

MAPE

the living, learning handbook

MA in Media and Public Engagement

Department of Media Studies

College of Media, Design, Communication and Information

University of Colorado Boulder

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As we gather, we honor and acknowledge that the University of Colorado's four campuses are on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute, Apache, Comanche, Kiowa, Lakota, Pueblo and Shoshone Nations. Further, we acknowledge the 48 contemporary tribal nations historically tied to the lands that comprise what is now called Colorado.

Acknowledging that we live in the homelands of Indigenous peoples recognizes the original stewards of these lands and their legacies. With this land acknowledgment, we celebrate the many contributions of Native peoples to the fields of medicine, mathematics, government and military service, arts, literature, engineering and more. We also recognize the sophisticated and intricate knowledge systems Indigenous peoples have developed in relationship to their lands.

We recognize and affirm the ties these nations have to their traditional homelands and the many Indigenous people who thrive in this place, alive and strong. We also acknowledge the painful history of ill treatment and forced removal that has had a profoundly negative impact on Native nations.

We respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land. We honor them and thank the indigenous ancestors of this place. The University of Colorado pledges to provide educational opportunities for Native students, faculty and staff and advance our mission to understand the history and contemporary lives of Native peoples.

CU Systemwide Lands Recognition Statement (2020)

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What is MAPE, anyway?

The master's program in Media and Public Engagement is first of all a network of people: its students, faculty, and graduates. You. We help each other do media practice, theory, and analysis. We commit to being accountable to communities beyond ourselves and to working for positive social change. We're so glad you're here!

We live in an increasingly networked culture defined by vast production and circulation of information. Governments, politicians, activists, organizations, and corporations compete for visibility and struggle for relevance. Both old and new media function as important venues and tools of civic engagement and public debate, but what is the political and social impact of this information abundance, and what possibilities does this proliferating communication offer for social change?

Compared to many other graduate programs, MAPE is small and tight-knit, enabling students to develop customized projects with their faculty advisors. We meet together regularly and workshop each other's projects. By the time they earn their degrees, students should have a ready-to-deploy project developed through collaboration with relevant communities, which may be a jumping-off point for the next step in life after their time in MAPE. Above all, we hope students will leave with a deeper understanding of the theories of change—and with the habits of carrying those theories out—that will guide their future work.

To that end, we value each student's work on its own terms. MAPE tends to be best suited for students who are self-motivated and self-directed, who are seeking an education based on relationships and opportunities more than on a pre-scripted sequence of experiences.

MAPE students have created a variety of projects, ranging from art exhibitions to mobile apps, from scholarly papers to new organizations, from documentary films to podcasts. In each case, MAPE students collaborate with relevant communities—locally, internationally, or virtually.

Boulder is the ideal home for a program like MAPE. A vigorous technology startup scene and a wide range of activist organizations make this area a perfect site for networking and developing creative social projects.

The first MAPE cohort arrived in September 2015, at the same time that the College of Media, Communication, Design and Information (CMDI) opened to students. We think of it as a young program that is always learning, adapting, and reinventing itself a little every year.

Welcome to the MAPE community! We look forward to working closely with each one of you to ensure your stay with us is productive and fulfilling.



MAPE isn't scary, but our jack-o-lanterns are.

Who is steering this boat?

MAPE is a collective effort among faculty in the Media Studies department. Students should feel welcome to contact any of the directors with questions about the program. The whole [Media Studies](#)

[faculty](#) also supports MAPE and can serve as advisors, though some have more experience working with the program than others.

The current Director of Graduate Studies for Media Studies is [Lori Emerson](#). For logistical questions about enrollment, registration, paperwork, and the like, the best contact is [Jorge Garza](#), the CMDI Graduate Program Manager.

