

The Graduate School



**MONTCLAIR STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Thesis Procedure Manual
For
Master's Students and Faculty

2024-2025

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I. Introduction

A graduate thesis is a permanent record of a significant contribution made by a student to a particular field of knowledge. It demonstrates the writer has the capacity for research, the ability to draw logical conclusions, and make interpretative claims. In the process of developing the thesis, students will be required to study extensive readings and demonstrate significant knowledge of their discipline's methodological approach to research.

Statement of Responsibility:

Students are responsible for following the requirements set forth by this thesis guide and any additional guidelines established by their department or program. To determine if their program has additional or special guidelines, students should contact their graduate advisor. It is also the student's responsibility to locate appropriate materials, perform the necessary research, develop conclusions, and present all of the aforementioned in a thesis which meets their program's standards.

Plagiarism in any form is unacceptable and will result in serious disciplinary action including loss of matriculation. If it is detected after graduation, the student's degree may be rescinded. Students must act ethically in all aspects of the thesis process. ***Students are expected to know, understand, and follow the policies and procedures as outlined in the students' Rights and Responsibilities section of the Student Handbook.***

Subject content and appropriate supervision of all aspects of the thesis process is the responsibility of the thesis sponsor and the thesis committee. The Graduate School will approve the thesis only if style, form, and content standards appropriate for the department are maintained, and if the thesis conforms to the guidelines present in this document.

Students are required to be fully matriculated and in good academic standing in their graduate degree programs before being allowed to register for the thesis course or complete the thesis project.

Before certifying to the Office of the Registrar and the department that the thesis has been formally approved, The Graduate School will review the manuscript to determine whether or not it complies with The Graduate School's standards regarding form and style.

II. The Thesis Process

A. Identification of the Thesis Topic

1. Upon matriculation into the master's program, students should begin to consider possible thesis topics. Students should also receive this Manual and any departmental guidelines from their Graduate Program Coordinators at the time of matriculation. Thesis writers should begin the thesis process as early in their program as possible to ensure timely completion of the degree. As students begin to take their courses, they should continue to

discuss possible thesis topics with their Graduate Program Coordinator as well as other faculty in the department.

2. As a possible thesis topic begins to form, students should begin to review the literature available on this topic. MSU librarians and graduate advisors may be useful resources to help students begin their literature reviews.
3. As students begin conducting their literature review and are attempting to define their thesis topic, they should meet with their Graduate Program Coordinator to discuss the thesis topic and identify potential thesis sponsor/advisors. The Graduate Program Coordinator can answer any questions they may have about the thesis process at this meeting.

B. Thesis Sponsor and Committee Selection

1. Following the meeting with the Graduate Program Coordinator, students should seek the cooperation of a particular faculty member to serve as their thesis sponsor. The selection of this person is very important. The thesis sponsor has the primary responsibility of providing general supervision over the student's thesis. In order for students to secure a thesis sponsor, they should prepare a 1-3 page general topic statement; this topic statement should serve as a tentative outline of the student's potential thesis and thesis topic. Faculty members will then use this document to decide if they have the expertise and interest to

serve as the student's sponsor.

2. The thesis sponsor/advisor must be a full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty who holds graduate faculty status within the student's department.
3. In consultation with your thesis sponsor, students should seek the cooperation of two additional faculty members to serve on the thesis committee. The sponsor and the two committee members constitute the three-member thesis committee.
4. Thesis committee members shall be full-time, tenured, or tenure-track faculty who hold graduate faculty status within the student's department. Committee members who do not hold graduate faculty status and/or are not full-time, tenured, or tenure-track, or from another department may serve on the thesis committee with the approval of the Graduate Program Coordinator and The Graduate School.
5. Faculty from outside MOnclair State University may serve as a committee member at the request of the student and with the approval of the Graduate Program Coordinator, Department Chair and The Graduate School. Students may not have more than one external committee member. The student and outside committee member must fill out the [Approval of an External Thesis Committee Member](#) form and send it to The Graduate School for approval.

6. Changes in committee members may be made at the request of the student and with the approval of the thesis sponsor and/or Graduate Program Coordinator at any time up until registration for the thesis course.
7. Once registered for the thesis course, changes may only be made to thesis committee members or the thesis sponsor in unusual circumstances. This request must be made in writing to the Dean of The Graduate School.

