

Masters Thesis Guidelines
Department of Urban and Environmental Planning
University of Virginia
September 2005

Summary

This document provides information on the optional masters thesis in the Department of Urban and Environmental Planning.

A masters thesis is a student-initiated project. It is not a degree requirement in our program. It provides an opportunity for graduate students to deepen their knowledge on a particular topic of interest (beyond current course offerings), to work closely with an individual faculty member, and/or to work with a “client” in the context of a “professional report.” There are unique rewards to developing and completing a masters thesis: (1) an individually initiated project successfully completed on a student’s resume; (2) an opportunity to work closely with a faculty member(s) (perhaps across disciplinary boundaries); (3) the possibility of collaborating on faculty-sponsored research; (4) the possibility of co-authorship of papers with faculty; (5) an opportunity to apply knowledge gained in courses to actual problems of a “client”; and (6) extending a summer internship or externship experience into a significant piece of professional work. Students are encouraged to examine theses filed in previous years at the Fiske Kimball Fine Arts Library before embarking on their own projects (Call number: Masters Planning 1997).

A masters thesis committee must be established that is composed of at least two faculty. The chair must be a full-time planning faculty member. The committee may also include a third member who is a professional practitioner from the field.

The Department offers PLAN 898: Masters Thesis for 3-6 credits each semester. Graduate students should sign-up for a total of 6 units of PLAN 898, normally during their second year of residency. The thesis committee chair should be specified as the instructor. Students, alternatively, should consider whether an independent study course (PLAN 885) of 3 credit hours with an individual faculty member might meet their objectives better than a thesis. A thesis is a significant undertaking requiring considerable initiative, responsibility and time management; therefore, students should carefully think through the advantages and disadvantages of undertaking a thesis project.

For thesis students, the following books on research, writing, and the thesis process are recommended:

1) *The Craft of Research* by Booth et.al, University of Chicago Press (1995) (Q180.55.M4 B66 1995); 2) *Thinking on Paper* by Howard and Barton by Conde Nast Pub. (1986); and a classic 3) *Writing for Social Scientists* by Becker, University of Chicago Press (1986) (H91.B4 1986).

Guidelines

A. Introduction: The thesis should address some aspect of urban and environmental planning, demonstrate the student's ability to conduct independent research, exhibit engagement in original and critical thinking, and apply knowledge acquired in courses to a specific set of problems. The thesis may be directed toward the discovery of new facts or investigate an existing body of knowledge. The thesis can also be in the mode of a "professional report." In any case, the thesis must present something worth knowing.

A thesis topic may be an outgrowth of work done in previous classes, may involve an issue of personal interest to the student not extensively covered in classes, or emerge from consultation with a faculty member. A professional report would typically involve the identification of a "client" who is willing to serve as a third member of the student's committee. The topic should be formulated in close consultation with the thesis chair, and the "client" simultaneously. There are no specific requirements concerning a maximum or minimum length, number of bibliographic entries, or the extent of visual documentation, but traditionally, thesis texts of 40-50 pages have been acceptable. The same applies for theses in the form of professional reports.

The thesis/professional report generally involves six (6) credit hours (with a letter grade) and will normally be taken during the second year of residency. In order to receive the degree on time, students should familiarize themselves with the appropriate dates by which various steps must be completed (described in Section D).

B. Committee Chair and Member(s): The thesis committee chair and one other individual constitute the basic thesis committee. The role of the committee chair is critical, and it is therefore important that the student establish a sound working relationship with him/her. That person supervises the work to assure that it is of a high standard and monitors progress leading to the completion of the work.

Although the student maintains closer contact with the chair than with the other member(s) of the committee, it is important to choose all members of the thesis committee carefully. The committee must be established, each member must agree to serve, and the prospectus must be approved by the last day to drop courses of the fall term of the second year (See Section D).

While the committee chair must be a full-time faculty member of the Department, the other committee member(s) may be from outside the Department. A third optional member may be from outside the University. It should be understood that the University offers no compensation or reimbursement of expenses to outside advisors or readers. The responsibility for securing such people's services rests on the student. Students should also note that because faculty may go on leave at times or leave the University, it is in the student's interest to complete the thesis on time.

The committee will advise and approve the student's prospectus, review the draft thesis, and approve the final manuscript.

C. The Prospectus: The thesis prospectus is a summary of what the student intends to do in the thesis and how it is to be done.

The prospectus should include the following in double-spaced pages:

1. Title page: containing student's name, thesis title, date, anticipated degree date, and the names of those who have agreed to serve as thesis chair and committee member(s).
2. Research Problem: the problem that the research is to address (1/2 page)
3. Research Objectives (1/2 page)
4. Research Approach/Methodology (1 page)
5. Expected Results and their Significance (1 page)
6. Bibliography A list of primary and secondary sources to be consulted including the location of any unique sources (e.g., drawings, manuscripts) (1-2 pages)
7. Timeline A plan of work that specifies what will be done and when. The timeline should include a proposed set of dates for meeting with committee members and for submitting materials for review. Many students find it useful to organize this material in the form of a Gantt (bar) chart indicating the sequence of work and the time to be spent on each task (1 page).

