



Thesis Guidelines

2020-2021

Academic Year

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1. Overview

A thesis serves as a personalized and distinguishing mark on a graduate degree from Fairfax University of America. As a well-planned, rigorously researched, and professionally written piece of scholarly work, it will constitute an original contribution to your discipline and represent a significant step in your independent scholarship. Throughout the process, you will work closely with a mentor who will provide guidance and help to ensure not only that you are on track to fulfill the requirements of your program of study, but also that the product will be of publishable quality, meeting the expectations and standards of research in your field.

This guide is not intended to prescribe all components of the thesis, but should be viewed as a reference tool outlining common components of the thesis, suggested timelines, and expectations of the program.

A student on the thesis track must submit an officially approved thesis which meets all requirements prior to the conferral of the degree. The burden of responsibility is on the student to complete all requirements of the thesis, including those pertaining to the formatting, caliber of the content, procedures, and deadlines, as outlined in greater detail below.

2. Committee

Each student on the thesis track will work with a mentor throughout the process of planning, researching, writing, and defending the thesis. In most cases, the student will have two thesis courses (XXXX 698 Thesis I and XXXX 699 Thesis II), and while it is possible for a student to complete their thesis in a single semester, most students would require completion of both courses. The mentor, who will also serve as the committee chair, must be an FXUA faculty member and must be assigned prior to the beginning of the semester in which the student takes the final thesis course. In order to request a mentor, the student will submit a completed Mentor Request Form to their Program Chair. This should be done at the start of the semester prior to the final semester, which would coincide with the start of the first thesis course.

Students should note that not all faculty are able to serve as mentors for the thesis. Requests for specific faculty members will be taken into account by the School, but final decisions on the mentor will be made by the School. Final assignment of a mentor will be done with consideration given to the research topic and available faculty.

Once a mentor is named, the student will work with the mentor to identify 1-2 other potential committee members. Upon approval by the mentor, the student will contact the potential committee members via email to invite them to participate on the committee. The final constitution of the committee should be based upon considerations such as the methodology, content, and/or theoretical/conceptual aspects of the proposed research. Committee members from outside the institution must be approved by the mentor and their Program Chair. The goal of the formation of the committee is to ensure that a diverse set of scholars/professionals with complementary expertise will be able to provide the student with guidance and constructive feedback in a variety of relevant areas. Please note that some potential committee members may wish to speak with the student prior to formally committing to serving on the committee. Students are encouraged to exercise patience and work with potential committee members as requested. (Remember that committee members are giving their time as a service to you and your committee.)

In extenuating circumstances, a student may request for a mentor or committee member to be replaced. A request to replace the mentor should be processed through the Program Chair, while a request to replace a committee member should be processed through the mentor in his or her role as committee chair. Acceptable reasons for such a request would include unresponsiveness or egregious behavior, such as unethical conduct, on the part of the mentor or committee member. Unacceptable reasons to request a change to the committee would include situations such as, but not limited to, the receipt of challenging feedback or expectations of a dissenting vote on the defense panel. Students should consider the fact that it will take additional time to find an alternate member for the committee, as well as additional time for the new committee member to read, understand, and comment on the existing manuscript, which

may affect the student's ability to complete the thesis on time. Therefore, consultation with the mentor and/or the Program Chair is compulsory and should include a consideration of potential effects on the timeline for completion of the thesis.

3. Thesis Proposal

The completion of a thesis requires prior coursework in research methodology. Students will work to review the prior literature, collect resources, design the methods and materials, and conduct preliminary pilot-testing in the research methods course(s) prior to taking the thesis course.

Upon selection of a mentor, the student will need to complete a proposal which includes an overview of the goals of the study, theories or frameworks to be employed, potential aspects to be explored, the intended methodology, and a list of resources/references to be used in completion of the thesis. The proposal must be completed before the opening of registration for the semester in which the student will work on the thesis. It must be submitted to the mentor and the Program Chair for approval prior to registration for the thesis course. Occasionally, changes may need to be made prior to final approval of the proposal, so delays in submission may result in a delay in registration for the thesis course. A student who does not complete the proposal prior to the deadline will not be able to register for the thesis course on time.

