

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STUDIES

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Thesis Guidelines

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PREFACE

Writing a thesis is often one of the most rewarding aspects of graduate study. It gives the student an opportunity to study a topic in depth and to work with noted scholars on a paper that makes a lasting contribution to the scholarship of a field. It is also rewarding for faculty members to work with students on thesis research and writing.

This document is designed to help students in the School of Library and Information Studies who wish to write a thesis. The School's requirement for graduation includes writing a thesis, presenting a portfolio (available only to MLIS students), or successfully completing a comprehensive examination. The decision to write a thesis should be made no later than at the completion of the first semester of enrollment in the program. A decision to write a thesis is advisable for those wishing to pursue studies beyond the Master's degree and any others who wish to have the satisfaction of doing in depth research and presenting the results of the research in a format that can be shared by others.

It is not advisable for students pursuing certification in the School Media Program to write a thesis due to the number of prescribed courses that students specializing in School Media must take. Students who have written a thesis for another master's degree or are enrolled in a double major that requires a thesis, should not choose to write a thesis in the MLIS or MSKM program.

Throughout the degree program, the student should keep in mind the statement from the Graduate College Bulletin:

It is the responsibility of graduate students to familiarize themselves with the general requirements of the Graduate College and with the specific requirements of the particular disciplines in which they are working (Graduate College Bulletin, 2006-2007).

When the decision is made to write a thesis, the student should become familiar with thesis policies and procedures of the Graduate College and the School of Library and Information Studies. A thesis packet can be ordered from the University's Graduate College through its Web site at

<http://gradweb.ou.edu/docs/info/master/thesispkt.htm>

Students should also check with the SLIS staff to receive current information from the School regarding the thesis.

See the following pages for suggested procedures, timelines, and other items of importance.

Procedures

The steps toward the master's degree begin with the selection of a three-person Advisory Committee. A prospectus is prepared by the student and evaluated by the members of the Advisory Committee. After the thesis is completed, a formal oral defense of the thesis before the Advisory Committee and interested members of the public is required. At the discretion of the student and his/her committee, the public may or may not be invited. Once a student begins enrollments in master's thesis research (LIS/KM 5980 Research for Master's Thesis), he or she must continue such enrollments until the degree is granted or the student is terminated. However, at most, 6 of these hours will count toward the degree.

1. Academic Adviser

One of the most satisfying experiences for a graduate student can be to work closely with a faculty member in the research and writing of a thesis. This is an opportunity to do in depth study and to have intellectually challenging discussions with scholars. It can be a highlight of the student's academic experience. The experience can be especially rewarding if students take responsibility for the procedures and timelines so that time with the faculty members can be spent discussing the topic of study.

Each student admitted to the program is assigned a faculty adviser based on the student's interests expressed in the application materials. Upon entry to the program and prior to the completion of 12 hours at the latest (including any hours taken before official admission to the program), any student in the MLIS or MSKM program must file with the School a program planning form that shows which courses are to constitute the 36 hours to be taken for the degree, including any courses to be taken at the University of Oklahoma outside the School and any courses transferred from another institution. This program of study, developed in consultation with the student's adviser, must be approved by the student's adviser, and must be filed with the student's records in the SLIS office. No student admitted to the master's program will be allowed to register for beyond 12 hours without the filing of an approved program.

2. Chair of Advisory Committee

If you are considering the thesis option, you should choose a chair for your advisory committee early in your program. Until an agreement is explicitly made between the student and academic adviser assigned at the beginning of the program, neither should assume that a chair of advisory committee-student relationship exists. The academic adviser is expected to make this policy clear to his or her student from the beginning. Not all faculty are eligible to chair the advisory committee.

Your chair must be from SLIS, and a member of the OU Graduate College faculty. The university does not permit adjunct professors to serve on thesis committees. When the chair accepts the student, he/she becomes the academic adviser. As a courtesy, the academic adviser assigned at the beginning of the program should be notified of this change.

