

MASTER'S THESIS GUIDELINES

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

(Revised, February, 1999; August 2005)

The Thesis Committee

1. The thesis committee consists of at least three members: a chair and two others. The chair and at least one other member must be full-time members of the psychology faculty. The chair also must qualify as a member of the Graduate Faculty. The third member may be another member of the department, another faculty member from the university, or a person from the community who (a) holds a Ph.D. or is otherwise qualified, (b) has expertise that can be brought to bear on the particular thesis topic, and (c) agrees to serve as a committee member.
2. The thesis committee chair must first agree to work with the student and must approve the topic that will be pursued. The remaining committee members should be selected by the student in consultation with the chair. No faculty member is required to serve on any particular thesis committee. It is the responsibility of the student to ask each potential committee member if he/she is willing to serve.

The Thesis Proposal

1. The purpose of the proposal meeting is for the student to provide evidence of a basic knowledge of the research area and to give the thesis committee the opportunity to (a) hear a summary of the proposed research, (b) ask questions of the student, (c) decide whether the proposed study is adequate, and (d) make recommendations for changes in the methodology if necessary.
2. The content and length of the proposal is a matter for the student to work out with the committee chair. Typically, the proposal consists of a review of the immediately relevant literature, a statement of the research hypothesis(es), a description of the proposed methodology, and analytic strategy. Any committee member is permitted to require additional information before making a judgment on the adequacy of the proposal.
3. Each member of the committee should receive a copy of the proposal (that has previously been approved by the thesis adviser) at least one full week prior to the proposal meeting.
4. All members of the thesis committee must be present at the proposal meeting.
5. The members of the thesis committee will sign a form (sample attached to this document) indicating their approval of the proposed/revised thesis research plan, along with a listing of any significant changes made to the research design as proposed. Copies of this form will go to the student, the committee chair, and to the Coordinator of the Research Master's program. Additionally, a copy of the approved proposal (incorporating required changes) must be filed with the committee chair and the Coordinator of the Research Master's program. If additional revisions are made after the proposal meeting that significantly alter the research strategy, these revisions must be approved by the full committee and noted on the aforementioned form.

Completing the Research

1. It is difficult to give any more than the most generic guidance about the completion of thesis research since every project will be unique. In general, the student should complete a literature review on the topic, design a study, collect the data, perform the analyses, and write the final thesis.
2. The student should work closely with the committee chair on the content and format of the written document. The thesis should conform to the APA Publication Guidelines. The final document also must meet the requirements of the Graduate Division. (Check with the Graduate Office or the Research Program Coordinator for guidelines.) Copies of recently completed theses to use as guidelines are available in the library.

The Oral Defense

1. When the research is completed, the student should schedule a time for the oral defense. All committee members must attend the defense. The defense should take place no later than five weeks prior to the end of the semester (one month before the last day of classes), if the student is planning to graduate. The time, date, and location of the defense must be announced to all department faculty and students one week prior to the defense.
2. When approved by the thesis chair, each member of the thesis committee must be given the complete thesis draft, at least one full calendar week prior to the oral defense date.
3. The oral defense consists of: (a) a presentation by the student of a summary of the research process, findings, and conclusions, (b) questions of the student by the committee members and any other interested persons who are present, and (c) a decision made by the committee members as to the adequacy of the thesis. Grades for the thesis defense are: Pass, Conditional Pass, and Fail. A grade of pass indicates that the thesis, in its current form, is acceptable and ready for final copying and submission to the graduate office. If a grade of Pass is given, committee members will sign the signature page indicating their approval. If a grade of Conditional Pass is given, the committee agrees to accept the thesis contingent on the student making specified changes to the document prior to its submission to the Graduate Office. Revisions are almost always necessary. When the specified revisions have been made, the committee members will then sign the approval page. A grade of Fail indicates that the thesis and/or the oral defense of it is unacceptable and must be completely rewritten or redone. Final grades on the thesis itself take the form of letter grades (e.g., A, B).
4. While all faculty members and students are welcome to attend the oral defense, only the committee members may participate in the decision to accept or reject the thesis. Each committee member must accept the thesis in order for the student to receive credit for having completed the thesis.