C. Approval of Thesis Topic and Development of a Thesis

Outline

1. With the establishment of the thesis committee, students should immediately begin to clearly outline the thesis. The student should prepare a document that provides a clear statement of the research issue, an extended literature review, a proposed research design/methodology, and an annotated bibliography (if appropriate). It should follow disciplinary standards and include significant detail. In developing the outline, it is imperative that students work closely with their thesis sponsor. Although they are not usually asked to review the outline until it is completed, other committee members may be approached for assistance. This document will be used by the student and the thesis committee to focus the remainder of the work on the thesis.
2. When the student and the sponsor agree the outline

adequately presents the proposed thesis, it should be submitted to the thesis committee. Upon their suggestion, significant revisions may be necessary. When the outline is approved, the [Approval for Writing a Master's Thesis form](#) (with the outline attached to it) must be approved and signed by the student, thesis sponsor, committee members, Graduate Program Coordinator and The Graduate School. Copies of the thesis outline will be retained by the student, thesis sponsor, and The Graduate School.

D. Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants

1. In accordance with federal legislation and university policies, any research involving human participants, in any way, must be reviewed and approved prior to the initiation of such research. Montclair State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) is responsible for the review and approval of your thesis research submission. Students will first need to [request a Cayuse IRB account](#). Submissions are submitted through an online system called [Shibboleth](#). Students should plan to allow three to six weeks for IRB approval. Students can also attend IRB training workshops which are listed [here](#). All IRB related inquiries or concerns can be directed to the IRB at

reviewboard@montclair.edu or 973-655-7583.

III. Registering for the Thesis & Thesis Extension Courses

A. The Thesis Course

1. As was previously mentioned, once the thesis topic and outline have been accepted and approved, the appropriate parties can sign the [Approval for Writing a Master's Thesis form](#).
2. Registration for the thesis course shall not take place until all preliminary steps have been completed, students have earned a minimum of 18 credits from graduate-level courses within their degree program, and they are sure of their commitment to the thesis project.
3. All Master's Thesis courses are numbered 698 (e.g., the M.A. in English Master's Thesis Course is ENGL 698). Master's Thesis courses are one-semester courses, counting as either 3, 4 or 6 credits in total depending on the approved academic program. For specific information about their thesis courses, students should consult with their Graduate Program Coordinator.
4. In order to register for the thesis course, the student must submit the [Approval for Writing a Master's Thesis Form](#) (with the thesis outline attached to it) signed by the student, thesis sponsor, committee members, and the Graduate Program Coordinator to The Graduate School via

thesisinquiry@montclair.edu. The signatures of the sponsor and committee members confirm that the thesis outline has been approved. The signatures of the Graduate Program Coordinator and The Graduate School confirm the student's eligibility to register for the thesis course. Upon approval, The Graduate School will forward the form to the Office of the Registrar for registration. ***The Office of the Registrar enrolls students in their thesis course. Students are not able to register for their thesis course via NEST.***

5. The Graduate School offers holistic support for students throughout the entire thesis process. To contact The Graduate School with any thesis-related questions, students can email thesisinquiry@montclair.edu. This inbox is monitored by a Graduate Assistant for Student Success, who is a part of the Student Affairs team at The Graduate School. As of January 2023, this position is employed by Alison VanOrden (She/Her/Hers). You can [book 1-on-1 appointments with Alison here](#) for help with any part of the thesis process.

B. Master's Thesis Extension Course

1. Students who are unable to complete the Master's Thesis during the semester in which they register for the thesis course must register for the Master's Thesis Extension course (1 credit) each subsequent semester until the Master's Thesis is

successfully completed and approved by The Graduate School.

- a) Students are not required to register for the Thesis Extension Course in the Summer or Winter semesters unless they will explicitly be working on their thesis with their sponsor during this time, or intend to graduate during these semesters.
2. Students must fill out [Thesis Extension Application form](#) for every semester they have not completed their thesis. Once it is approved by the Thesis Sponsor, it should be submitted to The Graduate School via thesisinquiry@montclair.edu. The Graduate School will review, approve and forward to the Office of the Registrar for registration.
3. Failure to enroll in the Thesis Extension Course (699) each semester until the thesis is submitted will result in being billed retroactively for the sum of the required extension courses.

C. Registering for the Thesis or Thesis Extension Course During Summer Session

1. Students may request enrollment for the [Thesis Course \(698\)](#) during the summer session.
2. Students who do not complete their thesis during the spring semester and wish to graduate in August must register for the [Thesis Extension Course \(699\)](#) during the summer session.
3. Every member of the committee must agree to be available for

their usual role during the summer months.

4. The student must pay for the appropriate amount of credits (1 for Thesis Extension and 3, 4, or 6, depending on their program, for the Thesis course) by the summer payment deadline.
5. In order to meet the University's deadline for August graduation, the thesis must be completed, approved by the full committee, and submitted to The Graduate School via 'Master Your Thesis' canvas course by August 10th. If the thesis isn't complete, and the student's work must continue into the Fall, the student must register for the 1 credit Thesis Extension (699) Course, and apply for January graduation. That represents an additional cost.