3. Form an Advisory Committee

Together, the student and chair form an Advisory Committee and submit the committee appointment form report to the Graduate College. At the initial meeting of this committee with the student they discuss potential thesis topics, review the student's curriculum, modify, if necessary, the program of study on file in SLIS, and prepare the formal Program of Study filed with the Graduate College.

The Advisory Committee is comprised of three members of the graduate faculty (status M2 or higher): the chair and two faculty from SLIS or the chair and one member from SLIS and one member from outside the department. One member, often the "outside member" is charged with assuring that the rights and interests of both the student and the Graduate College are maintained. The decision to serve on an Advisory Committee will depend upon the faculty member's area of expertise, interest, advising load, and committee load. The Advisory Committee consists of a group that brings particular expertise to the student's area of interest, with each member typically having a unique contribution and role.

When all invited committee members have agreed to serve, the student should obtain and complete the Committee Appointment Form, obtain the signatures of the members, and submit the form to the SLIS Office for recording and forwarding to the Graduate College. Any committee changes must be processed on the Change of Advisory Committee form. Throughout the thesis process, it is advisable for the student to stay in close contact with the thesis committee chair, and, to some extent, the committee members. Problems and surprises can be avoided by keeping the communication open and informing committee members of progress.

4. Research Proficiencies

The student should familiarize him/herself early with the research proficiencies needed. Mastered early, they will be very useful in other coursework, and will lay the groundwork for necessary skills in reading research, assisting with and completing research, and successfully completing the thesis.

Research proficiencies may consist of the following: 1) LIS 5713 Research Methods; 2) proficiency in both qualitative methods of research and data analysis techniques; 3) proficiency in quantitative methods and data analysis techniques; 4) reading knowledge of a language other than English; and 5) knowledge of a computer programming language. Certain language skills may be needed depending on the scope, depth, and topic area of the research as well as the necessary source materials.

Specific courses may be identified which are needed to supplement a program, depending upon a student's specific research interests.

5. Prospectus

After the student has been admitted to candidacy, the student should begin to develop the prospectus. At this time the Advisory Committee Chair becomes the Thesis Chair. The nature of thesis research, by exposing the student to new knowledge, typically broadens interests and introduces new vistas that often make topic selection more complex. It is not unusual for the student to lose interest in a topic as knowledge grows and interests change. Should this occur, another topic should be chosen rather than to pursue the original one merely because one has invested some time in exploring it. The thesis has meaning and excitement only to the extent that the researcher is truly interested in the question. However, if the student's topic changes from one emphasis area to another, the student may need to identify a new Thesis Chair. The student and Committee should discuss the need for a change in Chair and, if agreement is reached, the student must identify a new Thesis Chair. The decision to accept responsibility for serving as Thesis Chair rests solely upon the faculty and depends upon a variety of factors, including current advising load.

Once the Thesis Chair is identified, the student will work to complete the prospectus. When the chair of Advisory Committee agrees that the prospectus is ready, the student should distribute copies to the committee members and then set a time for convening the committee for the prospectus meeting. At that time the committee will make final recommendations for any improvements or modifications. When the prospectus is accepted, all committee members sign their approval and the signed copy is filed in the SLIS Office. The student is now cleared to proceed with the thesis research. If for some reason, as the research progresses, modifications are necessary, the committee must approve such changes. The changes must be filed as amendments to the original prospectus in the SLIS Office.

6. Thesis

The method of preparation and handling of the thesis will vary from committee to committee as well as topic to topic. The student should ascertain precisely the particular requirements of format and documentation. The student should also learn from the chair of Advisory Committee and the committee members exactly how each wishes to review work in progress, i.e., chapter by chapter or in larger portions. In the thesis process the committee members will be of great assistance to the student and frequent consultation is in order as the reading copy is developed. The student should pay careful attention at this point to all the necessary procedural steps regarding the thesis and its defense and all deadline dates.

While working on the thesis, the candidate must maintain continuous enrollment by enrolling in at least two hours of LIS/KM 5980 Research for Master's Thesis (See [Graduate College Bulletin](#)). If continuous enrollment is interrupted for two consecutive semesters, and a summer session, the candidate is dropped from the rolls and must reapply for admission if he/she wishes to complete the program.