Credit

1. The student receives six credit hours (in Psychology 599) toward graduation requirements for completing a thesis. (This does not include course credit for Psychology 514 or 597). Once the student registers for thesis credit the first time, he/she is required to register for at least two hours of thesis credit each fall and spring semester thereafter until the thesis is completed. In addition, the student must be enrolled in thesis hours during the semester they plan to graduate, even if it is summer. (Please note: No student will be allowed to apply more than six hours of thesis credit toward graduation requirements.)

2. While the thesis is underway, students registered for thesis hours will receive a grade of "SP" if satisfactory progress is being made, or "NP" if satisfactory progress is not being made. When the thesis is completed, six of the thesis hours are converted to a letter grade (A or B). Excess thesis hours (SP or NP) will remain on the student's transcript (but will not count towards graduation requirements).
3. There is a provision for students to "stop-out", or discontinue work on the thesis, one time during the course of the thesis. This stop-out may last up to four semesters (not including summers). The stop-out request must be approved by the thesis adviser and the director of Graduate Studies.

Timing

1. Proposal Meeting. Experience indicates that it almost always takes a minimum of a full calendar year to complete a thesis after the proposal is approved. Therefore, students attending full-time who hope to graduate in the spring of their second year need to select a committee and have a proposal meeting during or just following the completion of the second semester of coursework. Copies of the thesis proposal are distributed to the committee members a full week before the meeting. One week after the proposal meeting, a copy of the final, approved proposal and the approval form should be filed with the thesis coordinator.
2. Oral defense. The oral defense of the thesis needs to be scheduled so that the requirement given below (#3) is met. This means that the oral defense should be scheduled at least one month in advance of the first day of finals to allow changes to the document required by the committee and by the Director of Graduate Studies.
3. Submission of Draft to Committee and Graduate Office. A draft copy of the complete thesis (approved by the committee chair as ready for the oral defense) must be submitted to each committee member at least one full calendar week prior to the defense. A copy of this draft also must be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies one month prior to the first day of scheduled final examinations for the term in which the student expects to receive credit for the thesis course. The deadline is posted in the STARS each semester. Since this is usually the semester in which the student intends to graduate, it is imperative that this deadline be observed.
4. Final Copies. When the thesis document is finalized (all revisions required by the committee and the graduate office have been made, and the signature page is completed), two copies (printed on special paper, with a receipt for a binding fee paid to the library) must be submitted to the Graduate Office. This should occur no later than the last day of classes in the semester in which the student will receive a grade for the thesis (typically this is the semester of graduation).
5. Failure to meet deadlines. Students not meeting these deadlines will be required to register and pay for 2 hours of thesis course credit for every following semester until their thesis is completed and approved. You must be enrolled for at least two thesis hours during the semester in which you plan to graduate.
6. Summer completion. Students wishing to begin or complete their thesis during the summer should recognize that faculty schedules may preclude the possibility of scheduling a proposal meeting and/or the oral defense in a timely manner.

Summary of Typical Thesis Schedule

- 1. By end of second semester/first year** - schedule proposal meeting
- 2. One week prior to proposal meeting** - distribute copies to committee members
- 3. One week after proposal meeting** - file proposal form and copy of proposal with thesis coordinator
- 4. Five weeks before final exams begin in semester of graduation (at latest, and one full week before oral defense)**- submit thesis (approved by thesis committee chair) to graduate office (check official school calendar in STARS for exact dates) and to committee members. Must be submitted to committee members one full week before oral defense, below).
- 5. One month prior to final exams (at latest)**- oral defense
- 6. Two weeks after defense** - submit revised version of thesis, incorporating changes recommended at defense, to committee chair for review
- 7. Last day of classes** - submit 2 copies of completed, approved thesis with original signature pages on binding-quality paper to Graduate Office.

Thesis Proposal Acceptance Form

Candidate's Name: _____

Date: _____

Proposed Semester of Graduation: _____

Thesis Working Title:

The undersigned members of this thesis committee do hereby accept this proposal, provided the following revisions are made:

Thesis Committee Chairperson

Committee Member

Committee Member

Committee Member