

GUIDELINES ON THE PREPARATION AND EXAMINATION OF THESES, MAJOR PAPERS, PROJECTS, OR EXTENDED ESSAYS

1. INTRODUCTION

These guidelines are for all graduate programs at UFV. Used together with the [General Regulations for Graduate Studies](#) and the [Library Guidelines for Theses or Major Papers](#) most aspects of preparing and examining a master's thesis, major paper, project or extended essay are addressed. Note: Unless otherwise specified "major paper" is used in these guidelines to designate a major paper, project or extended essay.

Each program may also have additional requirements that have been approved by the Graduate Studies Committee. Students need to become familiar with these specific requirements before preparing their thesis or major paper. In addition, they will find it helpful to consult published theses in their respective discipline.

2. DEFINITIONS

Master's Thesis

A Master's thesis is a significant body of work produced in writing by a student, usually in the form of a monograph, demonstrating that the student is able to work in a scholarly manner, carry out research and organize results and is familiar with the principal works published on the subject of the thesis. A Master's thesis must be expressed in good literate style. Original scholarship is encouraged but not necessarily expected. A Master's thesis should not normally exceed one hundred pages. Longer theses are discouraged. Depending on the discipline, the duration of the thesis project can vary significantly, but should not normally exceed two years.

Major Paper

Major papers are shorter than a Master's thesis. They should normally be approximately fifty pages long. In some disciplines, the major paper may be a project report, a project evaluation report, a case study, an extended essay, or a more theoretical paper. Just like a master's thesis, they must be in good literate style and demonstrate that the student is able to work in a scholarly manner, carry out research and organize results and is familiar with the principal works published on the subject of the major paper. Original scholarship is encouraged but not necessarily expected. Depending on the discipline, a major paper can normally be completed within one semester, four months, of full time study.

3. POLICIES AND STANDARDS

Master's theses or major papers must conform to UFV's policies, regulations, and standards. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with all applicable policies and regulations of UFV.

Ethics Considerations

All research plans must comply with UFV Human Research Ethics and Animal Care [add links] policies. Students must familiarize themselves as soon as possible with these policies and, when applicable, seek the necessary approvals from the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) or Animal Care Committee (ACC) before the research is initiated. Each program will have a point of contact that should be familiar with these policies as well. When a formal HREB or ACC review is required, the submission to the HREB or ACC must be submitted at the same time or after the thesis proposal is submitted to the AVP Research, Engagement & Graduate Studies for approval. The proposal must be approved by both the AVP and the HREB or ACC in order to proceed.

4. TIME LIMITS

Unless a different time limit has been specified for a particular program, a candidate for a master's degree is expected to complete all degree requirements **within seven years** of the date of the initial registration in the master's program. A Program Graduate Committee can specify its expectations of normal degree completion times for a given program as a guide to determining whether a student's progress is satisfactory.

5. CONTINUANCE REGISTRATION WHILE THE THESIS OR MAJOR PAPER IS BEING COMPLETED AND EXAMINED

Students must maintain their registration in the program until all the requirements, including the thesis or major paper, have been completed. See the General Regulations for Graduate Studies for more detail. Students who will not complete the thesis or major paper in the final semester of the program must seek GPC approval and register for a continuance section set up by the GPC in each semester until they are prepared to defend.

6. REGISTRATION OF TOPIC AND THESIS OR MAJOR PAPER PROPOSAL

The topic of the thesis or major paper is to be determined in consultation with the student's supervisor as soon as possible, but no later than one year after the student's admission in the program. Students are also expected to prepare a thesis proposal in consultation with their supervisory committee. In some programs, students are expected to participate in a seminar which facilitates the development of the proposal. The proposal must be submitted in writing and approved by the student's supervisory committee. It is then transmitted with the appropriate form¹ to the Chair of the Graduate Program Committee. Once the program requirements in regard to the proposal have been satisfied, the completed form is submitted to the AVP Graduate Studies for final approval. The AVP's office will notify the Chair of the Graduate Program Committee once approved and will enter the project title into the official student record system.

The maximum length of a proposal is 3,000 words. It should contain a brief statement in non-technical language of the purpose or goals of the research, the relationship to existing work in the area, the method which will be used and the contribution that will be made to the field of enquiry.

7. STRUCTURE OF THESIS OR MAJOR PAPER

The Library has prepared Formatting and Submission Requirements for Graduate Theses and for Major Papers. Students should refer to these as guides in structuring their papers.

