

# HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

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School of Communication

MASTER OF ARTS IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

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## MASTER'S THESIS HANDBOOK 2020-2021\*

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This handbook is a work in progress, so be sure to consult your adviser and the NQSC graduate director about thesis specifics.

\*Last updated 04/07/20.

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## MASTER'S THESIS CHECKLIST – STUDENT

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### ***Prior to beginning the first semester of your Master's Thesis:***

- Select faculty adviser and topic.
- Submit appointment of chair form to NQSC graduate director and Norcross Graduate School (due before registering for Master's Thesis hours).
- Submit signed thesis registration form to enroll in appropriate course sections in the coming semester (do this before each semester of thesis work).

### ***During the thesis development semester(s) of your Master's Thesis (while enrolled in COM 5900, 5910, and 5920):***

- Work with advisor to refine project idea and complete necessary research.
- Identify committee members and submit appointment of committee form to NQSC graduate coordinator and Norcross Graduate School (due at least two weeks before proposal defense).
- Write proposal.
- Schedule proposal defense with all committee members. The proposal can be defended during any of three development course credits, but it cannot be defended in the same semester as the final project defense. This means that you cannot register for COM 5930 (thesis defense) until you have successfully defended your proposal. The proposal must be defended prior to the last day of regular classes of the proposal semester.

The proposal defense will result in 1 of 3 decisions:

- a. The proposed project meets the standards (no changes or minor changes).
- b. Approval to proceed once specified changes are submitted and approved by the supervisor and other members of the committee.
- c. Proposal rejected.

### ***After your proposal is approved:***

- Submit IRB application before the end of the exam week of the proposal semester.
- Begin work on the master's thesis. Students need to work closely with their master's thesis adviser and submit continuing drafts of the project for approval. The project cannot be defended until the master's thesis adviser has reviewed all portions and agreed that it meets the project requirements.

- Apply for graduation.

### ***During the thesis defense (5930) semester of your master's thesis:***

- Schedule master's thesis defense. Coordinate a two-hour time with your committee. To allow sufficient time to make revisions before the Norcross Graduate School's final submission dates, Spring defenses should be completed by the first week of April, Summer defenses by the first week of July, and Fall defenses by the first week of November.
- Schedule a room for the defense. Work with campus concierge to schedule a room (NQSC 109—the screening room—is a commonly used room).
- Submit *Master's Thesis Defense Schedule Form* to the graduate school two weeks prior to the defense.
- Post a *defense announcement* needs on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the NQSC building two weeks prior to the defense.
- Submit master's thesis materials (manuscript and production materials) to committee and NQSC graduate director at least one week prior to defense.
- Defend thesis.
- Make committee's corrections to thesis.
- Format project according to NQSC and Norcross Graduate School standards.
- Electronically submit a Word and pdf copy of the master's thesis to Norcross Graduate School for format check and approval (approximate deadlines: Spring--April 15; Summer--July 15; Fall--November 15. Check the official deadlines with the Norcross Graduate School). The review checklist must be included indicating that you have read and adhered to the format guidelines.
- Submit closure report to IRB. Provide copy of the report to adviser.
- Make Norcross Graduate School corrections and resubmit for final approval.
- Submit a final electronic copy of the master's thesis to Norcross Graduate School for binding.
- Provide electronic copies of the final, approved master's thesis to all committee members. Provide bound copies to any members who want them.
- Prepare a research poster for the Graduate Research Symposium (typically held in late April) to present your work.

## MASTER'S THESIS CHECKLIST – ADVISER

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### Throughout the thesis process:

The student and faculty adviser should meet frequently to ensure the student stays on track. The adviser is the student's mentor through the thesis process and professional development.

### Prior to the beginning of the student's first semester of master's thesis work:

The *appointment of adviser form* and *thesis registration form* must be submitted to the graduate school in order to enroll in thesis hours.

### During the student's thesis development semester(s) (while enrolled in 5900, 5910, & 5920):

The adviser will work with the student during preparation of the proposal. The adviser must sign off on the proposal manuscript before the student schedules a proposal defense or sends the manuscript to the rest of the committee.

The *appointment of committee form* needs to be submitted to the graduate school two weeks prior to the proposal defense (defense must be completed by last day of regular classes for proposal semester).

*Proposal defense evaluation form* needs to be submitted to the NQSC graduate director.

If the student successfully defends the proposal, the professor enters a "CR" as the grade for all enrolled thesis development sections at the end of the semester (5900, 5910, 5920).

### IF the student does not complete the proposal or if the committee DOES NOT approve the proposal:

The adviser enters an "IN" as the grade for ALL enrolled thesis credits. Then:

a. If the student has not yet enrolled in all three thesis development credits (e.g., he/she only enrolled in 5900 and 5910), the student can enroll in the final development credit (5920) in the next semester, complete the proposal, and enroll in the thesis defense credit (5930) during the semester after that.

b. If the student has already enrolled in all three thesis development credits, he/she will have to go into continuation, enrolling in COM 5921 during the next semester. If the student successfully defends the proposal during the continuation semester, he/she can enroll in the

thesis defense credit (5930) during the semester after that.

Once the student's proposal is approved, the adviser will submit a change of grade form for previous IN grades in all thesis development sections. The grades should be changed to CR upon approval of the proposal.

### During the student's defense (5930) semester:

The *scheduling of the thesis defense form* needs to be turned into the graduate school two weeks prior to the defense. The defense should be scheduled to allow sufficient time for revisions before the grad school's thesis deposit deadline.

The *defense announcement* needs to be posted in the department two weeks prior to the defense.

The Norcross *defense evaluation form* needs to be turned in within 24 hours of the defense.

The completed NQSC *project evaluation form* needs to be turned in to the NQSC graduate director.

Official signature pages will need to be signed (these will be provided by the graduate school).

### IF the committee DOES NOT approve the thesis:

The adviser enters a grade of "IN" at the end of the semester and the student will have to enroll in 5931 (continuation) the next semester. In this case, the professor submits a change of grade form for 5930 after successful completion of 5931 (resulting in a successful project defense). If a student goes into 5931 continuation, he/she must successfully defend his/her project at the end of that semester or he/she will be terminated from the program.

### After committee approval of the master's thesis:

The student submits electronic copies of project to the grad school by the deposit deadline.

After receiving final approval from the graduate school, the adviser enters a "CR" as the grade at the end of the semester. If the project was evaluated as exceeding expectations in all areas and accepted with no more than minor revisions, the professor should enter a grade of "HP" (high pass) to indicate that the student earned distinction.

Ensure that the student provides final copies to committee members and prepares a research poster for the Graduate Research Symposium.

## THE MASTER'S THESIS DESCRIPTION

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The master's thesis is the culminating experience for NQSC graduate students. This project provides students the opportunity to integrate the knowledge and skills acquired through their coursework and apply these principles and ideas to a particular strategic communication problem or a situation similar to that found in the professional workplace. The project must:

- represent high standards of scholarly and theoretical inquiry
- demonstrate technical mastery
- demonstrate research proficiency
- have important implications for the field of strategic communication.

Although the topics will be determined by a student's interest, the purpose of the project is to develop and test messages that address a communication problem. Students will need to build on the skills they learned during their coursework to analyze their target audience, design messages aimed at the audience, develop the campaign materials, and analyze if the campaign messages achieved the intended effect. This project will be a valuable addition to a professional portfolio and suitable for submission to academic conferences.

### **Registration:**

Students can register for project hours after completing 18 hours of graduate coursework. The master's thesis requires four hours taken across at least two semesters. Up to three project hours can be taken concurrently.

- COM 5900 – Master's thesis development I (1 credit hour)
- COM 5910 – Master's thesis development II (1 credit hour)
- COM 5920 – Master's thesis development III (1 credit hour)
- COM 5930 – Master's thesis defense (1 credit hour)

These four hours cannot all be completed in the same semester. The hours can be distributed in multiple ways: 2/2; 3/1; 1/1/1/1.

The thesis **proposal** can be completed during any of the development sections (5900, 5910, 5920), but the proposal and the final **defense** (5930) cannot be completed in the same semester. The thesis defense must be completed in the student's final semester of graduate study. A student will not receive credit for the thesis development sections (5900, 5910, 5920) until his/her proposal is approved, and will not receive credit for the thesis defense section (5930) until he/she successfully defends the final thesis project.

If a student needs additional time to satisfy the requirements of a project component, he/she will register for the following 0-credit continuation courses (billed at a rate of ½ credit each):

- COM 5921 – Master's thesis development continuation. A student must enroll in this course if his/her proposal has not been completed or approved by the end of the semester in which he/she is enrolled in COM 5920.
- COM 5931 – Master's thesis defense continuation. A student must enroll in this course if

he/she does not successfully defend the thesis project during the semester in which he/she is enrolled in COM 5930.

