

The School of Information Sciences Thesis Guidelines

Approved by the Faculty
March 24, 2010 Updated
February 24, 2016

1. General Information

The School of Information Sciences thesis guidelines comply with the Graduate School's guidelines and policies (available at <http://gradstudies.utk.edu/>, accessed 2/21/2010).

The Graduate School presents Thesis/Dissertation workshops twice, early in each semester (normally January, June, and September). The workshop will provide general guidelines for proper formatting of theses, as well as steps for submittal (information on workshops available at <http://web.utk.edu/~thesis/workshops.shtml>, accessed 2/21/2010). However, the workshops are not meant to substitute for consultation with the Graduate School's thesis/dissertation consultant.

The Thesis/Dissertation Consultant at the Graduate School reviews the submission for acceptance and provides assistance and advice about formatting, preparation, and submission. The consultant can be reached at (865) 974-1337 or in 111-S Student Services Building.

1.1 What is a Master's Thesis?

A master's thesis in Information Sciences is a major piece of original research, a formal written description of that research, which must pass oral defense. A thesis should contribute new knowledge to the discipline, but will also include an extensive review of what other researchers have contributed to the body of knowledge. The writing should be scholarly, with a primary audience of other information science researchers.

Typically, a thesis will include five basic chapters:

- Introduction and Statement of the Problem
- Review of the Literature
- Methodology
- Analysis and findings
- Conclusions

All completed theses can be found in the library collection. A list of thesis examples is available at <http://www.sis.utk.edu/programs/thesis-list>

1.2 SIS Thesis Coordinator

The Thesis Coordinator acts as a contact person for information regarding the thesis process, policy, and procedures. He/She may also act as a counselor to help students in the process of finding a thesis advisor, if needed. The Thesis Coordinator maintains a database on current thesis students, committees, and topics.

Dr. Rachel Fleming-May, SIS Director of Graduate Studies, is the current Thesis Coordinator. She may also be reached via email rfm@utk.edu.

2. Thesis Committee

2.1 Thesis Advisor (Major Professor)

The thesis advisor must be a faculty member in the School of Information Sciences at the rank of assistant professor or above. The thesis advisor works closely with the student throughout the thesis process. The thesis advisor chairs the thesis committee and guides the student throughout the thesis process. At each step of the process, the thesis advisor must approve the student's work, including the proposal and final thesis, before each is distributed to the other committee members. The thesis advisor should update the student's file on the student's progress. In addition, the thesis advisor notifies the Thesis Coordinator after the student has defended the proposal for the purpose of database entry: student, title, and committee members. The advisor also notifies the Coordinator after the successful defense of the final thesis for the purpose of updating the entry.

2.2 The Committee

The committee is composed of the major professor and at least two additional faculty members, all at the rank of assistant professor or above. At least one member in addition to the major professor must be from the School of Information Sciences. A member from outside of the School must also be at the rank of assistant professor or above at the University of Tennessee. It is advisable that the student select committee members who are interested in his/her topic and who have expertise, such as knowledge of a research method, statistical technique, or a unique perspective on the topic.

Committee members review the thesis proposal, attend the proposal defense, and approve the proposal at the onset of the thesis research. Finally, committee members review the completed thesis, attend defense, and sign the Approval Sheet to the final thesis before it is submitted to the Graduate School.

Thesis Process

Typical Timeline of Thesis Process

1st Semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take INSC 510, 520 and 530.• Consult advisor about thesis option.• Explore thesis topics.• Learn guidelines and policies for Thesis option
2nd Semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete all required courses• Take electives and INSC 540.• Attend Thesis Workshop by Graduate School• Identify thesis topic and thesis advisor.• Prepare proposal (and oral defense).
Semester(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue taking electives.• Begin to register for INSC 500.• Submit proposal & hold oral defense if not yet done.• Collect and analyze data.• Write thesis.
Semester before Graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Register for INSC 500 if needed.• Submit Graduation forms.• Attend Thesis Workshop by Graduate School if needed• Continue collecting and analyzing data.• Continue writing thesis.
Graduating Semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Register for INSC 500✓ Submit thesis to committee & defend by deadline.✓ Submit the approved thesis to Graduate School.✓ Graduate!

3.1 Identify Topic and Thesis Advisor

A student who chooses the thesis option should begin by consulting his/her academic advisor on his/her interest in pursuing thesis research and potential thesis topics. The student may develop a thesis idea based on prior course work, informed by relevant literature of current research, inspired by presentations at research conferences, etc. If the student's academic advisor is interested in the thesis idea, he/she may agree to serve as the thesis advisor. Alternatively, the academic advisor, due to their particular interest or expertise on the topic, may suggest another faculty member or refer the student to meet with the SIS Thesis Coordinator to identify another faculty member who may better serve as the thesis advisor. The student should then contact the faculty member to discuss the thesis idea. Once the faculty member agrees to serve as the thesis advisor, the student will transfer from his/her assigned academic advisor to the thesis advisor. This transfer is documented on the Student Planning Form upon notifying SIS Student Service Coordinator. The student will work closely with the thesis advisor to develop a written proposal to be distributed to the thesis committee members.