Program directors

Assistant Professor [Steven Frost](#) (they/them) is an interdisciplinary fiber artist whose research focuses on textiles, memes, queer history, pop culture, and community development in DIY spaces and libraries. They are the associate director of the [Unstable Design Lab](#). Their work has been widely exhibited, locally and internationally. Using weaving, Frost combines traditional materials like yarn and cotton with non-traditional materials from a range of sources, exploring the ways history and time are embedded in materials. Professor Frost often teaches MDST 5001 for incoming MAPE graduate students.

Associate Professor [Nathan Schneider](#) (he/him) does participatory research focused on building an online economy more just to workers, users, and communities. He also directs the [Media Economies Design Lab \(MEDLab\)](#), which offers research fellowships to MAPE students. His academic background is in religious studies, and he is part of our [Center on Media, Religion and Culture](#). Nathan is the author of four books and has published hundreds of articles in journalistic and scholarly venues. He co-founded a news organization that covers social movements around the world and serves on several nonprofit boards.

How our community works

Although students develop highly individualized projects, they do so through ongoing mutual support and collaboration. The MAPE community includes not only the program directors and students, but also the full Media Studies faculty, who teach and advise MAPE

students, and the students in our PhD program. Our community additionally extends to the networks of allies, organizations, and collaborators beyond the university who have worked with MAPE students in the past. At the heart of this program is a spirit of mutual accountability, woven among all these stakeholders.

The MAPE community also strives to continually grow in its inclusivity. We emphatically share CMDI's vision for [inclusive excellence](#). We commit to addressing both individual acts and systemic patterns of harmful discrimination, recognizing that our program is in no way immune from the legacies of oppression that surround us, but that it can nevertheless be a site of healing and liberation.

This section introduces some of the spaces and practices we use for community building. Active participation is essential to the health of our community, so students should ensure that they are available to fully take part in all that we do together as a program. Non-participation is not compatible with degree completion.

Email list

We have [an email list](#) where we share announcements relevant to current MAPE students. All students should be added automatically. The program directors are on the list as well. If you are not on it and feel you should be, please let a director know.

Feel free to use the list to communicate with fellow members of the MAPE community. After graduation, there is also an [alumni list](#) for ongoing updates and opportunities.

Retreat

Each Fall the MAPE community comes together for a one-day retreat. The date will be announced during the summer. This is a chance for us to get to know each other, learn about one another's projects, and share a meal and some time outdoors.

Please consider participation obligatory, barring circumstances beyond your control.

Workshops

Roughly every month during the academic year, MAPE students and faculty meet for an hour-long workshop. In these sessions, students present their progress on their degree projects (including very rough and in-progress ideas!) for peer feedback. Speakers for each session will be scheduled in advance.

Please consider participation obligatory, barring circumstances beyond your control.



Jeff Godwin presents at the 2018 showcase (photo: Stephanie Cook).

Colloquia

The department holds regular colloquium sessions throughout the academic year, which include talks by guest speakers, faculty, graduate students, and more. These are intended for Media Studies faculty and graduate students of all levels, in order to cultivate a shared culture and discourse across the MA and PhD programs. Dates, times, and topics will be announced.

You guessed it: Please consider participation obligatory, barring circumstances beyond your control.

On-campus organizations

The CU Boulder campus is full of organizations that can make great allies for MAPE students. Here are some of the ones closest to us that we would love to help connect you with, starting with those based within Media Studies:

[**Center on Media, Religion and Culture**](#). Directed by MAPE co-founder Nabil Echchaibi as of 2022, the CMRC is an internationally recognized leader in religion and media scholarship. It organizes regular conferences and hosts a weekly seminar for graduate students, which MAPE students are welcome to participate in.

[**Media Archaeology Lab**](#). Directed by Media Studies professor Lori Emerson, the MAL is a living museum of old technology that invites artistic and technical experimentation. Come for the video game consoles, stay for the lie-detectors.

[**Media Economies Design Lab**](#). Led by MAPE co-director Nathan Schneider, MEDLab is a site for practice-based research on community ownership and governance in the online economy. MAPE students helped to build MEDLab and often serve as paid research fellows.

