



Proposing, Writing and Defending a Thesis/Research Paper

“I was working on the proof of one of my poems all the morning, and took out a comma. In the afternoon I put it back again.”
Oscar Wilde (advice on how NOT to write a thesis)

A little humour

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbT4G8XR2io>

Today

- Choosing a topic and advisor
- What should be in a proposal
 - Common mistakes
 - methodology, methodology, methodology
 - The Writing Process
 - Defending Your Thesis
 - Important dates, ethics approval and funding opportunities

MA Regulations

- Can be found at http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/graduate_studies/admin/supplemental_regulations.html
- Note pp 25 – 31 esp (PDF)
- Note, they are being revised so check often.

Graduate Regulations

- http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/graduate_studies/thesis/index.html
- E.g. if you want to graduate next May 2021, Grad Studies recommends you defend by January/February 2021 with all paperwork completed well BEFORE April 2021.
- one digital version submitted as an e-thesis at the MSpace website: <https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/>
- original approval form and copyright license declaration form
- http://umanitoba.ca/graduate_studies/thesis/guidelines.html

2 Streams – Thesis and Comprehensive

- http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/departments/political_studies/master_arts/index.html
- Andrea.Rounce@umanitoba.ca is the Graduate Committee Chair
- [Asako Yoshida@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Asako_Yoshida@umanitoba.ca) is the Political Studies' librarian

Comprehensive Stream

Research Paper & Presentation

- Paper written on a key research topic (relating to your coursework).
- Topic is chosen in conjunction with your advisor
- Paper is no more than 20,000 words (approximately 80 pages)
- Paper will be submitted to the Comprehensive Examination Committee, through the Graduate Chair. For specific process/timelines/guidelines, see the Supplemental Regulations.
- There will be an “oral examination” (i.e. presentation of your paper and questions asked about it), based on the paper, conducted by the Comprehensive Examination Committee. This is a public presentation.

The Thesis Stream

- The thesis is expected to demonstrate the student's research skills
- An M.A. thesis shall be no more than 50,000 words in length but will normally fall within the 25,000 to 31,250 words range (100 to 125 double spaced typed pages).
- Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* 6th edition is a useful guide

4 components to research design

1. Research question (should be able to summarize in one, main question)
2. Theory (consider the I.R./political studies' theories)
3. Data (systematically collected elements of information – qualitative or quantitative. It must be valid, reliable and replicable) OR Theory
4. Use of Data (use data to generate inferences that are “unbiased” i.e. correct on average) OR Theory

A thesis is not about what you think, but what you demonstrate via your arguments.

Your Proposal AND Defence Committee(s)

1. Your advisor (You may have co-advisors)
2. Examiner #1 – typically an academic from Political Studies
3. Examiner #2 – can be an academic from a different U of Manitoba department or within Political Studies. In some cases, they can be from U. of Winnipeg or Université de Saint-Boniface (or another local university)
4. A Chair (your advocate) from the Department.
 - Note: one member of the committee must have a *primary* appointment within the Department of Political Studies and one in Grad Studies.
 - Your proposal committee MAY be different from your defence committee, but usually they have the same composition.

Advisors

- http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/departments/political_studies/faculty/index.html
- These are your tenure/tenure track faculty
- Your advisor will help to find the internal and external examiner
- Think about the subject area. It is not a good idea to ask an advisor to advise you outside of their research field.
- Also be sure to investigate when a professor you may want to work with is going to be away on a research or administrative leave!

Proposal Process

- Once the advisor deems the proposal acceptable, it will be distributed to the other members of the Thesis Advisory Committee for review. Normally, this review takes 3 weeks. Members of the Committee can grant acceptance, conditional acceptance (which may or may not require the proposal to be resubmitted for review) or reject the proposal. The advisor will advise the student of the outcome.
- You may meet with the committee to discuss the proposal, and the next steps. You MAY have a proposal “defence”, but this is meant to be an opportunity to discuss your work so far, and where you intend to go with it. A thesis proposal defence is not necessary.

The Proposal

The good news is that much of this is also going to be your Chapter 1:

All proposals must centre on a **question**. “Why” or “how” questions are common.

- Please note that thesis proposals can only be successfully written after doing a considerable amount of research for your thesis. This will not be wasted and part of the proposal can often end up being parts of your thesis.
- Plan for 2,000 words (3000 maximum).

Proposal – essential elements

The thesis proposal will normally contain:

1. the title of the proposed thesis project;
2. a thesis outline of approximately 2,000 to 3,000 words including: a) a thesis statement; b) the context in which the thesis topic will be evaluated (a brief introduction to the problem area, the purpose of the study, and a general introduction to the thesis problem); c) the relevance and importance of the thesis topic; a plan for proceeding, normally including a chapter breakdown of the proposed thesis; d) a description of the methodology/resources to be employed.
 - In instances where the methodology calls for human participation (e.g. interviews, surveys), plans for obtaining ethical review should be included; and
3. a bibliography of relevant literature and secondary sources.

What the Proposal Addresses

1. Contextualization the importance of your research question: why should anyone care about it?
2. **The question your thesis attempts to answer (it should emerge naturally, as it were, from your contextualization)**
3. The existing literature which attempts to answer it, or comes closest to answering it and the gap it leaves, which your thesis is designed to fill (wholly or in part)
4. **The hypothesis: what you expect to find and why. Not all theses/papers have a hypothesis but it is a good idea to know in what direction you think your research will take you.**
5. **Methodology – this is key!!!**
6. The main sources: these may include data, news stories, documents, etc.
7. Chapter outline with brief descriptions of the content of each chapter, preferably the argument of each chapter
8. Bibliography/Reference List/Works Cited

Proposals

- If your Grandma can't read your proposal and cannot summarize your thesis in one question, you need to rethink
- Don't underestimate definitions – they can be your saving grace or your undoing. (eg. what do you mean by “effectiveness”, what exactly is a “sanction”?)