¹ [Form 03 – Approval of Major Paper or Thesis Proposal](#)

MAJOR PAPER SUBMISSION

8. SUBMISSION OF THE MAJOR PAPER

Before submitting a major paper, a candidate must have completed all other program requirements, including residence when applicable. At the time of submission members of the supervisory committee must certify that they have read the major paper and find it acceptable for submission to the examining committee.²

Refer to the [General Regulations for Graduate Studies](#) for information on the examination of a major paper, project, or extended essay.

9. FINAL SUBMISSION OF THE MAJOR PAPER TO THE LIBRARY

A student is considered to have completed degree requirements on the date that the major paper is submitted to the Library, provided that the Library finds the format acceptable.

Please refer to the [Formatting and Submission Requirements for MAJOR PAPERS](#) for submission instructions.

THESIS SUBMISSION AND EXAMINATION

10. SUBMISSION OF THE THESIS

Before submitting a thesis, a candidate must have completed all other program requirements, including residence when applicable. At the time of submission members of the supervisory committee must certify that they have read the thesis and find it acceptable for submission to the examining committee.³

The student must submit an electronic copy of the thesis to the Chair of the Graduate Program Committee and hard copies if requested.⁴

The GPC Chair will submit [Recommendation to Proceed with Final Review or Examination \(Form 04\)](#) to the AVP along with recommendations for an external examiner and suggested dates for the oral defense. The AVP's office will contact potential examiners and provide them with a copy of the thesis that has personal identifying information redacted.

11. EXTERNAL EXAMINER PROCESS

ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER

- Assess whether the thesis meets the criteria for a successful thesis, as outlined in the [Guidelines on the Preparation and Supervision of Thesis, Extended Essays, and Research Papers](#).
- Provide a review of the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis and recommends revisions (as appropriate).

² A form is available for that purpose: [Form 04 – Recommendation to Proceed with Final Review or Examination](#)

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⁴ This should be in a version that is not protected so that identifying information can be removed for blind review by external examiners.

- Make a recommendation to the AVP Graduate Studies on whether the Candidate should proceed to Final Oral Exam.
- Participate in the Final Oral Examination whenever possible. If not possible, the External Examiner submits questions to be asked of the Candidate by the Research Supervisor.

NOMINATING THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER

The Candidate's Supervisor and Graduate Program Chair nominate at least two (but preferably three) people for the role of External Examiner. **Invitations to serve in this role must be initiated by the AVP Graduate Studies.** The AVP Graduate Studies will select and invite the External Examiner. The AVP Graduate Studies retains the authority to reject a recommended external examiner based upon a real or perceived conflict of interest, or ineligibility.

External Examiners are nominated using Form 04 [Recommendation to Proceed with Final Review or Examination](#). **This form should be submitted to AVP Graduate Studies approximately 6 weeks prior to the intended date of submission of the thesis for external examination.** Failure to provide this advanced notice is likely to result in delays in the later stages of the examination process. The external review cannot begin until the AVP Graduate Studies has an approved External Examiner confirmed to review the thesis.

External Examiner nominees should not be contacted by the Candidate, Supervisor or Graduate Program prior to the exam.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR EXTERNAL EXAMINER

The Supervisor and Graduate Program are responsible for nominating well-qualified, objective, experienced individuals not associated or affiliated with UFV. Reflecting the importance of this role, it is imperative the External Examiner:

- Have an established reputation in the area of the thesis research and be able to judge whether the thesis is acceptable at a university comparable to UFV.
- Have had previous experience with the supervision and examination of master's students.
- Hold a PhD (preferred) or at least a master's degree so they have a degree equal to or greater than the one which the Candidate is pursuing.
- Hold the rank of Full, Associate, or Emeritus Professor (or the equivalent if outside North America) at a university that offers the degree the Candidate seeks, or have comparable expertise and standing if not at a university.
- Have not acted as External Examiner in the Candidate's graduate program or for a Candidate with the same Supervisor in the past three years.

A brief rationale must be provided for each nominee indicating the special field(s) of expertise and achievements of each nominee. This may include a list of publications by the nominee that are of central importance or are closely related to the Candidate's research.

If a nominee is not currently associated with a university, a brief CV and a statement outlining the relevant qualifications of the nominee must be provided.

ARM'S LENGTH REQUIREMENTS FOR EXTERNAL EXAMINER

A person is ineligible to serve as External Examiner if, with respect to the Candidate or any member of the Candidate's Supervisory Committee, she/he is:

- a close friend or relative,
- a research collaborator and/or co-author within the past 6 years,
- an institutional colleague within the past 6 years,
- a former supervisor (for the Candidate, Supervisor or Co-Supervisor only),
- a person who has offered future employment or mentorship to the Candidate,;
- a former student,
- involved in a dispute, or
- involved in a partnership.

