

University of Michigan-Dearborn  
Faculty and Student Guide to  
Completing a Master's Thesis/Project

# CONTENTS

Document Purpose .....	3
Research Ethics .....	3
Master's Thesis .....	3
Thesis Overview .....	4
Thesis Chair/Advisor .....	4
Thesis Committee .....	5
Thesis Credits .....	5
Written Thesis Proposal .....	5
Proposal Defense .....	6
Thesis Completion .....	6
Thesis Defense .....	6
Thesis Format Check .....	7
Submission to Deep Blue .....	7
Non-Thesis Project Option .....	8
Project Chair .....	9
Project Credits .....	9
Written Project Proposal .....	9
Project Completion .....	9
Shared Expectations .....	10
Thesis/Project Process .....	10
Documentation .....	10
Appendix A: Chart for Completing Thesis/Project .....	12
Appendix B: Example Syllabus for Course Credit .....	13

## DOCUMENT PURPOSE

Students in the MS Clinical Health Psychology program are not required to complete a thesis or a project. A 3-credit project or a 6-credit thesis is an option for students. Students who do not choose to complete a thesis can choose elective classes (two electives for no thesis and one elective for project) to fulfill the degree requirements.

This document is intended as a guide for both students and faculty to help promote consistency and quality standards, to outline the steps and procedures, and to clarify the responsibilities and expectations involved in the entire process of completing a thesis/project.

The thesis option is recommended for students in either concentration who intend to go on to a doctoral program in psychology or who wish to advance their research credentials. Completion of a thesis or project provides a significant opportunity for students to gain advanced knowledge in a particular area (e.g. PTSD, integrative medicine, trauma) to support their employment goals. However, it should be noted that choosing the thesis option may increase the length of time it takes to complete the program depending on the complexity of the research.

## RESEARCH ETHICS

Regardless of whether a student is doing a thesis or a project, this section will apply. All students have a responsibility to conduct and report the results of their research in an open and ethical manner. Both a thesis and a project represent the culmination of years of academic preparation and uniquely express a student's training, skills, and ideas. As such, the thesis or project has a significant impact on the reputation of both the student and the University, and therefore deserve the student's greatest effort and demand the highest ethical standards. Ethical misconduct in research includes fabrication or falsification of data, as well as plagiarism in proposing, conducting and reporting on scholarly research.

All human participant research must be approved by the University of Michigan-Dearborn Institutional Review Board (for details see the website at: <https://umdearborn.edu/research/office-research/more-help/human-subjects>).

## MASTER'S THESIS

The most common thesis is empirically based—in other words it is usually based on an independently proposed project where data are collected by the student. There are other less common options including the use of large published data sources (e.g. NHANES) as opposed to independent data collection, or proposing a set of independent hypothesis while collecting data in conjunction with a larger faculty based project. Additional types of thesis may include meta-analyses and, in some cases a qualitative study. Further options can be discussed with the student's graduate thesis advisor.

Regardless of the type of thesis, the basic requirements are that the thesis make a significant, novel contribution to the field, and that the student demonstrates mastery of the topic area and a solid understanding of the theoretical and empirical issues involved. In addition, while the student's faculty thesis advisor will provide guidance, the student is expected to demonstrate the ability to conduct independent research throughout the process.

Faculty members who provide primary support for a thesis (thesis chair) are making a substantial contribution of time and effort to enhance the educational experience for the student. Faculty members should be aware that this mentoring involves not only the student's education in conducting research, but also a commitment to helping the student fully develop their identity as a high quality professional. As such, faculty member responsibilities may include helping students develop more effective communication skills, writing skills, or a variety of other professional developmental factors in addition to enhancement of research skills. In many ways this position is one of providing overall mentoring. It is expected that once a faculty member accepts the responsibility for chairing a thesis, they will support the student throughout the process until the project is completed. Similarly, students who choose the thesis option are making a significant commitment and are expected to bring the thesis to fruition.

