

Master's Thesis

Each student has the opportunity to prepare a thesis applying the analytical tools of policy studies to some facet of the policy area of concentration. Theses will be expected to reach a quality level that could pass peer review for publication in leading policy studies journals.

The MPP thesis is an analytic document that should answer a specific public policy question and should allow students to develop expertise on a topic of their substantive interest. The thesis can take any of the following forms:

- (1) An empirical research paper testing a hypothesis using qualitative or quantitative methods or a combination of both;
- (2) An analytical literature review critically assessing the results of research or evaluations of a policy issue or set of programs; or
- (3) A critical policy evaluation using qualitative or quantitative methods or a combination of both.

The thesis should address a specific research or policy question—it should not be an exhaustive treatise on an entire substantive area of policy research. For many students, choosing an appropriate topic is the most difficult part of the thesis assignment. For this reason, students should think of topic selection as a process that **begins at the very start of the master's program**. This process is a progressive narrowing and focusing of research interests that culminates in a written thesis. Students begin the thesis process in the fall of their first year by declaring an area of concentration for their coursework and should begin research on their topic during the spring of the first year and continuing into the summer. Once the student has identified his or her general topic area of interest, s/he should seek out one (or more) MPP faculty member(s) to serve as thesis advisor (more on the advisor(s) below). **Ideally, this should occur before the student leaves campus at the end of the spring semester.** By August after the first year, each student should have identified a clearly defined, researchable thesis topic.

Students attend a meeting during late March of the first year to discuss thesis requirements. The written thesis proposal (6-page max. double-spaced, 12-point font, 1 inch margins) is due to the primary advisor's office **on the first Monday in August**. Two copies must be submitted: one to the thesis advisor(s) and one to Jennifer Arndt, Assistant Director for the MPP program. The thesis proposal must:

- (1) Delineate the research question to be investigated,
- (2) Describe its policy significance, citing some key sources in the literature to make the case;
- (3) Outline the general methods to be used; and
- (4) Provide a work plan and schedule for the two semesters.

The thesis proposal must include the four sections listed above, sequenced in this same order. Proposals not including these sections will not be approved. MPP faculty will review the proposals and notify students of thesis approval or disapproval before the beginning of the fall semester. If the proposal is approved, the student will register for an Independent Study (195.825) in the fall term, and assuming satisfactory progress, will register for the Thesis (195.801) in the spring term. The thesis advisor will determine at the end of the fall semester whether the student has the ability to produce a solid thesis within the stringent time frame. If the proposal is not approved, the student will register for an additional 3-credit elective in the fall and in the spring.

Students are required to have at least one MPP faculty member serve as a thesis advisor. If a student elects to work with only one advisor, that advisor must be an MPP faculty member. Students may include one or more thesis advisors who are not MPP faculty members on their committees, but the committee must still include an MPP faculty member, and the **administrative** chair of the committee must be the MPP faculty member. (Your thesis advisor does not have to be your faculty advisor).

Any student wishing to include an outside faculty member on the committee should review this request with their general faculty advisor and/or MPP thesis advisor first and obtain written approval. Students must have a thesis advisor or a thesis committee established by the first week of classes in the fall semester and submit the names of advisors, in writing, to the MPP Assistant Director.

As noted above, thesis students must register for two courses (195.825 Independent Study in the fall, and 195.801 Thesis in the spring). At the outset of the fall course, thesis students further develop their proposed work plan, establishing firm deadlines for "deliverables," such as written outlines and chapter drafts, to ensure that the thesis is completed in a timely manner. The final work plan must be approved by the student's thesis advisor(s).

Throughout both semesters, students are required to:

- (1) Rigorously adhere to a regular schedule of meetings with advisor(s). In the case of multiple advisors, the entire committee should meet approximately once a month;
- (2) Set and meet deadlines for completion of written drafts and other deliverables;
- (3) Discuss substantive and methodological issues, incorporate suggestions from advisor(s) into drafts, and maintain steady progress towards the completion of the thesis; and
- (4) Produce a viable draft of a completed master's thesis.

Students should have drafted a substantial portion of their thesis by the end of the fall term. The primary thesis advisor will determine whether sufficient progress has been made to receive credit for the fall thesis course. Grading on the thesis is Pass/Fail. Each student is responsible for ensuring that the primary advisor gives a course grade to Jennifer Arndt, so that the grade can be submitted to the Registrar.

Students not meeting the fall semester deadlines agreed to with their committees will receive a grade of "Incomplete" for the fall term. A grade of Incomplete for the fall thesis course is an indication of a serious setback. **If the "Incomplete" grade is not resolved by the first day of classes in the spring semester, receipt of a degree in the spring is unlikely.**

A draft of the thesis must be submitted to student's advisor(s) by the third week of March to allow for revisions before the university deadline. The final thesis must be no more than fifty pages and is normally due the first Monday in April. **University policy stipulates that students who miss this deadline will not be allowed to participate in University graduation ceremonies and will not receive their degree until the next academic year - even if they finish before the completion of the spring semester.** Students will give an oral presentation on their thesis topic to faculty and fellow students in early April.

Note that the intersession break between the fall and spring semesters is an important block of time during which students can make substantial progress on the thesis without the diversion of coursework or, in some cases, job responsibilities. Students should make plans for this break accordingly.