NOTE – A student may enroll in a maximum of two semesters of continuation over the course of his/her project. If a student goes into 5931 continuation after a failed project defense, he/she must successfully redefend at the end of the semester following the failed defense or he/she will be terminated from the program.

NOTE – To register for project hours, a student must submit the Norcross Graduate School's Independent/Practicum/Thesis/Project Request Form directly to the graduate school (see Appendix).

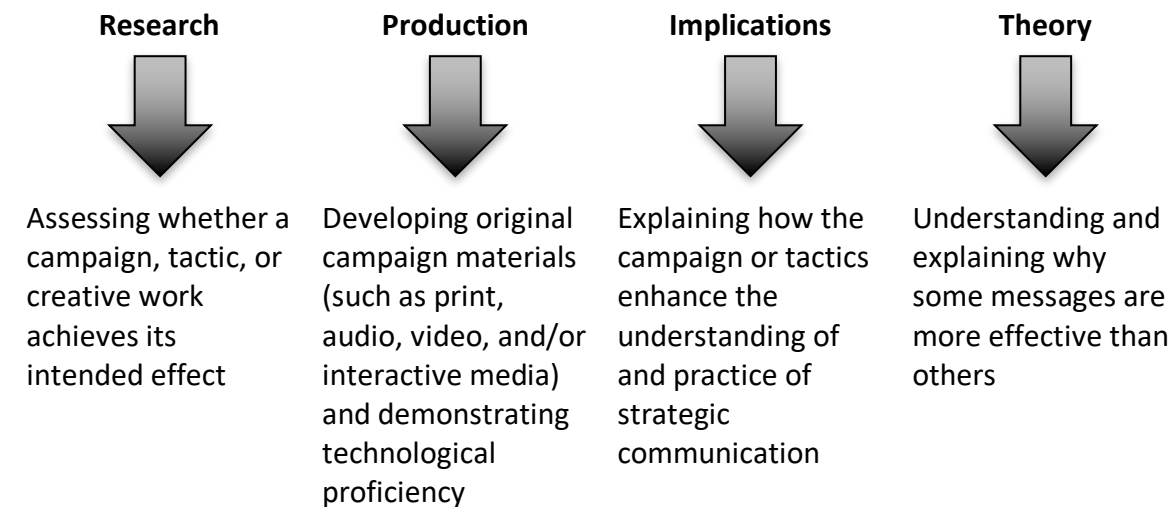
**Goals:**

- a. To identify and apply theories and principles of communication and message design for the purpose of solving problems
- b. To assess audience needs and design materials to meet those needs
- c. To develop professional quality campaign messages
- d. To implement a rigorous evaluation plan
- e. To demonstrate proficiency in message design and production
- f. To produce a professional quality final manuscript or creative project

## REQUIRED PROJECT COMPONENTS

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All master's theses must include these four components, related to the different areas of study in the Strategic Communication M.A. program:



While projects may emphasize certain components more than others (e.g. a research-heavy project with modest production elements, or a production-heavy project with a more modest

research component), all projects must address all four components. At the proposal phase, the committee will evaluate whether or not your project plan sufficiently addresses these components by using the following rubric.

**Project Proposal Components – In order for a proposal to be approved, it must:**

- Earn at least 18 total points across all categories
- Meet at least the minimum expectations in every category

	MINIMUM EXPECTATIONS		AVERAGE		EXCEPTIONAL
<b>RESEARCH</b>	<p><b>2 POINTS</b> Proposed research method is appropriate for the topic and will sufficiently assess the project’s goals. Method might require less time, effort, or analysis by the student than an average project. <i>Possible examples: Convenience online sample, convenience college student sample, one round of testing</i></p>	<b>4 PTS</b>	<p><b>6 POINTS</b> Viable choice of method that will require good methodological skills, and extensive and appropriate material. <i>Possible examples: College student sample recruited for specific targeted factors, targeted online sample, pre/post-testing not at same time.</i></p>	<b>8 PTS</b>	<p><b>10 POINTS</b> Ambitious method that involves hard to reach populations and/or multiple rounds of testing at different times (e.g., pre-post-post)</p>
<b>PRODUCTION ELEMENT(S)</b>	<p><b>2 POINTS</b> Project plan requires basic technical skill and includes at least some original elements. These might be combined with pre-made elements (photos, graphics, layout templates, etc.). <i>Possible examples: Brochures, flyers, social media posts, template-based websites or interactive media</i></p>	<b>4 PTS</b>	<p><b>6 POINTS</b> Project plan requires at least intermediate-level technical skills and includes all (or nearly all) original material created by the student. Project is ambitious in scope and makes creative use of software and equipment. <i>Possible examples: Podcasts, basic videos, photos/graphics involving significant editing/design, non-template websites or interactive media built by the student</i></p>	<b>8 PTS</b>	<p><b>10 POINTS</b> Project plan requires advanced technical skills and includes all original material created by the student. Project is exceptionally ambitious, exceeding a typical project in terms of length, complexity, and/or technical mastery required. <i>Possible examples: Highly produced podcast series, sophisticated video productions, complex websites or interactive media built by the student</i></p>
<b>TOPIC/ IMPLICATIONS</b>	<p><b>1 POINT</b> Topic is appropriate for the field, though somewhat conventional. Topic is appropriately limited. Project addresses a problem and builds on past research.</p>	<b>2 PTS</b>	<p><b>3 POINTS</b> Interesting and fresh research topic with implications for the field and a well-reasoned limiting of the topic. Proposal creatively approaches a problem and explains how the project will fill a gap.</p>	<b>4 PTS</b>	<p><b>5 POINTS</b> Genuinely challenging and innovative topic with significant implications for the field, accurately defined and well researched problem, adequate limiting of subject, fresh point of view. Presents a compelling argument for the broader significance or value of the project.</p>
<b>THEORY</b>	<p><b>1 POINT</b> Theoretical framework is clear and appropriate, if somewhat narrow. Assumptions and hypotheses are in line with the definition of the research problem, source material is sufficient, sources are used appropriately.</p>	<b>2 PTS</b>	<p><b>3 POINTS</b> Proposal demonstrates credible theoretical skills, viable starting point for the work, skillful use of concepts, well-argued discussion, appropriate and extensive sources.</p>	<b>4 PTS</b>	<p><b>5 POINTS</b> Proposal demonstrates deep knowledge of theories, well-reasoned theoretical starting point, clear and in-depth analytical approach, appropriate use of sources, extensive discussion. Synthesizes theories in a creative and original manner.</p>

## FINDING A TOPIC

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Some students enter the MA in Strategic Communication program with a well-defined topic. Others do not have a project topic or want to use their first year of the program to develop a topic. Whatever your situation, your topic should be something that strongly interests you. The project is a long process. When you pick a topic of great interest, you are more likely to be motivated to work and complete your project.

If you do not have a topic, meet with a faculty member to discuss various options. You can potentially enroll in an independent study or practicum to do background reading or pilot work on a study that you might want to use for your project.

If working with a client, the client must be a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, a low-profit limited liability organization with charitable or educational goals (L3C), or an organization that works for the betterment of the community. In exceptional circumstances, students can work with a for-profit organization, but the organization must provide reasonable compensation to the student. The project committee must approve all clients.

## SELECTING AN ADVISER\*

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\* Adapted from Karen Foss' academic relationship guide

Finding the right advisor (thesis committee chair) is an important step in successfully completing your master's thesis. A good advisor will mentor you through the campaign development process and provide you the assistance you need to succeed in graduate school.

All School of Communication faculty can serve on MA thesis committees, but only graduate faculty members (typically those with terminal degrees) can be advisers. A faculty member must have previously served as a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> committee member before serving as an adviser. Faculty are generally restricted to chairing a maximum of two student's committees at a time. Exceptions may be made in some circumstances with the approval of the graduate director.

Once you identify potential advisors, get to know them. Make sure they share your academic interests. Relationships take time to develop, so you should wait until the end of your second semester of graduate school to approach a potential adviser.

The type of relationship that each student needs with an advisor will differ. You may prefer to be given strong direction, to have frequent contact, and to be "checked up on". Others are more independent. Consider what kinds of feedback you prefer and how you like to interact, and make sure that your style and your adviser's style are compatible.

Once you've determined those faculty members with whom you would like to work, check to make sure they are available and interested in working with you on your master's thesis. Faculty may have commitments that prevent them from working with you.



## TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR ADVISER\*

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\*Adapted from Foss and Foss' handout *Asserting Agency to Create an Effective Relationship With Your Adviser*

Completing your master's thesis successfully is much easier if you have an effective interpersonal relationship with your advisor. These are some things you can do in terms of communication that will have a positive impact on the relationship you have with your advisor

**1. Ask Nicely.** If you have an established relationship with a potential adviser, you should have a sense of how to approach the discussion about working together on your project. This will be a lot of work for your adviser as well, so your request should be polite and thoughtful.

