

WHAT IS THE SENIOR THESIS PROJECT?

All Communication Arts and Theater majors must complete COMRT 601 (Thesis Seminar) prior to registering for the Senior Project. COMRT 601 counts for one course credit, and helps you prepare your project proposal, compile an annotated bibliography, and defend the soundness of your plan before an academic committee. **COMRT 601 must be taken in the second semester (Spring) of your Junior year.**

COMRT 602/603 (4 units) also known as the Senior Thesis Project is required by all Communication Arts /Theater majors as an academic requirement towards graduation. You must register for the Senior Thesis Project and have your add card signed by the Department Chair.

If you are a double major, please make sure that you register for the Senior Project with both departments. You would also need to verify with your Project advisor in each department, what the pre-requisites are, so you have completed these before you begin the assignment.

You should also have completed the Committee Assignment sheet during COMRT 601, which results in your being assigned a First and Second Reader for the project.

If you miss taking COMRT 601 (Thesis Seminar) because of the semester abroad program, your academic advisor will guide you on how to complete and submit the Thesis proposal and have a committee formed before you begin the project. Your advisor will also make arrangements to adjust the one credit requirement for COMRT 601 on your transcript.

The Senior Thesis Project allows the realization of the department's mission, which is to encourage "students to develop habits of engaged citizenship, thoughtful professionalism, and a meaningful private life." The theoretical/creative thesis project allows you to make the connections between your lives in the classroom and your future goals after graduation. The finished project, be it a critical analysis, a theoretical/historical investigation, a video production, or a performance piece, empowers you to put your ideas to the test and develop high-quality work that can open the doors to graduate school or a future career.

Successful completion of the Senior Thesis Project consists of the submission of a written research document and/or the viewing of a video production/stage performance. There is also an oral defense before the project committee that counts towards the final grade, and involves a formal seven to ten-minute presentation made by the candidate, followed by a Q&A session.

GETTING STARTED:

It is often useful to look back at research papers/projects you may have produced for your classes, and see whether any of these offer the potential to be developed into a Senior Thesis Project. It is a mistake to undertake a project about which you know very little or nothing at all, and which you will have to therefore learn about from scratch. Choose a topic that interests you and that you would like to spend time and effort studying. Don't make the mistake of selecting a project just because it would look good on the resume.

Some students have found it helpful to peruse past projects done by previous students. The faculty has selected sample projects that they consider to be strong examples of good work. These are available with the Department Secretary, Samantha Stephens, in Arter 102. You may look at them during regular office hours (8am-noon; 1.30pm-4pm) on weekdays.

Make it a point during your career as a student to familiarize yourself with faculty and their research. Faculty can provide research direction, mentoring, and information about academic and career resources. Often, one-on-one meetings with a faculty member allow you to assess whether this person would be useful on your Thesis Project committee.

PRE-REQUISITES:

The Thesis Seminar (COMRT 601) is offered only once during an academic year (in the spring semester) so it is mandatory that you take it by the end of your Junior year in order to begin work on the Thesis project. COMRT 601 is offered as a Credit/No Credit one-unit course, and usually meets once a week during a scheduled class period. During the course of the Thesis Seminar, you will develop a tentative research question and argument, research the topic and prepare an annotated bibliography of academic sources, refine your thesis statement, and prepare a comprehensive proposal and bibliography for the Senior Thesis Project. You will also have the opportunity to meet and discuss your ideas with faculty from your area, and request specific faculty to serve as committee members for the project.

TAILORING THE DOCUMENT TO SUIT YOUR AUDIENCE

Your Senior Thesis Project should be considered a work that showcases your scholarly and creative skills, and which you can excerpt as a sample to accompany your graduate school or work application. Therefore, while preparing the Senior Project you need to keep the target audience for the finished project in mind. While all Communication Arts/Theater projects are evaluated by a common standard of academic rigor, individual endeavors will reflect different goals and aims. Once you have decided what it is your project seeks to achieve decide the audience you are writing/producing this senior project thesis for. Is your primary audience an academic audience, the business and professional world, or a larger public? It is time therefore to think beyond your immediate audience of faculty readers on the committee and consider anyone else this document/performance may be intended for.

All documents, regardless of their intended audience, are expected to include:

- 1) An introduction that establishes the importance and contribution of your study to the field of communication/theater, and to the existing literature in that area;
- 2) a literature review that summarizes the key research findings or major academic perspectives on your topic and therefore provides the context for the argument you are making;
- 3) a description of the methodology and theoretical perspectives used to inform the project. Methodological approaches could take the form of an historical investigation, an ethnographic inquiry, sampling/surveying/interviewing subjects, genre analyses, production studies, or textual critiques, among others;
- 4) a section analyzing and interpreting your study, project, or creative performance;
- 5) a reporting of results, summary of your argument, or presentation of your creative product;
- 6) a conclusion that addresses what your work is contributing to our understanding of the topic, what are its limitations, and what are the future directions that such an investigation could take.

