

Final Year Thesis/Project

GRDS407 AUB/FEA/Graphic Design, Fall/Spring, 2006/07

LIST OF ADVISORS

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INTRODUCTION

The final year project is a year-long exploration into and completion of the project proposal that you submitted in June of your third year. Although the academic year is broken down into two semesters, the FYP should be considered as an uninterrupted process that encompasses topic research, visual research, project planning, and project execution. Much of this work is concurrent, and the project should be considered at all times as an integral whole.

This first semester of your FYP is a time to research and draw a theoretical framework. The second semester is then left to complete research, start exploration into the visual aspect of your project, and finally complete the project that has grown out of this exploratory process.

As graphic designers you are asked to contribute to your field and to expand its margins. By thoroughly researching your topic in terms of visual and scholarly precedent, you will better be able to fine-tune your thesis and add to the greater body of research already done in your topic area.

Paramount to keep in mind is that the entire FYP project process—from initial proposal to final delivered project—is fluid and dynamic. It is expected that research will expand, grow, and change. It is expected that at first there will be many more questions than answers. It is possible that the original proposal will change slightly or even completely during the school year. It is obligatory that students see this process as one of experimentation, exploration, playfulness, and examination of creative potential.

THESIS PROPOSAL

FIRST DRAFT: The first draft of the thesis proposal is due at the end of the third year of study. The focus of the proposal will naturally be quite broad, but you will be expected to have started reading some material on the subject. More than one proposal may be submitted, and you should not worry about a pointedly focused topic—on the contrary, this is the time to approach the subject from a broad perspective, which will be fine-tuned later on. The initial proposal should be comprised of the following:

Introduction: Give the background information which led you to this choice of topic.

Preliminary questions: List the questions that you would like to explore, or which raise themselves based on the premise you are

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working with.

Possible frameworks: Give an overview of any initial readings you've done on the subject and the frameworks that they might bring to your exploration.

Proposal statement: Summarize the above in a declarative statement that sets out the groundwork for further examination of your subject.

PROPOSAL RESEARCH: The summer between end of third year and beginning of fourth year should be devoted to developing your thesis statement. Consider the following as guidelines for this process:

Initial research: First and foremost, at this stage, Google—and by extension the Internet—are not sufficient nor reliable research tools. Students should do proper research using the various resources available via the library: Periodicals, scholarly journals, books, archives, picture collections, online databases, etc.

Those who are away for their training may access some of the AUB Library online resources (databases for full text articles in journals) and look into scholarly or renown journals available online, they can also visit public and/or university libraries in their city of residence.

Those who still do not know how to use the library resources, they might consider seeking assistance from the Librarian during the summer if they are around otherwise an introductory-session will be scheduled in fall.

Focused topical and theoretical research may also branch out into tangential cultural domains: Cinema, literature, music, theater, etc., as well as other academic research fields: media and communications studies, art history and theory, cultural studies, visual culture, etc. You should consider these as valid paths of research, in a way that can inform and enrich your field of study in graphic design and the larger realm of visual representation.

You should take advantage of the various faculties and departments of the University that might provide support for your research: Philosophy, anthropology, literature, sociology, etc.

Scholarly research: Separate from the above is examining the scholarly research on your topic within the academic realm. This is to be initiated through the library as well. As you turn up material on your topic, consider it in terms of how it fits into your thesis statement, but also feel free to question, doubt, or argue against what you find.

Visual research: Harder to research is visual forays into your topic of interest. Research here might be done in the library or online, but should continue with the primary advisor, and then branch

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out to other advisors, as well as professionals in the field.

Project scope: You should consider how you might focus your project into something manageable for the year. On the one hand, you have before you an experience that may be unique in your lifetime—an entire year to devote to a topic/project of your choosing. On the other hand, very often a year is not enough time to complete a large or extensive project. You should consider that it is possible to explore the “big picture” as it were, but that the project will end up being a “slice” of it. Your description and documentation of your project should state this from the outset.

Theoretical framework: Explore the theoretical discussion/debate concerning your topic if there is one; research its roots and origins; examine and understand the different positions in contemporary debate concerning your research subject at this point. Identifying the research framework and developing a question or set of questions to be answered are the first steps in the research process. The research question(s) will guide the remainder of the process.