The student must take a research method course (INSC 540 is offered each Spring semester). A waiver may be granted if the student has successfully completed a thesis or dissertation in another related discipline, or has completed an appropriate research method course that matches the research method used for this thesis work. The advisor will document this waiver.

3.2 Proposal and Oral Defense

The student must submit a written proposal. An oral defense must be held for the proposal. The student must pass the oral defense before data collection may start.

The student should consult with his/her thesis advisor about the proposed study and potential committee members of the thesis committee. The proposal should include:

- Introduction and Statement of the Problem
- Research Questions or Hypotheses
- Extensive Literature Review
- Proposed Methodological Approach
- Timetable

Although there is no set length for a proposal, it should reflect a good quality of work that may be incorporated into the first chapters of the thesis. This pre-empirical work may be done as INSC 500 Thesis Credit or INSC 591 Independent Study.

The thesis advisor (major professor) must approve the proposal before it is distributed to the committee members. Committee members should be given *at least two weeks* to read and review the proposal before the oral defense date. The student is responsible for scheduling the defense. The oral defense may be conducted on campus or may be conducted using a real time, synchronous media (such as Video conferencing or Zoom).

The selection of the media must be agreed upon by the committee. A typical oral defense will include a student presentation and followed by questions from the committee; the student then will step out when the committee makes decision on the defense. The student will be asked to return to the “room” and the chair will communicate the results. The student can discuss the result with the committee. All committee members must approve the proposal before data collection starts. If minor revisions are needed, the student will make the revisions and resubmit the revised proposal for approval. A second defense may be held at the discretion of the committee. The Major Advisor fills out the online Thesis Proposal Defense Form to document the final decision <http://www.sis.utk.edu/thesis-proposal-defense>.

3.3 Thesis Research and Writing

The student will collect data, analyze data and write the manuscript. The student should report his/her progress regularly.

3.4 Thesis and Oral Defense

At the discretion of the thesis advisor, the student may begin to register for thesis credit (INSC 500) as soon as the student starts to write the proposal. The student can wait until the proposal is approved by all committee members to register for INSC 500. The student must register for thesis credit (INSC 500) in each semester he/she works on the thesis. Although the student may take up to 15 hours of INSC 500, only 6 hours are required and will be counted in the 36 hours (as of Fall 2016) needed for graduation. The student must be registered for INSC 500 in the semester he/she plans to finish, defend, and submit final copies of the thesis to the Graduate School. INSC 500 is graded as P (progress) or NP (no progress) only.

An oral defense must be held by the Graduate School deadline for the completed thesis. The thesis advisor (major professor) must approve the completed thesis before it is distributed to committee members in preparation for the defense. Committee members need *at least three weeks* to read and review the thesis before the oral defense date. The student is responsible for scheduling the oral defense. The oral defense must be held in person on campus. The selection of the media must be agreed upon by the committee. A typical oral defense will include a student presentation and followed by questions and suggestions from the committee; the student then will step out when the committee makes decision on the thesis as defended. The student will be asked to return to the “room” and the chair will communicate the results. The student can discuss the result with the committee. The result of the defense will be reported to the Graduate School. The student should bring a copy of REPORT OF FINAL EXAMINATION/ DEFENSE OF THESIS MASTER’S OR SPECIALIST IN EDUCATION DEGREES (see link below) to the defense.

There are two sets of oral defense and thesis submission deadlines for each semester: (1) the first defense deadline is usually a month before the deadline for submitting the final thesis that is near the end of the semester before graduation; (2) If a student cannot meet the first deadline for defending and submitting the final thesis, the Graduate School offers a second set of deadlines. A student who defends and submits the final thesis by the

second set of deadlines will graduate in the following semester without having to register for the following semester. See the link below for the deadlines.

The University of Tennessee dictates the format and final appearance of the thesis. The student should download the most recent copy of *Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations* available online at the UT Thesis/Dissertation Website. The thesis must adhere to these guidelines. The bibliography and footnotes must adhere to the official style manual as approved by the thesis advisor (Major Professor). The Graduate School presents Thesis/Dissertation Workshop early in each semester (normally January, June and September). It is highly recommend that the thesis student should attend at least one such workshop (Check the dates at <http://web.utk.edu/~thesis/workshops.shtml>)

3.5 Important Dates and Forms

Graduate School Policies apply to thesis students. In addition, check deadlines applicable for thesis defense and submission at the Graduate School Website <http://web.utk.edu/~thesis/deadlines.shtml> (accessed 2/21/2010)

As mentioned above, there is a second set of deadlines that will allow students to graduate in the following semester without having to register again. The second deadlines are also posted on the same page above.

Graduate Student Forms: <http://gradschool.utk.edu/gradforms.shtml> (accessed 2/21/2010)

3.6 Change from Thesis to Comprehensive Examination

A thesis student may change from Thesis to the Comprehensive Exam Option. The student should discuss this change with the thesis advisor; the student may also consult with the SIS Thesis Coordinator. The student will need to reapply for Graduation and Admission to Candidacy and must meet the graduation requirements. The IS 500 credit hours cannot be counted towards the required 36 credit hours (as of Fall 2016) if he/she takes the Comprehensive Examination to fulfill the exit requirement.