4. Completion of Requirements

For a 15-week thesis course, a complete version of the thesis must be submitted to the mentor at least four weeks before the end of the semester. The thesis will be reviewed by the student's mentor and committee members. All suggested revisions should be interpreted as required unless otherwise noted by the committee. Once revisions have been made to the committee's satisfaction and the work has been deemed to meet the requirements for a thesis at FXUA, a finalized version of the thesis will be submitted to the Program Chair or his/her designee for review at least a week before the end of the semester. This final version should represent publishable work meeting the expectations and standards of the discipline. A response will generally be provided within one week of this final submission. However, it should be noted that the length of time required to review the thesis may differ based upon a variety of factors, including its length, content, and the number of other theses being submitted. Failure to follow the conventions outlined herein and by the relevant Program Chair and course instructor may result in a delay in graduation.

A suggested timeline is provided below. Please note that every project is different and would likely require some modification of the suggested schedule. Students should consult their mentor and committee members on a specific schedule for completion based upon the nature and scope of the research. Students should plan to conduct a study whose data collection, analysis, interpretation, and write-up can be completed within one semester as part of the thesis course.

Time Period	SUGGESTED TIMELINE FOR COMPLETION	TASK
First Semester		
Weeks 1-15	<i>Consider potential topics to cover for your thesis and familiarize yourself with the thesis process.</i>	<i>Familiarize yourself with available mentors.</i>
Second Semester: Introduction to Research Methods Course		

Weeks 1-15	<i>Take introductory research methods course, review the thesis guidelines in detail, and make a personal plan for completion.</i>	<i>Begin identifying potential mentors for your project; consult with them (as well as other faculty) about your research interests, and develop a reading list based on their advice.</i>
Before Week 12	<i>Discuss your project with faculty members, including your potential mentor.</i>	<i>Meet to establish meeting times and discuss your timeline for the following semester. Share your work thus far, identify areas that need to be addressed, and make a plan for completing each stage of the project.</i>
By Week 12	<i>Submit a Mentor Request Form</i>	
Course Registration	<i>Register for courses based upon your intended topic in consultation with your mentor.</i>	
Third Semester: Expanding Upon Your Research Methods		
Weeks 2-3		<i>Consult your mentor and course instructor about a plan for your semester including submission of IRB application for pilot testing, potential methods and data collection tools.</i>
Weeks 3-5	<i>Continue to identify literature related to your topic</i>	
Weeks 3-10	<i>Work on your literature review, research materials, and IRB application.</i>	
Week 8-9	<i>Submit Expanded Preliminary Thesis Proposal</i>	
Week 14	<i>Submit an IRB application for your thesis, including the instruments you plan to use in your research.</i>	
By Week 15	<i>Submit Thesis/Project Proposal</i>	
Fourth Semester: Thesis Research		
Weeks 1-2	<i>Continue working on your literature review and make any necessary revisions to your research materials. Revise your IRB application if necessary and submit it to your mentor.</i>	<i>Meet to discuss and finalize your semester plan and IRB application with your mentor.</i>
Week 3	<i>Submit your literature review and methods sections to your mentor. Revise your materials and procedures based on feedback. With your mentor's approval, submit a Change in Protocol form to the IRB if necessary, including finalized materials and procedures.</i>	<i>Meet to discuss your literature review and methods sections.</i>
Weeks 4-5	<i>Incorporating the feedback you have received, revise and resubmit your literature review and methods sections.</i>	<i>Meet to discuss data collection and your approach to analysis.</i>
Week 6	<i><u>Pending IRB approval</u>, begin collecting data.</i>	
Week 7	<i>Continue to collect and analyze data. Begin writing your results section.</i>	<i>Meet to discuss your analysis and preliminary results.</i>
Week 8	<i>Finish collecting and analyzing data. Write your results section.</i>	
Week 9	<i>Submit your results section. Begin writing your discussion and conclusions sections.</i>	<i>Meet to discuss your results section.</i>
Week 10	<i>Revise your results section based on feedback. Complete your discussion and conclusions sections.</i>	<i>Meet to discuss your discussion and conclusions.</i>
Week 11	<i>Revise the discussion and conclusion sections based on feedback. Submit the full thesis to your mentor, including an abstract.</i>	