B2 Center for Media, Arts and Performance. Housed at the ATLAS Institute and formerly headed by MAPE co-director Steven Frost. It is a potential exhibition space for performance and art projects.

New Venture Challenge. A campus-wide startup contest offers a chance to validate your own business idea or join an existing project. MAPE co-director Nathan Schneider has served as a co-organizer and can help students connect.

Office for Outreach and Engagement. OOE provides grants and other resources to support community-engaged scholarship.

Unstable Design Lab. Housed at the ATLAS Institute, the lab pursues projects that reflect an interest in designing and making textiles (some with integrated circuitry), community building and advocating for the arts within engineering practice. MAPE co-director Steven Frost serves as Associate Director of the lab. The Unstable Design Lab hosts a talk series focused on contemporary textiles and design. Feel free to see past lectures on their YouTube channel or sign up on their website for future talks.

Off-campus partnerships

The health of our community depends on the health of our relationships with external partners, who make our collaborative projects possible. Every MAPE student and faculty member who works with off-campus partners serves as an ambassador for the program; how we behave affects how partners and their networks will perceive MAPE in the future, and even the university as a whole. We therefore all benefit from supporting each other in being good partners.

Every relationship is different, but here are a few guidelines that MAPE community members should strive to follow with off-campus partners:

Respect. Academia is not the exclusive source of valuable knowledge. Honor the knowledge and wisdom of partners in their domains. Recognize that academic research has often been extractive toward

external communities, and design relationships that confer mutual benefit.

Humility. Do not over-promise. Take on only what you know you can follow through on in the time available. Be careful about “savior” mentalities; avoid thinking of yourself as solving others’ problems for them. Err on the side of following partners’ lead.

Transparency. At each stage of the process, make transparent what you are doing, what you plan to do, and how your academic incentives (such as assignments and courses) relate to your work in the partnership.

Consent. Obtain explicit consent for all aspects of the collaboration, from documentation and recording to publication or exhibition.

Accountability. Create agreements that specify the obligations that you and your partners are committing to. Particularly when working with historically marginalized communities, strive to practice the disability-justice slogan, “Nothing about us without us.” For more, consider reading Sasha Costanza-Chock’s [*Design Justice*](#) (2020).

In most cases, MAPE projects do not require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. However, if you plan to conduct research with human subjects that involves risk or is designed to produce generalizable results, consult the campus [IRB website](#) to see if the approval process applies to you. When in doubt, discuss with your advisor or the MAPE directors.

Above all, if you have any questions or uncertainty about how to proceed in a relationship, turn to the MAPE community for support. Talking through an interaction or a dynamic can lend clarity that may be hard to see at first. We all have an incentive to see you succeed in your relationships.

Funding, financial aid, and extra support

We hope to make MAPE as financially accessible as possible for students while providing valuable experiences with paid teaching or research. Each year we are able to offer a limited number of teaching assistantships and research assistantships through the Media Studies department. Typically, MAPE students have also had success finding teaching assistantships in other departments as well.

During your time with us, you may encounter unanticipated financial needs. We also want to help you cultivate the skills you need to find resources for your projects. Funding opportunities for projects and emergency needs are available at the level of the campus, the college, and the department. Please feel free to reach out to the program directors for guidance, especially after reviewing these resources:

- Campus-level [financial aid opportunities](#)
- College-level [emergency funding procedures](#)
- The [CMDI Grad Student Resources Canvas page](#)
- Media Studies [fellowship funding procedures](#)

The Associate Chair for Graduate Studies will announce opportunities in the Fall semester to apply for CMDI awards as well as university fellowship funds.

Students may also want to consider applying for funds from the [Graduate and Professional Student Government](#), the [Center for Humanities and the Arts](#), and the [Office for Public and Community-Engaged Scholarship](#).

