

THE MASTER'S THESIS

The Committee

In consultation with your academic advisor or the department chair, you will select a committee chairperson, who will assist you in forming a thesis committee. As soon as you have a committee chairperson, you and your chairperson will need to assemble the remaining members of the committee. Thesis committees must comprise at least four faculty members, all of whom must have "graduate faculty" status. Three members of the committee will be from the Department of English and Modern Foreign Languages, and the fourth member will be an "outside" reader from another department at JSU.

Through a series of in-person conversations and email exchanges, you and your committee chairperson can refine and focus your thesis topic. Ideally, your entire committee should be drawn into the discussion at some stage. Keeping committee members knowledgeable about your progress will help the entire process run more smoothly.

ENG 590: Thesis

You will enroll in this course after you have completed at least 24 hours of course work (with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better) and have passed the Graduate Area Comprehensive Exam in English (the GACE).

ENG 590 must be taken every semester, for at least one hour of credit, until you graduate.

Important note: once you have passed the GACE, you have only two years to complete the thesis.

Students quite often miscalculate the amount of time and effort necessary to write a thesis, a document that is often at least sixty to seventy-five pages long. Your thesis writing will most likely take you longer than one semester, so you do not have to enroll in three hours of thesis writing the first semester. As in all things thesis related, discuss how many hours you should take the first semester with your committee chairperson. For the semesters during which you enroll in ENG 590 but in which you do not complete the thesis, you will receive a grade of In-Progress ("IP"), to be removed once you have completed the thesis.

The Thesis Proposal

You will submit a thesis proposal describing the project in detail prior to starting the thesis. The final proposal must be approved and signed by all committee members. The proposal provides a blueprint for your thesis project, giving you and the committee a clear understanding of its purpose and scope.

The proposal is integral to the process of scholarly writing and is tangible evidence of your qualifications for writing a thesis. The proposal is an essential stage in your degree program, and with the exception of the thesis proper, it is probably the most important document you will write for this program.

Submission of Thesis Proposal

When the thesis proposal is complete and all revisions have been approved by the committee or committee chairperson, you are ready to submit the "Committee Approval Form." The Division of Graduate Studies does not have a specific deadline for submission of this form. However, the Department of English and Modern Foreign Languages requires that this form be submitted at least one semester prior to the semester the students plans to submit his or her thesis project for defense. You will need to have all members of your committee sign the form.

Note: If you will be interviewing (even by email) people as part of your research, your thesis will subject to the "human subjects" provision; if you are studying actual behavior, you will of course be using "human subjects." If your project uses human subjects in any capacity—and the Division of Graduate Studies interprets this phrase very broadly—you will have to fill out a number of additional forms for submission to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Please discuss this possibility with your committee chairperson early in the process so that your research is not delayed.

Finishing Up The Master's Thesis

NOTE: Exact deadlines referred to in this document may be found on the Division of Graduate Studies website (<http://www.jsums.edu/~gadmappl/Dates.html>).

To meet Division of Graduate Studies' requirements, you will need to have applied for graduation at the beginning of the term in which you plan to graduate, which is typically the semester in which you will be defending your thesis.

The Thesis Defense

You and your entire committee will need to agree upon a date and time for the thesis defense, which typically lasts approximately one hour. The defense should occur at least one month prior to the date that the Division of Graduate Studies has set for submitting the "Committee Report of Defense Results." Thesis defenses are open to the public and may be attended by your committee, other interested faculty, and other graduate students. In fact, you may want to consider attending a defense before your own to better get a feel for the process.

A typical thesis defense will begin with a brief (15 to 20 minute) presentation by the candidate of her or his research findings; this is essentially a summary of the thesis, although it may cover other topics as well. This is followed, usually, by a question-and-answer period for the remainder of the hour.

Committee Report of Defense Results

Once your thesis committee chairperson has notified the department chairperson, you will need to complete the "Committee Report of Defense Results" in preparation for the defense. This critical piece of paperwork must be completed and submitted after the defense and before the Graduation Clearance Process can begin.