented in digital form, e.g. published on a web page on WordPress.

### **Reflective essay**

Each project is to be accompanied by an 8-10-page reflective essay that situates the project in a broader journalistic context. The student should explain why they took on this particular subject and adopted this particular form, and how the project fits into debates about how journalism can best do its job. Discussion of methodological and practical obstacles that arose along the way and lessons learned in dealing with them should also be included. The essay should be delivered to the supervisor and evaluated separately. Successful completion of the MRP includes successful completion of the reflective essay. (Note: the second reader must view the reflective essay for background information to better evaluate the MRP.) The reflective essay must be accompanied by a bibliography and list of interviews conducted.

### **Video documentary MRPs**

Because of the collaborative nature of video journalism, it will not normally be possible for a student to carry out all the work involved on his or her own. In most cases, students will require assistance in filming, particularly when conducting interviews or shooting in demanding locations. Students doing an MRP in video formats may want to consider forming a partnership with another student who is also producing a video-based project in order to provide assistance in filming during interviews and in demanding locations. The final responsibility for major editorial decisions (which locations to use, for example) rests with the student who is directing the MRP. Students who have provided technical assistance will be acknowledged in the credits for each

video-based project and in the program’s records. With the exception of video projects, the MRP will be an individual effort. **\*\*For 2020: With COVID restrictions, working in teams may not be advisable. Students pursuing a video project must discuss how to mitigate such risks with their supervisor as well as with any filming partner.\*\***

**Timeline and MRP deliverables at a glance:**

Date	Milestone	MRP deliverable	✓
Friday, May 1		<b>500-word proposal brief due</b>	
Friday, May 8	MRP supervisor assigned		
Week of June 8	<i>JN8501/MRP I: Story Development course starts online</i>		
Friday, August 28		<b>Expanded treatment and bibliography due</b>	
Week of Nov. 2	<i>JN8502/MRP II: Storytelling Seminar course starts</i>		
Friday, December 14		<b>First draft due for MRP II course</b>	
Friday, January 8, 2021		<b>First draft due for supervisor</b>	
Week of January 11	<i>JN8503/MRP III: Pitching and Branding Masterclass course starts</i>		
Friday, March 26		<b>Final draft due to supervisor</b>	
Friday, April 2		<b>Reflective essay due to supervisor</b>	
Friday, April 9	Second reader feedback		

	to supervisor		
Friday, April 23		<b>Final day to hand in completed MRP to program office</b>	

## Timeline and deliverables in detail

There are six deadlines students must meet in completing their MRPs. (Additional deadlines for drafts and revisions will be negotiated with the instructors of the MRP courses and the MRP supervisor.)

### Proposal brief: **Friday, May 1, 2020**

Students will provide a description (500 words) of their intended project, including a preference for the media form (magazine, newspaper, broadcast, or multimedia) in which the student wishes to work. The Graduate Program Director will use this statement of interest to assign supervisors and second readers. Supervisors will normally be assigned by **Friday, May 8, 2020**. Students are expected to meet with their supervisors and go over (and sign) the YSGS Student-Supervisor Checklist before the start of JN8501.

During summer of first year, in the JN8501 MRP I: Story Development online course (**which starts the week of June 8**), students will be required to conduct in-depth research and interviews on their proposed story topic. This will include an examination of previous journalistic work on the subject (in part to determine the originality of the project), as well as conducting pre-interviews and securing access to main sources.

### Expanded treatment: **Friday, August 28, 2020**

The [expanded treatment](#), indicates who will be interviewed (or those who have been interviewed), give a clear picture of access to live sources, spells out in detail the structure of the project and outline any specific journalistic strategy. While the 500-word proposal indicates the general subject of the project, the expanded treatment is intended to show how it will work as a story. It should clearly state the subject to be addressed and the form in which it will be done. Sufficient information should be provided to show the project's significance and journalistic weight and its feasibility (for example, a project that required a student to ascend Mt. Everest, gain access to secret corporate documents or interview several hundred people would not be considered feasible). The proposal should also provide evidence of the project's originality in journalistic terms, and demonstrate substantial familiarity with the relevant academic literature. Crucially, the proposal should indicate that the student has gained access to principal live sources for the story and has completed pre-interviews. What other sources of data are available? What locations can be visited? What events are taking place? For video, radio or online projects, what visuals and audio elements are available? What, in broad terms, will the storyline be? The expanded treatment is a detailed sketch outline of what the finished project is expected to look like and includes a workback schedule for completion of the first draft. Approximate length: 10-12 pages. The instructor of JN8501 will first mark the expanded treatment for fulfilling course requirements and then it goes to the MRP supervisor who should provide feedback to the student no later than **Friday, Sept. 25, 2020**.