Week 12	<i>With your mentor's approval, submit the full thesis to the rest of the committee.</i>	<i>Finalize your abstract and reserve a room for your oral defense.</i>
Week 13	<i>Revise your thesis based on feedback from the full committee.</i>	<i>Announce and prepare for your oral defense.</i>
Week 14	<i>Finalize the manuscript for submission to the Program Chair and Executive Dean.</i>	<i>Defend your thesis.</i>
Week 15	<i>Submit your finalized manuscript with approval signatures to the School, Registrar, and Library.</i>	

5. Course Registration and Course Completion

All students are required to register for a thesis course as continuing enrollment. In the event that a student is unable to complete the thesis in one semester, the student is permitted to enroll for an additional term in the thesis course. The thesis course can be repeated only once.

Given the unique nature of work required to complete the thesis, students will be awarded the grade of Pass ("PA"), Unsatisfactory Progress ("UP"), or Satisfactory Progress ("SP"), as determined by the mentor/committee chair.

A grade of "PA" requires final official approval of the thesis as determined by the committee chair and indicates successful completion of the course and the full thesis.

Unsatisfactory Progress ("UP") may include but is not limited to: not following a schedule that was agreed upon with the chair or other committee members, neglect of progress toward or completion of the thesis, failure to address comments or concerns in a timely manner, late submission of work that does not allow enough time for committee members to review, etc. Students receiving a "UP" grade do not receive credit for the course and must retake the thesis course in the following semester.

Students who have made progress toward the completion of their thesis requirements, but still have work to complete at the end of the semester, may receive a Satisfactory grade ("SP") for the course, indicating that they have made satisfactory progress, but have not yet completed all requirements for the thesis. This would include but is not limited to: a substantial approved demonstration of having actively worked toward completion of the thesis (e.g., the collection of at least some data) or the completion of a defense with major revisions required. Students receiving an "SP" grade receive credit for the course, and must work to complete the thesis in the following semester.

- Generally, for a program that has both Thesis I and II, a Thesis I would be awarded an SP (satisfactory progress) or UP (unsatisfactory progress); while a Thesis II would be awarded a UP or PA (pass).
- For programs that may only have one thesis course listed in their program, a student is permitted to have more than one attempt at the thesis (i.e., can retake the thesis). This would allow a student to take the thesis course twice, assuming satisfactory completion of the first attempt at the thesis in the first semester. Generally, if a student requires additional time to complete the thesis, they would receive an SP (satisfactory progress) or UP (unsatisfactory progress) in the first semester taken; while the final thesis attempt would receive a UP or PA.

A student who has minor revisions to address following the oral defense may be granted an Incomplete for the course if and only if the time to complete the revisions would not exceed the limit of time allotted for an "I" grade to be changed to a letter grade. All requirements for an Incomplete grade apply to the thesis course. Please refer to the Academic Catalog for information on the Incomplete policy.

The title of the student's thesis will appear on his/her transcript with the thesis course. The student is responsible for ensuring that the Registrar's Office receives the full name of the final thesis submitted to the library. Thesis main line titles cannot exceed 45 characters (including spaces, characters/letters, and symbols). A thesis may include a subtitle, but the subtitle will not fit on the transcript. For example, "A mixed-methods study on student course preferences:

Why students choose what they choose” could be the long title for the thesis (as it would reflect on the document submitted to the library), but only the main portion of the title, “A mixed-methods study on student course preferences” would appear on the transcript. For this example, the name of the thesis would be shown in the following format: “XXXX 699: Thesis A MIXED-METHODS STUDY ON STUDENT COURSE PREFERENCES.”

6. Formatting

It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that the thesis meets the quality expectations and adheres to the formatting and component requirements specified by program and the university. Students may be required to submit their work to the Writing, Research, and Media Center prior to final submission. Improper formatting and/or not adhering to the School’s requirements may result in a delay in graduation. Students are encouraged to find and use an editor who has a strong command of academic English and APA style.

