

## **UA SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM THESIS PROPOSAL GUIDELINES FOR THE MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM\***

According to the UA Graduate College, you should choose your thesis topic and select your committee by the end of your second semester in the School of Journalism master's degree program. That means you should start thinking about your topic almost as soon as you arrive on campus—these two years will fly by. Generally, master's students develop their theses proposals in conjunction with JOUR 589: Survey of Research Methods, which you should take in your second (spring) semester.

A thesis is an original piece of scholarship based on independent research to test a hypothesis or answer specific research questions. Theses employ quantitative or qualitative research methods or both. Quantitative methods use statistics and other mathematical forms of data analysis to conduct empirical observation of phenomena. Qualitative methods focus on analyzing language, signs, and behavior in a search for context and social meaning.

The thesis generally comprises several chapters that include an introduction, literature review, statement of hypotheses or research question, and explanation of research methodology, all of which are part of the School of Journalism thesis proposal. The remaining chapters to be completed following approval of the thesis proposal include discussion of your findings and a conclusion, followed by a bibliography. A completed thesis usually runs fifty to one hundred pages long and can be for three to six credits. Students should register for JOUR 910: Thesis.

### **Graduate College Master's Plan of Study (MPOS)**

The first step in the thesis process is to complete the online Master's Plan of Study (MPOS), which must be signed by the Journalism director of graduate studies and your proposed committee chair ("major advisor") and filed with the Graduate College. This two-page document is essentially a contract among you, the School of Journalism, and the Graduate College specifying which courses you will take to fulfill the master's degree requirements. It also requires you to state a thesis title and find your committee chair.

The Plan of Study identifies (1) courses the student intends to transfer from other institutions; (2) courses already completed at The University of Arizona which the student intends to apply toward the graduate degree; and (3) additional course work to be completed to fulfill degree requirements. The Plan of Study must have the approval of the student's major professor and department head (or chair of the Graduate Committee) before it is submitted to the Graduate College. The Graduate College will charge your student account when you file your MPOS. All deficiencies must be satisfied before the Plan of Study is approved.

As stated by the Graduate College, "each student is responsible for developing a Plan of Study as early as possible during the first few months in residence, to be submitted to the Graduate College no later than the second semester in residence." The sooner the Plan of Study is submitted, the sooner the student knows whether the proposed coursework is acceptable under Graduate College policies. Students who wait too long to submit the Plan of Study sometimes unexpectedly have to alter their coursework late in their degree program and may have to take

additional courses. You will not be able to graduate without a Plan of Study that is approved by Journalism and the Graduate College. More information is available here:

<http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/mpos>

To complete the form, go to: <http://grad.arizona.edu/>

Click on My Grad College, log in, and click on Forms. Scroll down to “Master's/Specialist Students” and click on “Master's/Specialist Plan of Study.” Fill it out online, including all past and planned coursework; it will generate a two-page document. One page lists your coursework. No signatures are necessary.

The other pages require your chair’s signature in two places: Under No. 7, which certifies your thesis complies with all “Responsible Conduct of Research” regulations, and under No. 8a, as “Major Advisor.” You must check to see whether your research will need approval from the UA Institutional Review Board. See Professor Shahira Fahmy, Journalism’s IRB representative, for help with this process. More information is available here:

<http://orcr.vpr.arizona.edu/>

You sign at the bottom. Bring both signed pages to the Journalism director of graduate studies to sign. He or she will make copies and deliver the MPOS to the Graduate College.

Changes to an approved MPOS may be submitted to the Graduate College in three ways: (1) on the Change of Program form (downloadable from the Graduate College website); (2) by e-mail directly from the major advisor to the degree auditor (if acceptable to the degree auditor in the Graduate College Degree Certification office); or (3) on the “Completion of Degree Requirements” form submitted when students defend their theses.

The MPOS should be completed by the end of the second semester. Generally, a student will work on his or her thesis proposal over the summer and defend it the following fall. If approved, the student will write the thesis in the fourth and final semester.

### **Thesis Committees**

You should consult with faculty with expertise in your research area as you begin shaping your proposal. Think about which faculty member you would like to work with—and who has the background and skills you will need to complete your thesis. Besides the faculty member who chairs your committee, you will need to ask two other faculty members to serve on the committee. Your chair usually is someone you have had as a professor.

