IDM Master's Thesis Project Guidelines

IDM students are welcome to develop a project of a range of types. Typically, projects fall within one of the following categories.That said, project boundaries are fluid and may have aspects of different categories.In all cases, an IDM Thesis should result in a professional-quality outcome. If ideas for other types of outcomes, discuss these with your Thesis Instructor

A. Design Intervention

This is a project that makes something for others. This will often be the design of a service, an object, an interface.

The quality of this project is measured as:

- How well the problem is defined and scoped
- How well the problem is addressed by this design
- The execution and polish of the final outcome

These projects:

- use design methodologies such as participatory design, speculative design, etc
- Must include a stakeholder discovery process
- Must include primary research with these stakeholders

Professional-level outcomes for this type are:

- Publication in a peer reviewed design journal
- Presentation at a design conference
- Use of this design by the stakeholder group in question
- A pointed intervention into an existing space that has quantified results on its efficacy

What this kind of project is *not*

- A wireframe or 'clickable' demo of an app
- A hypothetical product or platform that addresses a massive group

B. Art piece

This is a project that makes a new thing that did not exist before. This can be a film, a sculpture, an installation, a program, an experience, a performance, a game.

The quality of this project is measured as:

- How insightfully it fits in the context of art history, current social and artistic movements
- The depth of the process research
- The execution and polish of the final outcome

These projects:

- Use methodologies of practice-based research, fabrication, craft
- Must be the result of extensive iterative process in making and execution
- Result in a new thing that did not exist before

Professional-level outcomes for this type are:

- Presentation in a gallery or museum setting
- Reviews by external critics
- Public presentation
- Submission to open call programs

What this is *not*

- An opportunity to do something “random” for the sake of it
- A technical demo
- An unarticulated project that has little to no relationship to the artists, movements, and concepts cited
- A design project without stakeholder engagement
- A research project without successful experiments

C. Collaborative research

This is a project conducted in collaboration with a faculty member at IDM. These projects are usually part of a multi-year, collaborative effort and your thesis project will address a specific facet of the research. You will consult with this faculty member to define the brief for your project. To engage in this kind of work, you should establish a relationship with a faculty member's research projects and understand the scope of their work and expectations. This is a formal agreement between yourself and the faculty.

The quality of this project is measured as:

- How insightfully it fits within the context of the field
- The rigor of the research process
- The execution and polish of the final outcome

These projects:

- Use methodologies appropriate for the project, including participatory design, practice based research, scientific method, etc …
- Are situated in the context of a larger, ongoing project
- Result in new knowledge that did not exist before

Professional-level outcomes for this type are:

- Publication in a peer-reviewed journal
- Presentation in a field-specific conference

What these projects are *not:*

- Group work presented as solo work
- "Execution" or busy work for a faculty member

D. Portfolio

This is a project that is a collection of pieces which would not constitute a thesis if they were shown individually. The goal of this collection is to demonstrate your skills, values, and work quality to potential employers. An example would be: a collection of published photojournalism stories, a series of client-facing design work, a series of small-scale related artworks. These works must be clearly related, cogently articulated as a collection, and have defined boundaries that delineate why other work would not be included in the group.

The quality of this project is measured as:

- How insightfully it fits within the context of the field
- The depth and breadth of skill deployed
- The execution and polish of the final outcome

These projects:

- Use methodologies appropriate for for a particular field
- Constitute a cohesive collection that, taken as a whole, demonstrates your expertise and insight in a field
- Can include work made prior to IDM thesis, but no more than 30% of the total number of pieces
- Heavily rely on the Thesis Paper to articulate the rationale behind the series, and why they work together to constitute a whole

Professional-level outcomes for this type are:

- Individual items in the series are published in an appropriate professional publication
- Presentations in a field-specific venue (conference, gallery, etc)

What these projects are *not:*

- Collection of disparate projects with little to do with each other
- Collection of unpolished or unfinished ideas