The finalized thesis must use APA formatting and include, at minimum, all of the following elements (unless specifically listed as optional):

- Title Page (student’s official name, previous degree[s], etc.)
- Signature Page
- Abstract (not to exceed 350 words in length)
- Dedication Page (optional)
- Acknowledgements (optional)
- Table of Contents (must automatically update)
- List of Tables
- List of Figures
- Sections (usually, these will include Introduction, Review of the Literature, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion; consult your committee for guidance)
- References
- Appendices (optional based upon the nature of your research)
- CV or Resume (optional)
- Biography (optional)

General scholarly templates can be accessed through the Writing, Research, and Media Center website (<http://fxua.edu/wrmc>) and/or through your School. Errors or issues with formatting can cause delays in graduation.

The length of the thesis will depend on the nature of the research being conducted. The body of a thesis at the Master’s level is generally between 40-80 pages in length (excluding appendices, references, etc.).

7. English Requirement

Since the primary language of instruction at FXUA is English, all theses must be written in English and follow the general conventions of academic English. Should a student wish to include items in a language other than English, the mentor should be consulted and translations must be provided.

8. IRB Approval

Students wishing to collect data from human participants as part of their thesis research must complete the necessary training in the protection of human research participants, must seek and obtain approval from FXUA’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) before beginning to conduct their research, and must follow exactly the procedures that have been approved by FXUA’s IRB.

9. Proof of Academic Integrity

All students are expected to run their thesis through TurnItIn prior to final submission. The final report should be provided to the mentor as a PDF attachment with the final submission as part of its proof of academic integrity. Failure to submit a TurnItIn draft report could result in a delay of graduation. At their discretion, chairs may choose to run the manuscript through TurnItIn again in addition to the student's submission.

It is the student's responsibility to adhere to the high rigors of academic integrity throughout his/her work including in the proposal, manuscript, and defense, and to adhere to all other committee and university requirements.

10. Submission Requirements

The completed thesis must be submitted to the mentor in electronic format. A paper copy may also be requested by the mentor, but a minimum of an electronic copy must be provided.

11. Thesis Defense

Rigorous academic debate and probing are a fundamental part of the learning, teaching, and growing process at higher education institutions in the US. The thesis defense is an opportunity for the student to present, explain, and defend his/her work, and for the committee to provide additional feedback to be incorporated into the final manuscript. The committee, Program Chair, and the Executive Dean will be the main parties granting approval of the thesis, with the mentor overseeing the entire process. All suggested revisions should be interpreted as required unless otherwise noted by the committee. At the discretion of the mentor, a thesis requiring significant additional work may need to be re-defended in front of the committee following substantial revisions.

The student will coordinate with committee members to establish a day and time for the defense. Please note that working with a variety of schedules can be complicated, and students need to be quite organized in order to ensure that they are able to accommodate everyone's schedule. This is a part of the learning experience for the thesis. Students should consult with the mentor on any suggestions including resources for organization of multiple schedules (for example, scheduling, surveying, polling tools such as doodle.com or Google Forms) and/or any tips s/he may have.

The student will coordinate with the Registrar to reserve a place for the defense. The entire committee must be present (virtually or physically) at the time of the defense. Upon approval of the time and location for the defense, the student will submit a full version of the thesis for consideration to the committee.

The defense will be open to the public and the FXUA learning community. The announcement of the defense will include an abstract of the thesis.

The total length of time of the defense will generally be up to an hour and a half, plus time for the committee to confer and report on the results. It will consist of a brief (20- to 30-minute) presentation of the thesis, addressing the major points (e.g., the theoretical framework, rationale, research questions, methods, main findings, limitations, and conclusions), followed by questions and feedback from the committee and, time permitting, an opportunity for members of the community to comment and ask questions. The mentor may determine the maximum time allotted for the defense presentation and will communicate this to the student. Committee members are generally allotted 10-15 minutes each for questions and follow-up. Questions may involve the substance of the argument, the application of theory, the methodology, the approach to analysis, and/or the interpretations. The mentor will serve to moderate the defense and will allow questions from non-committee members as deemed fit and as time permits.