The UA Graduate College requires that master's committees include at least two tenured or tenure-track faculty members. If the third member is not tenured or tenure-track, the School of Journalism director of graduate studies must submit a “Special Member Request” form to the Graduate College. One committee member may be from outside the School of Journalism. Occasionally, a committee may have four members. Dual-degree student committees must include a faculty member from both programs.

## **PREPARING THE THESIS PROPOSAL**

The thesis proposal is an approximately twenty- to forty-page document that describes what you plan to do, how you plan to do it, when you will do what—and why. It is the blueprint for this long-term research thesis that you will be working on for several months. The proposal also serves as a kind of contract between you and your committee that establishes what work you have agreed to do in exchange for the committee’s final thesis approval. A major purpose of the thesis proposal is that you and your committee agree from its earliest stages on the criteria for judging its success. The clearer and more specific your proposal, the smoother and less stressful completing the thesis will be. For a sample thesis proposal, please contact the graduate program coordinator at 520-621-9616.

### **Tentative title**

The main title should be catchy, while the subtitle following a colon should describe your topic more specifically. The title should be clear enough that your audience knows what to expect. Examples are: “Picturing Afghan Women: A Content Analysis of AP Wire Photographs During the Taliban Regime and after the Fall of the Taliban Regime” or “Access Attitudes: Measuring and Conceptualizing Support for Press Access to Government Records.” You may revise your title as you refine your thesis, but a well-considered title will help keep your focus on the main idea of the thesis.

### **Introduction**

The most important part of the introduction is a clear, coherent statement of purpose. What is your topic? Why is it important? The introduction should contain a brief overview of the thesis topic, possibly including any important background information. An anecdote that segues into the broader topic you plan to address can be an effective way to introduce a topic.

### **Literature Review**

This is the lengthiest section of your proposal and provides the theoretical background for your research. Theoretical frameworks will vary and may include approaches such as agenda setting, framing analysis, survey methods, or experimental methods. Often running more than fifteen pages long, the literature review has several purposes: it demonstrates that you have informed yourself about the topic, are aware of what works on your topic already exist, and allows you to demonstrate how you intend to contribute new, original information on the topic.

The review is more than an annotated bibliography. Besides synthesizing the main arguments in scholarship relevant to your thesis, you must analyze their strengths and weaknesses. The final section of the review should identify gaps in the literature that your thesis will attempt to fill.

### **Research Questions and/or Hypothesis**

This is where you specifically describe the research or questions your thesis will address. What new material or perspective will you contribute to the literature on the subject? Explain its significance.

### **Research Methods**

Explain how you will conduct the study. Describe your methodology: Framing analysis? Cultural historical research methods? Content analysis? Legal research methods? Explain the steps you will take to answer your questions or test your hypothesis. When and where will you conduct your research? Set parameters for the scope of your research and justify those limits. Parameters may include certain time periods, demographic populations, geographic regions, or type of mass medium.

### **Citations**

Proper and full citation of sources is crucial in scholarly research. Citation styles differ according to discipline and methodology. Your advisor will help you select the most appropriate citation style. The most common citation styles are:

- University of Chicago style as explained in *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*
- American Psychological Association Manual*
- Bluebook* for legal research
- Modern Language Association

### **Bibliography**

The bibliography should formally cite sources you intend to use in your final thesis as well as those discussed in your background section. Discuss with your chair which of several bibliographic styles is most appropriate for your thesis.

### **Deadlines**

Set deadlines with your committee chair for when you will submit outlines, drafts, other preliminary work, and finished pieces and include them in the proposal. Note that even drafts of all work should meet professional standards: spelling and mechanical errors are unacceptable in graduate-level work.

### **Completion of the Thesis Proposal**

When your chair decides that your thesis proposal meets the requirements, he or she will send it to the other proposed committee members. They may request revisions or additional material. After all have agreed that the proposal is ready for approval, they will meet with you to discuss it and sign the school's "Thesis Proposal Approval" form. Each of you will receive a copy of the original proposal, which will go on file in the School of Journalism.

