Thesis Guide

School of Information Sciences, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

[To be Approved by the Faculty
Spring 2022]

The SIS thesis guidelines comply with the Graduate School's policies and the Graduate School's Procedures and Policies precede this guide.

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.

The thesis typically includes five basic chapters:

1. Introduction and General Information
2. Literature Review
3. Materials and Methods
4. Results and Discussion
5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Note: A list of recent theses from the school are accessible at https://tinyurl.com/5n96bxat (a.k.a. the UTK repository Trace.tennessee.edu)

2.   Thesis Process

When a student selects the Thesis option, the student will develop a research topic under the guidance of the major professor. The student is required to complete INSC 504, Research Methods for Information Science. The student will develop a thesis proposal with the help of and approved by the major professor. The approved proposal is distributed to the thesis committee for defense; the committee members are given at least two weeks to review the submission. Upon successful defense of the thesis proposal, the student proceeds to conduct the research. A minimum of 6 credit hours of INSC 500 are required for the Thesis option. The thesis reporting an original research project is defended and approved by the thesis committee. The Graduate School sets the due dates for receiving the thesis for final approval. The process can be listed as follows:

- develop a topic with the major professor
- complete Research Methods coursework
- develop a thesis proposal and defend it

- conduct research
- write the thesis and defend it
- submit the approved thesis to the graduate school

2.1 Thesis Committee (Master's Committee) and Major Professor[1]

The thesis committee should be formed as soon as the student selects the thesis option. The committee is composed of the *major professor* from SIS plus two other faculty members, all at the rank of assistant professor or above. One or both members must be from the SIS and one member may be from another academic unit meeting the rank requirement. One member may be an adjunct faculty approved by the director first and then the Graduate School (currently Dr. Sara Bradberry). If the student wishes to add a committee member from outside of the university, this faculty's CV as the 4th member needs to be submitted and approved by the director first and then by Dr. Sara Bradberry.

The major professor 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 thesis proposal and final thesis, before each is distributed to the other committee members.

The student-assigned academic advisor may serve as the major professor for the thesis, but may recommend another faculty member whose research area and interest match the student's need. To switch advisors, notify the Coordinator of Student Services, Tanya Arnold, by filling out the form at https://sis.utk.edu/change-advisor-request

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 the defense, and sign the Approval Sheet to the final thesis before it is submitted to the Graduate School.

2.2 Thesis Proposal and Defense

Under the guidance of the thesis advisor (major professor), the student develops a thesis proposal including

- Introduction and Statement of the Problem
- Extensive Literature Review
- Research Framework and Questions or Hypotheses
- Proposed Methodological Approach
  - Population and sampling
  - Data collection instruments
  - Data analysis
- Timetable

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[1] Defined by the Graduate School https://gradschool.utk.edu/documents/2016/02/thesisdissertation-approval.pdf/

The thesis advisor must approve the proposal before it is distributed to the committee members. Committee members should be given *at least two weeks* to review the proposal before the oral defense date. The student is responsible for scheduling the defense.

A typical oral defense will include a student presentation followed by questions from the committee; the student then will step out when the committee makes a 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 thesis advisor will write a memo to document the defense and results. The memo should be distributed to the student and all committee members.

2.3 Thesis and Oral Defense

The student will collect data, analyze data and write the manuscript. The student should report progress regularly to the thesis advisor.

The Graduate School has useful information on preparing theses at
https://gradschool.utk.edu/thesesdissertations/
Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations
http://gradschool.utk.edu/documents/2016/03/guide-to-thesesdissertations.pdf

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 review the thesis before the oral defense date. The student is responsible for scheduling the oral defense. A typical oral defense will include a student presentation and be followed by questions and suggestions from the committee; the student then will step out when the committee makes a decision on the thesis as defended. The student will be asked to return to the "room" and the chair will communicate the result. The student can discuss the result with the committee.

The defense should be completed according to the Graduate School's deadlines posted at
https://gradschool.utk.edu/graduation/graduation-deadlines/

After successful defense, the chair should submit the report signed by all members to the Coordinator of Student Services, Tanya Arnold, using the form at
http://gradschool.utk.edu/documents/2016/02/report-of-final-examinationdefense-of-thesisprojectcapstone-masters-or-specialist-degree.pdf

3. Additional Information

The student may request a waiver of INSC 504 if the student has successfully completed a thesis or dissertation in another related discipline or has completed an appropriate research methods

course that matches the research method used for this thesis work. The advisor will document this waiver.

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 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.

If the student will not be able to complete the thesis, the INSC 500 credit hours cannot be counted towards the required 36 credit hours. If the amount of work can be converted toward an independent study, the student should discuss the options with the major professor.

The student also needs to consult with Tanya Arnold on forms needed for graduation.

For the Exit Requirements, the thesis proposal and thesis are counted as two learning products for the Student Learning Collection (SLC).

Dr. Peiling Wang is the current instructor for INSC 504 Research Methods for Information Science and may serve as the Thesis Coordinator. You can reach her at peilingw@utk.edu,