

Thesis

Students who choose to write a Masters thesis usually are thinking about pursuing a doctoral degree or other further study, although other students can and do complete a thesis for their own personal satisfaction and development. A Masters thesis involves defining an original research topic or problem, planning a research program, selecting and using appropriate methodologies to collect and analyze artifacts, information, or data, and writing a professional quality thesis with faculty guidance. A thesis generally takes two semesters to complete. ***The first semester's work will produce the student's proposal/prospectus. The second semester will produce the thesis and its public oral defense in front of the student's supervising committee.***

While theoretical frameworks should guide and/or be tested by the research questions, a strictly theoretical paper is not acceptable for a masters thesis. Masters theses must involve an analytic or empirical component. Thus, the thesis must involve research questions that are examined through data or artifact analysis. Theses may grow out of students' ongoing projects or interests, but must involve original artifact analysis or new data collection. The thesis may involve quantitative, qualitative, rhetorical, cultural, and/or critical research methodologies. Note in the guidelines below which come from the Graduate School, that a student must declare her or his intent to write a thesis after half the course work (18 credits) is completed.

The Graduate School *Thesis Guidelines*

Establishing a Committee

Students with a thesis requirement in their graduate program must follow these guidelines.

- Once a student has completed about 50 % of their degree program requirements, the student should consult with his/her Graduate Program Director and establish a thesis committee consisting of three University of Portland faculty members.
- The chair and one other faculty member (2 out of 3) must hold a terminal degree.
- Additional members may be selected especially for their expertise (e.g. statistics, content area, etc.). Off-campus committee members must be approved by the Graduate Program Director and the candidate is responsible for all expenses related to the off-campus committee member's participation.
- Once the committee has been approved by the Graduate Program Director, the student selects a chair, asks the chair to serve, and the chair has agreed to serve; then, the student may begin to work on a thesis proposal. The chair becomes the candidate's academic advisor.

Thesis Proposal/Prospectus

It is the student's responsibility to schedule regular meetings with the chairperson to discuss the chairperson's expectations regarding the quality of the proposal.

The Written Prospectus. The prospectus begins as the *blueprint* or plan for the thesis and evolves into a *contractual agreement* between the student and his or her thesis committee. Students meet with their thesis committee chair to determine a research topic and plan their prospectus and thesis, including a schedule of meeting times and a benchmarked time frame for completing the thesis. As a general guideline, the text of the full prospectus should be between 15-25 pages (excluding references, appendices). **All members of the committee must receive the prospectus at least two weeks prior to the end of the first semester's thesis work.** The written prospectus should adhere to either APA or MLA publication format and address the following prompts:

COVER PAGE, including title, author, date, and purpose of the submission.

ONE-PAGE ABSTRACT

RESEARCH PROBLEM

- What is the goal of the research project?
- What is the problem, issue, or critical focus to be investigated?
- What are the important terms to be defined?
- What is the significance of the problem?
 - Do you want to test or extend a theory?
 - Do you want to test or evaluate competing theories?
 - Do you want to analyze an overlooked, but important, message or set of messages?
 - Do you want to analyze an important or compelling message or set of messages that, as yet, has not garnered scholarly attention?
 - Do you want to correct previous research that wasn't conducted very well?
 - Do you want to resolve inconsistent results from earlier studies?
 - Do you want to solve a practical problem?
 - Do you want to test a method or methodology?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE / JUSTIFICATION FOR STUDY

- What is the theoretical framework for this investigation?
- Are there complementary or competing theoretical frameworks?
- What does previous research reveal about the different aspects of the problem?
- What research questions and/or hypotheses emerge from the literature review?
 - Is your research question focused enough to yield tangible insight from analysis?
 - Do you have the resources, time, skill, and energy necessary to address this question?
 - Will your research help answer a question about human messages and interactions that will advance current understanding of communication processes and characteristics?

JUSTIFICATION FOR RHETORICAL ARTIFACT(S) (IF DOING RHETORICAL CRITICISM)

- Are desired artifacts readily available?
- Can artifacts be analyzed in the time available given designated method or analysis approach?
- Can you provide direct evidence as to the impact or importance of your selected artifacts?