Grievances

According to CU Boulder campus policy, all students have a right to lodge a complaint or grievance without fear of retaliation or adverse consequences. Make sure you familiarize yourself with the [Graduate Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities](#).

The grievance process should follow the steps outlined below:

1. **Meeting with the instructor.** If you have a grievance about a grade or your performance in a course, you should meet with your instructor to discuss your concerns and attempt to find a resolution.
2. **Meeting with the Director of Graduate Studies.** If you cannot resolve the issue after having discussed it with your instructor, you may request a meeting with the Director of Graduate Studies in Media Studies. The meeting should be preceded by a written appeal, where you outline the reasons for your grievance and provide all the necessary details about the case. The written appeal should be submitted within 45 days of the end of the semester in question. The Director of Graduate Studies will then meet with you and with your instructor separately and make a recommendation on how to proceed. Please note, though, that the Director of Graduate Studies (or the department Chair) cannot require an instructor to change their grading policies.
3. **Meeting with CMDI Associate Dean of Graduate Studies.** If the previous steps have not led to a satisfactory solution, you may request a meeting with the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. This meeting shall be preceded by a written appeal as outlined above.

You can also find more information about the grievance procedure on the Graduate School website: [Grievance Flowchart](#) and [Grievance Process and Procedures](#).

Sorting out a course of study



At the 2019 MAPE showcase (photo: Kimberly Coffin).

How long will all this last?

The standard duration of the MAPE program is two years—three semesters focused on required courses and electives, and one semester focused on completing a degree project. This schedule enables students to move through the program with the support of a consistent cohort of colleagues. It's also a good pace for keeping students' momentum going from beginning to end.

If a student needs an alternative schedule, we can accommodate that as well. For instance, students who are full-time university employees may need to proceed at a slower pace. Students who need to take a leave of absence for personal reasons may do so as well. According to [Graduate School policies](#), students risk dismissal if they take more than four years to complete their degree. Even if they extend their coursework beyond a

two-year period, students should carry out the degree project portion of their work within one year, from selecting their advisor to completing the project. This helps faculty members budget their advising capacity and ensures that students complete their projects with the support of a cohort.

Advising is a relationship

Throughout their time in the program, students may have several different advising relationships. At first, they should work with the program directors to identify priorities and particular courses. Students who plan to do a certificate program outside of Media Studies should also work with an advisor in that program. Finally, the degree project committee chair (hereafter, “advisor”) becomes the primary guide during the final year of the program. But that’s not a limit! We encourage students to seek out multiple faculty members in order to get multiple perspectives on how best they can use their time at CU and afterward.

Students and faculty should both be respectful of one another’s time. If faculty feel too much is being asked of them, they will say so. Students should also voice their concerns about advising relationships to their advisors or program directors.

Best practices for an advising relationship include:

- Meet one-on-one at least once per month, which the student is responsible for organizing
- Maintain a shared timeline for all activities and deliverables
- Establish clear agendas for meetings
- Maintain a professional relationship with appropriate boundaries

The advising process is one of the best parts of our jobs as faculty members, and we hope it is one of the highlights of your time with us. We want to get to know you and help you succeed as much as possible on your own terms.

Trajectories

MAPE is designed for students to make it their own. We don't have a finite set of specified tracks in the program, because the relationship between student and advisor should be sufficient for determining the relevant expectations. Those standards can vary quite a bit. Here is a sense of some of the different ways people have used the MAPE program in the past:

Academic. Take graduate courses that are geared toward PhD students, alongside MAPE courses. Develop a degree project that combines a publishable article for a peer-reviewed journal, along with accountable engagement with a relevant public based on your findings. By the end, be ready to apply to PhD programs to continue your research.

Activist. Identify an issue area and plan coursework across the university to receive an issue-specific certificate by the end of the program. Articulate a theory of change and how your intervention might fit within broader processes. Develop a degree project that supports an organization or community relevant to the issue.