Requests should be made in person, NOT via email.

**2. Articulate Needs.** There are a number of areas where you should articulate your needs to your advisor, and it's perfectly appropriate for you to do so. For example, you should:

- Hold an extended conversation to work out the plan for your master's thesis.
- Discuss your advising relationship— work out together how often you will meet, how quickly your advisor will provide feedback on submissions, how you both will keep track of decisions, and expectations your advisor has for your behavior.
- Ask you advisor basic questions about the proposal and defense processes (deadlines, expecations, etc.). Ask your advisor to supply you with samples of good proposals and master's theses.

**3. Present yourself in the best light.** Advisors find very rough drafts frustrating and irritating. Show your respect for your advisor's time by giving him/her polished products whenever possible. Keep appointments and be on time. Respect the ground rules you and your advisor have established for the relationship.

**4. Accept Feedback.** Be attentive to the suggestions of your advisor. Disconnect your ego or self-esteem from the feedback. Your advisor is trying to help you be successful, and his/her feedback isn't a commentary on your worth. Ask questions when you don't understand something, and ask for examples if the feedback is vague.

**5. Show Appreciation.** The advising relationship is a reciprocal one. Just as you want to get needs met and have certain outcomes as a result of that relationship, so does your advisor. Advisors want to feel that they aren't giving and giving with nothing coming to them in return.

One way to show your appreciation is to do your best to follow your advisor's advice and guidelines. Another way is to express your appreciation explicitly to your advisor periodically. Thank you cards and notes are lasting tokens of appreciation.

## SELECTING A COMMITTEE

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By the end of the second or third semester of graduate study (including summer), a student will have selected a master's thesis adviser (committee chair) and a committee. The committee will be comprised of a minimum of three members:

- the committee chair (who must be a NQSC graduate faculty member),
- a second member of the NQSC graduate faculty,
- a third member who may be a member of the NQSC faculty, a HPU faculty member from another department, or an individual who works professionally in the student's area of concentration.

Students should look for committee members with complementary skills/expertise. For example, if the chair is primarily research-oriented, it would be a good idea to recruit a faculty member who specializes in production as a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> member. This way the student will have a diverse team to turn to for advice on various elements of the project.

It is the student's responsibility to ask specific committee members if they are willing to serve on the committee. Once the committee is selected, the Appointment of the Master's Thesis Committee Form should be submitted to the Director of the NQSC Master's Program.

Should a student wish to change the members of their graduate committee, they must submit a new Master's Thesis Committee Form. The committee chair, the outgoing committee member, and the incoming committee member must sign the form.

## COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

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### The Committee Chair

- Is the student's primary advisor in the process of completing the thesis project.
- Ensures all protocols are followed by the department, graduate school, and IRB.
- Ensures the student has been informed of all project deadlines and milestones.
- Approves the theoretical framework, research plan, and production plan.
- Reads, evaluates, critiques, and provides guidance for drafts of the project.
- Reviews drafts for honor code violations.
- Works with the committee to provide feedback for drafts and project progress.
- Works with the student to schedule the defense.
- Chairs the defense.
- Handles all paperwork related to evaluation and any necessary follow-up/corrections.
- Signs off on the graduate school formatting checklist submitted with the final draft.
- Ensures the student corrects, changes, or revises any suggestion as a result of the defense before submitting to the graduate office.
- Advises the student on the preparation of Graduate Research Symposium poster.
- Submits the final grade for the project course once the project has been approved by the graduate school.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Committee Members

- Provide ideas and suggestions for research or direction of project.
- Read, evaluate, critique, and provide guidance for drafts of the project as necessary.
- Read and evaluate the final draft.
- Participate in the defense of the project.
- Contribute to the knowledge of theoretical, research and/or production procedures as well as ensuring high quality written and production standards.
- Review drafts for honor code violations.

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## WRITING THE PROPOSAL

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Your proposal will describe the purposes of the project and the methods for accomplishing them. Writing a proposal is important because it forces you to be explicit about your plans and facilitates feedback from your committee members. Before asking the committee to review and approve your proposal, you must ask the chair of the committee to critique the proposal and then revise the proposal based on the chair's recommendations.

Your proposal should provide *sufficient detail and clarity* concerning the rationale, objectives, and methods for your project. As a general guideline, the text of the full proposal should be between 15-25 pages (excluding appendices). The proposal should be in APA style. Length of each section greatly depends on the particular topic and preferences of the adviser. Regardless of length, clarity and conciseness are strongly encouraged. Part of the master's thesis experience is to improve one's writing skills.

The specifics of the written proposal are outlined in the deliverables section below.

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## OBTAIN COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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After completing your proposal, you should provide all members a copy and allow them at least one week to review it before your scheduled proposal defense.

The start of the proposal defense includes an approximately 10-minute presentation about the project followed by a Q/A with the committee. Committee members may ask you to improve elements of the plan, and you may have to submit revisions until all committee members approve your proposal.

When the committee approves your proposal, they are essentially declaring that your project and methods for addressing your topic are acceptable, and you now have the "green light" to actually do the study. This "contract" between student and committee ensures that if the student completes the plan as outlined in a satisfactory way, he/she will pass. A student's

ability to successfully defend his/her final project is not linked to the outcome of the research analysis but is instead linked to the quality of the process.

With everyone on the same page about the planned direction of the project, students are more likely to meet the committee's expectations, and committee members are more likely to approve the master's thesis. In addition, students with well-developed proposals often find that many elements of the proposal can be used in the final project with little modification.

NOTE: The proposal cannot be defended in the same semester as the final project defense.

## OBTAIN HUMAN SUBJECT APPROVAL

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Regardless of the type of campaign project you will develop, if you are dealing with humans, you must submit a request for approval to High Point University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB monitors all research projects that use humans and ensures that all participants are informed of their rights. You must obtain human subject approval before starting on the research or evaluation component of the project. If you are using images or recordings in the production component, you will need to collect media release forms from all participants.

## TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

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THESIS MILESTONE	DEADLINE FOR COMPLETION
Find an advisor and register for the first credit of thesis development (COM 5900).	The semester prior to the beginning of thesis enrollment.
Form thesis committee, submit appointment of committee form.	At least two weeks prior to scheduling the thesis proposal defense
Defend proposal (can be completed during enrollment in COM 5900, 5910, or 5920).	The last day of regular classes in the proposal semester.
Submit IRB application.	The last day of exams in the proposal semester (after approval of proposal).
Enroll in the COM 5930 – Master's Thesis Defense	Student enrolls in this section during final semester of study. Proposal must be approved before enrolling.
Schedule thesis defense and book room for defense.	Approximately one month prior to defense.
Submit thesis defense schedule form to graduate school and post defense announcement on 3 <sup>rd</sup> floor of NQSC.	Two weeks prior to thesis defense
Submit master's thesis materials (manuscript and production materials) to committee and NQSC graduate director.	At least one week prior to thesis defense.
Thesis defense.	Spring semester = first week of April Summer semester = first week of July Fall semester = first week of November
Submit final revised manuscript to Norcross Graduate School for final approval.	Spring deadline = April 15 Summer deadline = July 15 Fall deadline = November 15
Submit closure report to IRB.	Before the end of the defense semester.
Prepare research poster for Graduate Research Symposium.	Date TBA, typically late April.

## MASTER'S THESIS DELIVERABLES – PART ONE: PROJECT PROPOSAL

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Your proposal document should include:

- Title page** Include the title of the master's thesis proposal, your name, degree sought, department, names of the supervisor and committee members, and date.
- Abstract** The one page abstract should not exceed 300 words.
- Rationale** Contains a statement of the problem issues to be addressed in the study.
- Literature** The review of relevant literature should provide an overview of the field and demonstrate that the student knows the area under investigation. This section should also provide supporting evidence concerning the rationale, statement of the problem and/or issues to be addressed by the present study.
- Objectives** This section describes the overall purpose, as well as the specific objectives of the present study. In some cases, the objectives may be formulated as research questions. In other cases, such as an evaluation project, the study may address program objectives and/or underlying assumptions. This section of the proposal often includes the researcher's hypotheses.
- Methods** Subsections typically include: study design; sample selection criteria, size, and sampling process; data collection procedures and instruments; and a description of data analysis techniques and statistical software programs to be used.
- Production** Describe your plan for the message production component of the project. Include specific information and visual examples of colors, typefaces, layouts, visual treatments, etc. For video projects, include scripts, outlines, and/or storyboards. Be as detailed as possible, including the identification of concerns.
- Time Line** Develop a reasonable time line for each phase of the project, including: pilot testing of instruments or procedures, design and fabrication, data collection, data analyses and interpretation, and write-up. Specify the anticipated term/year for final defense.
- Resources** Itemize all costs anticipated. Although master's thesis research is not typically funded, the School of Communication may provide some resources. Work this out with your supervisor or committee members in advance.
- References** For the proposal, this may include a list of references already obtained and cited in the literature review section, as well as a list of articles to be obtained (listed separately). Use APA format for references and proposal style.
- Appendices** Should contain supporting and descriptive materials, instruments, etc.

