MCRP Culminating Experience Guidelines

Every MCRP student must complete a culminating experience to graduate from the program. These courses are taken in the final year of the program. The department offers three different options, described below.

Type	Description	Courses to Take
Master's Thesis	The Master's Thesis is a scholarly research paper which thoroughly investigates the selected subject, based upon the published theoretical and empirical literature, and which is extended further by the researcher to answer a specific research question(s).	Fall: CRP 5599, 2 units Spring: CRP 5599, 2 units
Professional Project	The Professional Project is an applied research effort that incorporates practice-based methods to address a contemporary planning issue of concern to typical planning clients. The student must diagnose a problem situation, select appropriate analytic methods, evaluate alternative approaches, and recommend an approach or solution.	Fall: CRP 5596, 2 units Spring: CRP 5596: 2 units
Studio Project	The Studio Project is an opportunity to develop a project that emerges from their Community Planning Studio course.	Spring: CRP 5556, 4 units

Important notes:

- No option is inherently better than the other. Choose the culminating experience that suits your interests.
- If you do not have a strong idea for a thesis or professional project in mind, take the studio project course (CRP 5556).
- If you start a thesis or professional project in the fall but find that you cannot complete the project, you can switch to the studio project and take that culminating experience.

Culminating Experiences Timeline

	CRP 5599 **Master's Thesis**	CRP 5596 **Professional Project**	CRP 5556 **Studio Project**
Fall, Year 1	• Begin to consider possible project/thesis topics		
Spring, Year 1	• Identify a thesis topic • Secure an advisor • Submit your Culminating Experience Proposal Form • Advance to Candidacy	• Secure a summer internship • Secure an advisor	• Decide to not pursue a professional project or thesis • Submit your Culminating Experience Proposal Form • Advance to Candidacy
Summer	• Begin initial research and research design	• Complete internship • Formulate professional project topic • Submit your Culminating Experience Proposal Form • Advance to Candidacy	
Fall, Year 2	• Deadline to choose thesis: Add Deadline of fall term. • Enroll in CRP 5599 (2 units)	• Deadline to choose professional project: Add Deadline of fall term. • Enroll in CRP 5596 (2 units)	• Identify potential studio project from Community Planning Studio (CRP 5554)
Spring, Year 2	• Enroll in CRP 5599 (2 units) • Schedule oral defense (week 11) • Submit to Graduate Education and Upload to the Digital Commons (week 13) • Submit Graduate Education Culminating Experience Form	• Enroll in CRP 5596 (2 units) • Schedule oral defense (week 13) • Finish project edits (week 15) • Submit to the instructor and email to crp@calpoly.edu • Submit Graduate Education Culminating Experience Form	• Enroll in CRP 5556 (4 units) • Final Presentation (week 14) • Finish project edits (week 15) • Submit to the instructor and email to crp@calpoly.edu • Submit Graduate Education Culminating Experience Form

Resources and Common Questions

Where can I find Cal Poly's requirements for graduation?

Please visit Graduate Education's Steps to Graduation page here:
https://grad.calpoly.edu/steps-to-graduation

I want to complete a Master's Thesis. Where can I find formatting guidelines?

Please visit Graduate Education's Master's Thesis page here:
https://grad.calpoly.edu/masters-thesis

How do I find an advisor for my Thesis or Professional Project?

Once you have a rough idea about your topic, find a faculty member with that shared interest and schedule a meeting with them. They will either agree to be your advisor or recommend another faculty member to approach instead. Please note that securing an advisor for either of these two tracks is not guaranteed. However, all students are guaranteed a spot in the CRP 5556 Studio Project track to complete their culminating experience.

How many people do I need on my Thesis or Professional Project committee?

You need three committee members. Your chair is your advisor and needs to be in the CRP department. If you are doing a professional project, your work supervisor will likely be on your committee as well. You can choose committee members from outside of the department.

How do I choose a topic for my Thesis or Professional Project?

Theses usually start with a driving question that requires substantial research, data collection, and analysis to answer. Your first step should be to email your faculty advisor with a brief description of your proposed project to gauge their interest in advising you on the topic. Once they agree to work with you, collaborate with your advisor to refine your topic into a focused, answerable research question. Professional Projects usually emerge from a summer internship. The project you work on with your employer may lead to additional work and research that is suitable for a Professional Project.

MCRP Culminating Experience Proposal Form

Please complete this form to indicate your eligibility and preferred culminating experience. Submit the completed form before the **Add Deadline of the fall term in your final year of the program**. Once you submit this form, you may advance to candidacy.

Section 1: Student Information

Student Name:
[Text Field]

Expected Graduation Semester:
[Dropdown: Fall / Spring / Summer + Year]

Academic Eligibility:
Have you completed at least 6 units of graduate coursework with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Section 2: Culminating Experience Selection

Select your preferred culminating experience:

☐ **Thesis**

☐ **Professional Project**

☐ **Studio Project (CRP 5556)**

Please note: Securing a faculty advisor for the Thesis or Professional Project track is not guaranteed. All students are guaranteed a spot in the CRP 5556 Studio Project track.

Section 3: Proposed Project Description

Project Title (Working Title):
[Text Field]

Project Description and Intended Methodology:
In approximately two paragraphs, describe your proposed project, including the problem or topic you intend to address, its purpose and significance, and the intended

methodology or approach. For research-based projects, briefly identify the research question and proposed methods of data collection and analysis, as applicable. For applied projects, describe the anticipated project outcomes and the approach you plan to use to develop them.

Section 4: Faculty Advisor Information

Complete this section if you selected Thesis or Professional Project.

Name of Proposed Faculty Advisor:
[Text Field]

Advisor Confirmation:
Have you discussed your proposed project with the faculty member, and have they agreed to serve as your advisor?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not Applicable — Studio Project

Advisor Signature:
[Electronic Signature Field]

Date:
[Date Field]

Section 5: Graduate Program Coordinator Approval

Graduate Program Coordinator Signature:
[Electronic Signature Field]

Date:
[Date Field]