Artistic. Study a particular medium or topic and produce a degree project in collaboration with fellow artists or subjects. Understand previous work that your contribution builds on. Identify appropriate exhibition options and be ready for exhibition in a form that is accountable to collaborators.

Documentary. Take courses that cultivate particular production skills or subject knowledge and plan a documentary project. Identify a mentor in the relevant profession. Pitch the project to prominent publications and aim to produce a publishable draft at the end of the degree.

Entrepreneurial. Aim to come out of the program with a startup organization or company with a particular mission. Take courses in either business or a relevant issue, and work with the Media Economies

Design Lab. Showcase your idea at the campus-wide New Venture Challenge.

Again, the above summaries are not formulas, just models. Students should work out their own plans with their advisor.

Classes, of course

Courses should prepare students for the practical and theoretical work of their degree project. Students in the MAPE program take a total of 30 credit hours, including 24 hours of coursework. This includes courses offered by the Media Studies department, CMDI, and the campus beyond. The final semester should consist of only the 6-hour Graduate Professional Project course.

The schedule below assumes a standard, two-year period in the program. Students who require a different schedule should consult with program directors. Students may also opt to take courses in the summer when available.

There are three required courses listed below, plus the degree project course; these must be taken to complete the MAPE degree. *Italic* text indicates recommended distributions for other credit hours, which can be taken in Media Studies and CMDI, or across campus if directly relevant. As a general rule, students should take only graduate-level courses. Explore the CU Boulder catalog at classes.colorado.edu.

Year one	
Fall	• Connected Media Practices • <i>Emphasis Course</i> • <i>Media Practice/Research Course</i>
Spring	• Media Activism and Public Engagement • Media Theories

	• <i>Emphasis Course</i>
Year two	
Fall	• <i>Emphasis Course</i> • <i>Media Practice/Research Course</i>
Spring	• Graduate Professional Project

The MAPE project course is to be taken with the student's advisor. All students should be sure they are registered for MDST 5851 - Graduate Professional Project, at 6 credit hours, during their final semester. Contact the department administrator if this is not the case.

For internships or independent studies, students should consult with program directors and the relevant instructor. Instructors are under no obligation to offer these opportunities, so be sure your proposal is aligned with their interests. Find internship opportunities and register for one through the [CMDI Career and Internships Office](#).

Various [graduate certificates](#) are available across campus, and we encourage students to consider those, to the extent that they are compatible with MAPE requirements.

The big, very important degree project



Autumn Tyler (MAPE '19) presenting at the degree project showcase (photo: Glenn Asakawa).

The heart of the MAPE program is the degree project. Its mission: a critical media intervention, deeply accountable to a relevant community. Like the MAPE program as a whole, the project should integrate theory and practice, self-reflection and strategic advocacy, social awareness and technical prowess. Upon its completion, the project should be ready-to-deploy, so it can serve as a starting point for post-degree next steps. With the exception of being part of the required showcase event, the project need not actually be deployed—published, broadcast, shared, or whatever the appropriate verb is.

The project process goes like this: first, the student will submit a proposal, explaining the project, the field to which it contributes, and its rationale as a critical intervention. From proposal to project, students work with the guidance of a three-member committee, to whom

students will finally present the project in an oral defense. Finally, we celebrate each year's projects with a public showcase.

Medium/media

We are most concerned about the ideas and relationships that guide students' projects, rather than the particular medium. Some use the project as a chance to learn new technical skills; others use it to apply skills they already have in new ways. Possible forms that the final project might take include, but are not limited to:

- Interactive website or app
- Public-relations campaign strategy
- Artwork
- Multimedia reportage
- Video essay, documentary, or podcast
- Scholarly article with a plan for publication and circulation
- Popular education curriculum and practice

The medium or media, along with other aspects of the project, should be explained and justified in the proposal and agreed on with the advisor.