## MASTER'S THESIS DELIVERABLES – PART TWO: FINAL MANUSCRIPT

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Advisers will differ in their approaches to guiding a thesis, but the guide below should provide students a general overview of the written components.

### I. COVER PAGE

II. SIGNATURE PAGE – See sample in Appendix

III. TITLE PAGE – See sample in Appendix

### IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT PAGE

[IV-b. Dedication page (optional)]

### V. TABLE OF CONTENTS

### VI. LIST OF FIGURES

### VII. LIST OF TABLES

VIII. ABSTRACT – See sample in Appendix. The abstract should not exceed 300 words.

### IX. INTRODUCTION

In 2-3 pages, the introduction briefly summarizes the problem, significance, and purpose of the project. You can organize your intro with:

- **Opening** – Set the stage for the paper and put your topic in perspective.
- **Statement of the Problem** – Briefly explain the context of your problem statement, including a clear and succinct discussion of the conceptual or theoretical framework that undergirds your study.
- **Significance of the Study (Rationale)** – Use a persuasive rationale to justify the reason for your study and explain how this new knowledge will add to the field of knowledge that already exists on this topic.
- **Statement of Purpose** – Write a single sentence that defines the purpose of your study. Support this sentence with several elaborative paragraphs. Present persuasive arguments for why the problem is important enough to study. Explain how the problem relates to business, social or political trends by presenting data that demonstrates the scope and depth of the problem.

### X. REVIEW OF LITERATURE & RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The literature review elaborates on the ideas from your introduction. This section:

- Demonstrates your knowledge of the research problem and your understanding of the theoretical and research issues related to your research question(s).
- Shows your ability to critically evaluate, integrate, and synthesize relevant information.
- Provides new theoretical insights or develops a new model as the conceptual framework for your research.
- Convinces your reader that your proposed project will make a significant and substantial contribution to the literature and discipline.

Organize your review around ideas, not researchers. A review of literature is not simply a bunch of annotations of research papers; it's an argument about ideas leading to your study.

**Possible structure for a review of literature:**

- I. The interesting context or topic or theoretical framework
  - A. Define/history/importance
  - B. Prevalence
  - C. Challenges or dilemmas
- II. Variable one
  - A. Define/history
  - B. What do we know about this variable in general? Provide details about the most pertinent studies.
  - C. What do we know about this variable in your context? Provide details about the most pertinent studies.
- III. Variable two, etc.
- IV. What do we know about your variables together (if anything)
- V. Summarize the argument. Be sure it leads to your research questions and hypotheses.

**Theoretical Framework** – The theoretical framework must demonstrate an understanding of existing theories and concepts that are relevant to the topic and that will relate it to the broader implications of your project. Note who the key theorists are in the field who have conducted research on the problem you are investigating and, when necessary, the historical context that underpins the formulation of these theories.

**Research Questions and/or Hypotheses** – Your review of literature should have made a clear argument that justifies your RQ/Hypothesis and explains why you are examining these variables together in this content. If you have multiple Research Questions and Hypotheses, you will want to present each RQ/Hyp after you have created that argument. Thus, you might need to space out your RQ/Hyp.

Make a clear and careful distinction between the dependent and independent variables and be certain they are clear to the reader (but you don't have to say DV and IV).

**XI. DEVELOPMENT OF CAMPAIGN MATERIALS**

Provide an overview of the campaign materials you developed and tested in this project. You will likely need to include diagrams, pictures, screen shots, text of audio recordings, and other artifacts so that the reader understands your campaign approach.

You may also need to review key elements of the evaluation you are conducting. If you are assessing how to deliver campaign content (rather than just the effectiveness of various campaign materials), you review the other components as well.

**XII. METHOD**

The method section describes your basic research plan. It usually begins with brief introductory paragraphs that restate purpose and research questions. This section should contain sufficient information for the reader to determine whether your methodology was sound.

**Population and Sampling** – Who are your subjects? How and why did you select them? If available, outline the characteristics of the sample (by gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic

status, or other relevant group membership). Detail procedures followed to obtain informed consent and ensure anonymity and/or confidentiality. When a sample is drawn out of convenience, rationale and limitations must be clearly provided.

**Procedures** – Outline the general procedure for collecting the data, including survey administration procedures, interview, or observation procedures. If appropriate, discuss how you obtained access to your group. Provide a well thought-out rationale for your decision to use the design, methodology, and analyses you selected. Indicate the methodological steps you took to answer every question or to test every hypothesis illustrated in the Questions/Hypotheses section.

Confounding variables should be minimized by various kinds of controls or be estimated and taken into account by randomization processes (Guba, 1961). In the design section:

- Indicate the variables you attempted to control and how you attempted to control them, experimentally or statistically, and
- Indicate the variables you attempted to randomize, and the nature of the randomizing unit (students, grades, schools, etc.).

If your methods are complicated, it may be helpful to create a flowchart describing the procedures. You may also need to include images of your campaign and/or manipulations. Video stills, scripts, and print examples will help the reader understand your manipulations.

Disclose possible sources of error to the reader and explain what efforts were made to overcome them or take them into account in your analysis

**Instruments** – Outline the instruments (measures) you used to evaluate the effectiveness of your campaign or to test your approach. If instruments have previously been used, identify previous studies and findings related to reliability and validity. If instruments have not previously been used, explain how you tested their reliability and validity. In the latter case, a pilot study is nearly essential.

Include an appendix with a copy of the instruments used or the interview protocol followed. Also include sample items in the description of the instrument.

For a mailed survey, identify steps taken in administering and following up the survey to obtain a high response rate.

### **XIII. RESULTS**

You cannot just write about analysis and numbers and expect readers to understand. Your statistical information should be used to support a reader-friendly narrative.

**A. Description of the data categorization and analysis** – Present evidence that your study successfully set up the conditions for testing your hypotheses or answering your questions. Describe how you analyzed the data. If the results section is complicated or divided into several parts, you may wish to provide an overview of the section.

**B. Presenting the Findings** – Review in prose the hypothesis or the question you asked and the direction of the responses you hypothesized.

1. Provide the answer to your research question or hypothesis
2. Provide the statistical information.



3. Elaborate or qualify the overall conclusion, if necessary.

The general rule is to report the central findings first and then the more peripheral findings.

**Figures and Tables** – Unless a set of findings can be stated in one or two numbers, a figure or table summarizing the relevant data should accompany results that are sufficiently important to be stressed. Title and label figures/tables clearly and completely. Lead the reader through a table in the text itself – don't expect the reader to ferret out the information. For detailed information on figures and tables, see the *APA Publication Manual*.

**On Statistics** – Though an indication of the level of statistical significance should accompany every comparison between groups or relationship between variables, inferential statistics are not the heart of your narrative and should be subordinated to the descriptive results. Whenever possible, state a result first and then give its statistical significance. In no case should you ever give the statistical test alone without interpreting it substantively (effect size).

#### **XIV. DISCUSSION**

Organize the Discussion from the specific to the general: your findings to the literature, to theory, to practice. Discuss everything, but be concise, brief, and specific.

A possible organization for your discussion section is:

- A. Opening paragraphs
- B. Address hypotheses/variables
- C. Link results back to your literature review and theoretical framework
- D. Limitations
- E. Future research
- F. Conclusions

Indicate how your research will refine, revise, or extend existing knowledge in the area under investigation. Note that such refinements, revisions, or extensions may have substantive, theoretical, or methodological significance.

Most studies have two potential audiences: practitioners and professional peers. Statements relating the research to both groups are in order. When thinking about the significance of your study, ask yourself the following questions:

- What will results mean to the theoretical framework that framed the study?
- What suggestions for subsequent research arise from the findings?
- Will results influence programs, methods, and/or interventions?
- Will results contribute to the solution of educational problems?
- Will results influence policy decisions?
- What will be improved or changed as a result of the proposed research?
- How will results of the study be implemented, and what innovations will come about?

#### **XV. REFERENCES**

#### **XVI. APPENDICES**

Include evaluation measures. Include copies of all print materials developed. Include screen captures of any video/web/multimedia materials developed. You will also submit electronic copies of all production materials along with your report (see below).

## MASTER'S THESIS DELIVERABLES – PART THREE: PRODUCTION MATERIALS

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Students are expected to produce professional-caliber production materials as part of their master's thesis project. These materials could be developed to test with audiences during your research phase, or they could be final client deliverables that apply the findings from your research and evaluation.