Regional focus: Much of the research you will do will be from outside the region; much of the theoretical discussion of your topic will likewise be framed within Western concepts and constructs. To the extent possible, balance this with (or consider completely basing your work on) research in local and regional constructs and conceptual frameworks.

Personal motivation: Look into the reasons why this topic is of interest to you, and consider research into this aspect of the project as well.

FINAL DRAFT: In the first week of the Fall semester, you will be expected to have finalized your thesis proposal. Consider working with the help of AUB’s Writing Center (ext.: 3157; e-mail: writing@aub.edu.lb.) The proposal must first be approved by the group of advisors as a whole, at which point the student can move on to working on the thesis aspect of the project. Criteria for approving your proposal will be mainly based on the fulfillment of the requirements of this document. The final draft of the proposal should be comprised of the following:

Title: Give your thesis proposal a short title.

Thesis statement: This statement can be a hypothesis, a premise for research, or a project/goal statement. The thesis statement defines the basic idea of your project and sets its initial limits.

Expanded description: Going from the broader aspect of the subject you are tackling and zooming in to the focus you are bringing to it, develop on your thesis statement and identify your research framework. This will be the main bulk of your final draft.

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Material covered: Provide an initial review of the literature (scholarly writing) covering your subject area.

Initial results and questions for further research: List if you wish anything you have uncovered so far and questions initial research has opened for further exploration.

Case studies: List as well any case studies that you consider might be useful as you move forward. Explain how you will study them as well as how you will collect data about them.

Methodology: Explain what type of data you will need to collect and how you will go about collecting it. Describe what methods of interpretive analysis will guide your study. (A lecture on methodologies will be given in the Fall as well.)

Significance of the project: State why this research is important and what your project will bring to the general field of knowledge you are working within. Explain briefly how your academic training as a graphic designer enables you to embark on your chosen topic.

Working bibliography: Provide the research bibliography you have started working with at this point.

THESIS AND PROJECT

At the beginning of the first semester, you will be expected to thoroughly research your topic in terms of literature and scholarly papers on the topic, as well as in terms of visual reference concerning how the topic may have already been approached design-wise or artistically. The fact that your topic may have been explored already or used elsewhere as subject matter does not diminish it; knowing what has come before will help you determine a niche within the given area of research or else a twist or take on the subject at hand.

Through assignments, lectures, and juries you will learn research methods and ways of approaching your thesis as well as how to consider the visual implications of your project. To help guide you, you will receive feedback from juries throughout the year. There will be two juries in the fall and two in the spring.

The FYP—although technically split by the break between semesters—should be treated as an uninterrupted year-long endeavor. To accomplish this, you will be asked to integrate into the research phase of your project an investigation of the available literature and visual reference on your topic. This will hopefully obviate a major shift from written theory to visual project, and will allow for a steady but gradual evolution toward the production of a visual work.

The year-long process is thus an organic and changing one, and you

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are encouraged to consider that your concept—in terms of proposal, thesis, and project—might shift, morph, and evolve as the year progresses. To provide an anchoring counterbalance to this, the following basic framework is proposed:

- A primary advisor is assigned to each student. The advisor's role is to assist in expanding the purview of the student's research before guiding the student into focusing his/her aims. Students are not locked in to their advisor; they are encouraged to consult with other advisors.
- After two meetings with the advisees (two weeks into the semester), a general review will be held among advisors.
- Based on this review, focus panels will be formed to follow the work in progress of students with common interests.
- Individual and group advisee meetings will continue to take place as decided upon by advisors and advisees.
- A second general review will be held to assess the progress of each student.
- According to this review, focus panels might be regrouped according to the most recent assessment of student work.

NOTE: The final research paper should be around 10,000 words long—this is an average length and should be used only as a guideline.

PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

It is highly recommended that as your project moves forward from your thesis research that you maintain a complete documentation of your process in the form of a sketchbook or a more formal overview. This documentation will serve two purposes. First, it will lead into your Project Design Brief (discussed below). Second, it will allow you to work more freely knowing that you are keeping track of your process—if for any reason your project does not coalesce into a solid visual form (highly unlikely, but just in case)—you might present your process document as your final.