THE ACADEMIC THESIS

Writing for an academic audience means that your project could be submitted in part or as a whole for presentation at a research conference like The National Communication Association convention, or the Mid-America Theater conference, where you would be presenting your ideas to other scholars in the field. The purpose of this type of study is to demonstrate your grasp of the research done on your topic and your ability to participate in that inquiry in an informed and critical manner. Those interested in graduate studies would most naturally choose this audience for your study. However, you might choose it for different reasons as well. The resources you utilize will derive mainly from academic books and peer-reviewed journals; your research processes will mirror the tools and techniques that are modeled in published research. You can, at the end of the process, turn a chapter from your project into a paper that can be presented at an academic conference, with the help of your faculty.

It is important that for the purpose of the Senior Project, all theory must be derived from primary sources (original books/articles by the theorist).

THE BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL THESIS

Writing for a business and professional audience means that your project may be used to improve or achieve the communication goals of organizations, groups, or communities. These may range from corporate organizations or campus agencies to non-profit organizations or activist groups. Some examples include but are not limited to: local media organizations, educational systems, community theater groups, sub-cultures, public issue advocacy efforts or grass roots efforts. It is important that you decide your approach to such a study. Are you going to be diagnosing an organizational problem that you can “fix”, or are you going to use the group as a case-in-point that allows you to further an argument about strategic communication? Students interested in going directly into communication-related careers after graduation may want to consider this option.

Very often internships offer students the opportunity to work closely with an organization and gather the material towards developing such a project. In other instances, you may notice an interesting phenomenon, or even a lack of a particular resource, so that the finished product is aimed towards a particular organization or industry and perhaps could be used by them. It is important for the credibility of such a project to integrate high quality research and analysis although the emphasis is different from an academic study. Writing for a business and professional audience usually means that your work will offer pragmatic solutions to an existing problem, advocate new plans or policies that the organization might consider adopting, or identify the existing merits of a program that the rest of the industry may benefit from. Examples of such a project would include designing an organizational website to achieve specific goals, developing a social marketing campaign, redefining the work-culture of a specific site, or finding ways to profile an exemplary case to create a new industry standard.

THE CREATIVE/ANALYTIC THESIS

Finally, you may elect to conduct a study that has a creative and analytic component. Selecting this option means that the general public could view your project. Examples would include a video production or a stage performance. Apart from the creative component of your project you are also required to produce a written document that explains the academic agenda of such an undertaking.

The form your study might take is as follows:

Video + Analysis

Performance + Analysis

A creative project will involve the same elements of the research process as a traditional thesis project. The only difference is that your research questions will be answered best through the creation and analysis of some kind of text. In addition, as part of the discovery process, you would discuss the choices you made in creating the performance/video, the reasons why you made them, and (where possible) some measure of evaluation of the response or effectiveness of the performance/video. For example, in the case of a theater performance, you might hold a discussion with the audience after the show. You would then record, summarize and interpret this audience evaluation and include it in your thesis discussion/evaluation section. The two options are explained in greater detail below.

THE ROLE OF YOUR PROJECT ADVISOR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The faculty role is to guide you and provide you with feedback as you finish the Senior Thesis Project. However, this is not a class assignment or term paper and so a lot of the initiative and work has to come from your end. Keep in mind that this project is meant to demonstrate your capability to do independent research and critical thinking and writing. Therefore, turning in chapters and the final project on time, meeting with committee members on a regular basis, and scheduling the oral defense are your responsibility, and not that of your Project Advisor (First Reader) or the committee.

You will request faculty from the department to act as your Project Advisor (First Reader) and Second Reader. This is usually accomplished a semester before you start work on your final project (Spring semester of your Junior Year). Both readers are usually selected because they can offer you expertise and guidance on the topic and area that you wish to study. The role of the Project Advisor is to give you direction to finesse your topic and research efforts, to do close-readings of individual chapters, and provide you with critical feedback that will make the project a stronger one. The second reader may offer to do close-readings of chapters as well, but usually provides assistance in the form of his/her expertise as the project advances.

The selection process for the Project Advisor (First Reader) and the Second Reader is decided at the end of COMRT 601.

The Department will assign you a Third Reader (also typically from the Department). The third reader does not participate in the process of developing the Senior Thesis Project. S/he serves on the defense board as an objective reader and evaluator of the final product and its presentation.

In some cases, where the project is interdisciplinary and requires input outside of the Communication/Theater field, the second reader may be a faculty member selected by the student from an appropriate department, with the approval of the Department Chair and the Project Advisor.