Time limits and academic standing requirements are the same as for non-thesis students.

7. Final Examination (Thesis Defense)

The culminating point of the process is the oral defense of the thesis. Upon completion of the thesis, reading copies must be prepared for each committee member. A request for degree check can be submitted the Graduate College 10 working days prior to submission of the reading copy. When approved by the chair of the advisory committee, one copy of the reading copy of the thesis, along with a memorandum of approval from and endorsed by the graduate liaison, is presented to the Graduate College by routing it through the SLIS Office.

The Graduate College will provide the Authority for the Examination form, microfilm contract, thesis title data entry form, Graduate College Exit Survey and other forms as necessary.

The examination, which may be open to the public, depending on the decision of the advisory committee, is not to be scheduled during the period of final course examinations or at any time when the committee cannot be assembled. Summer examination dates may be more difficult to schedule.

Students should distribute reading copies to committee members at least two weeks before the final oral examination (defense of thesis), obtain their corrections and comments, and incorporate these into the final copy. It is the student's responsibility to arrange the date, hour, and place of the final oral examination with members of the committee.

Responsibilities of Advisor and Student

The faculty advisor is available for consultation regarding program planning and course selection, planning for independent studies (directed readings, directed research, directed project, and internship enrollments), and for guidance on the thesis.

The student is responsible for initiating meetings with the faculty advisor and the student moves forward the successful completion of the thesis

SLIS office staff can assist with the enrollment process/procedures and with completion of documentation required for end of program assessment and with graduation.

Step-by Step – Procedures and Paperwork

The following table summarizes the procedures and processes that are necessary in the preparation and presentation of the thesis. There are a number of forms and other paperwork that must be completed in order to have all necessary information about your thesis and candidacy for degree registered in the University offices. All are important. The following is an abbreviated list of the procedures to be followed. More details can be found in the official materials issued by the Graduate College.

Procedure	Timeline
Complete Program Plan with adviser	First semester of enrollment
Choose chair of thesis Advisory Committee	Completion of nine graduate credits
Choose thesis Advisory Committee in consultation with committee chair	Completion of nine graduate credits
Complete Committee Appointment Form & submit to SLIS office	As soon as committee is chosen and all members agree
Choose a thesis topic in consultation with committee chair	As soon as possible
Schedule Advisory Committee meeting & secure meeting place	After Committee chair gives clearance
Develop Prospectus	Work with Committee chair
Schedule Prospectus meeting & distribute copies to the Committee	After Committee chair gives clearance
File for approval for human subjects research from the Office of Research Administration	Before administering experiments, surveys, or questionnaires
If there are any changes in either the committee membership or topic of the thesis, new forms must be completed	Fourteen days before the thesis defense
Submit Admission to Candidacy Form	Before the last day of advance registration for the semester in which the student expects to defend the thesis and graduate
Submit Application for Graduation to the Office of Records	During the semester when graduation is anticipated (usually 11/1 for Fall; 03/01 for Spring; 08/01 for Summer)
Pay the cap and gown fee in the Main Book Store on Elm Street on the Norman campus.	See the Norman Campus Class Schedule (usually 11/01 for Fall; 03/01 for Spring; 07/01 for Summer)
Schedule the thesis defense in consultation with committee	In enough advance notice so that committee members can review the thesis before the deadline for submission to the Graduate College. It is customary to schedule the defense and give public notice at least three weeks before the defense.
Submit two copies of the final typed draft version of the thesis to the Graduate College in person	No later than two days before the thesis defense
Secure the Authority Report Form of the Thesis Defense from the Graduate College	At the time of submission of the final draft version of the thesis
Deliver three originally signed, unbound copies of the thesis on 20 pound weight 100% watermarked cotton or rag bond paper to the Graduate College in person	After the thesis defense is completed and results reported
Secure a library deposit form from the Graduate College personnel	At the time of the submission of the signed copies of the thesis
Deposit the three copies of the thesis in the Acquisitions Department of Bizzell Library	After student secures deposit form from Graduate College
Receive signed and dated deposit form from the Acquisition Department of the Library	After student deposits three copies of the thesis with the Library Acquisition Department
Return the signed and dated deposit form to the Graduate College in person	The same day as the form is signed.

