

## **Guidelines for Proposing, Writing, Defending and Submitting a Master's Thesis at the Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism**

You should read the guidelines for writing and submitting a thesis on the Toulouse Graduate School website at <https://tsgs.unt.edu/new-current-students/theses-and-dissertations> before making the final decision on whether to write a thesis. This page has links to the manual (<https://tsgs.unt.edu/thesis-manual>), which you must read and comprehend, as well as other resources that explain the scope and depth of writing and completing a thesis.

You should also read the section of the UNT graduate catalog defining the master's thesis at <http://catalog.unt.edu/content.php?catoid=12&navoid=868#The Master s Degree Thesis>. The graduate catalog discusses the rules mandated for the degree.

A thesis presents an original investigation. This is not a term paper or a conference paper. You should aim to write a thesis as long as 100 pages or more. Because a thesis must be the outcome of your serious research and academic commitment, it must be substantive, not superficial. You are posing and answering questions never asked before. This can be very exciting. Aside from the discovery of knowledge, a thesis provides you with the opportunity to conduct original research. Committee chair and members help to mentor you along the way.

This document explains the following seven steps of the thesis-writing process:

1. Pre-planning
2. Degree requirements for the thesis option
3. Thesis committee selection
4. Thesis enrollment
5. The prospectus
6. The thesis
7. Thesis defense

### **1. Pre-Planning**

You should consider every core course and most electives as a place to begin your investigation of a thesis topic. If you already have a theoretically and methodologically “good” thesis topic in mind, have discussed it with your mentor/potential thesis adviser and want to start investigating it early on in your program, you may want to use each class you take to research one aspect of the topic. **However, you must not commit academic dishonesty by submitting a similar paper, or the same literature review in particular, to more than one class.**

Additionally, if you plan to use any portion of your primary research that involves human subjects in your thesis, you must obtain IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval prior to conducting the research for your coursework. For more information, ask your thesis adviser or course instructor, and also read through materials available at the following website:

<https://research.unt.edu/faculty-resources/integrity-compliance/irb>.

The faculty will attend a new student orientation in August and January to explain the thesis process. This event provides you an opportunity to understand how to start your thesis-writing process.

In addition, you can read past master's theses in journalism. Look at the list of the past Mayborn master's theses at <http://journalism.unt.edu/graduate/thesis-information> to find out some theses interesting to you, and go to <http://iii.library.unt.edu/record=e1000175~S12>. Click on the green bar in the middle of this page and type in a name.

## **2. Degree Requirements for the Thesis Option**

**All Master of Arts (M.A.) students are required to enroll in 6 hours of thesis credit and produce a master's thesis in order to graduate.** Master of Journalism (M.J.) students can choose to write a thesis by declaring their intent to do so very early in their coursework. **All M.A. students and M.J. thesis students must discuss their intent to pursue a thesis in a meeting with the director of graduate studies and their potential thesis chair no later than completion of 12 graduate journalism hours.** A degree plan must be on file with the Toulouse Graduate School.

**Thesis students pursuing the M.A. degree must provide proof of their foreign-language proficiency or complete a foreign-language requirement.** They should complete it early in the thesis-writing process. International students may take a proficiency exam in their own language or show that their undergraduate degree was in another language. See for more information at the following website: <https://worldlanguages.unt.edu/resources/testing/graduate-foreign-language-requirement>. M.J. students who elect to write a thesis are exempt from the foreign-language requirement.

## **3. Thesis Committee Selection**

A thesis committee is comprised of a chair and two or more committee members. **Before the completion of 24 graduate hours, you must select a thesis chair and receive approval from that chair to proceed with thesis.** All members must be full or associate members of the UNT graduate faculty and will be signers on the final defense form. You can usually find this information by searching for their profile pages (<https://faculty.unt.edu/>) and looking to the left of the pictures. However, because faculty do not always post this information, you should consult with them to confirm their status as members of the UNT Graduate Faculty. The Mayborn School of Journalism website faculty directory also includes links to faculty profile pages for most professors in our school. Non-member faculty may serve as advisory members only and are helpful if they have experience and/or expertise in your thesis topic area.

It is your responsibility to secure an appropriate thesis chair. You must formally ask a full member of the UNT graduate faculty whether or not he or she is able to serve as your thesis chair and work with you on your thesis topic. The chair must always be from the Mayborn School of Journalism. **The normal protocol of committee selection is that you consult your thesis chair to identify other committee members before directly talking to them.** If a faculty member declines for any reason, you must secure another chair and/or committee member. You can choose one signing member from outside the program whose class you have taken.

Always treat thesis committee members with professional courtesy and respect. In a sense, they are volunteers to help students with their thesis. At any time, a committee member can request to be removed from a committee, which leaves the student with the responsibility to find another committee member.

## **4. Thesis Enrollment**

Be sure to complete all four core courses and, if required, all background journalism courses before proceeding to register for your thesis hours. You must enroll in JOUR 5950, with 3 hours for each of the two semesters. You must form your committee and take 3 thesis hours to develop a prospectus for one semester, and then take another 3 thesis hours to write and defend your thesis for the next semester.