**First draft: Friday, December 14, 2020**

The MRP first draft is first submitted to the JN8502 instructor, who marks it for meeting course requirements. Then it is assessed by the MRP supervisor (Jan. 8, 2021). The student should hand in a substantially complete version, although some interviews, pieces of information or visuals may be missing at this stage. Deadlines for the second and subsequent drafts will be negotiated between the supervisor and student at this point. Student and supervisor must create and agree upon a workback schedule to manage this crucial seven-week period between first and final draft.

**Final draft: Friday, March 26, 2021**

The final version of the project is to be submitted to the supervisor. The final version must, in the supervisor's opinion, merit a passing grade and be ready to be assessed by the second reader. N.B. Failure to submit an acceptable final version to the supervisor means the student will not be eligible to graduate in June 2021 and will have to register for the Spring/Summer semester.

**Reflective essay: Friday, April 2, 2021**

The reflective essay is submitted. No student will receive credit for his or her Major Project unless an essay judged satisfactory by the supervisor and second reader has been submitted.

**Second reader feedback: Friday, April 9, 2021**

The second reader provides their comments to the supervisor no later than this date. The second reader may respond by passing the project as is; by requiring specified minor revisions; by requiring specified major revisions; or by giving the project a failing grade. In the MRP Feedback Form the second reader will specify to the supervisor changes that are "recommended" and changes that are "required." The supervisor will communicate the changes both recommended and required to the student.

**Completed MRP and reflective essay: Friday, April 23, 2021**

The final version of the project, including all revisions required, will be submitted to the Program Administrator's office no later than this date. The supervisor and second reader must indicate that all required revisions have been done to their satisfaction. Students are responsible for submitting the final version of their project to the program office, along with written verification from the supervisor that all necessary revisions have been completed. (Note: Regarding the final source list, do not include source contact information.)

N.B. Failure to meet the April 23, 2021 deadline means the student will not be eligible to graduate in June 2021 and will have to register for an additional Spring/Summer semester.

## Deadlines

Missing any of the project deadlines listed above will result in a student reverting to unsatisfactory status in the program, and a notice to that effect will be entered in their program file. If the student's status has not been restored to satisfactory by the end of the semester in question, a grade of Unsatisfactory (UNS) will be entered on the official transcript, and the student's academic standing will be provisional.

Students with provisional standing may not continue their program of studies until a specific plan to correct academic deficiencies has been authorized in writing by the Graduate Program Director and the supervisor, signed by the student, and recorded with the Office of the Registrar.

The grade UNS carries the same academic weight as the grade F. Students whose progress in the MRP is UNS for two semesters will be withdrawn from the program. (See Yeates School of Graduate Studies Policies and Procedures for Master's and PhD Programs, Section 5.3.)

## Grading

In cases where the second reader has been at arm's length from the project, the final version of the MRP will be assessed by the supervisor and second reader. Where the second reader has not been at arm's length from the project, it shall also be assessed by a third reader. The project will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis.

Supervisors, second readers (and third readers, where applicable) are to bear the following considerations in mind when grading an MRP:

- Originality (both form and content)
- Depth of research
- Mastery of the chosen journalistic form
- Publishable quality
- Accuracy
- Clarity
- All deadlines met
- Journalistic purpose (i.e., relevance to public interest)
- Satisfactory completion of reflective essay
- For documentary projects, satisfactory completion of Technical Partner role

Please note that it is the student's responsibility to provide a version of the project without errors in grammar, spelling, usage, fact, etc. A project with uncorrected errors will not be accepted.

## Projects involving foreign travel

Projects involving foreign travel present special challenges and have special requirements. Students are advised to consider the challenges carefully, and come up with a detailed plan for meeting them, before committing to a project requiring foreign travel.

- 1) All projects involving foreign travel must be assessed and approved by Ryerson International. See [http://www.ryerson.ca/ri/students/ryerson\\_students/](http://www.ryerson.ca/ri/students/ryerson_students/) for further information.
- 2) The Master of Journalism program has limited funds to support major project research. Thus students who plan foreign travel must provide most or all of their own funds.
- 3) Scheduling must be carefully considered. For a successful project involving foreign travel, fieldwork must be completed before January of the student's graduating year. The Spring/Summer semester and the Fall Study Week are important opportunities for fieldwork abroad.
- 4) The feasibility of projects involving foreign travel must be carefully considered. Access to interview subjects and locations can be difficult, and language may present additional challenges. Issues of health and safety must also be addressed. Any student considering foreign travel must discuss the idea with their supervisor before making a commitment.

**\*\*During the COVID crisis, even domestic travel may pose significant risks. Please consider alternatives when at all possible.\*\***

## Publication

No project that is substantially the same as something that has previously been published or submitted for publication will be accepted. In this connection, "substantially the same" means based on the same, or most of the same, research. Students are encouraged to submit their projects for publication after they have been approved by the supervisor and second reader. If a student's project has been accepted for publication, it cannot be published prior to the final submission date of the project, Friday, April 23, 2021.