Taking Charge of the Thesis and Creative Project Process

As a Barrett student you have a culminating experience that we refer to as the Thesis or Creative Project. Defining a thesis or creative project and deciding on a faculty director and other committee members takes time. Do not put this off until the prospectus is due. How you go about this project differs across fields of study. If you want general guidance, review the advice below.

1. Consider what most interests you and can represent a culminating experience in your college education. Think about your academic preparation for various topics and ideas. Those ideas might come from courses, internships, research, creative work, community engagement, travel experiences, leadership, athletics.... But what interests YOU.

2. Once you have some ideas, it is time to talk with faculty. You will have the greatest likelihood of success if you approach faculty who know you. In fact, you are likely not to get a response if you email a faculty person who does not know you. So start with your “network” of faculty, built from your courses and experiences in college.

3. Discuss ideas with the faculty. The thesis and creative projects are done in collaboration – you and your director and committee. Keep an open mind about how the project might develop. You will be less successful insisting on a specific project. Faculty directors and committee members are giving their time freely to support you.

Completing a thesis or creative project also takes time. Most successful projects involve two semesters of work, but they may require three or four semesters. The faculty with whom you will be working can advise on the time commitment. The following is general advice.

4. Discuss with the faculty director of your thesis or creative project the time commitment you will need to make weekly, monthly and through the year. That discussion should occur at the start so there is no misunderstanding between you and the faculty.

5. Make a schedule of the work, including the writing. Here you will need to include time for drafts and time for your faculty to review your work. Be aware of the defense and submission deadlines.

6. Make a schedule of your meetings with your director as well as with other committee members (you will probably meet less with the latter).

7. Come to a shared understanding of the final product. This should happen early in the process to avoid misunderstandings.

8. Enjoy the experience. This is once in a lifetime. The faculty cares about your success.

The defense is your opportunity to have a voice in your field, based on the work you have done. “Defending” your thesis or creative project can feel intimidating, but really it’s an opportunity for you as a newly-formed expert in your chosen field to offer your ideas to other experts, and to hear how they respond to those ideas. To learn about the defense consider the following advice.

9. Talk with your faculty about what defenses are like in the field of your thesis or creative project.

10. Go to some thesis or creative project defenses in the field of your work.

11. Practice your presentation with friends who can give you feedback.

We would like all of you to show your work at Barrett’s Celebrating Honors Symposium in April of each year. Please watch for announcements and submit your project.