Please note that the various steps in the process require the student to "walk" various documents to campus offices in person. These include getting approval of the thesis from the Graduate College, depositing the draft thesis with the Graduate College and the final version in the library, as well as returning the deposit form to the Graduate College. These procedures can not be done by mail. Students can appoint someone to walk through the process for them if they are unable to do these steps themselves, however.

If you choose to prepare an electronic thesis, some of these steps will change. More details about an electronic thesis are given below.

Time Considerations

It is a good idea to decide on the thesis option early in the program so that research can begin as early as possible. Course options sometimes allow the student to choose the subject of a paper. Some coursework can contribute to the background and understanding of the thesis topic.

Most of the documents that must be filed with the University regarding the thesis are submitted in the semester that the student will graduate; however, others need to be filed early. It is especially important to submit the request for working with human subjects early since it takes time for the review board to read the material and grant approval. The review board is working with students from all university schools and programs, so your request will be just one of many.

Information regarding ethical practices regarding human subjects research and information about the approval process for working with human subjects through surveys, questionnaires, interviews, or experiments can be found at the following University Web site:

<http://gradweb.ou.edu/docs/info/master/thesispkt.htm>

Application can be made to work with human subjects at any time; however, survey, questionnaire, and interview questions need to be submitted with the application, so careful thought should be given to the process. The student and the committee chair should agree on the protocols, methods, and questions to be used before the student applies to the Office of Research Administration for approval.

Application for graduation and payment for cap and gown must be made by the deadlines listed in the Norman Campus Class Schedule each semester.

Typically these dates are

Fall November 1

Spring March 1

Summer July 1

If the student decides not to pursue the thesis option, he or she can register to take the comprehensive examination, but he or she must comply with the comprehensive examination declaration date guidelines. Registering to take the comprehensive examination is made the semester prior to actually taking the exam.

Format

Paper

The thesis is prepared using *The Chicago Manual of Style, published by the University of Chicago*. Your committee may have additional guidelines that you need. You must also be familiar with the *Instructions for Thesis Preparation* from the Graduate College.

Electronic

The Graduate Council is discussing how to implement this option. The questions below will help you decide if you want to submit your thesis in the manner.

Does my committee have to approve of an electronic thesis?

You are encouraged to work with your committee to gain their approval and assistance.

Your committee is required to check your final submission, and all members should agree to accept an electronic thesis.

Is an electronic thesis/dissertation (ETD) format acceptable to all academic areas?

The full implementation of electronic thesis process is expected to enrich the contents of theses and dissertation documents by integrating multi-media representations of data and findings in addition to increasing the accessibility. Although it remains to be seen how disciplines will find acceptable ways to convey research results, it is likely that the multimedia approach in the electronic thesis/dissertation process may easily prove to be superior to the printed page.

What must be done at the University of Oklahoma to implement the ETD process?

- identify issues involving intellectual property (including copyright and fair use) as they relate to preparing electronic thesis/dissertations
- determine the infrastructure to use: university libraries, university computing, UMI, outside vendor, separate entity created by OU, or outside vendor or separate entity created by a consortium of schools
- decide if students may elect to make their own arrangements for publication of their dissertation (including UMI)
- identify the method of archiving the material
- identify all costs involved

Who in the current system needs to be involved in the ETD process?

- graduate committees for students in each program
- Graduate College
- University Libraries
- Academic Computing
- Instructional Technology

What are the primary advantages of an electronic thesis?