METHODS (SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES)

- What will constitute the data for the research?
- What materials and information are necessary to conduct the research?
 - How will they be obtained?
 - What special problems can be anticipated in acquiring materials and info?
 - What are the limitations in availability and reporting of materials and info?
- Who or what will provide the data for the research?
 - What is the population being studied?
 - Who will be the study's participants?
 - Which sampling technique will be used?
- What instrumentation (if any) or other inquiry tools will be used?
 - Why use these instruments rather than others?

- How reliable and valid have these instruments proven to be?
- What methods or techniques will be used to collect data?
 - What are the variables ?
 - How will they be manipulated, controlled, measured, and/or observed?
- What procedures will be applied to the methods or techniques?
 - What are the limitations of this methodology?
 - What factors will affect the study's internal and external validity?
 - How will plausible rival hypotheses be minimized?
 - What sources of bias will exist and how will they be controlled?
- Will any ethical principles be jeopardized? How will participants be debriefed?

METHODS (RHETORICAL CRITICISM)

- Which prior studies inform your selection of method analysis steps? In which ways do these prior studies overlap or parallel the analysis you seek to accomplish?
- Which method analysis steps have you borrowed, combined, or adapted from previous studies? What are the advantages and liabilities of these analysis steps?
- Which method analysis steps have you created that are unique to your analysis?
- Indicate precisely the step-by-step analysis you intend to use in this study. Be specific.

DATA ANALYSIS

- How will the data be analyzed?
- What statistical procedures will be used (if any)?
- What criteria will be used to determine whether hypotheses are supported and/or conclusions are valid?

CONCLUDING INFORMATION

- How will the final research report be organized (outline)?
- What sources have you examined thus far that pertain to your study (reference list)?
- What instruments, analysis tools, questions, artifacts, or other data must be made available (appendices)?
- (FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE): What is your working timeframe for obtaining human subjects clearance (if applicable), collecting and analyzing the data, and thesis writing?
- (FOR RHETORICAL CRITICISM): What is your working timeframe for artifact collection, analysis, and thesis writing?

Surces: Pierce, D. L (2003). *Rhetorical Criticism and Theory in Practice*. New York: McGraw-Hill (pp. 94-129); Rubin, R. B., Rubin, A. M., & Piele, L. J. (1993). *Communication research: Strategies and sources* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (pp. 238-240)

A timeline for critical activities and completion must also be included. Specific guidelines are determined by the thesis chairperson.

Once the chairperson has approved of the proposal, then the two other committee members or “readers” are asked to read the proposal (all committee members should be given at least two weeks to read drafts of the thesis and/or proposal).

The proposal defense or hearing should be scheduled by the chairperson upon completion of at least 24 hours of course work.

When the chairperson and two other committee members are ready for the proposal defense, the student coordinates a day and time that the committee and student may meet for the proposal hearing.

Once the student has obtained the committee's agreed upon time for the hearing, the proposal hearing is officially filed with the Graduate School by the chairperson one week prior to the hearing using the following guidelines:

- Fill out the Notice of Thesis Proposal form (Appendix C) and the Graduate School will schedule a room.
- Route the form for signatures; and
- notify the unit faculty of the hearing.

Although all faculty members may attend the proposal meeting and ask questions, only the thesis committee may vote or make binding recommendations for the thesis work.

At the time of the proposal defense, the chairperson obtains the appropriate signatures (see Appendix A) with a copy to be filed in the student's file, a copy going to the Dean, and a copy to the student.

Proposal Defense

A two-hour time slot is scheduled for this hearing.

The chairperson of the thesis conducts the hearing.

The student is asked to prepare a 10 to 15 minute formal presentation explaining justification, rationale, brief overview of the review of literature and proposed methods.

Because the proposal hearing is designed to establish *agreed upon* future work, this hearing must be held no later than the semester prior to the expected final defense and degree completion. Students may not hold a proposal and final defense within the same semester.

Other invited guests such as faculty, students, and friends are asked to leave along with the proposal student approximately 15 minutes before the proposal hearing is scheduled to end. While all guests and the student are outside, the committee members discuss whether or not the proposal is acceptable. There must be unanimous consensus that the proposal is acceptable. The agreed upon proposal becomes a binding agreement between student and faculty. Any changes to the proposal methods and goals must be agreed upon by all members and signed by each committee member.

