

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION
THE MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION

CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE – THESIS OPTION

The thesis project consists of completion of a research paper in which the student proposes and tests new ideas, replicates an existing study, or advances theoretical understanding of an issue. The thesis must demonstrate scholarly abilities, including solid conceptualization, analysis, and writing. The thesis must clearly define the problem to be investigated, demonstrate mastery of relevant academic literature, and show competence in the relevant methodology and analysis techniques. The form and content of the thesis are to be determined by the student and the advisor in consultation with the thesis committee.

REQUIREMENTS FOR M.A. THESIS OPTION

Completion of 24 hours of graduate-level course work as outlined in the student's approved Permanent Program of Study (Form II). With written approval of the faculty advisor, a student may substitute up to six (6) hours of cognate course work.

Completion of a minimum six credit hours of COM 7000 thesis hours to include:

- Design of thesis proposal
- Preparation of the written thesis proposal
- Oral defense of the proposal
- Completion of the thesis to the specifications of the advisor and the capstone committee and in accordance with the guidelines of the Graduate College
- Oral defense of the thesis
- Submission of the thesis with any revisions to the School and to the Graduate College for approval

Students selecting the thesis option should be aware that most thesis projects require approximately one year from conceptualization to delivery of the final approved copy of the thesis to the Graduate College. Students in consultation with the faculty advisor should review the Graduate College deadlines for submission of the thesis and other required documentation in order to plan thesis enrollment efficiently.

FACULTY THESIS ADVISOR

Responsibility for the direction, supervision, and evaluation of the thesis rests with the student-selected faculty thesis advisor and the thesis committee. The student considering the thesis option is strongly encouraged to select the individual as his/her faculty advisor who is best equipped substantively to serve as the student's thesis advisor.

THE THESIS ADVISOR IS CHARGED WITH:

- Advising the student regarding selection of other committee members
- Monitoring the student's thesis progress
- Initiating and facilitating thesis committee meetings
- Determining the readiness of the thesis for committee review
- Evaluating the oral defense of the thesis
- Advising the student regarding relevant university and departmental thesis policies, procedures, and documentation

THESIS COMMITTEE

The student and faculty advisor must choose members of the graduate faculty to serve as members of the student's thesis committee. The committee should include a minimum of three members of the graduate faculty (including the advisor). Two of the committee members must be from the School of Communication. Students may also choose additional members from allied disciplines around the University.

APPOINTMENT OF A COMMITTEE INVOLVES:

- Mutual agreement between the student and the prospective committee members
- Formal appointment of the committee members by the Director (or director designee)
- Notification of and approval of the appointment by the Dean of the Graduate College, where required by current University policy

The purpose of this thesis committee is to provide the range of expertise necessary to advise the student on the thesis and to evaluate the thesis to ensure it represents quality work in the discipline of communication.

THE CAPSTONE COMMITTEE IS CHARGED WITH:

- Reviewing and evaluating specific steps in the thesis
- Providing consultation during the course of the thesis
- Reviewing and evaluating the written component of the thesis
- Evaluating the oral defense of the thesis

REQUIREMENTS FOR ENROLLMENT IN MASTER'S THESIS CREDITS

Students are required to take a minimum of six (6) COM 7000 thesis credits as part of the Permanent Program. Typically, students enroll in three thesis credits per semester.

A student who intends to register for the Master's Thesis (COM 7000) for the first time is **required** to file a completed **Permission to Elect** form (**Form A**) with the Graduate College before registering to ensure that the student is informed about the regulations pertaining to the preparation and submission of the manuscript and to the requirements for research involving regulated subjects and hazardous materials. This permission must be obtained prior to the thesis proposal defense meeting. Further, the student must also have his/his thesis committee approved by the School of Communication, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Graduate College (See **Form IV**). It is strongly recommended that this approval be obtained prior to registration in COM 7000 credits.

Following a first enrollment in Master's Thesis credits (COM 7000), the student must have continuous enrollment in that same course until all thesis requirements are completed satisfactorily and approved by the appropriate bodies. Registration deadlines apply.

At the completion of three (3) hours of thesis credit, the student must have official approval of the thesis proposal by the committee and must have filed **FORM VI: Defense of Capstone Proposal** with the Director of Graduate Studies before she/he can enroll in any additional thesis credits.

For students not enrolled in summer I or summer II sessions, pre-enrollment in the subsequent fall semester is necessary for access to library resources during summer. A student must be enrolled in at least one credit hour of COM 7000 during the semester he/she intends to graduate.

HUMAN SUBJECTS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (HSIRB) APPROVAL

Students conducting research that involves human subjects must have prior approval of the research proposal by the appropriate University board, thus assuring compliance with the regulations for the protection of such subjects. There are no exceptions to this requirement.

Registration for courses in which research is conducted that requires such prior approval must not be attempted until the approval is granted by the appropriate University board.

The student completing such research for a master's thesis must include written approval or an exemption letter from the appropriate board as an appendix to the thesis. If you have any questions about this policy, contact the Director of Graduate Studies, the

Director of the School of Communication, and/or the Office of the Vice President for Research.

GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING THE THESIS

STUDENTS CONDUCTING THE THESIS SHOULD:

- Determine topical area of interest for thesis.
- Choose a faculty member as faculty advisor who has expertise in the topical area of interest.
- Discuss the various thesis requirements as outlined by the Graduate College, including formatting requirements and the deadlines for thesis submission and graduation. The student and his/her faculty advisor should prepare a timeline that outlines the steps/dates that facilitate completion of the thesis by the projected graduation date.
- Work with faculty advisor to determine membership of the thesis committee. This committee must include a minimum of three members of the graduate faculty (including the advisor), at least two from the School of Communication. The student is responsible for securing the commitment of all thesis committee members. The student should complete **Form IV: Request for Appointment of Thesis Committee** (WMU Form) and submit it to the Graduate Director and Director of the School for approval.
- Work with faculty advisor to design a project and complete a thesis proposal for review by all committee members. The student will give thesis committee members copies of the completed proposal to review for the oral defense of the proposal. Committee members must have a minimum of two (2) weeks to review the proposal.
- Schedule an oral defense of the proposal at the initiation and with the facilitation of the faculty advisor. This meeting will be facilitated by the advisor, who will determine the format of the meeting. This meeting may be open to all interested faculty and students or others invited by the student or committee members.
- Complete the oral defense of the proposal. All members of the committee will respond to the proposal during the course of the oral defense of the proposal. Following the oral defense of the proposal, the committee must vote on the acceptability of the thesis proposal. The committee shall vote by simple majority to either approve or disapprove of the proposal. Committee members may vote to abstain.

THE ORAL DEFENSE OF THE PROPOSAL WILL RESULT IN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES:

- Accept the proposal
- Accept the proposal with revisions
- Reject the proposal

The thesis advisor and student should submit **Form VI: Defense of Capstone Proposal** to the Graduate Director and the Graduate College.

When a proposal is acceptable to the committee members or has been revised concurrent to committee specifications, the student may complete the thesis project under the guidance of the faculty advisor. A proposal that is rejected must be rewritten and the student must orally defend the new proposal following the steps outlined above. Note: All necessary HSIRB approvals must be obtained before initiation of the project.

ON COMPLETION OF THE THESIS:

- Submit the completed thesis to the thesis committee. The student will give thesis committee members copies of the completed thesis to review for the oral defense. Committee members must have a minimum of two (2) weeks to review the thesis.
- Schedule the oral defense of the completed thesis at the initiation and with the facilitation of the faculty advisor. The advisor will determine the format of the meeting and will facilitate the meeting. This meeting **must be open** to all interested faculty and students or others invited by the student or committee members. The committee members and the advisor will conduct the oral defense. All members of the thesis committee will evaluate and respond to the thesis during the defense of the completed thesis.
- Complete the oral defense of the thesis. Following the oral defense of the final thesis, the committee must determine the acceptability of the thesis. The committee will consider both the student's written and oral performances in making its decision. The committee's deliberations and vote are to be held in private. The committee shall vote by simple majority to either approve or disapprove of the thesis. Committee members may vote to abstain.

THE ORAL DEFENSE OF THE THESIS WILL RESULT IN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES:

- Accept the completed thesis
- Accept the thesis with revisions
- Reject the thesis

A thesis that is rejected must be rewritten and the student must orally defend the revised thesis.

When a completed thesis is acceptable to the committee members or has been revised in accordance with committee specifications, the student must submit **Form VIII: Results of Capstone Experience** indicating the final outcome of the thesis defense to the Graduate Director and Director of the School of Communication. Students must also submit the appropriate Graduate College forms to be submitted with the thesis in accordance with the rules established by The Graduate College for submission of theses and dissertations. A final version of the thesis must be submitted to the School of Communication.

GRADUATION CHECKLIST FOR MASTER'S STUDENTS WITH THESES

The following activities should be completed prior to or during the semester listed.

YEAR ONE: FALL SEMESTER

- _____ *Meet with temporary advisor.*
- _____ *In consultation with temporary advisor, prepare tentative program of study; discuss capstone options.*
- _____ *Complete one course in Communication Research Core (COM 6010).*
- _____ *Complete one course in Communication Foundations Core.*

YEAR ONE: SPRING SEMESTER

- _____ *Select permanent faculty advisor (Form I) and in consultation with your advisor, complete Form II: Permanent Program of Study.*
- _____ *Submit Forms I and II to Director of Graduate Studies for approval.*
- _____ *Continue progress on Communication Foundations Core, Communication Research Core.*
- _____ *In consultation with your thesis advisor, select thesis committee members and secure their willingness to serve.*
- _____ *Prepare and submit Form A for approval of the committee to the Graduate College.*
- _____ *Conceptualize thesis in consultation with your thesis advisor.*

YEAR TWO: FALL SEMESTER

- _____ Register for COM 7000 (3 credits) by submitting Form A: *Permission to Elect*.
- _____ Develop thesis proposal in consultation with thesis advisor, typically your permanent advisor.
- _____ For April graduation, apply for graduation by December 1.
- _____ Set thesis proposal defense meeting (optional – open meeting).
- _____ Hold thesis proposal defense and file Form VI with Director of Graduate Studies.
- _____ Secure HSIRB approval prior to conducting thesis research with human subjects.

YEAR TWO: SPRING SEMESTER

- _____ Register for COM 7000 (3 credits) by submitting Form A.
- _____ Complete Communication Foundations core requirement.
- _____ Complete Communication Research core requirement.
- _____ Complete elective course requirements.
- _____ For June graduation, apply for graduation by February 1.
- _____ Give completed final thesis draft to committee for review at least two weeks prior to final defense meeting.
- _____ Set and publicize final thesis defense meeting (open meeting).
- _____ Hold final thesis defense. Following the defense, submit Form VIII to Director of Graduate Studies.
- _____ Submit committee approved thesis with appropriate paper work to Graduate College by deadlines for graduation.
- _____ Deliver two copies of thesis to School of Communication (one to advisor and one for school records).