## Thesis Overview

The student should initially meet with the graduate thesis coordinator to discuss the general aspects of the thesis and the student's topic of interest. The graduate thesis coordinator is a faculty member (currently Dr. Michelle Leonard) who will help the student clarify their general topic area of interest, and provide initial guidance on focusing the research topic/project idea. In addition, the coordinator will provide recommendations for faculty members who may be best suited to take on the role of thesis chair and will send an introductory email to the selected faculty members to expect contact from the student. Based on the recommendations of the graduate thesis coordinator and preference of the student, the student should then approach specific faculty members to find the most suitable fit to chair their project. The faculty member chosen by mutual agreement will then assume the role of manager and mentor for the student's progress (see below).

The thesis itself shall contain:

- evidence of independent, original thinking
- a scholarly review of the relevant literature demonstrating that the student has developed mastery of the topic area.
- a clear statement of the problem or thesis with specific hypothesis statements
- a well-conceptualized research design
- empirically validated methods/measures
- appropriate statistical analyses
- a complete review of the study findings
- a theoretically based discussion of the results demonstrating clear and integrative thinking
- a discussion of how this original research fits within the existing literature
- implications for future research and practice in health psychology

The thesis should conform to APA guidelines (see Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edition), as well as formatting specifications required by the University of Michigan-Dearborn (see Formatting Guidelines).

## Thesis Chair/Advisor

Clearly, the sooner the student begins this process the more likely they are to be able to complete the thesis in a timely fashion. The thesis chair must be a full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty member in Psychology in the Department of Behavioral Sciences at the University of Michigan-Dearborn (see discipline website ). Faculty from other disciplines (e.g. sociology, anthropology)

cannot chair a thesis, but may serve as a secondary or tertiary committee member based on area of expertise.

Both students and faculty serving as a thesis chair should be aware of the embedded library services available to aid in literature searches and related thesis activities. Nadine Anderson serves as the Behavioral Sciences librarian and she has created several websites to help both graduate and undergraduate students conduct research. She has developed an Advanced Psychology Research Guide to help guide graduate students through the process of researching and writing thesis and research project proposals (<http://guides.umd.umich.edu/psychology>). Nadine is also available by appointment to meet with students individually in her CASL office to assist with library related research needs.

## Thesis Committee

The composition of the Master's Thesis Committee will be negotiated with input from the student, thesis chair, and, if needed, the Program Director. The committee shall be composed of at least two individuals including the thesis chair. The secondary committee member for the thesis can be any individual with the appropriate credentials (Ph.D., M.D.) from either UM Dearborn or another academic/medical institution. Students may also have additional members (beyond the minimum two) if desired to tap into additional expertise, although this is rare.

## Thesis Credits

If a student chooses to conduct a thesis they are required to register for thesis course credits (Psyc 697). These credits are to be taken in blocks of three credits at a time for total of six credits. Often students will register for the credits in the winter of their second year and the summer of their summer year (when elective classes are typically taken). Students registering for a set of thesis credits in the summer term must register for the full summer term option. Students are not allowed to register for three credits in summer I and three credits in summer II. It should be noted that these credits are a recognition of the completion of the thesis on the student's academic transcript and students may begin working on a thesis idea, solidifying a committee, completing a literature review, or beginning project development prior to registering for these credits. In order to register for the credits students will need to complete the graduate independent study contract (<https://umdearborn.edu/sites/default/files/unmanaged/pdf/forms/casl-graduate-independent-study-contract.pdf>.) with their thesis chair. The student and chair also develop a syllabi that will outline the work to be completed. This form and syllabi will then be submitted by the chair to the program director for ultimate approval by the dean's office and registrar.

Grading for the thesis credits will be determined by the committee based on the work that the student has completed. Grades will not be given until the project has been completed (along with a public defense) and the student has completed a format check of the process. Until completion faculty can provide a student with "Y" grade to signify that work is continuing. It is then the faculty member's responsibility to change the grade from "Y" to a letter grade when the thesis is complete.