Possible modes of production include:

- Print/digital communication (posters, brochures, infographics, photos, etc.)
- Audio (radio ads, podcasts, etc.)
- Video (PSAs, documentary, training videos, etc.)
- Interactive (websites, apps, games, etc.)

All production approaches are not created equal. The expectations will vary based on the ambition of the student's other project elements. A student who has a very challenging and ambitious research/evaluation plan might be able to take a more modest approach with his/her production materials (for example, a print package and graphics/photos for a social media campaign). A student who wishes to create more ambitious production elements (like a podcast series or an elaborately produced video) might be able to take a more scaled down approach to evaluation. It's about finding the right balance between the various requirements. Students should work with their advisors to ensure that their production elements are sufficient for their master's thesis project.

Regardless of the production approach you choose, we expect professional quality work that you will be proud to include in a professional portfolio. It is recommended that students include at least one production-oriented faculty member on their thesis committee to help advise the production portion of the project.

Whenever possible, you should create all elements of the production materials yourself. This means you should not use stock photos/video/graphics in your project if the subject is something you could arrange to shoot/create yourself (if you need an image/video of something that would not be possible for you to shoot, purchasing stock footage might be acceptable). You can hire or recruit talent/crew to help you with supporting production roles, but you should maintain authorial control over the final results.

Electronic copies of all audio/video/interactive materials should be submitted with the final thesis. Submit hard and electronic copies of all print materials.

## MASTER'S THESIS DEFENSE OVERVIEW

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### Part One: Presentation

The master's thesis defense is a public meeting. You will post an announcement of your defense will be in the School of Communication, and an electronic announcement of your defense will be sent to all graduate students and faculty in the School of Communication. You can invite people to attend the defense.

Prepare a 12-15-minute presentation

- 1-2 minute overview
- 2-minute review of key literature
- 2-3 minute overview of the method, including your analysis steps (factor analysis)
- 3-4 minutes on results. What were the key findings?
- 3-4 minutes on discussion. What are the larger implications of this for the literatures you reviewed? What implications do your results have for professionals? Limitations and future directions

### Part Two: Discussion

Your committee and the audience will ask questions. This usually takes 45-60 minutes. You don't know what the questions will be, but remember, a defense is an argument. Be prepared to justify your choices as a researcher and communication professional. "I was interested..." is insufficient. Ground your reasons in logic, literature, and research goals.

### Part Three: Deliberation

The committee discusses the project and the defense. You will be asked to leave the room while the committee makes a decision and makes recommendations for revisions.

The proposal will be evaluated in multiple categories related to:

- Research Plan
- Production Elements
- Strategic Communication Implications
- Theory Application

The committee's evaluation of the proposal must be at least "meets expectations" in all areas. If any area is deemed "does not meet expectations," the proposal will have to be revised (see evaluation criteria on defense evaluation form and rubric in Appendix).

### Part Four: Decision

You come back and learn the decision. After, you and your adviser will talk specifics about what to do and how to do it.

Defense will result in one of five decisions:

1. ***Thesis accepted with no more than minor edits and clarifications***– Thesis requires no change or only minor typographical or editorial changes.

2. ***Thesis accepted with minor revisions noted*** – Thesis requires minor changes in substance and/or major editorial changes or clarifications. Typically, this category implies that no additional analysis or data collection needs to take place. It is more a matter of refinement, clarification or elaboration. The adviser will make notes on the changes requested by the committee, as well as who will take responsibility for examining and approving these changes.
3. ***Thesis accepted with substantial revisions—resubmit manuscript to committee*** – Thesis requires substantial modifications in at least two sections (such as new analyses or new discussion section); acceptability is questionable. The report of the adviser will provide a list of concerns and modifications required, as well as a time line for completion, and consequences should the student fail to comply. In this case, the revised master’s thesis must be submitted to the entire examining committee. Normally, the same committee will serve. A decision to defer is permitted only once for each candidate.
4. ***Thesis accepted with major revisions—resubmission & new defense required*** – Thesis requires major modifications in at least two sections (such as additional data collected and new analyses); acceptability is in doubt. The report of the adviser will provide a list of concerns and modifications required, as well as a time line for completion, and consequences should the student fail to comply. In this case, the revised master’s thesis must be submitted to the entire examining committee and a subsequent defense scheduled. Normally, the same committee will serve. A decision to defer is permitted only once for each candidate.
5. ***Thesis not accepted*** – The adviser will provide a written report concerning the reasons for rejection by the examining committee. The NQSC graduate coordinator will subsequently advise the student concerning continuing in the degree program.

**DISTINCTION:** A master’s thesis can earn distinction if it receives scores of “outstanding” in all evaluation areas and is accepted with no revisions.

**TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE DEFENSE:**

- ✓ Dress professionally
- ✓ Practice the presentation
- ✓ Anticipate questions and prepare answers
- ✓ Prepare handouts about key information
- ✓ Ensure that any equipment is working before the presentation
- ✓ Arrange the room so that everyone is comfortable

# NORCROSS GRADUATE SCHOOL

## FORMAT REQUIREMENTS FOR MASTER'S THESIS

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Your need to submit three single-sided copies of your final project to the Norcross Graduate School. These copies must meet all the format requirements. A copy will be bound and kept in the library. In addition, you should provide every member of your thesis committee and electronic copy of the final manuscript, and bound copies to any members who want them. **(Please consult The Norcross Graduate School master's thesis guide. Below is a summary of key format issues but the Graduate School may have additional guidelines).**

### Organization of Master's Thesis

- Title page.
- Signature page.
- Copyright page (optional)
- Abstract. (300-350 words)
- Distinction Award Page (optional)
- Dedication page (optional).
- Acknowledgements (optional).
- Table of contents.
- List of Tables (if applicable)
- List of Figures (if applicable)
- List of Abbreviations (if applicable)
- List of Symbols (if applicable)
- Text, divided into chapters
- References.
- Appendix (includes materials too bulky or distracting for the text).

### Title Page

- The title page consists of:
  - Full title of thesis, project, or dissertation.
  - The full name of the student.
  - The type of project being submitted (thesis, project, dissertation).
  - The degree being earned (e.g., Master of Arts, Doctor of Education, etc.).
  - The program from which the degree is being earned.
  - The school and department (if applicable) from which the degree is being earned.
  - The month and year on which the student graduated.
- The title of the thesis is set two-inches from the top of the page.
- The title is centered on the page.
- The title is written in all capital letters.
- Long titles are double-spaced between lines.
- The full name of the degree and the program issuing the degree is used.
- The full legal name of the student is used.

### **Signature Page**

- The title of the thesis/dissertation is consistent with the title page.
- The correct name of the department or school is used.
- The name of the student is consistent with the title page.
- The name of the degree program is consistent with the title page.
- The signature lines for all committee members are aligned flush right.
- The names of the committee members and their position on the committee (e.g., Chair, Member) are written beneath each signature line.
- The signature line of the head of the Graduate School is positioned beneath the signature lines of the committee and aligned flush left.
- All signatures are original and written in black or blue ink.

### **Copyright Page (optional)**

- The copyright symbol (©) and the year of graduation are listed first.
- The student's name is listed second and is consistent with the title page.
- The phrase, "ALL RIGHTS RESERVED" is listed third.
- All three lines are centered both horizontally and vertically on the page.

### **Abstract**

- The heading, "ABSTRACT", is centered at the top of the page in all capital letters.
- Two double-spaced lines separate the heading from the first line of text.
- Full title of the thesis/project/dissertation is written in all capital letters, is centered at the top of the page, and is consistent with the title page.
- Name of the student is consistent with the title page.
- The month and year on which the student graduated is consistent with the title page.
- The degree being earned (e.g., Master of Arts, Doctor of Education, etc.) and the program from which the degree is being earned are consistent with the title page.
- The full name of the committee chair is used.
- The abstract is no longer than two pages.
- The abstract includes succinct statements of the problem, methodology or procedure, and conclusion or major finding(s) in the thesis/project/dissertation.
- The first line of each paragraph is indented ½ inch.

### **Distinction Award Page**

- The heading, "[THESIS/MASTER'S PROJECT/DISSERTATION] DISTINCTION AWARD" is written in all capital letters and centered at the top of the page.
- Two double-spaced lines separate the heading from the first line of text.
- Title of the thesis/dissertation is consistent with the title page.
- The correct name of the department or school is used.
- Name of the student is consistent with the title page.
- Name of the degree program is consistent with the title page.
- The signature line of the dean or program director is aligned flush left.
- The name and title of the dean or program director are written beneath the signature line.

- All signatures are original and written in black or blue ink.

### **Dedication Page (optional).**

- The heading, "DEDICATION", is centered at the top of the page in all capital letters.
- Two double-spaced lines separate the heading from the first line of text.
- The first line of each paragraph is indented ½ inch.

