



SO YOU WANT TO WRITE A THESIS . . .

Students may opt to do a thesis as their capstone project for a total of 4 credits maximum. This option requires registration for MFJS 4995 for a maximum of 4 credits.

To begin work on the thesis, the student must first choose an area of research interest and develop a research question that will guide the thesis research. At that time, the student should also choose a thesis advisor with expertise in the student's interest area. The advisor will help the student to focus the research question and may suggest additional readings or coursework that will help the student develop the thesis project.

THESIS PROCESS

Timeline: Although the groundwork for a master's thesis should begin in the fall of a student's first year, the majority of the work involved in developing a thesis project takes place during the Spring Quarter of the first year. By the start of Spring Quarter of the first year, the student should approach a faculty member as a possible thesis advisor and discuss his or her project idea. A student's thesis proposal will be developed in close consultation with the thesis advisor.

As students begin work on a thesis, it is important to consult an advisor and develop a timeline. Below is a typical timeline for a full-time graduate student (8 credits/quarter, beginning with Fall Quarter, completing 48 credits required for the M.A. by the end of Spring Quarter of 2nd year), which students can use as a guide and adapt to their individual situation.

First Year (estimated dates only):

- **End of Winter Quarter/beginning of Spring Quarter:** Choose thesis advisor, identify thesis topic.
- **Spring Quarter:** Begin literature review, begin developing thesis proposal;
- **Summer Quarter:** Continue work on writing a formal thesis proposal. Select thesis committee.

Second Year (estimated dates only):

- **Fall Quarter:** Submit formal thesis proposal to thesis committee no later than October 1; defend proposal and, if approved, continue work on thesis.
- **Winter Quarter:** Continue work on thesis; first draft of all parts/chapters completed by March 1.
- **Spring Quarter:** Complete thesis; submit the Schedule of Oral Examination form to the Office of Graduate Studies at least THREE WEEKS PRIOR to the date of your oral thesis examination. For Spring Quarter graduation, April 1 is the final date by which your

Schedule of Oral Examination form may be submitted. Take the oral thesis exam no later than May 1. Make final revisions and submit the approved thesis to the Office of Graduate Studies no later than May 5.

Note: See the Office of [Graduate Studies Schedule](#) and consult the *Graduate Policy Manual* for details on specific deadlines for thesis completion during other quarters. Students may choose to accelerate this schedule and finish by the end of Winter Quarter of their second year. Others may choose to extend the schedule and graduate by the end of Summer Quarter in their second year.

Thesis Advisor and Committee: In order to serve as a thesis advisor, a faculty member must hold a tenured or a tenure-track appointment in the Department of Media, Film & Journalism Studies. Other thesis committee members may be tenured, tenure-track, or teaching professors in the department. The student should choose a thesis advisor with the expertise and background which best match the student's own interests. This may or may not be the student's initial faculty advisor. If a student is changing his or her advisor, he or she will need to fill out a Change of Advisor form. In some instances, a faculty member may wish to confer with one or more other faculty members before accepting the thesis advising role to determine the viability of a student's research project. Students can consult with their original academic advisor or with the Graduate Director if they need help in identifying a suitable faculty member to serve as their thesis advisor

In addition to the thesis committee, the student must contact a tenured or tenure-track faculty member outside of the MFJS department to act as an outside thesis chair. The outside chair presides over the oral thesis defense, providing both quality control for the University of Denver and protection that the student is being treated fairly.

Thesis Proposal: When a faculty member agrees to become the thesis advisor, the student should work with this advisor to develop a thesis proposal. The advisor will help the student to focus the research question and the thesis project. In addition, the advisor may recommend specific readings or additional coursework that will help the student to develop his or her ideas. The student should meet with his or her thesis advisor at least twice during the Winter or early Spring Quarter of the first year to outline the thesis research or project (see the Timeline section for scheduling suggestions). The student will need to select a thesis committee, which includes the advisor and a minimum of two other faculty members who will read the formal research proposal and the final report. These additional members should be contacted and asked if they would be willing to serve on the thesis committee. Generally, the thesis committee is drawn from MFJS faculty.

