UM Master’s in Environmental Science and Natural Resource Journalism

Project Proposal

Overview

- The Project Option entails one large, documentary-style work of journalism.
- It’s your opportunity to conduct an ambitious investigation or create a comprehensive public information project outside of the deadline pressures of daily journalism.
- Depending on your preference and expertise, you will tell your project as a long-form magazine piece; a video documentary; a radio feature; a multimedia package, or a serialized narrative.
- Candidates register for 6 Professional Project credits as they work on their project.
- A faculty committee needs to be seated before the student starts working on the master’s project, typically before the student’s third semester of residency at UM.

Specifications

- A successful proposal will argue that the project represents an original and in-depth contribution to the public knowledge of environmental science or natural resources.
- You will support that contention with a detailed explanation of how the work will advance public knowledge on the theme. That explanation should include a story pitch.
- Your proposal must include an explanation of the media you anticipate using to tell your story, as well as your strategy for developing and practicing the skills you need.
- Spell out the potential for publication and include examples of established, reputable news outlets that you know to be interested in a story such as you have chosen.
- In addition, the proposal should address any ethical concerns associated with producing work related to this topic.
- Include a projected assessment of costs you expect to incur in doing the research and propose sources of funding. All proposals must include an annotated bibliography, as well as a discussion of potential committee members, focusing on their expertise.
- Your draft proposal will be your calling card when you start enlisting committee members. Often, committee chairs will expect you to update your proposal frequently as you work on your Master’s project.

Template

1 Abstract
Summarize and pitch your project in 500 words or less.
- State your topic and your interest in it.
- Establish the greater context and news value of your topic.
- Pitch your story idea and name your target audience.
- Make a strong argument on how your work will advance public knowledge.
- Provide answers to these 3 questions: What's the point? Why now? Why you?

2 Resume
Include a professional resume of no more than 2 pages.

3 Pre-Reporting
By now, you know: Pre-reporting doesn’t equal reporting. Therefore, begin with laying out the preliminary research you’ve done and plan to do, to get ready for reporting your story.
- List and describe previous journalistic coverage of the topic.
• List and describe previous scholarly work on the topic.
• List and describe comparable bodies of work.
• List and describe sources for background research.
• Discuss how your planned externship might further your project.
• If necessary, describe how you will acquire specific skills for your project.
• Discuss ethical issues associated with your project.

4 Reporting and Production
Describe the anticipated reporting and production phase of your project.
• Formulate two alternative story pitches of 150 words or less.
• List and assess availability of sources, including individuals, experts, documents, websites, institutions, organizations and databases.
• Describe the media you want to use to tell your story.
• Draw up a cost estimate, including travel and technology.
• List and describe possible sources of funding, including application deadlines.

5 Publication
Describe how you plan to publish or otherwise disseminate your work.
• List and assess possible venues of publication.
• List and assess award contests you want to enter.
• List and assess conferences you want to present at.

6 Committee
Propose a 3-member committee for your master's portfolio.
• Identify a J-School faculty member as potential chair of your committee.
• Identify another J-School faculty member as second member.
• Identify a faculty member from a relevant department as third member.
• Refer to their areas of interest and expertise, and discuss your familiarity with them, in supporting your choice.

7 Timeline
Draw up a timeline on when you plan to complete each phase of your master's work.
• Preliminary research and staging of story production
• Externship
• Coursework
• Distinct reporting phases, including travel
• Application deadlines for funds and awards
• Conferences
• Committee appointments
• Production phase
• Defense date

Please update this timeline each time you re-submit your proposal.

8 Bibliography
Document every source you've used for your proposal.

Updated by Henriette Lowisch, Graduate Program Director, 08012015