PROJECT DESIGN BRIEF

As the project moves toward its final stages, you will need to examine it in terms of its final form, as well as production methods and techniques. To this end, you will be required to create a design brief that will be presented at the pre-final jury toward the end of the school year. The design brief summarizes where you have been and answers design questions as you bring your project to its final. The brief might be structured in the following way (consider these as guidelines for its creation) and might contain the following:

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Project summary: Describe the current state of your project and the major steps it has gone through to arrive at this point.

Form overview: Based on the exercise you were given to explore the possible forms your project might take, list out the pros and cons of the various explorations you made and state the reasons why you've chosen the decided form it is to take.

Objective statement: State your project in terms of its "big picture" and how the project you will be working on fits into that. Determine if the project will reflect this whole or will be a part of this whole. Define your project in terms of its "ideal" as regards budget, time, etc.

Target audience: Determine whom you are attempting to reach and state how your design choices reflect this.

Medium: Explain your finalized choices in terms of materials and processes.

Technical constraints: Based on discussions with printers, pre-press houses, technicians, etc. state what practical constraints you are forced to work within. Consider workarounds and other "breakthrough" solutions at this point.

FYP PROJECT SCHEDULE

METHODOLOGIES AND RESEARCH [JUNE INTO FIRST SEMESTER]

FIRST DRAFT PROPOSAL: What is the basic premise/question of the paper? Flexible in nature, and changes as the first semester moves on.

FINAL DRAFT PROPOSAL: Continued and focused research into topic subject; fine-tuning of argument. [WITH WRITING CENTER]

VISUAL, LITERATURE, AND SCHOLARLY RESEARCH: Provide a work-in-progress bibliography, list of scholarly papers, and visual reference that apply to the topic. [LIBRARY SESSION]

DATA COLLECTION: What methodologies are useful in terms of collecting data on a particular subject? [GUEST SPEAKER/LECTURE]

METHODOLOGIES FOR RESEARCH PAPER WRITING: Notes and bibliographical references should be kept on index cards; references for writing a research paper.

FINE-TUNING OF ARGUMENT [BEGINNING OF FIRST SEMESTER]

CONTINUED RESEARCH: The scope of research will in all likelihood balloon out and encompass many fields and areas of expertise before settling back to a more distilled question.

VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE THESIS: What are the possible

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ways the project might be visualized? The student, reflecting on the studio courses he/she has taken within the department, should imagine how their theses might be represented in terms of one of the following: Identity project, advertising/marketing campaign, publication (book, magazine, comic, art book, etc.), animation, video, installation, exhibition, information graphic, etc. Is it one of these things or many of these things? Furthermore, what medium helps best in terms of visualizing the project? For each exploration above, the student will examine the feasibility of each in terms of learning curves, current skills, technical ability, technical restraints, etc. [ASSIGNMENT]

SELF-EVALUATION: For each jury presentation, a documentation of where they are in the process and an evaluation of how their research is going. [ASSIGNMENT]

JURIES: Jury evaluation will be based on announced expectations for where a project should be at that point in the year.

FINALIZING OF THESIS [END OF FIRST SEMESTER]

FINALIZED PAPER: The paper should "exist" in terms of students' notes and index cards; draft writing begins; students will be required to work with the AUB Writing Center.

FORMAL PRESENTATION OF FINAL PROJECT: Based on the students' theses as well as explorations into various media and visualization possibilities, students will present a formal description of how they see their thesis evolving into their final project, explaining choices they've made. [PRELIMINARY DESIGN BRIEF]

START OF PROJECT [BEGINNING OF SECOND SEMESTER]

VISUAL EXPLORATIONS: Students will fully document their visual research in terms of design choices: colors, fonts, papers, etc.

JURIES: Jury evaluation will be based on announced expectations for where a project should be at that point in the year.

FINALIZING OF PROJECT [END OF SECOND SEMESTER]

FINALIZED DESIGN BRIEF: The project should "exist" in terms of a design brief by the third jury.

FINALIZED PROJECT: The project is presented at the last jury; it is submitted with its finalized design brief which also serves as documentation of the project.