GUIDELINES FOR A MASTER'S THESIS

The learning process for writing a master's thesis is as important as the final project. Therefore, the contribution will be as much to the student as to the field. The final project should contain a comprehensive literature review. It should contain enough originality and clarity of thought so it can be rewritten for a journal or for presentation at a professional meeting.

Research may be of a quantitative or qualitative nature. For a quantitative study, the student investigates a particular problem by collecting data from observations or measurements that can be analyzed numerically or statistically. For example, a student might choose to isolate the news values of a particular broadcaster. The student would begin by performing a content analysis on a random sample of television newscasts. The student could then form generalizations from the data analysis. A study of this nature would contribute to the literature on agenda setting.

For a qualitative study, the student investigates a particular problem by classifying the characteristics or nature of something. This kind of study generally provides insight into an aspect of an endeavor or behavior. For instance, a student might wonder about how the "gatekeepers" of the 1960s handled stories on abortion. The student would then read newspaper articles printed during that decade, looking for allusions, metaphors or symbols. She/he might note that these stories contained allusions or symbols that referred to a "villain" (the abortionist or the woman) and a "victim" (the fetus). One could then conclude that newspaper articles of the 60s contained the message that abortion equals murder.

These are only examples. Many thousands of variations exist. Check Journalism Quarterly, Dissertation Abstracts, Ebsco Host, Social Sciences Index, and other such databases for more research examples.

Whether the study is quantitative or qualitative, the thesis should include the following sections: (1) an Abstract; (2) an Introduction section that includes a statement of the problem and its pertinent background information, objectives of the study, and limitations of the study; (3) a Literature Review section which culminates with your specific research questions and/or hypotheses; (4) a Methodology section; (5) a Results section; and, (6) a Discussion section which culminates with your specific conclusions and recommendations for future studies.

Students should select a Comm/Journ professor as thesis advisor. This professor should have the skills and background related to your topic which will be of the most help in the research and writing. Students will also select two additional professors as thesis committee members who can offer other insights into the project. One professor on the thesis committee may be a faculty member in another S.U. department.

The final draft of the thesis must be completed and delivered to all committee members at least three weeks before the end of the semester in which the student plans to hold the oral defense meeting and graduate. Students should expect to make frequent changes and rewrite drafts before arriving at this point.

Following the defense, student and thesis advisor will talk about what else needs to be done to the thesis. There may be minor revisions, deletions, or additions to the final draft required before submission to the Graduate College for binding.

THESIS PROCESS

1. Select a topic, theory, and research methodology.
2. Select a thesis advisor. Ask this person if he/she will serve as your thesis advisor.
3. Write a proposal that explains your topic, the theory you plan to use to guide the study, and the methodology you will use to research the topic.
4. Upon approval by the thesis advisor, submit proposal to committee.
5. Hold a meeting of your committee to discuss and approve the proposal.
6. Complete the thesis registration form at this meeting. You must obtain the signatures of all three committee members on this form and show the date of your proposal approval meeting.
7. Deliver the form to the Department Chair for his/her approval. Include the following two items with this registration form: (a) a note listing the semester(s) in which you would like to schedule Thesis I and Thesis II and (b) a copy of your thesis proposal.
8. While writing your thesis, submit each section to the thesis advisor for approval before starting the next section.
9. Upon completion to the satisfaction of the thesis advisor, submit the draft to the committee.
10. Defend the thesis to the committee via a formal oral presentation. If approved, have the committee members sign the thesis signature page before concluding the defense meeting
11. Make the appropriate revisions required by the committee. Submit to thesis advisor for final approval.
12. Submit the completed and approved thesis to the Graduate School in final form.