

Romancing the Capstone: Models for Successful Completion of the Final Project or Thesis -- 2013 Chicago AGLSP Workshop

Problems: 1) time management; 2) preparation and skills; 3) inconsistent faculty advising

Preparation Before the Project/Thesis

- Introductory/academic skills course
 - Develops skills useful for project
 - Anticipates and addresses specifics of the project
- Pre-project course or workshop
 - Helps students conceptualize the project and create the project proposal
 - Features sample proposals and projects, plus advice from those who are finishing projects
 - Programs with two-semester projects (first semester for research, proposal) report success
- Formal project proposal with specific requirements
 - Specific requirements (such as central question or tentative thesis, statement of method, writing plan) help students focus on academically significant goals
 - Other requirements can situate the project/thesis within the existing scholarly conversation (review of literature, bibliography, potential contribution to existing scholarship) and/or within the student's GLS career (degree plan).
 - Faculty need clear sense of GLS standards, goals – and to take their roles as advisors and/or gatekeepers seriously, sending back proposals that are unclear, unfocused or do not meet academic standards.

Alternatives

- Some programs offer different tracks (e.g. academic, creative) to better fit student needs and abilities.
- Some programs offer a non-thesis track in which the thesis is replaced by a portfolio of work; one program offers a non-thesis track in which the student takes an additional 3-credit course.

Support During the Project/Thesis

- Faculty advisor: Most students work on projects under the guidance of a faculty advisor, whose role is crucial to successful completion
- Project seminar or colloquium:
 - Some programs feature a weekly seminar apart from their advisor's tutelage that offers opportunities for oral presentation, faculty and/or peer writing feedback and expert research or writing advice
 - Other programs offer a similar colloquium that meets just 1-3 times/sem.
- Student work groups: Program facilitates opportunities for student peer support
- Writing assistance: Student access to a writing

Challenges

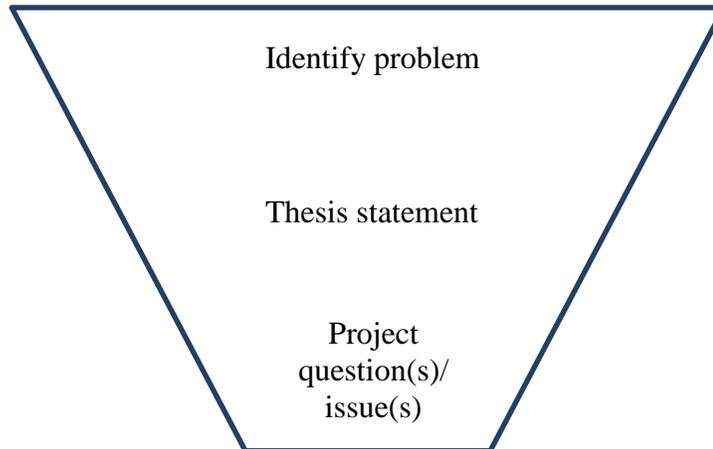
- Effective models – such as the two-semester project or thesis – can be challenging to sustain given faculty availability, limited program resources and other institutional issues.
- Strategies that work are often not built into the structure of the program but depend on the committed efforts of individual directors and faculty, who can burn out or move on to other responsibilities.

ROAD MAP FOR MLS THESIS PROJECT

STEPS

CHAPTERS

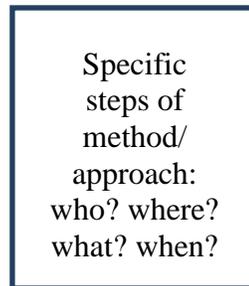
1. Identify the problem
 Formulate thesis statement
 Define project question(s) or issue(s) that the scholarly or creative project will address



1. Introduction/Literature Review:
 Provides background for thesis statement and provides motivation for project question(s)/ issue(s)

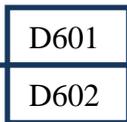
Answers question: WHY?

2. Design method/approach that will allow you to address the project question(s)/issue(s)

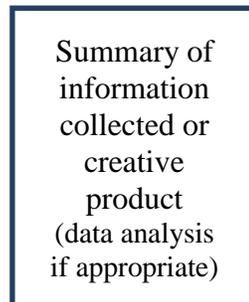


2. Method/Approach:
 Provides precise description of how project question(s)/ issue(s) will be addressed.

Answers question: HOW?



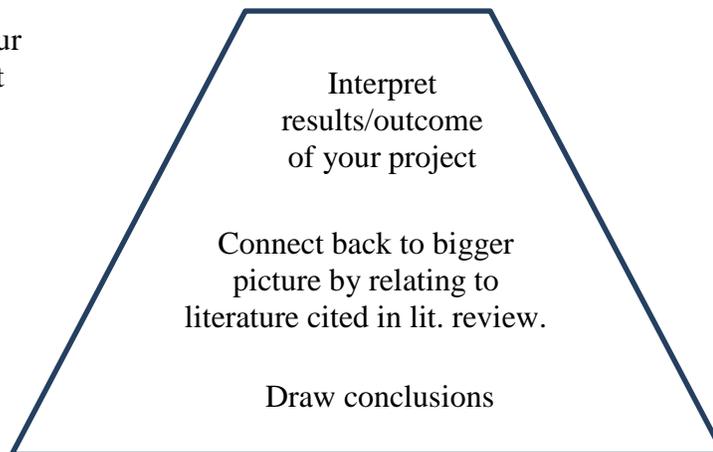
3. Summarize/analyze information collection to determine the validity of the project questions(s) or discuss and present creation of creative product.



3. Results/Outcomes:
 Describes what you found or produced.

Answers question: WHAT DID YOU FIND?

4. Interpret the outcomes of your work and place it in the context of the literature.



4. Interpretation/Conclusions:
 Explains outcomes, puts them in context, and provides take-home message.

Answers question: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Note: This road map provides a suggested framework for an MLS thesis project. Every project is different and may vary from this road map as appropriate.

[This page courtesy Debbie Finkel - Indiana Univ. Southeast]