## Written Thesis Proposal

Once a specific topic has been developed by the student in conjunction with their chair and committee, the student, with guidance from their chair, reviews the relevant literature, develops specific hypothesis statements. Prior to undertaking the IRB application or any data collection, each candidate will be required to submit a written proposal of the research plan to each member

of their master's thesis committee. The proposal, which includes the introduction and methods section of the thesis manuscript, should provide the following information: literature review, potential implications of the planned research, description of the research problem and hypotheses, planned methodology, and planned analyses. This written proposal represents half of the thesis manuscript and while it is not expected that this will be a final version of the introduction and methods sections, it is expected that it represents an 80% completion of these two sections of the written thesis.

While it is typical for students (as well as faculty) to be unsure of the length of the proposal, it should be noted that the length is highly variable depending on the topic and amount of literature to be reviewed. However, the proposal must demonstrate mastery of the existing science and literature on the chosen topic. It is typical for the introduction and methods section to range from 25 to 50 pages not including references.

## Proposal Defense

An oral defense shall take place when the primary thesis advisor determines the written proposal (thesis introduction and methods section) is acceptable. During the defense the student will be expected to guide the committee through the proposed project. This allows time for the committee to review and discuss the proposal before initiating the proposed research, including prior to applying for IRB approval. The student should be open to feedback the project and make adjustments in accordance with the feedback. Once again, each student is responsible for arranging this meeting of their committee to review and discuss the thesis design and, as described above, the student must provide a completed copy of the manuscript to each advisory committee member at least two weeks prior to the scheduled defense, unless other arrangements have been made.

Following the oral defense, the student will make the required revisions and present a revised version of the thesis to their chair for final approval. A completed Thesis Proposal Defense form (Appendix B) must be completed and filed with the Graduate Program Director upon successful completion of this defense. This form needs to be signed by both the thesis chair (primary advisor) and other committee members. Once this defense has been completed the student can move forward with their IRB application. Both advisors should be included on the IRB application.

## Thesis Completion

Once the thesis proposal defense has been successfully completed, the student in conjunction with their faculty chair will complete the IRB application ensuring that all committee members are included in the application and that all must accept their role on the IRB application prior to submission. All members must approve the IRB application. At this point the student primarily works only with their faculty chair to complete data collection and the statistical analysis, as well as completion of the results and discussion section of their manuscript.

Again, while there is a significant amount of variability, completed thesis manuscripts (introduction, methods, results, and discussion) are often between 50 – 80 pages (not including references). Once the manuscript is finished, the student must schedule their thesis defense.

## Thesis Defense

An oral defense shall take place when the primary thesis chair and all committee members determine the written manuscript is acceptable. Once the student and faculty chair are satisfied

with the completed manuscript, they pass it on to all committee members. Each committee member has two weeks to review the manuscript and request changes, unless other arrangements have been made. Once all members are satisfied with the manuscript, the defense can be scheduled. Once again, each student is responsible for arranging this meeting of their committee to defend the completed thesis. In addition, the thesis chair is responsible for providing an announcement to all psychology faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students inviting them to the defense. This announcement should be made at least one week before the defense. Thus, the defense is open to the Behavioral Sciences Dept. The meeting should be scheduled only during times when classes are in session. Additionally, the thesis must be defended and the format check described below (See format guidelines) needs to be completed before or during the semester in which the student intends to graduate. The Graduate Studies office has a final date for format checking each semester. Current deadlines can be found at <https://umdearborn.edu/office-graduate-studies/masters-thesis>.

The thesis defense consists of an oral presentation by the student describing the existing literature, their hypotheses, methods, results and discussion. The presentation should be equivalent to a national conference presentation complete with professional PowerPoint slides. After the presentation, the student should be prepared to field questions from the audience and their committee. Upon successful completion of the thesis defense, a copy of the signed thesis defense form (Appendix C) must be submitted to the Graduate Program Director prior to approval for graduation. Thesis manuscript revisions may be required post-defense based on questions and comments that arise during the defense. Before submitting for format check, all content should be finalized.

## Thesis Format Check

The thesis format guidelines are outline in the [format checklist](#). Once a recommendation from the thesis committee has been granted, please send an electronic copy of your thesis in Microsoft Word and PDF format [umd-formatcheck@umich.edu](mailto:umd-formatcheck@umich.edu) Be sure to follow the format guidelines provided.