Having formed a thesis committee, the student should begin writing the formal thesis proposal. The student should ask his or her advisor to provide examples of a successful thesis proposal for guidelines. The exact form of this proposal will be outlined by the thesis advisor and will vary according to the thesis topic, the specific problem being studied, and the methodology proposed to explore that problem. Proposals tend to range in length from 25-40 pages. All proposals should include the following sections (the order may vary):

Introduction/Problem Statement. The proposal begins with a general introduction to the thesis, which includes the thesis topic, a clear statement outlining the student's interest in the subject, and a preliminary explanation of the theoretical and methodological approach that will be used in the thesis.

Literature Review. The proposal includes a review of the existing literature related to the specific topic and provides a clear and succinct statement of the issues the thesis will address. This review provides a critical analysis, examining the topic and approach and highlighting the specific issues in the debate about that topic and approach. The discussion should make clear where the student places her/himself within that debate and justify the approach he or she will apply to the thesis.

Research Question(s). The student identifies and clearly states the specific research questions that will be addressed in the thesis.

Methodology. The student situates his/her work within a methodological perspective and outlines the specific study design of the thesis project. This section of the proposal should also include a description of the materials or data that will be examined as the student researches and develops the thesis.

Contributions. The proposal should include a discussion of the contributions the study or project will make to the existing discourse on the thesis topic.

Once the proposal has been approved by the thesis advisor, the student needs to distribute the proposal to all thesis committee members and convene the thesis committee for a proposal defense. The committee members should be presented with the proposal at least two weeks prior to the date of the proposal defense. At the meeting, the committee members will question the student about the project's theory, design, and research methods to ensure the project is rigorous and of appropriate scope.

Four general outcomes for the proposal defense are possible: Pass with no revisions; pass with minor revisions, pass with major revisions, or fail. The committee decides the extent of the revisions and whether the revisions will be overseen by the committee chair (thesis advisor) or whether the entire committee will need to see the proposal again before proceeding. Students will receive, in writing, the specific changes required by the committee. Students may regard this written communication as a contract. An approved proposal outlines specifically what procedures the student must follow to complete the thesis requirement; no committee member may fault the student for the study's design when the thesis is complete. Such concerns must be addressed at the proposal defense.

Research and Writing: Following approval of the thesis proposal, the student may proceed to conduct the research described in the proposal. When the research is completed, the student discusses the results and processes in the final written thesis. The format of the thesis must follow the guidelines developed by the Office of Graduate Studies exactly. The length of the thesis will be determined by the approach and the topic, but most theses average between 75-150 pages in length.

Once the student completes a draft of the entire thesis, he/she submits it to the thesis advisor for approval. Once approved, the student distributes the work to the other thesis committee members and schedules an oral defense of the thesis before the required deadline stated in the Graduate Studies Schedule of Deadlines. In addition to the thesis committee, the student must contact a tenured or tenure-track faculty member outside of the MFJS department to act as an outside thesis chair. The outside chair presides over the oral thesis defense, providing both quality control for the University of Denver and protection that the student is being treated fairly. The Office of Graduate Studies must be notified of the defense three weeks prior to the date, using the Schedule of Oral Examination form obtained from the Office of Graduate Studies (see Deadlines section of this Handbook for deadlines).

Thesis Defense: As with the proposal, the student should deliver copies of the final thesis to the committee members at least two weeks prior to the defense date.

At the thesis defense, the student may be questioned as to the interpretation of the results, methods used, any additional unanticipated findings, and the implications of the study. Four general outcomes for the thesis defense are possible: Pass with no revisions; pass with minor revisions; pass with major revisions; or fail. It is uncommon for a thesis to fail once it has been approved for circulation by the thesis advisor. The committee will decide the extent of any revisions and whether the revisions will be overseen by the thesis advisor or by the entire committee. The student will receive, in writing, the specific changes required by the committee. The students may regard this written communication as a contract.

Revisions must be completed by the [Graduate School Schedule of Deadlines](#).

Students should check the [Dissertation/Thesis Instructions from the Office of Graduate Studies](#).