INDEPENDENCE OF ASSESSMENT

Prior to the Oral Exam the Supervisor, Graduate Program, and Candidate must scrupulously avoid discussing the thesis' merits or academic content with the External Examiner. Any such contact initiated by the External Examiner should be redirected to the AVP Graduate Studies without delay.

IDENTITY OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER

The Candidate should not know the identity of the External Examiner until after the thesis has been submitted to the APV Graduate Studies and reviewed by the external examiner.

PARTICIPATION IN THE ORAL EXAM

The External Examiner's participation in a Candidate's Final Oral Exam offers the opportunity for a valuable dialogue about the thesis and the research it presents. Therefore, the participation of the External Examiner in the Final Oral Exam is expected, but it is not required.

12. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

A student could be assessed unduly positively or negatively as a result of a conflict of interest or close relationship between the student and the examiners or supervisory committee members. The Chair of a Graduate Program Committee or the AVP Research, Engagement & Graduate Studies should be made aware of and seek to avoid situations which may affect the assessment of the work of graduate students, such as potential conflicts of interest or other situations where examiners may not be sufficiently at arm's length from the student.

13. EXAMINATION

All members of the examining committee must be present at the oral examination, except under exceptional circumstances when prior permission has been granted by the AVP Research, Engagement, & Graduate Studies.

When required to make corrections to the thesis after the oral exam, the student must do so within two weeks following the exam and submit the corrected version to the supervisory committee who can then recommend that the degree be awarded.

If the corrections cannot be made by the deadline, and a new semester has started, the student must seek permission from the GPC to register for a continuance session and maintain registration until the corrected copies are submitted and accepted. A maximum of one semester is allowed to submit corrected copies of the thesis, unless permission has been obtained from the AVP Graduate Studies. Failure to submit the corrected copies within these time limits may result in the Graduate Program Committee closing the file.

14. ORAL EXAM OF MASTER'S THESES

A Master's thesis is subject to oral exam which is chaired by an Assistant, Associate, or Full Professor representing the AVP Graduate Studies and who is not a member of the examining committee. The Graduate Program Committee arranges the exam of a master's thesis.

Role of an External Examiner in a Master's Thesis Oral Exam

An external examiner participates in the examination of the thesis to provide an independent assessment of the quality of the candidate's research. Prior to the exam, the external examiner will submit to the AVP Graduate Studies the External Examiner Report. All members of the Supervisory Committee and the student will receive copies of the External Examiner's report.

Standards for a Master's Thesis Oral Exam

Each master's thesis will need to successfully pass a public examination. At the oral exam the candidate must successfully defend the contents of the thesis, demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of research methods appropriate to the topic and fields of study; and demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of the literature in the field(s) and the work of other scholars. All exams are open to the university community and the public at large. All exams will take place face to face or via video-conferencing unless exceptional circumstances apply. The exam may not be audio- or video-recorded.

Each exam begins with a brief (15-20 minutes) presentation by the student, summarizing the major themes and findings of the thesis. After the presentation, the Committee members take turns asking questions. In general, questions are limited to work relevant to the thesis and to knowledge of matters directly related to it. After the Committee is satisfied that sufficient dialogue has occurred to make a decision, the student, along with any outside guests, is asked to leave while the Committee renders a decision. Normally, an exam should not exceed 90 minutes.

Scheduling the Oral Exam

Once the external examiner has been selected by the AVP Research, Engagement & Graduate Studies and has agreed to serve, the GPC will be notified of their availability, referring to the recommended dates provided by the GPC. The GPC will schedule the oral exam. After the External Examiner Report has been provided to and approved by the AVP Research, Engagement & Graduate Studies, the GPC may contact the External Examiner to finalize the details and scheduling of the oral exam.

15. FINAL SUBMISSION OF THE THESIS TO THE LIBRARY

A student is considered to have completed degree requirements on the date that the thesis is submitted to the Library, provided that the Library finds the format acceptable.

Please refer to the [Formatting and Submission Requirements for Graduate Theses](#) for submission instructions.

By registering for graduate studies at UFV, a candidate agrees to the use of his/her thesis or major paper for research purposes. Once deposited in the University, the thesis or major paper becomes a public document although the copyright remains with the student.

16. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

Intellectual property rights are a complex matter. At UFV, students, faculty members and other authors have copyright in works they produced. UFV's policy on intellectual property⁵ is designed to protect all parties to the intellectual enterprise. These policies protect the rights of students, faculty, staff, UFV and its partners and others around the world whose intellectual property we use.

⁵ UFV Policy 210.11 – Intellectual Property