

MA Theses – Steps to Completion

MA Theses Content and focus. MA theses are formal reports of research and add new knowledge and understanding. The content and organization of theses vary widely depending on the topics addressed and research approaches employed. A thesis demonstrates your ability to design, carry out and report on a research project in which you apply accepted methods of scholarship to a question or issue of concern. “Accepted methods of scholarship” should be interpreted quite broadly to include any and all empirical, analytical, interpretive, and critical approaches regarded as legitimate forms of scholarship in the area of study. Reviewing recently-completed theses by students in your area of specialization will give you a good idea of the range of research topics addressed, methods employed, reporting formats used, and effort required to complete a thesis. All MA theses are available digitally through the Koerner Library’s cIRcle, UBC’s institutional depository.

Supervision and proposals. MA students usually begin work on their thesis proposals when they have completed most required courses. Whenever students begin work on their proposals they should enroll in EDST 599, Master’s Thesis, and maintain registration until the thesis is completed. The thesis carries 6 credits, and is graded. Once you have a reasonably clear idea of the area or question you wish to research, you should discuss it with your supervisor. You should also discuss with your supervisor who should be invited to serve as additional member(s) of your research supervisory committee.

MA supervisory committees consist of a minimum of two faculty members who are members of the Faculty of Graduate Studies: either one supervisor and at least one member, or two co-supervisors (with possibly an additional member). The supervisor or at least one of the co-supervisors should be a faculty member in EDST. All members may be from EDST, but committees often include members from other departments. All members of the committee must approve your research proposal. In some cases an early draft of the proposal is prepared prior to or during the formation of the committee. Some students use this draft as a discussion paper with faculty who they are considering inviting to serve on their committee. Faculty have different expectations about how detailed a proposal should be, so you should discuss this early on with your research supervisor.

Proposals can range in length from a few pages to several chapters of the thesis and often are revised several times before they are approved. In general, thesis proposals include an introductory section that states the purpose of the research, provides a context for the study and makes a convincing argument that the study is worth doing (addresses the “so what?” question); a section that critically reviews prior research done in the area and relevant theoretical and conceptual work; and a section that describes how the research will be carried out including a description of methods and procedures that convinces the committee that you have the knowledge and skills necessary to complete the study. Proposals should also include a rough timetable for carrying out the study and writing the thesis.

Once the proposal is considered acceptable by the committee, all members of the committee will sign the proposal cover sheet (see an example under the “Policies and Forms” section of the EDST website. Your supervisor will then have a copy of the approved proposal placed in your file and will notify the Graduate Program Assistant that your proposal has been approved. It is the responsibility of your supervisor and committee members to insure that the scope and

complexity of the research project are within the usual expectations for MA-level study. On occasion a student will propose a project that is too ambitious for a MA thesis (sometimes even too ambitious for a PhD thesis). In these cases the supervisor and committee may insist that the proposal be revised until it reflects the work expected of an MA student.

If your thesis involves collecting information from people via surveys, interviews or observations, you will also be required to prepare and submit a “Request for Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Subjects.” This request is reviewed by the Behavioural Sciences Screening Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (commonly referred to as the “Ethics Committee”) which must issue a certificate of approval before any data can be collected. The review normally takes 4-6 weeks. The procedure and forms for submitting this request can be obtained from the Office of Research Services (<http://www.ors.ubc.ca/home>).

Criteria for assessment. MA theses are assessed using criteria that are applied to the kind of research study that you carry out. To approve a thesis, your committee must be convinced that you have adequately demonstrated your ability to design and carry out a respectable research study and to describe the process and outcomes of that study in a clear, complete and cogent fashion.

Structure. Theses must contain the following elements: a signature/title page in the format prescribed by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (G+PS) (<https://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/dissertation-thesis-preparation>) an abstract of no more than 350 words; a Table of Contents; when appropriate, a List of Tables and List of Figures, an acknowledgement (if you wish), the body of the thesis; References or Bibliography, and, when appropriate, appendices. Because theses are submitted to the cIRcle repository, there are strict production requirements that must be met before they are accepted by the library. Follow the instructions provided by G+PS and you will save yourself a lot of grief.

Acceptable styles: Most programs in the department accept theses that conform to one of two major styles: the *American Psychological Association (APA) Manual of Style* or the *Chicago Manual of Style*—also found in abbreviated form in Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (latest editions for all). It is important to check with your supervisor about acceptable style because some programs in the department encourage students to use other styles that are particular to those specializations.

Process. Once the research proposal is approved by the committee, the student proceeds to carry out the research consulting with the research supervisor and committee members when needed. Students usually prepare drafts of chapters for review by their supervisor and committee. These are revised until a complete draft of the thesis is produced. This draft may be revised several times until the student, supervisor and committee members are all satisfied that it meets expectations. Once approved by the committee one of two things happens. If the student is in a program that requires a defence of the thesis, this is scheduled and the student presents the research at a public meeting and answers questions posed by committee members and a faculty member external to the committee. This “outside reader” may be, but does not have to be, from another department at UBC. Audience members are also invited to ask questions at the defense

The student is responsible for depositing the approved thesis with G+PS before the published deadline for completing all program requirements (see the University Calendar). Guidelines provided by G+PS regarding format and paper quality must be observed. Students are advised to carefully review these requirements well before the date of submission to G+PS. As of November 2007, students can submit their final dissertation to G+PS electronically. The student must also complete a series of forms which are downloadable from the G+PS website. As of November 30, 2007, students are no longer required to submit a copy of their thesis to EDST for binding. Instead, students should submit to the Graduate Program Assistant a copy of the front page and abstract of the final version of the thesis plus a copy of the approval form (signed by the members of the examining committee) as well as a copy to cIRcle following the instructions below or go to <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/final-dissertation-thesis-submission/circle-instructions> .

cIRcle for Depositing Theses and Dissertations. Students who complete their program with a Doctoral Dissertation or MA Thesis have to upload these to cIRcle following the instructions provided by G+PS: <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/final-dissertation-thesis-submission/circle-instructions>

Students who complete their program with a Graduating Paper or Capstone course paper can choose to upload this to the GSS Award Collection of cIRcle: <https://circle.ubc.ca/handle/2429/42591>

1. As part of uploading a file to cIRcle, the student provides contact information for their course instructor/supervisor.
2. The course instructor then receives an automated email from cIRcle asking them to approve the student submission online.
3. The course instructor logs in to cIRcle and approves the submission (the automated email contains full instructions).
4. cIRcle staff receive automated notification of the instructor's approval.
5. cIRcle staff add the record to cIRcle.

Full information and instructions are available from: <http://circle.sites.olt.ubc.ca/gss-graduate-student-society-open-scholar-award/>