FORMATTING GUIDELINES

See the [Thesis and Dissertation Formatting Guidelines document](#) on the Office of Graduate Studies website. The student will defend the thesis research before the committee shortly before completion of the degree. The Office of Graduate Studies must be notified of the defense three weeks prior to the date, using a form available on their website. As with the proposal, the student should deliver copies of the final report to the committee members at least two weeks prior to the defense.

At the thesis defense, the student may be questioned on interpretation of the results, methods used, any additional unanticipated findings, and the implications of the study. Committee members may require revisions of the thesis. Once the final revisions are completed, three copies of the thesis are required; one copy must be filed with the Office of Graduate Studies, following their instructions. Also, the student is required to file one copy with the department and one copy with their master's thesis advisor.

ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF THESES AND DISSERTATIONS

As of 2008, all theses and dissertations must be submitted electronically to the University of Denver. The electronic submission process eliminates the need to print these documents for final submission and allows students to pay for their submissions online with a credit card.

Following the oral defense and after receiving confirmation from their advisor that their dissertation/ thesis is ready for publication, students must officially submit their dissertation/thesis to an online submission site, ETD Administrator. ETD Administrator will guide students through each step, but the steps are also listed in in the “Submitting Your Dissertation/ Thesis via ETD Administrator” on this website. After the document has been submitted, ETD Administrator will send an email to the Office of Graduate Studies, which will then review and approve the formatting of the document to ensure that it meets DU’s standards and send confirmation once the submission is complete.

In instances where students would like to receive a hard bound copy of their thesis/dissertation, DU has maintained a relationship with the Denver Bookbinding Company. Students may submit up to six printed copies of the complete document (in separate boxes) for binding to the Office of Graduate Studies. The cost to the student is \$15 per copy, with additional charges for documents over two inches thick. After they have been bound, they will be returned to the student’s department for the student to pick up.

EMBARGOS AND RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESSING THESES AND DISSERTATIONS

Students should be advised that a thesis or dissertation may be considered to be “previously published” by some publishers if it is put into a searchable repository (e.g., ProQuest). Students should discuss their future publication goals with their advisor regarding their scholarly work.

Students planning to publish from the thesis or dissertation should consider requesting an embargo of their work. An embargo will completely restrict access to the document. The thesis or dissertation will be held in the ProQuest repository with no access until the specified embargo period has expired. For more information on thesis or dissertation rules, embargos, restrictions and regulations, students should meet with their thesis or dissertation advisor.

CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT POLICY

Students who have completed all coursework and are working on a thesis are required to keep their student status active by enrolling in Continuous Enrollment (CE). Students working on internships after the completion of all coursework are not eligible for CE. All graduate degree-seeking students must be in active status and continuously enrolled Fall through Spring terms, unless they plan to graduate in Fall or Winter. To enroll in CE, students must fill out the Continuous Enrollment Approval form which must be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies five business days prior to the first day of the Fall quarter (or the quarter in which the student begins CE). The online form is available on the website of the Office of Graduate Studies.

Students submit the completed form, with a signature of their advisor, to the Office of Graduate Studies in the Mary Reed Building, Room 5. Upon submission and approval of the CE form, the student will receive an email with the approval and then must register for CE via WebCentral. Students enrolled in CE pay a fee, but are not charged tuition.

To avoid late fees, registration must occur within the appropriate registration drop/add periods for the quarter. To be eligible for financial aid, students must be registered by the end of the 100% refund period. Complete policy and procedures regarding continuous enrollment can be found on the Registrar's website. Students can also check the [Graduate Bulletin](#).

DEADLINES

- [Schedule of Thesis Deadlines 2018-2019](#)

FORMS

- [Thesis/Dissertation Oral Defense Committee Recommendation Form](#)
- [Schedule of Oral Defense](#)

HELPFUL WEBSITES

- [DU Graduate Bulletin: Thesis Requirements](#)
- [DU Graduate Bulletin: Criteria for a Master's Thesis](#)
- [DU Graduate Bulletin: Electronic Thesis and Dissertation](#)
- [Thesis/Dissertation Submission Instructions](#) (pdf)
- [Thesis and Dissertation Formatting Guidelines](#) (pdf)
- [Graduate Research: Committing to a Thesis or Dissertation](#) (student article)

This document is a work in progress. If you have recommendations for other resources, please let us know via mfjs@du.edu!