WHAT SENIOR THESIS PROJECTS HAVE OTHERS DONE?

Samantha Stephens, the Department Secretary, in the main office (Arter 102) maintains a list of the past Senior Thesis Projects. You may consult this list to look up a document that closely resembles what you are attempting to do either in terms of the subject or the methodological approach. It is a good idea to review the document with faculty on your committee so they can point out the project's strengths and weaknesses. Samantha Stephens also has a list of documents that were considered strong samples from the various fields (media, rhetoric & performance studies, theater, video production). You may request these and go through them during regular office hours. Videos can be accessed by request through Professor Keeley.

RESEARCH RESOURCES:

Apart from the books and journals housed at Pelletier Library, you can also access electronic journals through the [college database system](#). If titles are unavailable at Pelletier Library or through the electronic databases, you can use the interlibrary loan system. A comprehensive list of the important journals in your field/track are listed on the COMRT 601 website.

Narrowing the Scope of Your Research:

If you had to select three key terms that would serve as database search terms for your finished project, what would these be?

This will give you an indication of the chief concepts that are crucial to your argument, and therefore the areas you should be researching for the conceptual background for your project.

It is a good idea to make an appointment with a research librarian and discuss your project, so that they can show you where to look for material pertinent to your research. However, do not restrict your research to the Pelletier library database/catalog system.

Also try:

- Amazon.com and University Press websites (University of Chicago Press, Oxford University Press, University of Iowa Press, Univ. of California Press, NYU Press, etc.), as well as reputed publishing house websites such as Francis & Taylor and SAGE.
- When you find a good source, check the bibliography for additional references. This applies to academic journal articles as well.
- You can order books and journal articles via interlibrary loans (at Pelletier library) for \$1 each. The items usually take two weeks to arrive, and you can keep them for two weeks, renewable once. You will need the name of the book/article/journal, author's name, Publisher and place of Publication, Year of publication, and ISBN#. These details can be located on amazon.com for books (select link "Additional Product Details" when you locate your book choice on this site).
- Direct interviews with personnel at the corporations you are investigating; researchers who have written on the subject, members of the target group under study. This may be done via phone/e-mail, but requires time to set up. It is vital that you have a ready question list when you contact such sources. Also be prepared to provide a fax number to have the information returned ASAP, and to ask for one, should a phone interview or e-mail chat be denied.
- Examples of music videos, advertising campaigns, documentaries, reviews, historical documents, etc. that you plan to analyze for the project.
- Remember that while there is no prescribed number of sources that you should use for the project, you must not depend upon just one or two sources for a chapter. That is too narrow a range.
Your credibility rests upon the range of sources that best showcase the fact that you have done your homework selecting evidence, and that you have examined current critical work as well as sufficient theory in establishing this.
- You should use a wide range of sources that include academic books and journal articles, newspaper/magazine reports, credible online sources, videos, etc.
- When using theory, remember to cite from primary sources (Foucault writing about his ideas, NOT someone writing about Foucault's ideas).

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE THESIS PROJECT:

1. The Class of '39 Senior Project Fund

Students can request up to a maximum of \$250 to fund research and travel costs towards completion of their projects. Detailed applications outlining the project and including a budget must be submitted in writing via e-mail to Dean Linda DeMeritt (through her Assistant, Sonie Esterly). The faculty advisor on the project also needs to send a letter of approval to the Dean. The funds cannot be used towards costs of audio or videotapes, photocopying or binding documents, or purchase of books.

2. The Betsy Dotson, Esquire, Experiential Learning Fund

The purpose of this scholarship is to support experiential learning opportunities in Washington D.C. This includes attendances at conferences and seminars; participation in internships; senior project research; and tuition for enrollment in special courses. The funds cannot be used towards tuition costs at the American University for the semester program sponsored through the Allegheny College International Office.

No student may receive more than one award in any given semester. The summer is considered part of the spring semester. Subsequent awards may be granted in additional years, provided that the recipient continues to meet the conditions of eligibility and ample funds are available.

Awards range from \$200-\$2000, with priority being given to: a) female political science majors, (b) male/female social science majors, and (c) male/female students in any field of study. Applications are available in the ACCEL office located on the 2nd floor of Reis Hall.

3. You can also inquire at ACCEL for other funding sources, and check with the Department to see if any additional money is available.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS:

Human Subjects Review

Your project or thesis may involve questioning or surveying others. Federal guidelines exist to protect human subjects in research or experimentation. Any time your work involves human subjects, you must get clearance for your project, which is a time-consuming process and involves paperwork. Consult your advisor for guidance in this matter.