Every degree-worthy project will be expected to meet the following standards:

Critical reflection. Include clear evidence of reflection on (a) relevant theoretical discourses, (b) one's own choices of subject and media, (c) the broader social context.

Originality. Make a unique contribution to the field of which the project is a part, demonstrating a sophisticated grasp of the existing literature and research.

Public engagement. Collaborate with an external organization or community to develop and implement the project. Do so with accountability and integrity.

Technical prowess. Complete the project using the highest standards of excellence associated with the chosen medium or media, making sophisticated use of appropriate technologies.

Revision. With the guidance of peers and advisors, carry out meaningful revisions on early drafts that demonstrate a commitment to process and self-improvement.

Completeness. Ensure that the project fully meets the standards of format, topic, and scope agreed on in the proposal process.

Readiness. Produce a project that is ready to implement in some public venue upon completion. The project should include a realistic plan for deployment, though carrying it out is not required.



Equipment at the 2019 MAPE showcase event (photo: Kimberly Coffin).

Documenting community engagement

When we talk about public engagement, we mean *accountable* engagement. MAPE must not produce extractive collaborations. Projects should demonstrate their mechanisms of accountability with relevant communities. For more on what we mean by this, see [“Off-Campus Partnerships”](#) above.

Students should document their community engagement in the following ways:

- At the proposal stage, the student identifies bios and contact information for three affected community members to their committee. Before approving the proposal, the chairperson may contact them for feedback on the proposed project.
- When turning in the final project, the student should include at least one letter, audio message, or other appropriate medium from an affected community member attesting to the impact of the project.

If the timing of the degree project does not line up with that of the collaboration, it is not necessary that a project be deployed to be considered complete. It is sufficient for the completion of the degree for students to simply complete a strategic plan for how they currently intend to deploy it. With that plan in hand, the defense and evaluation process can provide useful feedback that can be used after the degree is complete.

Commissioning a committee

Students are responsible for assembling a three-member committee to evaluate their project. Each member should have an area of expertise related to the key features of the project, and together they should reflect a diversity of perspectives. The committee must include:

- First, a CU faculty member affiliated with Media Studies who will serve as the committee chair and primary advisor

- Second, a CU faculty member affiliated with any department in CMDI (including Media Studies)
- Third, any CU faculty member with a relevant area of expertise (including a faculty member in Media Studies or other CMDI departments)

The second and third committee members must be approved by the primary advisor. At least one committee member should be equipped to evaluate technical prowess in the chosen media.

It is also possible for the third committee member to be a stakeholder from outside the university, such as a member of the student's partner community. This requires additional paperwork, as any committee member must be recognized by the Graduate School. We recommend using only CU faculty as committee members, while developing an appropriate accountability process with the partner community.

All committee members must have a current Graduate Faculty Appointment (GFA) to serve on the committee. If you are uncertain about a member's GFA status, or if you need to request a GFA for an external member, please contact CMDI's Graduate Program Manager.

Faculty must balance many demands, and a student's preferred committee members may not be able to participate. Faculty are under no obligation to serve on a committee, and no faculty member should chair more than three MAPE committees during a given year.

When a student has formed their committee, they should contact the CMDI Graduate Program Manager to file the appropriate paperwork.

What a committee does (and doesn't)

The purpose of the committee is to assist, guide, and evaluate a degree project. Committees are there to help, but the entire process should be led by the student. The student takes responsibility for scheduling meetings and making sure the committee has whatever paperwork is necessary for the process to proceed.

Students should work especially closely with their advisor, who chairs the committee, meeting more regularly and coordinating logistics. A degree project is a complex process, and we expect that changes will occur as it develops; the student should be sure to discuss with their advisor any substantial changes to the project.

The basic outline of what students should be sure they do with their committees:

- Meet for at least monthly check-ins with advisor
- Meet with other members at least once before the defense for feedback, in addition to sharing drafts of the proposal and project
- Plan a defense date that works for all committee members
- Organize the circulation of defense paperwork and deliver it to the CMDI Graduate Program Manager

Students should plan at least a week in advance when scheduling meetings with committee members, and at least a month in advance for all-committee gatherings such as the defense.

