

THESIS PROJECT GUIDELINES

NATURE AND SCOPE OF A THESIS

The thesis is a scholarly, original work that makes a significant contribution to the body of knowledge in the chosen discipline. The Thesis plan is designed for students wishing to conduct a full-fledged research study under faculty guidance. A master's thesis presents the results of an original investigation of a problem or topic approved by the student's committee. Its purpose is to demonstrate the candidate's ability to conduct original research appropriate for agriculture, to analyze the information obtained from the research, and to present the results in a form acceptable to the committee.

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In order to successfully accomplish the thesis project, students should complete the following:

1. Meet with your advisor to discuss if a thesis project is viable.
2. Meet with your advisor to identify two other faculty members to serve on your committee that can provide expertise or guidance with your research.
3. Meet with committee members to seek advice and counsel to clarify project scope, focus, methods, and desired outcome from the thesis research project.
4. After the meeting, develop a formal proposal that clearly describes the scholarly project.
5. Email the proposal to your advisor for approval and copy the MSAG academic coordinator.
6. Once approved, submit to the MSAG director for final approval.
7. If approved, conduct the project while staying in contact with your advisor to maintain progress and focus in the work. Consult committee members as needed.
8. Submit your thesis drafts to your committee for review.
9. Make the necessary edits and submit your final draft to the committee for final review.
10. Students must allow sufficient time for review of their final thesis by the advisor and committee and for making any necessary revisions before proceeding to the final examination. This schedule and process must be developed and conducted by the student in consultation with the advisor. Since the advisor is responsible to the graduate faculty and the discipline for ensuring the quality of the student's work, the advisor had the authority to postpone the defense if the thesis is not deemed ready for the committee's examination.
11. Schedule Final Exam.
12. Prepare presentation on the thesis project.
13. Give the presentation and complete the final exam.
14. Submit an electronic copy of the final independent project report to the Graduate School as required, and also the MSAG academic coordinator once the final edits are made.

CREATING THE THESIS PROPOSAL

Graduate research proposals are formal documents and, once approved, are agreements between the committee and the student of the requirements for successful completion.

Two objectives are accomplished in the research proposal:

1. Clearly identify the problem or issue to be addressed and convince the committee that it is a topic worth of investigation. Provide a clear statement of objectives that will be accomplished in the work.
2. Develop a plan that will accomplish these objectives and present it in sufficient detail that the committee has confidence in the project's success.

The proposal is written as a formal document: All statements of fact are references, tables and figures have captions, and the language is careful, concise, and to the point. The organization of a proposal is usually very simple. It should have the following components:

- title page
- abstract
- introduction
- background or literature review
- methods or work plan
- expected results and methods of analyses, or expected outcomes
- references

Student should expect to put considerable work in the proposal. Keep in mind that the proposal constitutes the first draft of the project/thesis (chapters 1-3). In this respect, the research proposal establishes the organization for the final document. Indeed, if done well, nearly all of the material contained in the proposal will be used in the final project/thesis. Thus, extra effort devoted to producing a high-quality proposal will be recovered in the form of a more efficient and productive process, and ultimately, a better final document.

Acknowledgement given to Dr. Bruce Thompson who developed these guidelines for use at the University of New Mexico.

WRITING THE THESIS

Theses typically follow a similar five-chapter structure. The finished document can range from approximately 50-200 pages, depending on size, scope, type of data collected, and analyses of said data. At the completion of the thesis process, the student will present the process, findings, and conclusions in an oral defense with the full committee. A typical thesis outline entails:

Chapter 1 - Introduction

- Background and setting
- Theoretical/conceptual framework
- Statement of the problem
- Purpose of the study
- Objectives/research questions/hypotheses
- Definition of terms

- Limitation of the study
- Basic assumptions
- Need for the study, justification

Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

- Can have sections as deemed necessary
- Should end with a summary
- Summary may lead up to statement of hypotheses
- Should attempt to provide answers to the objectives/questions/hypothesis

Chapter 3 - Methodology

- Research design
- Population and sample (subject selection)
- Instrumentation/data source (outcomes measured/observed)
- Data collection (conditions of testing)
- Treatments - if ex post facto and experimental designs
- Data analysis
- Timeline and budget

Chapter 4 - Results

- Findings relative to research questions/objectives, and/or hypotheses
- Tests of significance

Chapter 5 - Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Appendices

References

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