To maintain the usability and appearance of your work, please review Best Practices for Producing High Quality PDF Files and Preparing Your Manuscript Guide. Electronic submission ensures the highest quality copy of your manuscript, with color images preserved. The most important consideration when submitting electronically is to be sure that fonts are embedded in the PDF submitted.

Note: The format check process does take time and may require edits to be made prior to approval. Be sure to submit your thesis with adequate time.

## Submission to Deep Blue

Once the format check has been completed, the student will receive an email notification. The final PDF digital copy will be the copy of record and will be submitted to Deep Blue, a digital repository that is part of the University of Michigan Library. In order to submit work to Deep Blue the student will need an ORCID number and Library Category for archiving. In addition, the student will need to provide up to six bibliographic keywords that describe the content of your thesis, including subject, concepts, theory, and methods. These will help others to find and retrieve your thesis. The Behavioral Sciences embedded librarian will assist students with the submission process into Deep Blue.

Master's theses and abstracts are normally made publicly available upon degree conferral when they are deposited electronically in Deep Blue. If a student wishes to postpone public release of the final thesis, also called an embargo, the student should discuss embargo options with his or her faculty advisor. It is the student's responsibility to request an embargo of the thesis. This is sometimes done when you would prefer not to share the document prior to publication in another outlet.

## NON-THESIS PROJECT OPTION

The non-thesis project option is a substantial paper that would not meet the requirements for the thesis described above. Generally, no systematic data collection or statistical analyses will be involved. Instead, the non-thesis option generally emphasizes the application of psychological theory and research methods; however, this option is not defined as research. The final product is a generally a manuscript that resembles the introduction and methods section of the thesis as described above.

Examples of a non-thesis project option include, but are not limited to the following:

A scholarly review of the relevant literature culminating in the development of an innovative clinical program or evaluation of an existing program that incorporates current psychological theory and research in a way that differs from traditional programming.

A scholarly review of the relevant literature culminating in the development of an innovative research proposal that specifically outlines a research design (that you will not be expected to complete), and a discussion of the potential implications of this research.

A scholarly review of the relevant literature incorporating and integrating an extensive investigation of this topic in the community by conducting visits or interviews at relevant agencies (e.g., hospitals, clinics, schools, hospice programs, service or intervention programs), however this does not include formal data collection in an attempt to answer a hypothesis question.

A scholarly review of the literature, both theoretical and empirical, on a given topic with a specific research question identified. The project could be formatted in accordance with the guidelines of a funding agency were the student could submit the project for potential funding for continued research support following graduation from the program.

The student should follow the same guidelines as described above for a thesis in terms of identifying a topic and faculty member to chair the project.

Overall, the project shall contain:

- evidence of independent, original thinking
- a scholarly review of the relevant literature
- a clear statement of the goals of the project



- evidence of application of psychological theory and research
- a discussion of the implications for research and practice in health psychology

The thesis should conform to APA guidelines (see Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edition)

## Project Chair

Similar to the thesis the project chair must be a full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty member in Psychology in the Department of Behavioral Sciences at the University of Michigan-Dearborn (see discipline website). Faculty from other disciplines (e.g. sociology, anthropology) cannot chair a project. The student and project chair must provide a signed copy of the Thesis Committee Chair Contract (Appendix A) to the Graduate Program Director before the director will sign off on the student's registration for independent study/project credits.

## Project Credits

If a student chooses to complete a project they are required to register for project course credits (Psyc 592). These credits are to be taken as a block of three credits. It should be noted that these credits are a recognition of the completion of the project on the student's academic transcript. In addition to these credits the student will need to complete an additional elective course to fulfil the requirements of the MS in Clinical Health Psychology program.

In order to register for the credits students will need to complete the graduate independent study contract (<https://umdearborn.edu/sites/default/files/unmanaged/pdf/forms/casl-graduate-independent-study-contract.pdf>) with their project chair. The student and chair also develop a syllabi (see example below) that will outline the work to be completed. This form and syllabi will then be submitted by the chair to the program director for ultimate approval by the dean's office and registrar.