- Most students are already using a digital medium to prepare their dissertations and theses simply because this makes preparation easier and less costly.
- The digital process may make access to theses and dissertations easier, more rapid, and more economical compared to the processes today. For example, dissertations placed on the Internet may be accessed quickly using Web browsers, bypassing the waiting period involved when a paper or microfilm of a dissertation must be ordered, and it will be less costly for individuals to access them in this manner.
- Still and moving images, as well as sound, can be incorporated in digital format, thus allowing for the communication of information that is otherwise difficult to capture through prose only.
- Information, such as raw data, may be incorporated in the dissertation or thesis through appendices or other formats and links and can be accessed economically in a short period of time.
- Particular information in a thesis or dissertation can be located easily through the use of word searches.
- Digital theses and dissertations require less space than their paper counterparts. Libraries have already begun moving to the digital medium to store materials to conserve space and make them easily accessible through electronic means.

What are the primary disadvantages of an electronic thesis?

- Potential problems with the longevity of information stored using the currently available technology.
- Unequal global and local distribution of technology to access this information.
- The lack of standardization of technology to access this information.
- Current preferences in disciplines and of individual faculty who may wish to continue to use print media.

- Current lack of clarity about the location of archived digital documents.

How will the preparation and defense be different for an electronic thesis?

- Formatting your electronic thesis for submission will require you to think about writing style, layout, and design issues that take advantage of the technology.
- Defending your electronic thesis will require you to consult with your committee about how you present your defense.
- Making changes the committee requires may be complex and involve several files. For example, at minimum you will need to:
 - Convert to a PDF file or other required format
 - Check your PDF file for missing pages, poor font translation, and other anomalies.
 - Check for all internal and external multimedia objects and files.
 - Include a Table of Contents and a list of each multimedia object type.
 - Check that all your pages are numbered correctly.
 - Submit your electronic thesis to the network in an approved manner.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Should I write a thesis?

There are many good reasons to write a thesis. It allows you to pursue specialized interests in greater depth and to make your own contribution to the field. You will learn about research and about researchers' needs.

2. How long will it take?

The time consumed in the development of a thesis proposal and the subsequent research and writing is longer than the six credit hours might suggest, and a student who undertakes the thesis option should allow at least two years for its completion.

3. Why would I not write a thesis?

What your education gains in depth, it loses in breadth, since the thesis option allows for only four electives. Also, it takes a great deal of self-discipline to complete a thesis on schedule. If it takes longer than planned, your graduation may be delayed.

4. What are the other options for research?

Consider a directed research project as an alternative. Though more limited in scope, such projects are easier to design and complete, and a three-hour project would still allow you to take five other electives.

5. Can the student change the thesis chair, committee members, or course requirements?

Yes, but each change requires substantial paperwork, so a little forethought is the better alternative.

6. How do I change the thesis chair?

A student might change the thesis chair at the student's instigation or at the chair's. In either case, the student should speak with the current thesis chair about the anticipated change, with the probable new chair, and with the Graduate liaison.

7. Once I decide to write a thesis, can I change my mind?

Yes, but then you will be required to register for the comprehensive exam the semester prior to taking the exam. Also, if the change is from thesis to nonthesis, more courses may be required because the thesis hours, if any, will not count.

8. How do I know who to ask to be on my thesis committee?

Choose a professor who has expertise in the subject area you will be researching, and one with whom you would like to work. You will be working closely together, so you should choose carefully. Your committee chair will then become your academic adviser, and he or she will help you choose other committee members.

9. How many Research for Master's Thesis credits shall I take?

You must register for at least two hours and up to six hours each semester you are working on your thesis. The number of credits depends on how much time you are devoting to the thesis. Following the initial enrollment in Research for Master's Thesis (5980), the student must maintain continuous enrollment in Research for Master's Thesis until all degree requirements are completed or until candidacy for the degree is discontinued. Summer Session enrollment may be waived. See the Graduate College Thesis Packet for more information.

10. How firm are the timelines for the submission of paperwork, forms, and the thesis itself?

These deadlines are set by the University for all graduate students. They are firm. No exceptions are made. The only recourse if you miss a deadline is to try again the next semester. It is a serious responsibility for the student to comply with the dates for necessary forms.