The proposal and project statement

The proposal is a 4,000-to-5,000-word text that explains the scope and rationale of the final project. It is an opportunity to demonstrate critical and theoretical sophistication, while applying them to the task of describing a public intervention. Before beginning the proposal, the student and their advisor should agree on the basic structure of the project, including the topic, the medium, and the strategy for public engagement.

Proposals can take different forms, but all should include the following (and this can serve as an outline for its structure):

- Clear summary of the project and rationale

- Literature review, drawing on coursework and independent reading, that grounds the project and its theory of change in theoretical perspectives and empirical research
- Explanation of the medium of the project, including all specific deliverables the committee should expect to see
- Structure of the project's public engagement and accountability to relevant communities
- Timeline for project development
- Contact information for two relevant community partners

A proposal needs to be approved with unanimous support of the student's committee. If a proposal is not approved by the committee by the start of a student's final semester, they cannot proceed with the degree project and must take at least an additional semester to complete the degree.

The proposal will be updated into a project statement that fully reflects the feedback from peers and committee members at the time of the oral defense. Some students use the proposal as a public-facing component of their project, as an artist statement or whitepaper. Others use it solely as a form of communication with their committee. It also guides committees as they carry out evaluation.

The defense

The defense is a session in which a student meets with their committee, presents their project, answers questions, and receives feedback. At the end of the defense, the committee evaluates the project for approval.

At the start of their final semester, the student should schedule the defense. We recommend using an online scheduling tool to negotiate committee members' schedules. Send a calendar invite with a Zoom link or in-person location to all committee members. Finally, the student must submit the [Final Examination Form](#) at least two weeks before the defense, which enables the Graduate School to initiate the process necessary for approval. Select "Project Defense" as the exam type.

The student should send committee members the final version of their project materials and project statement at least ten days before the defense. Consider this the final due date of the degree project.

A typical defense should take one hour, with the advisor presiding and guiding the discussion. Given the tight schedule, please do not invite guests; that's what the Showcase is for! We suggest the following basic agenda:

- Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)
- Student presentation with slides or a demo (10 minutes)
- Questions and discussion (30 minutes)
- Committee deliberation without student (10 minutes)
- Final feedback with student (5 minutes)

Students should use their presentation time to give a transparent account of the project process, including its challenges and setbacks. This is not a sales pitch but an opportunity for final feedback and guidance. The committee decides on whether to accept the project by consensus. At the end of the defense, the advisor informs the student whether the project has been accepted by the committee. The committee may request revisions, which may or may not be required for approval.

After the defense, the chair should inform the CMDI Graduate Program Manager to begin the process for submitting the committee's assessment to the Graduate school.

Evaluation

We seek to evaluate MAPE projects on their own terms, rather than according to uniform criteria. In particular, a project will be judged by the standards described in the student's own proposal, in the form it was most recently approved by the committee, as well as the [above project requirements](#).

Degree projects will receive a letter grade according to the following breakdown:

- Adherence to timeline: 20%
- Proposal: 20%
- Final project: 60%

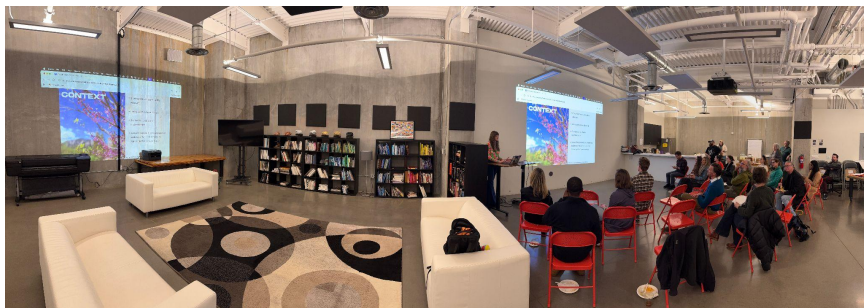
A passing grade is 80% (equivalent to a B-) or higher. A passing grade is necessary for the degree to be awarded. A project accepted by its committee must also receive a passing grade. The advisor has final discretion on what grade to award.