Grading for the project credits will be determined by the chair based on the work that the student has completed. Grades will not be given until the project has been completed. Until completion faculty can provide a student with "Y" grade to signify that work is continuing. It is then the faculty member's responsibility to change the grade from "Y" to a letter grade when the thesis is complete.

## Written Project Proposal

Working with their project chair, the student will complete a brief literature review and outline a proposal for the completion of the project. The proposal should provide a detailed description and timeline of what will be accomplished over the course of the project.

## Project Completion

Working with their chair, the student will complete the project and manuscript. Upon completion of the manuscript, the student and project chair will submit a signed copy of the thesis/project defense form and a copy of the manuscript to the Graduate Program Director. No public defense is required.

## SHARED EXPECTATIONS

Students and advisers should have a clear set of mutual expectations at the outset of the thesis or project, since students often are uncertain about the process and may have somewhat unrealistic expectations. It is important that both students and faculty members are fully versed in the expectations and processes outlined above. The following are additional typical issues that may arise:

**Time:** Many theses take a full one and a half years to complete, and projects may take almost as much time. It is the exception when a student can complete a comprehensive and sophisticated thesis in two semesters. The MS in Clinical Health Psychology program has high standards and expectations in terms of the thesis process and it is important that students have an initial understanding of the time involved in such a process.

**Manuscript:** While there are no specific guidelines about the length of the thesis or project manuscript as described above, it is expected that students will be able to demonstrate that they have expertise in the topic in which they are writing or conducting research. A typical thesis or project includes an introduction that can range from 15 to 30 pages, and a methods section that can range from 10 to 15 pages. For a thesis, the results section can vary considerably in length and a discussion section that again highlights that the student has mastery over not only their project, but the topic more generally, can also vary considerably in length (7 to 15 pages). Overall, it is typical that the final manuscript for a project can be between 25 and 50 pages while a thesis can be between 50 and 80 pages. It is again important that students understand this general expectation. While these numbers may vary considerably depending it is best to have a clear expectation.

**Mentoring:** The MS Psych student population is highly varied in terms of culture and previous educational and work experience. It is important to understand that the role of thesis or project chair often involves mentoring students to assist in their professional development. While the thesis is considered an independent research project, most students need considerable guidance. This mentoring includes not only development of research skills, but may also involve development of a sense of professional identity. This may require mentoring on expectations about meeting (perhaps once per week), communication, and responding to feedback. While chairs should encourage a regular meeting schedule, the primary responsibility for maintaining contact rests with the student.

## THESIS/PROJECT PROCESS

Completing a thesis or project is a complex and time consuming task as described above. In addition, there are specific process expectations. Appendix A provides a flowchart of the expected steps involved for a thesis.

## DOCUMENTATION

Documentation of student progress will then be followed with the use of course credit syllabi where the faculty member and the student will outline what specific tasks related to the

thesis/project need to be completed for the credits. An example thesis/project syllabus can be found in Appendix B.