D. "Master Your Thesis" Course on Canvas

1. Once students have been registered for the thesis (698), they will receive an invitation to join the "Master Your Thesis Course" on Canvas.
2. It is necessary for students to accept their invitation to the Canvas course — the completed thesis and [ETD Form](#) will be submitted to The Graduate School for final review and approval here (see section IV).
3. The "Master Your Thesis" Canvas Course contains all of the information and reference materials necessary for students to properly format, complete and submit their theses.

E. Due Date for Master's Thesis

1. The final thesis must be submitted to The Graduate School, via Canvas course on the following semester-dependent dates:
FALL SEMESTER/JANUARY GRADUATION: January 3
SPRING SEMESTER/MAY GRADUATION: May 3
SUMMER SEMESTER/AUGUST GRADUATION: August 3
2. Students will be notified of final submission deadline dates via multiple announcements in the "Master Your Thesis" Canvas Course each semester.

F. Thesis Course Grade

1. The Master's Thesis Course and Extension will be graded as 'S' (Satisfactory) at the end of each semester if the thesis is not completed. 'S' is not an available grade for a thesis; it indicates Satisfactory completion of a course which does not count in degree credit totals. A committee composed of three faculty members, including the thesis sponsor, will grade the thesis.
2. Only at the completion of the thesis and after confirmation from The Graduate School that the thesis is correctly formatted, should the thesis sponsor submit a final grade. The final grade will be applied to the original, three-, four-, or six-credit master's thesis course only.
3. The Master's Thesis Extension Course(s) will be graded as P when the thesis is satisfactorily completed.

IV. Research and Writing the Thesis

A. General Instructions

1. The thesis committee will specify a particular citation style manual. All drafts — preliminary (working) and final — must conform to the selected citation style manual, and if applicable, any special school, program, and/or departmental thesis guidelines.
 2. All questionnaires, letters of inquiry, etc. that are not subject to the Institutional Review Board for Human Subject Protection's approval, must be approved, in writing, by the thesis sponsor prior to final submission.
 3. Any change in the student's research outline and/or research methodology must be approved, in writing, by the student's thesis committee prior to its implementation and may require revision of the originally approved outline.
 4. It is expected that the student will provide each member of their committee with regular drafts of their work as they make writing progress. In providing material to their committee, the student should allow
 5. adequate time for the members to develop their responses.
- Please be aware of the [University Calendar](#) and of committee members' schedules. The thesis sponsor may also recommend a timetable for the completion of the thesis; students should follow

this timetable as closely as possible. ***For students enrolled during the summer semester (either in thesis or thesis extension), adequate planning is an absolute necessity.***

6. Maintain duplicates of all research materials and of the various drafts of the thesis.
7. It is highly probable that several drafts may be written before the final version is developed. Students should budget their time accordingly.

B. Citation Style Manuals

1. Style, footnotes, citations, and bibliographical form of the thesis should conform to the conventions prescribed by a standard style manual appropriate to the student's major field. In some cases, the style employed in the discipline's major research publications may also be appropriate. The style manual selected must be approved by the thesis committee, and indicated on the [Approval for Writing a Master's Thesis form](#). Students must confer with their thesis committee for possible additional style requirements.

C. Completion and Approval of Thesis

1. When the student, the thesis sponsor, and the thesis committee agree that the thesis is complete, students must submit a final version of the thesis to the committee for its approval. The thesis must follow the format listed in this manual and must adhere to

your style of writing. Upon approval, the Thesis Sponsor and committee members will sign the signature page of the thesis.

- a) Signature Page templates are available for student use on the “Master Your Thesis” Canvas Course.

2. Oral Examination (Optional)

- a) The oral examination is a critical element of the thesis process. The date of the examination will be determined by the thesis sponsor. Oral examinations may not be scheduled during the summer sessions or winter break without prior approval of each member of the thesis committee. To allow for the incorporation of changes and possible additional research, the orals should be held at least six weeks prior to the date of graduation.
- b) The format of the oral examination will be determined by the graduate program. Normally, the thesis sponsor will lead the examination. The student should be prepared to provide a verbal presentation of the thesis (approximately 10 to 20 minutes). Committee members and persons outside the committee are allowed to raise issues and ask questions. To determine the exact nature of the oral examination, students should contact their thesis sponsors.
- c) Immediately at the end of the oral examination, the

sponsor and the committee members will convene privately to discuss the thesis and oral examination. The sponsor will notify the student immediately of the decision. Some of the possible decisions include:

- (1) The thesis is approved.
- (2) The thesis is approved with modifications.
- (3) The thesis is not approved.

(a) In the case of (3), the committee will recommend further action.