Proposal Acceptance

- In consultation with your advisor, your committee will review your proposal and it is highly likely, there will be changes (see slide 12)
- Always better to get feedback in the beginning rather than the end of the process!



The key is the question you ask

- Is it, in fact, a question?
- “Why”? Or “How”?
- Is it testable?
- Is there data associated with it?
- Are there theories associated with it?
- Will it further knowledge/research?

Can you measure something? It doesn't need to be quantitative but you need to compare/contrast ideas, theories, approaches or data

Methodology

- Are you proving/disproving a theory?
- Are you conducting a case study? (the more you have, the more conclusions you can infer, the fewer you have, the more in-depth will be the analysis)
- What are your PRIMARY sources?
- Do you have independent variables?
- What is your dependent variable?
- Have you predetermined your outcome?
- We don't want summaries of stuff happening. We want arguments about why or when something happens.

Methodologies to avoid

- If your dependent variable doesn't change with a change in your independent variables, you have a problem
- Causation is very, very difficult to prove
- Inventing data bases (the latter more appropriate for a PhD thesis).
- The meaning of life – break down your research question into sub questions
- If you can't provide a "so what?" answer to the reason you are conducting your thesis....



Human Ethics

- If you interview people, you must complete an ethics review
 - http://umanitoba.ca/research/orec/ethics/human_ethics_index.html
 - Complete a protocol submission form
 - You must complete the Tri-Council's online tutorial (CORE) and save your certificate of completion, found at
<http://tcps2core.ca/welcome>

The Writing Process

- Once your proposal is approved, data gathering can begin
- Typically
 - **Chapter 1** – intro of why this topic, your research question(s), your methodology, expected outcome (your proposal minus the lit review)
 - Chapter 2 – literature review – what have others said about this topic
 - Chapters 3 – 5 – substantive chapters and argument (perhaps each chapter is a case study or time in history?)
 - **Chapter 4 - 6** – your conclusions. What was your initial question, what are your findings, did you answer the question, why or why not? Implications of this research and future research and next steps if you were to continue analysing this topic
 - Annexes but only if they are used in the thesis! Do not create maps and tables for the sake of adding them.
 - **Bibliography**
- **Bolded chapters are what examiners focus on especially!**
- Need to write a little every day, set deadlines, communicate with your advisor, peer review

Final Drafts

- Your committee members will need several weeks to review your thesis (your advisor will have seen many iterations)
- Your thesis will not be passed on to the committee UNTIL the advisor gives it the green light**
- The cleaner, more polished final draft that you have will limit corrections after the defence

The Oral Defence – applies to both streams

- 5- 10 mins – a summary of your research question, why it is an important one, how you tackled it and conclusions. You can use powerpoint but oral presentations are often better.
- 2 - 3 rounds of questioning beginning with examiner #2, examiner #1, advisor then repeat
- Questions from the public audience in final round
- Final remarks by you (but not required)
- You leave the room, the committee debates. You are invited in to hear the results

Defence Results

- Approved
- Not Approved
- Even if the thesis is approved, there will almost always be revisions needed
 - More major revisions: A chapter might need a rework
 - Small changes; grammatical or formatting issues
 - Usually your Advisor will be able to direct and sign off on these changes, but sometimes the committee will want to see the proposed changes.

Funding

- Canadian Graduate Scholarship via SSHRC – Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
 - http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/PG-CS/CGSM-BESCM_eng.asp?
 - http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/departments/political_studies/awards/index.html (internal awards)
 - Graduate student awards see https://umanitoba.ca/student/fin_awards/scholarships/1484.html
 - Student Conference Travel grants, see <http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/awards/3006.html>

Resources

- King, Keohane and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- Norman Blaiki, *Designing Social Research: The Logic of Anticipation* (New York: Polity Press, 2000 or 2001).
- Martin Hollis, *The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction* (revised edition) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: A Quick Guide*
http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html
- http://iimts.com/faculty/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Completing_you_dissertation_without_tears.pdf
(Completing your dissertation without tears)
- Gerring, John. 2004. "What is a case study and what is it good for?" *American Political Science Review* 98(2): 341-54.
- Bailey, Carol A. 2007. *A Guide to Qualitative Field Research*, Second Edition. Pine Forge Press. Chapter 10, 11 and 12.

U of Manitoba Resources

- http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/graduate_studies/workshops/1012.html
- http://umanitoba.ca/graduate_studies/thesis/guidelines.html (guidelines)
- <https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/> (myspace)

Before 1 June

Advisor Student Guidelines (completed **at least once** with your advisor!)

https://umanitoba.ca/faculties/graduate_studies/media/ASG_Instructions.pdf

Graduate Form (Completed every year with your advisor)

Your advisor must log into JUMP to get access to the form.

POLS COLLOQUIUM MARCH 6, 2- 4PM

- OPEN TO UNDERGRADUATES, GRADUATES, AND FACULTY
- DEADLINE TO SUBMIT FEBRUARY 18, 2020
- SEND ABSTRACTS TO REAL.CARRIERE@UMANITOBA.CA
- TITLE: 120 CHARACTER LIMIT

Great opportunity to test your proposals and thesis!

- ABSTRACT: 250 WORD LIMIT

Final Words of Wisdom

- Your mantra should be “get it done” NOT “make it perfect”
- Read aloud – you’ll catch more mistakes
- Peer review each other’s work



THE BEST THESIS DEFENSE IS A GOOD THESIS OFFENSE.