An advisor may allow a student to revise their project for a higher grade between the time of the defense and the due date for the grade. An advisor is not required to grant this option, particularly if the student has had ample opportunity to address relevant feedback from the committee.

In the event that the student does not receive a passing grade, the project must be revised and turned in again and defended at a later date agreed upon with the committee. Only one repeat is possible. If a student completes a repeat defense before the end of Maymester, they are not required to re-enroll, but they will graduate in the summer rather than the spring.

By the time of their defense and evaluation, however, students should already have a good understanding of how their committee views their project, due to ongoing sharing of drafts and feedback.

Showcase



Panorama of the 2026 MAPE Showcase (photo: Ted Striphas).

At the end of each academic year, we hold a showcase event featuring the projects of our graduates. This is a public celebration of all that we've achieved. Plan to invite your friends, families, and partner communities. It's a chance to deepen our accountability to all our stakeholders. The showcase itself is not part of formal evaluation, but it is very much part of how our communities see each of us and the program as a whole. Students should consider participation obligatory.

The format of the showcase changes somewhat each year. As the date approaches, the program directors will guide students who plan to graduate on how to prepare.

Timeline

These dates reference the academic year before a student plans to graduate. The MAPE timeline should be considered strict for students that plan to graduate on time. Any deviations should be discussed and approved with the advisor. The defense deadline varies each year; consult the [Graduate School for precise deadlines](#).

- **April 15 of the year before planned graduation:** Recruit an advisor and agree on a brief preliminary project plan
- **Summer:** Develop plan for the proposal with advisor
- **September 1:** Determine the other two committee members
- **October 15:** First draft of proposal due to committee

- **November 15:** Proposal approved by committee
- **March 1:** Submit project draft and updated proposal to committee members for feedback
- **Week of April 1:** Turn in final draft of project and updated proposal to committee members
- **Week of April 10:** Oral defense of final project

After graduation: don't be a stranger

MAPE doesn't stop when students get their degrees. We hope it will be an ongoing community for you wherever your path leads. Please know that we on the MAPE team want to hear from you and assist you in any way we can. And we hope that alumni will be available to each other as mentors, peers, friends, and allies.



Rossana Longo (MAPE '19) greets an attendee at the degree project showcase (photo: Glenn Asakawa).

Evaluate your experience

After you finish, please complete the [MAPE evaluation form](#) to give us one last bit of feedback on how your experience was and how we can do better. We also appreciate direct feedback by email or in a personal meeting with individual program directors. But the evaluation form helps us create a shared record of how students experience the program.

Letters of recommendation

MAPE students often ask their former faculty members to write letters of recommendation for future job or study applications. We love singing your praises! But doing so might not always be possible or appropriate, and faculty members reserve the right to decline such requests.

Please be courteous: Reach out to the faculty member by email two weeks to a month in advance of when the letter is due. Choose the faculty member(s) who know you best and who have worked with you most recently. And provide information about the opportunity being applied for and context about how you are positioning yourself for the role. Your success is our success!

Join the alumni email list

We have an email list to help alumni maintain communication with the program and each other. [Please join it](#) using an address that will be active for the foreseeable future. This is a list for announcements and light discussion. Feel free to post opportunities and updates that you think will be of interest to the wider MAPE community. The list is moderated to ensure it is gentle on our inboxes, so all posts will need to be approved before they circulate.

In this and other ways, please know that we hope your involvement in the MAPE community will not end at graduation. We are eager to hear (again and again) about where life takes you, and to continue learning from each other.