

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

You must first read the guidelines for writing and submitting a master's thesis on the [Toulouse Graduate School theses and dissertations page](#) before making the final decision on whether to write it. This page has links to the [thesis/dissertation 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 a section on the [master's degree thesis](#) in the UNT graduate catalog. The graduate catalog discusses the rules mandated for the degree.

A thesis is not a term paper or a conference paper. You should aim to write as long as 100 pages or more. Because a thesis is the outcome of your serious research and academic commitment, it must be a substantive, not superficial, original investigation. You are posing and answering questions never asked before. Thesis writing can be very exciting. Aside from the discovery of knowledge, a thesis provides you an opportunity to conduct original research. Committee chair and members 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 using all core courses and most electives to begin the investigation of your 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 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 misconduct by submitting a very similar paper, or the same literature review in particular, to more than one class.** Additionally, if you plan to use human subjects in your primary research for a class and incorporate it later 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 [IRB-related materials](#).

A Mayborn graduate student orientation held every August explains the thesis process. This event provides you an opportunity to understand how to start your thesis-writing process.

In addition, you can read master's theses in journalism. Look at the [list of the past master's theses](#) written by former Mayborn master's students to find out some theses interesting to you, and go to the UNT Digital Library's collection of [theses and dissertations](#) and enter the author's name or the title of a thesis to locate it.

## **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 enroll in 6 hours of thesis credit and produce a thesis by declaring their intent to do so 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 as soon as completing 9 graduate hours. However, the earlier you take an action, the better. 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. For more information, visit the [UNT graduate catalog](#) and the [UNT Department of World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures](#) webpages. 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. **Well before completing 18 graduate hours, you must select a thesis chair and receive approval from that chair to proceed with a thesis.** However, the earlier you take an action, the better. All committee members must be full or associate members of the UNT graduate faculty and will be signers on the final defense form. Because only a full member of the UNT graduate faculty can serve as the chair of your thesis committee, you should consult with Mayborn faculty to confirm their status as members of the UNT graduate faculty. Associate members of the UNT graduate faculty can serve as the co-chair or a member of your thesis committee. Go to the [UNT Faculty Information System](#) to read profiles of the Mayborn graduate faculty.

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 the faculty member can serve as your thesis chair and work with you on your thesis topic. The chair must always be from the Mayborn Graduate Institute 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 find 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 you with your thesis. At any point, a committee chair or member can request to be removed from your thesis committee, which leaves you with the responsibility to find another committee chair or member.

## **4. Thesis Enrollment**

Be sure to complete all four core courses and, if required, all undergraduate prerequisite journalism courses before proceeding to register for your thesis hours. You must enroll in JOUR 5950, with 3 hours for each of the two long semesters. After forming your thesis committee, you must 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 every spring/fall semester until you defend your thesis and your thesis 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 other commitments and responsibilities. Expecting them to read it through immediately shows a lack of professional courtesy.

You may like to meet with your thesis chair regularly. However, the frequency of those meetings is up to you and your chair. Although it is fine to ask committee members for their help during the process, you must follow your chair's guidance first and foremost. 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.

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 the date and time of the prospectus meeting, ask the graduate student and program coordinator to book a room for the 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 of your research
- a clearly stated “question” or “problem” to be addressed in the thesis
- the intended methodology(ies) clearly explained and justified
- research questions and/or hypotheses
- references
- the most current [American Psychological Association](#) or [Chicago](#) style.

## **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 other commitments and responsibilities. Do not expect them to read it through immediately. The TGS site shows the thesis-filing dates under [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 make a long-term plan by starting with the deadline for submission and then working backward.

As is the case with the prospectus-writing process, the frequency of meetings with your thesis chair is up to you and your chair. Although it is fine to ask committee members for their

help during the thesis-writing process, you must follow your chair's guidance first and foremost. 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.

**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.

You may like to consider attending a [Thesis/Dissertation Bootcamp](#) if you get stuck. You can also watch or attend other [professional workshops](#) that might help with the thesis option. [Graduate tutoring](#) is also available to help you.

## **7. Thesis Defense**

As stated before, your thesis defense date must be held **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 the date and time, ask the graduate student and 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 no revisions, the committee will sign the final defense form for submission to the Toulouse Graduate School. If the committee votes to accept it with revisions, the committee chair will be charged to approve those revisions on behalf of the committee. If the committee votes to reject it, the chair will provide the student with a written explanation no more than one week after the defense.

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.

All theses must be submitted electronically through Vireo, an online thesis/dissertation submission tool. Go to the [Toulouse Graduate School theses and dissertations page](#) to learn more about Vireo.

For more information about thesis writing, contact the director of graduate studies at [Koji.Fuse@unt.edu](mailto:Koji.Fuse@unt.edu) or 940-369-8083.

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