### **Acknowledgments (optional)**

- The heading, "ACKNOWLEDGMENTS" is written in all capital letters and centered at the top of the page.
- Two double-spaced lines separate the heading from the first line of text.
- The first line of each paragraph is indented ½ inch.

### **Table of Contents**

- The heading, "TABLE OF CONTENTS" is written in all capital letters and centered at the top of the page.
- Two double-spaced lines separate the heading from the first entry.
- Typing is double-spaced, except when entries run to two or more lines in length. In these situations, single-space between the continued lines.
- All sections of the manuscript that occur after the table of contents are included.
  - List of Tables (if applicable)
  - List of Figures (if applicable)
  - List of Maps (if applicable)
  - List of Abbreviations (if applicable)
  - List of Symbols (if applicable)
  - Each chapter in the main body of the document
    - Each subsection of each chapter
  - Appendices (if applicable). Each appendix is listed separately.
  - End notes (if applicable)
  - References
- All main headings of the manuscript are aligned flush left.
- All first-order headings are indented ½ inch. Second- and third-order headings (if applicable) are indented an additional ½ inch each.
- Leader lines connect each entry in the table of contents with its associated page number.

### **List of Tables (if applicable)**

- The heading, "LIST OF TABLES" is written in all capital letters and centered at the top of the page.
- Two double-spaced lines separate the heading from the first entry.
- All entries are aligned flush left.
- Typing is double-spaced, except when entries run to two or more lines in length. In these situations, single-space between the continued lines.
- List by table number and title. The title must match the table title in the text.
- Indicate the page number that corresponds to table in the text.

- Leader lines connect each entry with its associated page number.

#### **List of Figures (if applicable)**

- The heading, "LIST OF FIGURES" is written in all capital letters and centered at the top of the page.
- Two double-spaced lines separate the heading from the first entry.
- All entries are aligned flush left.
- Typing is double-spaced, except when entries run to two or more lines in length. In these situations, single-space between the continued lines.
- List by figure number and title. The title must match the figure title in the text.
- Indicate the page number that corresponds to figure in the text.
- Leader lines connect each entry with its associated page number.

#### **List of Abbreviations (if applicable)**

- The heading, "LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS" is written in all capital letters and centered at the top of the page.
- Two double-spaced lines separate the heading from the first entry.
- All entries are aligned flush left and listed in alphabetical order.
- The abbreviation is separated from its full text description by 1 inch.

#### **List of Symbols (if applicable)**

- The heading, "LIST OF SYMBOLS" is written in all capital letters and centered at the top of the page.
- Two double-spaced lines separate the heading from the first entry.
- All entries are aligned flush left.
- The symbol is separated from its full text description by 1 inch.

#### **Tables and Figures**

- Format all tables and figures according to the style guide mandated by the student's program.

#### **Appendices**

- The heading, "APPENDIX A", "APPENDIX B" (etc.) is written in all capital letters and centered at the top of the page.
- Two double-spaced lines separate the heading from the material in the appendix.
- Material in the Appendix matches the font in the body of the document;
- Each new appendix is presented on a separate page.

#### **References**

- The heading, "REFERENCES", "BIBLIOGRAPHY", or "WORKS CITED" (depending on the conventions of the style mandated by the student's program) is written in all capital letters and centered at the top of the page.
- Two double-spaced lines separate the heading from the first entry.
- All references are aligned flush left and conform to the style guide mandated by the student's program.



- All references are single spaced and separated from each other by a double space.
- All citations included in the body of the document appear in the reference list.
- Reference list entries are arranged in alphabetical order by the surname of the first author.
- Two or more references by the same author(s) lists the earlier study before the later study.
- References with identical authors and dates are arranged in alphabetical order by the first letter in the title of the work.
- Long website addresses are broken with a hyphen (as appropriate).

### **Typing**

- Typeface is a standard font (e.g., Times New Roman) and 11- or 12- points in size.
- Selected font is used consistently throughout the document.
- Print is laser quality.
- Document is typed in black ink only.
- Printing is single sided.
- No page begins or ends with a single line of a paragraph.

### **Spacing**

- Double spacing is used consistently throughout the document.
- Single spacing is used only for long quotes, tables, and figures.

### **Margins and Justification**

- Left margins are 1.5 inches.
- Top margins are one inch.
- Right margins are one inch.
- Left margins are justified.
- Right margins are not justified.
- No page is short because of a table or figure.
- Figures, pictures, graphs and other such materials must fit within the established margins.

### **Division of Words and Abbreviations**

- All words fit in their entirety on a line. No word is divided by a hyphen.
- Abbreviations are not used.

### **Pagination**

- Each page of the manuscript, except the title page, is assigned a typed number.
- Lowercase Roman numerals (ii, iii, iv, etc.) are used on all pages preceding Chapter 1. The title page counts as page i, but the number does not appear.
- Typed Roman numerals begin with the signature page.
- Roman numerals are centered ½ inch from the bottom edge of the page.
- Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.) start with Chapter 1 or the introduction (if applicable) and are used for the remainder of the thesis/project/dissertation.
- The first page of the text begins with "1".

- Arabic numerals are centered ½ inch from the bottom edge of the page.

### **Tables and Figures**

- Each table or figure is incorporated at the appropriate place in the text.
- Short tables or figures are placed on a page with some text.
- All tables and figures are referred to by number.
- When more than one table or figure is introduced on a page of text, each follows in the order they are mentioned in the text.
- Table or figure schemes are consistent throughout the document.

### **Citations**

- Works by the same author(s) with the same year of publication are consistently differentiated by a suffix after the year (e.g., 2005a for the first publication, 2005b for the second publication, etc.).
- Both authors' names are included in every citation when referring to a work by two authors.
- Write authors' names without any titles (e.g., Dr., Mr., Mrs., or Ms.).

### **General format**

- Adhere to American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines for formatting, including headings, tables, figures, citations, and references.
- A running head should be utilized. On right side, five spaces from the page number.
- Statistical symbols should be italicized.

**THE NIDO R. QUBEIN SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION**  
**MASTER'S DEGREE IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN OF STUDY**  
 (To be completed during the 1<sup>st</sup> year of study)

Candidate Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Adviser: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member: \_\_\_\_\_

COURSE	SEMESTER	PROFESSOR	GRADE	CREDITS
<b>CORE (6 credits)</b>				
<i>4996/5000—Contemp Strat Com</i>				
<i>4997/5001—Persuasion</i>				
<b>METHODS (6 credits)</b>				
<i>4998/5100—Research Methods</i>				
<b>CAMPAIGNS (3 credits)</b>				
<b>TECHNOLOGY (6 credits)</b>				
<b>ELECTIVES (9 credits)</b>				
<b>PRACTICUM (1 credit)</b>				
<b>MASTER'S THESIS PROJECT (4 credits)</b>				
<i>5900 – Thesis Development I</i>				
<i>5910 – Thesis Development II</i>				
<i>5920 – Thesis Development III</i>				
<i>5930 – Thesis Defense</i>				

Committee Adviser: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Graduate Director: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

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## Norcross Graduate School

**Independent/Practicum/Thesis/Project Request Form**

Student ID#: \_\_\_\_\_ Term: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Course to be Added:

Prefix	Course #	Instructor	Credit Hours

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Instructor \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Program Director \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate School Processed \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*\*Thesis/Project course registrations will not be processed without prior receipt of the Appointment of Chair/Committee Form.*

*\*\*Thesis/Project or Continuation course registrations are required continuously until completion of the course credit is received.*

# HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

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## Norcross Graduate School

### APPOINTMENT OF THE MASTER'S THESIS ADVISER

It is the student's responsibility to return this completed form to the Norcross Graduate School **prior to registering for the first project course**. All requested information must be provided.

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Program: **Strategic Communication**

Proposed year and term of registration for the first project course: Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Term:  Fall  Spring  Summer

Proposed title of master's thesis: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Will the adviser be available to advise in summer term, should the project extend beyond the expected number of semesters?  Yes  No

### APPROVAL SIGNATURES

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Project Adviser: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

NQSC Graduate Program Director \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

High Point University • Norcross Graduate School • High Point, North Carolina • 27262-3598  
[graduate@highpoint.edu](mailto:graduate@highpoint.edu) • (336) 841-9198

# HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

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## Norcross Graduate School

### APPOINTMENT OF THE MASTER'S THESIS COMMITTEE

It is the students' responsibility to return this completed form to the Norcross Graduate School prior to scheduling the master's thesis proposal defense. All requested information must be provided.