## APPENDIX A: CHART FOR COMPLETING THESIS/PROJECT

<b>Meet with coordinator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start to clarify ideas (if needed) and discuss potential faculty members to act as chair</li> <li>• Discuss how thesis or project credits fit into the student's plan of work and career goals</li> <li>• Email contact with potential faculty chair(s)</li> </ul>
<b>Meet with potential faculty chair</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further clarify idea or discuss and direct student to resources (e.g., embedded librarian) that could help guide research</li> <li>• Discuss, set expectations, availability, and plan for thesis and/or independent study credits/identify committee members (minimum 2 committee members, only chair needs to be from psychology)</li> </ul>
<b>Prepare thesis proposal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student completes a comprehensive review of relevant literature</li> <li>• faculty chair provides assistance with literature search, article comprehension, and inclusion/understanding of theoretical models</li> <li>• Student prepares a written document that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction (problem to be studied, theory that is guiding the research review of current literature, relevance of the work, and specific study hypotheses)</li> <li>• Methods (proposed subject recruitment, measures to be used, procedures to be followed, and proposed data analysis plan)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Proposal meeting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student meets with full committee to discuss and approve proposed project</li> <li>• Thesis proposal needs to be sent to all committee members at least 2 weeks prior to proposal meeting</li> <li>• Committee members can provide student feedback about project</li> <li>• Thesis proposal modified accordingly</li> </ul>
<b>Complete IRB</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student completes IRB application (even if project does not require collection of new data)</li> <li>• Faculty advisor assists with IRB process</li> <li>• All committee members need to be on IRB</li> <li>• NO data collection or analysis is to be completed without IRB approval</li> </ul>
<b>Data Collection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student completes data collection</li> <li>• Student can recruit research assistants, but should be responsible for the training of these assistants</li> <li>• Faculty chair and committee are ultimately responsible for research</li> </ul>
<b>Preparing Thesis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student modifies initial proposal document (Intro/Methods) to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Results - data screening, data analysis and relevant tables and figures</li> <li>• Discussion - integration of findings from the study with current literature, integration of findings with theoretical framework, conclusions to be made from study, future research, and strengths/limitations of study</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Thesis document should be formatted to be consistent with graduate school guidelines</li> <li>• Faculty chair is involved and assists student with data analysis and thesis manuscript</li> <li>• Faculty chair can also help to "polish" document</li> </ul>
<b>Prep Defense</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Together with committee, date for defense set/Student must submit thesis for format check within university deadlines</li> <li>• Student is responsible for reserving space and equipment for defense</li> <li>• Advisor creates announcement and distributes one week before</li> <li>• Final thesis draft to committee two weeks prior to defense for review unless alternative arrangements made</li> </ul>
<b>Thesis Defense</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student creates a presentation of thesis project</li> <li>• At defense meeting, student presents research and answers questions from committee and audience</li> <li>• Committee and student meet to talk about any changes that need to be made to manuscript</li> </ul>
<b>Completion of Thesis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student makes revisions to thesis consistent with committee recommendations</li> <li>• Ensure any format check changes are complete</li> <li>• Student completes Thesis submission form (with assistance from embedded librarian)</li> <li>• Faculty advisor completes grading when notice of format check complete</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX B: EXAMPLE SYLLABUS FOR COURSE CREDIT PSYC 697 Graduate Independent Study / Thesis



Supervisor:  
Office Location:  
E-Mail:  
Semester:  
Course Meeting Times and Format(s):

**Student: XXX XXX**

### **Area to be studied:**

XXX XXX is a clinical health psychology graduate student and is seeking to complete his/her/their Masters thesis with Dr. YYY. In his/his/her/their research project,. XXX will examine .....

### **Objective:**

The overall objective will be for the student to complete master's thesis. This will entail the completion of the data collection, data analysis and the written thesis manuscript. In addition, the student will need to complete an oral defense of the project.

### **Work to be Completed:**

XXX XXX will have completed the requirements for 3 credits of this course when she has completed his/his/her/their thesis defense and his/his/her/their thesis manuscript, in its final format, for format check and archival. It is anticipated that this will occur by the end of the Summer 2023.

### **Grading:**

Ms. XXX will be graded in this course according to the following target areas:

The first is basic professionalism and attendance. She is expected to be on time at weekly meetings with his/his/her/their advisor. She is also expected to conduct his/his/her/their self professionally and ethically when interacting with data collection agencies, university staff, or research participants. XXX is also expected to strictly follow abide by ethical guidelines in terms of data collection/storage/use.

Second, XXX will also be graded on his/his/her/their ability to complete the necessary research requirements. Specifically, this refers to designing the study, reviewing the relevant literature, writing and defending the research. This proposal will be written according to APA style and format. Grading for this paper will be based on completeness of literature review, scientific merit of the design, scientific writing style, format, and ability to integrate the relevant current empirical literature.

It is understood that there is some degree of unpredictability in terms of overall progress in each given semester. Ms. XXX is aware that these criteria are *subjectively graded by the faculty advisor* and thesis committee members.