Statistics Consultants

Will some sort of survey or statistical analysis be a part of your project? If so, make sure that you have taken the appropriate coursework and have a faculty member who is well-versed in statistics (from the Psychology or Economics departments) supervise you for this part of the project. You should consult with your project advisor before selecting a methodology or taking outside help.

Writing Resources

Check out the resources and seek the assistance of writing tutors at the Allegheny College [Learning Commons](#). Your finished document must be free of spelling and grammatical errors and well organized around a central argument.

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION OF THE SENIOR THESIS PROJECT:

Consult your Project Advisor (First Reader) for the final date when the Project document must be turned in to the Department. This date cannot be moved around, so if your document is not in the hands of the Department Secretary (Samantha Stephens in Arter 102) by 4pm of that day, you will receive a reduced grade on the Project.

Penalty for late submissions due to exceptional circumstances:

It is required that you turn in your Senior Thesis Projects on time. However, if there is an exceptional circumstance that prevents you from doing so, please understand that your final project grade is reduced by a full letter grade every 24 hours.

Thus, if your final grade was a B but you turned the COMP in 48 hours late, your grade is reduced to a D.

Late submissions are considered on a case-by-case basis by the Department.

The final draft of your document should be in the College Print Shop (basement of Oddfellows Building) at least two days prior to the due date.

One copy of your final document goes to the main office (to Sam, the Dept. Secretary) by the due date indicated on the semester calendar. In addition, you must provide copy for each for your first and second readers. Total # of copies = 3.

If you are using the College Print Shop, the Department will cover the charges for these 3 copies.

You can also choose to use *Staples* at your own cost to print the three copies, if you feel you are going to be working until the last minute.

In either case, you should consult with either the Print Shop or *Staples* to find out what their cut-off period is for getting the job done on time. Also keep in mind that mechanical failures, computer/disk problems, etc. do not constitute an excuse for turning in the final document late.

The format of the document will be discussed during COMRT 601, and you may consult prior samples of Senior Thesis Projects to see how this is done.

THE ORAL DEFENSE:

The day that the Senior Thesis Project is due, is also the day that the Department posts the sign-up sheet that you will use to arrange your Oral defense date and time.

This sheet is posted on the wall of the main office foyer in Arter 102. It indicates the schedules of the COMRT faculty, and the days and times that they are available.

- Find a one-hour slot when all three committee members are free, and sign your name in this slot against all three names.
- Please e-mail the committee members and confirm that this is okay with them.
- Next, arrange a room where you will have the Defense: typically this may be Arter 107, Arter 1 (greenroom), or your Advisor's office. If you require technical equipment, you should reserve Arter 111.
- To reserve Arter 107, sign up on the classroom reservation sheet that is posted on the inside wall near the door to that classroom.
- To reserve Arter 1, please consult with Samatha Stephens, the Department Secretary, and sign up on the reservation sheet in Arter 102.

- To reserve Arter 111, please seek your Advisor's help, since a faculty member must complete the online reservation form.

Typically, the Oral Defense lasts an hour. You will begin with a 7-10 minute presentation on your Project, followed by questions from the faculty. The format of this is outlined in the guidelines to the Oral Presentation for the Senior Thesis Project.

The dress code is semi-formal. This means a full-sleeved shirt, trousers, and dress shoes for men, and shirt with long skirt/formal trousers for women.

GRADING CRITERIA FOR THE SENIOR THESIS PROJECT:

You are graded on the basis of the final product (document and/or creative project) and how you perform at your oral defense. Your thesis advisor cannot give you an estimate of what your final grade will be since this is jointly decided by the committee. S/he can however give you an assessment of whether the written document and/or creative production are up to par or lacking. By the time you submit the final document you should have a clear self-assessment of whether your work stands by itself or whether you will have to account for some of the gaps during your Oral presentation.

Each member on the committee submits a grade based upon the document and or/creative work, as well as the oral defense. An average of the three grades is used to determine the final grade for the project.

Should a student receive a failing grade, s/he will not be able to graduate and will be required to re-take the Senior Thesis Project in the next semester and successfully complete it in order to receive their degree.

PRESENTING YOUR WORK TO THE PUBLIC:

You may consider reworking a part of your Senior Thesis Project for presentation at an academic conference where you can obtain valuable feedback from others in your field. This is invaluable experience in preparing you for graduate school, or just getting you to feel confident about presenting your ideas in public. You should consult with your thesis advisor and other faculty on suitable conferences that encourage undergraduate participation.

The University of Waterloo also has a useful [website](#) (arranged by discipline) of scholarly societies that sponsor such conferences. If you would like to have your research considered for publication, there are undergraduate academic journals to which you can submit your work.

In addition, there are film festivals, theater competitions, and other venues where you can share your work or compete for awards and scholarships. A list of these is available with the faculty you will be working with.