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Program: **Strategic Communication**

Year and term of project proposal defense: Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Term:  Fall  Spring  Summer

Proposed title of master's thesis: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### APPROVAL SIGNATURES

	SIGNATURE	DATE	Summer availability, if needed?
Student:	_____	_____	
Project Adviser:	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
2nd Member:	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
3rd Member:	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
NQSC Graduate Program Director	_____	_____	

HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY'S MASTER'S DEGREE IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION  
MASTER'S THESIS PROPOSAL DEFENSE FORM

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STUDENT NAME:

PROJECT TITLE:

---

**COMMITTEE EVALUATION OF EXTENT TO WHICH PROJECT PROPOSAL MEETS EXPECTATIONS:**

**REQUIRED COMPONENTS (see rubric for explanation of point values)**

<b>Research</b>	Points (0-10): _____	(at least 2 points required for approval)
<b>Production Elements</b>	Points (0-10): _____	(at least 2 points required for approval)
<b>Topic/ Implications</b>	Points (0-5): _____	(at least 1 point required for approval)
<b>Theory</b>	Points (0-5): _____	(at least 1 point required for approval)
<b>TOTAL:</b>	_____	(at least 18 total points required for approval)

**Additional Areas of Evaluation:**

<b>Writing</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Process</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Presentation</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>

**COMMITTEE DECISION:**

The project meets the standards for a master's thesis.

This project idea needs development. If these changes are addressed, this project will meet the standards for a master's thesis. (Notes are attached)

This project does not meet the standards for a master's thesis

**The committee has reviewed the master's thesis proposal and submits the above evaluation.**

Committee Adviser Name & Signature:	_____	_____
Committee Member Name & Signature:	_____	_____
Committee Member Name & Signature:	_____	_____

STUDENT SIGNATURE:

Date:

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## THESIS PROPOSAL EVALUATION RUBRIC

**REQUIRED COMPONENTS – For approval, must earn at least 18 points AND meet at least minimum expectations in all categories**

	MINIMUM EXPECTATIONS		AVERAGE		EXCEPTIONAL
<b>RESEARCH</b>	<p><b>2 POINTS</b> Proposed research method is appropriate for the topic and will sufficiently assess the project's goals. Method might require less time, effort, or analysis by the student than an average project. <i>Possible examples: Convenience online sample, convenience college student sample, one round of testing</i></p>	<b>4 PTS</b>	<p><b>6 POINTS</b> Viable choice of method that will require good methodological skills, and extensive and appropriate material. <i>Possible examples: College student sample recruited for specific targeted factors, targeted online sample, pre/post-testing not at same time.</i></p>	<b>8 PTS</b>	<p><b>10 POINTS</b> Ambitious method that involves hard to reach populations and/or multiple rounds of testing at different times (e.g., pre-post-post)</p>
<b>PRODUCTION ELEMENT(S)</b>	<p><b>2 POINTS</b> Project plan requires basic technical skill and includes at least some original elements. These might be combined with pre-made elements (photos, graphics, layout templates, etc.). <i>Possible examples: Brochures, flyers, social media posts, template-based websites or interactive media</i></p>	<b>4 PTS</b>	<p><b>6 POINTS</b> Project plan requires at least intermediate-level technical skills and includes all (or nearly all) original material created by the student. Project is ambitious in scope and makes creative use of software and equipment. <i>Possible examples: Podcasts, basic videos, photos/graphics involving significant editing/design, non-template websites or interactive media built by the student</i></p>	<b>8 PTS</b>	<p><b>10 POINTS</b> Project plan requires advanced technical skills and includes all original material created by the student. Project is exceptionally ambitious, exceeding a typical project in terms of length, complexity, and/or technical mastery required. <i>Possible examples: Highly produced podcast series, sophisticated video productions, complex websites or interactive media built by the student</i></p>
<b>TOPIC/ IMPLICATIONS</b>	<p><b>1 POINT</b> Topic is appropriate for the field, though somewhat conventional. Topic is appropriately limited. Project addresses a problem and builds on past research.</p>	<b>2 PTS</b>	<p><b>3 POINTS</b> Interesting and fresh research topic with implications for the field and a well-reasoned limiting of the topic. Proposal creatively approaches a problem and explains how the project will fill a gap.</p>	<b>4 PTS</b>	<p><b>5 POINTS</b> Genuinely challenging and innovative topic with significant implications for the field, accurately defined and well researched problem, adequate limiting of subject, fresh point of view. Presents a compelling argument for the broader significance or value of the project.</p>
<b>THEORY</b>	<p><b>1 POINT</b> Theoretical framework is clear and appropriate, if somewhat narrow. Assumptions and hypotheses are in line with the definition of the research problem, source material is sufficient, sources are used appropriately.</p>	<b>2 PTS</b>	<p><b>3 POINTS</b> Proposal demonstrates credible theoretical skills, viable starting point for the work, skillful use of concepts, well-argued discussion, appropriate and extensive sources.</p>	<b>4 PTS</b>	<p><b>5 POINTS</b> Proposal demonstrates deep knowledge of theories, well-reasoned theoretical starting point, clear and in-depth analytical approach, appropriate use of sources, extensive discussion. Synthesizes theories in a creative and original manner.</p>

### Additional Areas of Evaluation:

- **Writing:** Writing is purposeful and focused. Clear progression of thought within each section and between sections. Appropriate and engaging word choice. Writes with a distinct voice. Few errors in mechanics and APA format.
- **Presentation:** Well-planned and practiced presentation with slides that illustrate key points and emphasize conclusions. Provided accurate, clear, and mostly complete responses to questions related to the study and broader topic area. Seemed comfortable during the Q&A.
- **Process:** Process was smooth, student was motivated, agreements were kept, adequate responsibility of the process taken.



# HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

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## Norcross Graduate School

### MASTER'S THESIS DEFENSE SCHEDULE FORM

It is the responsibility of the student to complete and deliver this form to the graduate school two weeks prior to the defense of the master's thesis.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Degree Program: **Strategic Communication**

Title of master's thesis: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Defense Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Adviser: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Director: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY'S MASTER'S DEGREE IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION  
 MASTER'S THESIS DEFENSE FORM

STUDENT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PROJECT TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

**COMMITTEE EVALUATION OF FINAL PROJECT\*:**

<b>Topic</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Review</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Theory</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Method</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Analysis</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Results</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Implications</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Technique</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Aesthetics</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Writing</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Process</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Presentation</b>	Exceeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially meets <input type="checkbox"/>	Does not meet <input type="checkbox"/>

\*For the final determination of "pass/fail," projects must at least meet expectations in **Method** and **Results** areas. Only one "partially meets" is allowed. No "does not meet" is allowed. Components that do not meet expectations must be revised, reviewed, and approved as meets expectations prior to submitting the final evaluation form to the Norcross Graduate School.

**COMMITTEE DECISION:**

- Project accepted with no more than minor clarifications and edits
- Project accepted with some revisions—manuscript does not need to be resubmitted
- Project accepted with substantial revisions—resubmit manuscript to committee
- Project accepted with major revisions—resubmission & new defense required
- Project not accepted

*Projects evaluated as exceeding expectations in all areas and accepted with no more than minor revisions will earn distinction.*

**The committee has reviewed the master's thesis and submits the above evaluation.**

Committee Adviser: \_\_\_\_\_ (print) \_\_\_\_\_ (sign)

Committee Member: \_\_\_\_\_ (print) \_\_\_\_\_ (sign)

Committee Member: \_\_\_\_\_ (print) \_\_\_\_\_ (sign)