V. Final Submission

A. Submitting Your Thesis

1. When the student is ready to submit their thesis to The Graduate School, they must submit both their final thesis and a completed [ETD form](#) through the assignments tab in the Master Your Thesis Course on Canvas.
 - a) The [ETD form](#) must be signed by the student. This allows the writer to decide whether they would like their thesis to be immediately released or if they have an embargo on their thesis. Putting an embargo on your thesis means that the thesis release date will be delayed by 6 months, 1 year or 2 years (depending on the option you choose).
 - b) Typically, students put an embargo on their thesis if they

are going to publish a book or article that contains the same information as their thesis. They do not want the information from their thesis to be released before their book or article is published. Students can also share their personal email address with the Sprague Library if they would like to receive notifications on how many times their thesis has been downloaded.

2. As mentioned previously, the student must submit the final thesis and completed [ETD Form](#) to The Graduate School for review by the deadlines outlined above in order to ensure time for processing and review.

VI. Thesis Formatting and Document Style

A. Font and Style

1. The standard page size for a thesis is 8 ½ x 11 inches. The original manuscript must be printed on one side of the paper only. Non-standard typefaces--such as script--are not acceptable. All non-standard typefaces must be approved, in advance, in writing, by the thesis committee, by the student's department, and by The Graduate School. To obtain such approval, submit a sample page to the aforementioned contacts.
2. The Graduate School prefers the 12-point type Times New Roman font.

B. Page Numbering

1. The thesis document must be numbered. The location and format of the page numbering is subject to the standards of the style manual being employed. If no guidelines on page numbering are available in the style manual, then page numbers must appear on the bottom right margin.

C. Margins

1. Each page must have 1 inch for the right, top, and bottom margins.

D. Spacing, Pagination, Footnotes, Citations,

Bibliographical Entries, etc.

1. Follow the style manual selected by your thesis committee. Information regarding the most recent versions of writing style manuals is available from [MSU's Center for Writing Excellence](#).

E. Illustrations and Figures

1. Drawings, figures, tables, graphs, photographs, maps, and all other types of illustrative material may be included. However, they must be high-quality.
2. All illustrative data must also be contained within the margins of the page.
3. Larger tables and figures can be placed at the end of the thesis on separate pages; a landscape orientation is permissible for

those pages to ensure each illustration stays within the margins.

F. Proofreading

1. The manuscript in final form must be carefully proofread and corrected before it is submitted to The Graduate School. Every page must be checked for correct numbering and margins, and all copies must be checked to ensure that pages are consistent and not missing. All page numbers in the table of contents must correctly indicate where certain headings are in the thesis. Headings and subheadings must appear in the table of contents in descending order of value. Consistency in positioning all headings of the same value must be maintained.
2. Final theses will not be accepted and processed by The Graduate School until all formatting requirements are met. Failure to comply with The Graduate School's required formatting will result in delays approving and processing students' final theses.

G. Thesis Document Formatting

1. Examples of correctly-formatted theses in adherence to the most common style are available on The Graduate School's website. You can access them by clicking one of the following links:

- a) [APA](#)
- b) [MLA](#)
- c) [Chicago](#)

2. Regardless of the style guide utilized, the elements of the final thesis manuscript must be formatting in this particular order (items in **bold** are **REQUIRED**):

- a) **Abstract (Required): 1 to 2-page summary of the thesis.**
- b) **Thesis Signature Page (Required): This page must be signed by the thesis sponsor and committee members.**
- c) **Title Page (Required) : Templates for the Title Page can be found on the “Master Your Thesis” Canvas Course.**
- d) Copyright Page (Optional): Only include this page if you wish to have your thesis copyrighted. The University does not require that the thesis be copyrighted. However, if your thesis is released through the Sprague Library without a copyright page, it becomes public domain and cannot be copyrighted at a later date. To contact the U.S. Copyright Office for more information, please click

here (<https://www.copyright.gov/help/>) to access their official website. You can also call the Office at (202) 707-3000.

e) Acknowledgements (Optional)

f) Table of Contents (Required)

g) List of Figures (If Applicable)

h) List of Illustrations (If Applicable)

i) Thesis Text (Required)

**j) References/Works Cited/Bibliography
(Required)**

k) Appendices (If Applicable)

l) Supplemental Figures and Illustrations (If Applicable)

VII. Important Links for the Thesis Process

- A. [Book Appointments with Alison \(1:1 Support for Master's Thesis Students\)](#)
- B. [Approval for Writing a Master's Thesis Form \(698\)](#)
- C. [Application for Thesis Extension Form \(699\)](#)
- D. [Approval of an External Thesis Committee Member Form](#)
- E. [Request Cayuse IRB Account](#)
- F. [Information Regarding Current Versions of Writing Style Manuals](#)
- G. [Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Release Form \(ETD Form\)](#)
- H. [Example of a Completed ETD Form](#)
- I. [Example of Correctly-Formatted Master's Thesis - APA 7th Style](#)
- J. [Example of Correctly-Formatted Master's Thesis - MLA 9th Style](#)
- K. [Example of Correctly-Formatted Master's Thesis - Chicago Style](#)
- L. [The Center for Writing Excellence](#)