Thesis Management

Once the thesis proposal has been accepted by committee members, any change in committee must be requested by the student in writing to their respective Graduate Program Director with an explanation for the request.

The new committee member(s) must indicate in writing a willingness to serve and to accept the proposal as presented at the defense, but if the new member agrees to serve but has new recommendations regarding the thesis work, the student is responsible for following the recommendations, as approved by the thesis chair. If the proposal significantly changes, the chair

may request a new proposal defense with the new committee or elect to receive in writing the new member's agreement to the thesis work.

The student must be continuously enrolled in the thesis course from the time the proposal to the final defense. In selecting a chair, the student should recognize that a minimum of two semesters of work may be necessary and that chairpersons will be paid only for the three credits the student enrolls. Therefore, students should be certain that the chairperson is willing to spend his/her time reading the entire thesis work and is committed to the proposal and the timetable.

It is the student's responsibility to seek out faculty help and it is the faculty chair's responsibility to make adequate time for the student including planning the work, discussion, help in analysis of the work, and final editing time. Committee members may expect to act in the minimum capacity as a reader, but additional assistance may be requested by the student.

The thesis should be written following the style guidelines of the discipline/unit. A request for a style substitution should be directed to the student's thesis committee and to the Dean of the Graduate School. Any research involving human subjects should be approved by the campus Institutional Review Board prior to the thesis proposal hearing (see Appendix E).

The faculty is concerned about the occasional practice of using literature search services, statistical "consultants", or other third-party assistance in the completion of the thesis work. In general, the student should perform all research work independently. If outside assistance is used, the student has a special obligation to limit such aid to clerical assistance and operational advice. The student is expected to have attained personal professional mastery of the literature, problem, research techniques, design, analysis, results and implications.

Final Defense/Oral Examination Notice

The thesis advisor in consultation with the student and the committee should plan a final defense/oral examination at least six weeks prior to the date of graduation. The thesis advisor should:

- fill out the Notice of Thesis Defense form (Appendix C);
- route the form for signatures;
- file a copy in the student's file; and
- send copies to the student and other committee members.

The graduate school will schedule a room and appoint a representative to attend the defense.

Final Defense/Oral Examination

A **20 minute** oral presentation serves as a basis for the defense of the thesis. It includes the presentation of the student's ideas and interpretations of the research. The student will defend the relevance of the topic as a contribution to the field of research. All aspects of the study may be questioned.

The oral presentation is scheduled after the committee has accepted the completed draft of the thesis. The committee and student will agree on a convenient date. The thesis advisor will notify the unit Dean and the Dean of the Graduate School indicating the readiness of the

committee to examine the candidate and the time and place of the candidate's oral presentation. This notice shall be at least two weeks in advance of the desired day. The oral presentation is open to the University of Portland, faculty and students. An invitation to attend the presentation will be extended by the Graduate School to the university committee. Other invitations are the responsibility of the chair and/or student.

Copies of the abstract of the study will be provided by the student for distribution at the final defense.

The final defense/oral examination is moderated by the thesis advisor, however all committee members may ask questions. All faculty members may ask questions but only members of the thesis committee vote. All guests, other interested parties, and the candidate are asked to leave during the deliberations. The committee members must unanimously agree that the oral presentation is successful. Oral notice shall be given to the candidate by the thesis advisor and committee upon completion of the candidate's oral defense. Before adjourning of the oral examination the thesis advisor shall secure the signatures of all committee members on the appropriate form. At the time of the final defense/oral examination any modifications of the thesis should be placed in writing and appended to the form. The Graduate School representative observes to protect the interests of the candidate, faculty, and the graduate school.

Submission Of Final Copy

The Graduate School requests that all corrections and signatures be completed and the one hardbound copy and one digital copy (see Appendix D) of the thesis be submitted to the Graduate School office two weeks prior to graduation. The one hardbound copy will go to thesis chair and the digital copy will go to the Library.

Note: the hardbound copy of the thesis needs to be on 20 lb., 24% rag content paper. The student may contact the Graduate School for assistance. This copy should bear the original signatures of all committee members, the Dean of the Unit and the Dean of the Graduate School.