STUDENT SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## MASTER'S THESIS EVALUATION RUBRIC

	EXCEEDS	MEETS	PARTIALLY MEETS	DOES NOT MEET	Should not present to committee
TOPIC	Genuinely challenging and innovative topic with significant implications for the field, accurately defined and well researched problem, adequate limiting of subject, fresh point of view.	Interesting and fresh research topic with implications for the field, well reasoned limiting of the topic, accurate definition of the problem and appropriate point of view.	Topic is relatively fresh and interesting with some implications for the field. Definition viable. Appropriate limiting of the topic.	Topic fairly conventional with limited implications for the field, definition relatively clear, point of view customary.	Topic is conventional with little implications for the field, insufficient limiting leaves the topic unclear, considerable inconsistency in the definition of the problem.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE/ BACKGROUND	Reviews and accurately summarizes the relevant literature and problem, demonstrates how the project fills a gap, and presents a compelling argument for the broader significance or value of the project. Clearly and explicitly articulates a research question or the goals.	Reviews and summarizes most of the relevant literature, overviews the problem, demonstrates how the project fills a gap, and presents a strong argument for the broader significance or value of the project. Identifies a logical research question or goals.	Presents a literature review but does not sufficiently or effectively place the project within the context of current/past research or client efforts. Argument for the broader significance and/or value of the project needs development. Articulates a research question or the goals of the project, but the argument may need more clarity.	Presents a limited literature review and identifies a problem but does not sufficiently or effectively place the project within the context of current/past research or client efforts. The argument for the significance and/or value of the project is limited. The research question or the goals of the project are not clearly linked to the review and may be unclear.	Either does not present an adequate review of the literature and/or problem, or does not make sufficient connections between the literature and the project to explain its significance. Does not explicitly articulate a research question or explain the goals of the project.
THEORY	Deep knowledge of theories, well reasoned theoretical starting point, clear comprehension of concept, clear and in-depth analytical approach, appropriate use of sources, extensive discussion.	Credible theoretical skills, viable starting point of the work, skillful use of concepts, well argued discussion, appropriate use of sources.	Good knowledge of theories, essential concepts comprehended, assumptions and hypotheses in line with the definition of the research problem, source material relatively extensive, sources are used appropriately.	Theoretical framework somewhat unclear and narrow. Concepts and assumptions need clarity. Amount of relevant literature comparatively low. Genuinely critical touch is missing	Theoretical framework narrow. Insufficient definition of concepts and assumptions.. Problems with critical approach to sources.
METHOD	Justified choice of method, excellent command of methods, extensive and relevant material, deep, thorough and systematic handling of the material. Clear and creative connection to the project's goals.	Viable choice of method, good methodological skills, extensive and appropriate material, discussion accurate, connection to the project's goals clear.	Method is appropriate but the overall design only provides superficial insight into the issue. Measurement does a fair job assessing the project's goals. Connection between the analysis and the project's goal is sufficient.	Methodological choice fairly justifiable, method applied mechanically, problems with the compatibility of method, material and research problem. Handling of the material partly unbalanced.	Method impossible to justify and/or apply. Problems with methodological skills make the handling of material difficult. Unprocessed material impedes the analysis. Problems coordinating the analysis and project's goals.

ANALYSIS	All appropriate analysis conducted and reported correctly. Conclusions are clear and justified in a creative way and indicate excellent command of the analysis techniques.	Analysis appropriate to the data and conducted and reported correctly. Conclusions are clear and indicate good command of the analysis techniques.	Analysis is correct but the presentation of the results needs development. The interpretation is correct but lacks full explanation. The objective of the research is fulfilled.	Research questions are partly unanswered. Interpretation is insufficient. Conclusions fairly simple.	Research analysis questionable, too simple or inadequate. Problems with meeting the research objective. Conclusions are missing or do not correspond to the purpose of the study.
IMPLICATIONS/ CONCLUSION	Provides a compelling discussion of the implications of the findings (positive and negative) or the importance of the project for the client, placing the importance within the context of current knowledge. Demonstrates a full understanding of the results for the theoretical framework. The project includes a thorough consideration of possible future studies.	Discusses the implications of the findings (positive and negative) or the importance of the project for the client, placing the importance within the context of current knowledge. Demonstrates a good understanding of the results for the theoretical framework. The project includes a thorough consideration of possible future studies.	Overviews the results and makes some attempt to discuss the implications of the findings, but may not explain their significance fully. Demonstrates some understanding of the results for the theoretical framework. The project mentions possible future studies but needs elaboration on how this project contributes significant new knowledge to the field.	Reiterates the findings from the results and makes little attempt to discuss the implications of the findings, with little explanation of their implication for other research or practitioners. Demonstrates little understanding of the results for the theoretical framework. Doesn't explain how results would contribute significant new knowledge to the field.	Reiterates the findings from the results, but makes little or no attempt to discuss the implications of the findings or does not describe future directions for the project. Demonstrates no understanding of the results for the theoretical framework.
PRODUCTION (TECHNIQUE)	Project demonstrates technical expertise, is ambitious in scope, and makes exceptionally creative use of software and equipment.	Project demonstrates exceptional technical skill and makes creative use of software and equipment. Scope is sufficient for a master's project.	Project demonstrates basic technical competence and makes acceptable use of software and equipment. May lack in scope or ambition.	Project is either technically flawed, makes ineffective use of software and equipment, or is of insufficient scope for a master's thesis.	Project has major technical problems and makes ineffective use of software and equipment.
PRODUCTION (AESTHETIC)	Project demonstrates a willingness to take creative risks in order to create something bold and original. Aesthetic choices greatly enhance the goals of the project.	Project is visually/aurally captivating and demonstrates exceptional creativity. Aesthetic choices enhance the goals of the project.	Project demonstrates a basic understanding of composition, design, editing, etc. Aesthetic choices are appropriate for the goals of the project, but may do little to enhance the viewer's understanding of the content.	Project demonstrates limited understanding of composition, design, editing, etc., and/or aesthetic choices are inappropriate for the goals of the project.	Project demonstrates little creativity or understanding of visual/audio design. Aesthetic choices detract from the goals of the piece.
WRITING	Writing is confident and focused. Logical and creative progression of thought within each section and between sections. Effective and engaging word choice.	Writing is purposeful and focused. Clear progression of thought within each section and between sections. Appropriate and	Writing does not clearly communicate knowledge. Writing is loosely organized with some variation in word choice. Writers voice and sense of audience is	Writing is limited in communicating knowledge. Writing is brief and underdeveloped. Language choice lacks creatively. Voice shows little	Significant parts difficult to understand. Careless or inaccurate word choice. Numerous errors. Repetition, poor organization of ideas. Inappropriate

	Writes with a distinct voice. Very few errors in mechanics and APA format.	engaging word choice. Writes with a distinct voice. Few errors in mechanics and APA format.	vague. Some problems with mechanics and APA format.	sense of audience. Some problems with mechanics and APA format. Numerous problems with APA format.	use of quotations. Writing hinders understanding. Extensive problems with APA format.
PRESENTATION	Engaging, polished presentation style with well-crafted slides that illustrate key points and emphasize conclusions. Provided accurate, clear, and complete responses to questions related to the study and broader topic area. Unexpected questions about the topic are answered with concise, coherent answers that draw upon knowledge of the field and one's research methods.	Well-planned and practiced presentation with slides that illustrate key points and emphasize conclusions. Provided accurate, clear, and mostly complete responses to questions related to the study and broader topic area. Seemed comfortable during the QA but some answers needed more development.	Solid presentation style with coherent narrative and conclusions. Demonstrated comfort with the topic during the QA but left some questions unanswered or answered insufficiently.	Presentation was uneven and some points were confusing. Presentation style needed to be more engaging. Questions unanswered or answered insufficiently.	Too much or too little detail, goals and directions not clear, order of slides not logical; poor slides; or reads directly from many slides. Difficulty in answering questions and conversing about the topic in ways that show an easy familiarity and mastery of the topic.
PROCESS	Process was smooth, student was motivated, kept the agreements, took responsibility of the process independently, spontaneous researcher's attitude	Process was smooth, student was motivated, agreements were kept, adequate responsibility of the process taken.	Process was fairly smooth, motivation of the student varied, agreements were mostly kept	Difficulties in the process, the student needed a lot of help, motivation and taking responsibility of the process varied	Motivation of the student not very high, needed a lot of help, taking responsibility of the process varied, schedules were not kept

## Project Defense Evaluation/Master's thesis

It is the responsibility of the master's thesis chair to complete and deliver this form to the Graduate School ([graduate@highpoint.edu](mailto:graduate@highpoint.edu) or Norcross 128) on the day of or the day after the defense of the thesis.

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Program \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Project \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Defense: Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_

### Committee's Evaluation of the Project Defense

Pass

Fail (Reason)

Project Chair \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Project Committee Member \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Project Committee Member \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

High Point University · Norcross Graduate School · High Point, North Carolina 27262-3598  
(336) 841-9198

**SAMPLE TITLE PAGE**

FULL TITLE OF MASTER'S THESIS

by

Student Name

A master's thesis submitted to the faculty of  
High Point University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Strategic Communication

The Nido R. Qubein School of Communication

May, 20XX

## SAMPLE SIGNATURE PAGE

To Norcross Graduate School:

We, in the Nido R. Qubein School of Communication, are submitting a master's thesis written by [Name of student as it appears on the title page] titled ["COMPLETE TITLE OF MASTER'S THESIS AS IT APPEARS ON THE TITLE PAGE"]. We have examined the final copy of this manuscript for format and content, and we recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Strategic Communication.

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Dr./Mr./Ms/ Adviser Name  
Master's Thesis Chair

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Dr./Mr./Ms. Committee Member Name  
Master's Thesis Committee Member

---

Dr./Mr./Ms. Committee Member Name  
Master's Thesis Committee Member

---

Coordinator of the Strategic Communication MA Program

Accepted for Norcross Graduate School

---

Vice President for Research and Planning



**SAMPLE ABSTRACT PAGE**

ABSTRACT

FULL TITLE OF MASTERS PROJECT

Full Name of Student  
Month and Year Project Completed

Master of Arts in Strategic Communication

The Nido R. Qubein School of Communication

Master's thesis Chair: [Name of Professor]

Abstract begins here (indented and double spaced)