Upon conclusion of the defense, the committee will confer and recess until a time deemed appropriate by the committee and the mentor. The student will be evaluated on both the quality of the oral defense and the overall quality of the thesis, including its findings, significance, and articulation. Theses typically are given one of several categories

at the chair's discretion, including (a) pass, (b) pass with revisions, (c) pass with major revisions, or (d) does not pass. A thesis receiving more than one vote of "does not pass" from the committee cannot pass, and a thesis cannot pass if the chair deems the defense as "does not pass". If all committee members agree that the defense is in the passable range (options a-c), then it is at the chair's discretion whether or not the defense would pass as option (a), (b), or (c). The committee's official approval following any required revisions will allow the awarding of a Pass ("PA") grade for the thesis course. The final approval for the thesis will be granted by the Executive Dean of the university.

Any committee member(s) who is (are) not able to attend the defense in person will be permitted to email their approval to the mentor of the thesis. Wherever possible, an official email should be used (for example, ____@fxua.edu, ____@campus.fxua.edu, _____@fcps.edu, @state.gov, etc.).

12. Publication

All theses will be published and available through FXUA's library. Names and titles of theses may be published on university's website and/or the library website. All theses will also be on record with the students' files.

The student's diploma will be released once the thesis has been made available in the library and once the registrar has received the official signatures for the thesis.

13. Tips

Understand that conceptualizing, researching, and writing a thesis is an iterative process, requiring continued work, development, and refinement of content and methodology. Remain in regular contact with your mentor and work closely with him/her throughout the experience!

Appendix A Thesis Cover Page

The title page for your manuscript should include the following information:

TITLE

by

Student Name (First and Last)

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
School of XXXXXX

Fairfax University of America
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Degree Name
Specialization (if applicable)

Month Day (XX), Year (XXXX)

Appendix B Thesis Signature Page

The signature page for your manuscript should include the following information:

TITLE

by
Student Name (First and Last)

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
School of XXXXX
Fairfax University of America
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Degree Name
Specialization (if applicable)

Month Day (XX), Year (XXXX)

The thesis was reviewed and approved by the following

_____ Name, Chair

_____ Name, Committee Member

_____ Name, Committee Member

Academic Officer Approvals

_____ Name, Program Chair

_____ Name, School Official

Appendix C Mentor Request Form

Student's Name: <First Name Last Name>

Student ID: <Student ID Number>

Semester of Submission: <SEM YYYY>

Advisor: <First Name Last Name>

***STUDENTS:** Complete the form and submit it to your Program Chair. Upon submission, your Program Chair will work to find a suitable mentor for the thesis course. This may involve a meeting to discuss your proposal with the Program Chair.*

***PROGRAM CHAIR:** Review and determine an appropriate course of action to find a suitable mentor. Meeting with the student to discuss the proposal may be required.*

STUDENT INFORMATION SECTION (Provide your contact information)

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone Number: _____

PROGRAM OF STUDY: _____

Concentration (if applicable): _____

REQUESTED MENTOR

If you have a specific person in mind to serve as your mentor and chair, you may recommend this below. This is optional, but encouraged. You will work with your mentor throughout the process of your thesis, and your mentor will serve as the instructor for your Thesis course.

Requested Thesis Mentor: _____

Brief Proposal

Provide a brief summary of your proposal.

Initial Problem Statement (usually 1 paragraph)

Anticipated theoretical or conceptual perspectives (usually up to 1 page):

Preliminary research question(s) (at least one preliminary research question):

Anticipated Methodology (usually up to 1 page):

(For office use only)

Approved Committee Chair

Committee Chair: _____

COMMENTS

ADVISOR/PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR SECTION

Name: _____

☐ **Approve**

☐ **Reject**

COMMENTS

Appendix D Required Forms

The following is a list of forms used for the Thesis. These forms can be found on the Research at FXUA website:

- **Mentor Request Form** – Appendix C of this document includes the form used to briefly describe the intent of the thesis. This form serves as a formal request for mentor assignment.
- **Expanded Preliminary Thesis Proposal** – This is a more complete version of your earlier Mentor Request Form and represents a significant narrowing of your topic. The main areas to be included in the proposal are the theoretical or conceptual framework, problem statement, hypothesis, a brief (500-word) overview of information contained in the literature on the topic, proposed methods (materials and procedures), selected references (15-20) serving to support the literature review, and whether or not the research will involve human participants. The proposal should be submitted to your mentor in APA formatting.
- **Signature Page** – Appendix B of this document includes an example of how to incorporate the signature page into your manuscript.