Once registered, you must maintain continuous enrollment in JOUR 5950 for the spring and fall semesters until you defend your thesis and the committee approves it. You must be enrolled in thesis hours in the term in which you defend your thesis.

## **5. The Prospectus**

You must have your prospectus approved by the entire thesis committee at a prospectus meeting before you actually begin writing your thesis. **You must submit your thesis prospectus to your thesis committee members at least two weeks before the scheduled meeting.** Committee members need at least two weeks to review your prospectus because they have many commitments and responsibilities. Expecting them to react to it immediately shows a lack of professional courtesy.

You may like to meet with your thesis chair regularly. However, the frequency of meetings is up to you and your chair. Only when the chair makes the decision that you are ready for a prospectus meeting, should you send your prospectus to other committee members for that purpose. Otherwise, it is perfectly fine to informally ask committee members for their help during the process.

Once the chair gives approval to call a meeting, you are responsible for scheduling a prospectus meeting with committee members. If contacting a member of your committee proves difficult, let the chair know as soon as possible. Once all committee members have agreed upon a time and date, ask the graduate program coordinator to book a room for the prospectus meeting.

**The prospectus** (approximately 20 pages) should include and/or apply the following at a minimum:

- a brief literature review in which you explain how your project is situated in terms of research that has already been done
- any relevant theoretical positions
- your assumptions and/or limitations (especially true in qualitative research) and possibly include your own assumptions
- a clearly stated “question” or “problem” to be addressed in the thesis
- the intended methodology(ies) clearly explained and rationalized
- research questions and/or hypotheses
- references
- the most current American Psychological Association or Chicago style. See the following sites for more information: <http://www.apastyle.org> or [https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

## **6. The Thesis**

**You must submit a complete thesis draft to your thesis committee members at least two weeks before the scheduled defense. In addition, you must defend your thesis at least two weeks before the deadline for filing it with the Toulouse Graduate School.** Committee members need at least two weeks to review your thesis draft because they have many commitments and responsibilities. Expecting them to react to it immediately shows a lack of

professional courtesy. You can find the thesis-filing date at <https://tgs.unt.edu/new-current-students/graduation-information>. Remember that at UNT, the initial deadline for filing a defended thesis usually comes very early in each semester: late October in fall, late March in spring and late June in summer. **The “two week/two week” rule puts the deadline even earlier.** You must plan the calendar by starting with the deadline for submission and then work backward.

You may like to meet with your thesis chair regularly. However, the frequency of meetings is up to you and your chair. Only when the chair makes the decision that you are ready for your thesis defense, should you send your complete thesis draft to other committee members for that purpose. Otherwise, it is perfectly fine to informally ask committee members for their help during the process.

**The thesis** should include and/or apply the following at a minimum:

- front matter
- introduction
- literature review
- research questions and/or hypotheses
- method
- results
- discussion of the results, the study’s limitations and suggestions for future study
- references
- appendices
- the most current American Psychological Association or Chicago style. See the following sites for more information: <http://www.apastyle.org> or [https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

You may like to consider attending a Thesis/Dissertation Bootcamp if you get stuck (<https://tgs.unt.edu/eagle-thesis-dissertation-boot-camp-0>). You can also watch or attend other professional workshops that might help with the thesis option (<https://tgs.unt.edu/workshops>). A graduate student writing lab is also available to help (<https://writingcenter.unt.edu/graduate-tutoring>).

## **7. Thesis Defense**

As stated before, your thesis defense date must be **at least two weeks** before the initial filing deadline with the Toulouse Graduate School. The defense will be open to the academic community, and the date, time and location of the defense will be published at least one week before the defense. Once all committee members have agreed upon a time and date, ask the graduate program coordinator to book a room for your thesis defense.

You will make a presentation of the thesis. The committee members will then ask you questions as long as they deem appropriate. Public questions and comments may or may not be allowed.

At the conclusion of the defense, the committee will meet privately to discuss your thesis. The committee will vote to accept, accept with revisions or reject the thesis. If the committee votes to accept the thesis with revisions, the committee chair will be charged to approve those revisions on behalf of the committee. If the committee votes to reject the thesis, the chair will provide the student with a written explanation no more than one week after the defense. If accepted with no revisions, the committee will sign the final defense form for submission to the Toulouse Graduate School.

Summer thesis completion and defense can be problematic if your thesis chair and/or committee members are not available to attend a defense. A summer defense is strongly discouraged.

Vireo, an online thesis/dissertation submission tool, will be available for student use beginning October 1, 2015. The Toulouse Graduate School submission webpage has been updated at <https://tgs.unt.edu/new-current-students/theses-and-dissertations>. All theses must be submitted electronically through Vireo.

For more information, contact the graduate program coordinator at [mayborngraduateinstitute@unt.edu](mailto:mayborngraduateinstitute@unt.edu) or 940-565-4564.