## **COMPLETING YOUR THESIS**

After the proposal approval, you can begin the research for your thesis. The remaining parts of the written thesis in addition to the literature review and research methods section include a description of your results, a discussion of the findings, and a conclusion. You will work closely with your committee chair during the months in which you conduct your research and write your thesis. When you and your chair agree the thesis is ready, you must deliver copies of it to committee members at least two weeks in advance of the thesis defense date.

### **Academic Integrity Policy**

The thesis must meet all standards of the UA Code of Academic Integrity and the School of Journalism Academic Integrity Handbook. Work found in violation of the code, including but

not limited to plagiarism and fabrication, will receive a failing grade and the student will be removed from the program. You can download the handbooks here:

<http://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/policiesandcodes/studentcodeofconduct>

<http://journalism.arizona.edu/students/handbooks.php>

### **Thesis Defense**

Schedule a date and time and reserve a room with the main office for defending your thesis to your committee and other interested members of the school. The defense involves a twenty- to thirty-minute presentation of your thesis, followed by questions and comments from the committee. Be prepared to answer questions about how and why you made decisions about your thesis.

### **Graduate College Requirements for Completion of Master's Requirements**

A successful thesis defense requires that at least two members of your committee sign the Graduate College's "Completion of Master's Degree Requirements" form. The online form is accessible via logging into My Grad College at:

<https://grad.arizona.edu/gc/>

Your chair fills in the defense date and whether you passed or failed "the exam." The committee usually requires some revisions even when it approves the thesis, which will be noted on the form. Any changes in your course work from the MPOS should be listed in the space provided. At least two committee members must sign and date the bottom of the form. Your chair will give the completed form to the DGS or school director to sign and submit to the Graduate College. Keep a copy. The dean of the Graduate College will certify completion of degree requirements. To graduate, all other course work must be completed and your cumulative GPA must be at least 3.0.

**Final Grade and Transcript:** When the chair receives the final, revised thesis, he or she will replace the JOUR 910 "K" grade with a "P" for pass or an "S" for superior. The Graduate College must receive a copy of your official transcript with all final grades by the semester graduation deadline.

### **Graduate College Deadlines**

Deadlines for graduating in a particular semester are online at:

<http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/deadlines-for-graduation>

### **School Thesis Copy**

You must provide the School of Journalism with a bound copy of your final, revised thesis for its files. You also have the option of submitting the thesis to the Graduate College for a fee.

### **Thesis Formatting**

If you opt to submit your thesis to the university, The Graduate College has specific requirements on the formatting of theses and filing them either electronically or in paper form. You can download the guidelines at:

<http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/diss-theses/manuals>

### **Thesis Submission**

Submit your final, revised thesis to the Graduate College according to the Format Check Process described at:

<http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/diss-theses/format-check-process>

### **Registration and Tuition**

You must be registered as a UA student the semester you defend your thesis. If you do not complete JOUR 910 (thesis) during the semester, you may take a “K” grade (for “Continuing”). You must then register for one credit in summer or three credits of JOUR 910 or JOUR 930 in fall or spring. Out-of-state students may request a tuition waiver so that they pay in-state tuition rates while they complete their thesis.

Journalism faculty generally are unavailable for thesis defenses during the summer except under exceptional circumstances approved in advance. If you do not finish your thesis in the spring semester, plan on registering and paying tuition for another three credits of JOUR 910 or JOUR 930 the following fall.

### **Commencement Information**

University commencement ceremony information is available here:

<http://commencement.arizona.edu/index.html>

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Convocation Recognition Ceremony information is available here:

<http://web.sbs.arizona.edu/college/node/42>

### **More Information for Graduate Students**

Graduate students are responsible for knowing requirements of the UA Graduate College as well as those of the School of Journalism. A wealth of information, including deadlines and forms, is available on the college’s web site. You should familiarize yourself with its academic policies at:

<http://grad.arizona.edu/>

For more information about School of Journalism academic policies, or advice on and help with completing any of these forms, contact Linda Lumsden, director of graduate studies, at:

[lumsden@email.arizona.edu](mailto:lumsden@email.arizona.edu)

\*The School of Journalism Graduate Committee would like to acknowledge that some of its recommendations are based on similar guidelines it reviewed from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri.

*These guidelines are in effect beginning with the school’s 2009-10 master’s program cohort.*