A final prospectus, signed by the committee chair, should be filed with the Department Chair and placed in the student's files in the School of Architecture Registrar's office. This is the responsibility of the student. Each committee member should also receive a copy. The final prospectus must be approved prior to the last day to drop courses in the fall semester of the second year.

D. Timetable for Thesis Preparation: Students should plan to earn 6 units of PLAN 898, normally during their second year of residency. The following provides general guidance for students and committee members. Students should make every possible effort to keep well ahead of the dates given here. Failure to maintain the schedule described below may delay graduation.

1. During the semester before the student is to register for thesis credits, students should begin to consult with potential committee members. Much benefit can come from taking this step during the student's second semester, normally the spring semester, thereby allowing the summer to be used for collecting material for the prospectus and the thesis. The spring semester would also typically coincide with the student being enrolled in PLAN 605, Planning Analysis that provides a good opportunity to begin thinking about research design.

2. During the fall semester, normally the student's third, in which the student is first registered for 3-units (with grade) of thesis credit (PLAN 898):
 - a) First week: meet with the committee and review the prospectus in draft form unless already approved.
 - b) By the last drop date of the semester, finalize the committee membership and obtain approval of the final prospectus.
 - c) Prior to pre-registration for the next semester, meet again with the committee to present intermediate results and to discuss progress.
3. During the spring semester, the second semester in which 3 units of thesis credit are taken:
 - a) Prior to last drop date, hold a committee meeting to discuss plans for completing the thesis.
 - b) Seventh week: submit a draft of the entire thesis, including text, notes, and photocopies of visual material, to all committee members.
 - c) Ninth week: meet with committee members to receive comments on the draft and to discuss the needed revisions and/or additional work.
 - d) Twelfth week of classes: submit three copies of the final manuscript,¹ including the abstract, to each committee member.
 - e) No later than the last day of classes for the semester in which the student wishes to receive the degree, three copies of the final manuscript (with all corrections), signed and approved by the committee chair and member(s), must be submitted to the Department Secretary. The Department Secretary will inspect the physical standards of the thesis/professional report, check off appropriate boxes in the "checklist," and sign the form. The student will take this signed form, submit it along with the approved thesis to Alderman Library's Printing Services for binding, and submit the Alderman Library "receipt" to the School of Architecture Registrar.

¹ The final manuscript must be prepared according to the physical standard guidelines (See Section F).

E. Notes for Writing Planning Masters Theses/Professional Reports

All of these guidelines apply to both draft and final documents.

1. Students should examine theses filed in previous years at the Fiske Kimball Fine Arts or Alderman libraries.
2. All material submitted by students to readers must be typed. They should be easy to read and double-spaced to enable maximum constructive feedback from readers.
3. All materials submitted to readers should have been proofread and corrected. Students should not expect their readers to correct spelling and grammar. All materials submitted at the preliminary stages (i.e. chapters and rough drafts) should be as finished as possible. Students should not submit materials that are poorly written or disorganized. Footnotes (or endnotes) must accompany all drafts.
4. All pages must be numbered in the upper right corner. Except in the final manuscript, a new sequence of pagination may be used for each chapter.
5. It is the responsibility of the student to arrange with the committee chair a timetable for submission of chapters. If different from the prospectus, the student should submit to the committee an outline of the thesis/professional report before commencing writing.
6. Students should not wait for faculty to find them and give back drafts. Students should be in touch with committee chair and members frequently.
7. Figures, tables, and illustrations must be fully labeled, explained, and must cite all sources. They should be in order, be labeled, and be integrated to the text.

8. The thesis should be organized in a sensible, logical, and coherent manner. Good clear grammatical writing should be the goal of each student. The sequence of materials should be the following:

I. Preliminary Pages

Title page²
 Approval Page³
 Abstract⁴ (350 words or less)
 Table of contents
 List of figures, tables, and illustrations
 Acknowledgements

II. The Thesis Text

A. Introduction
 B. Research and/or Policy Problem
 C. Thesis Objectives
 D. Research Approach/Methodology
 E. Results and their Significance
 F. Conclusion and Recommendations

The specific contents, organization, style, and appropriate length of each section should be determined by close consultation with the committee.

III. Bibliography. See the latest edition of the Chicago Manual of Style (Fiske Kimball Fine Arts Library Reference section, Call number: Z253.U69 1993). A bibliography includes not only sources cited, but all sources used.

Sources should be cited by the author-date system of reference that is described fully in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, fourteenth edition (University of Chicago Press, 1993) in chapter 16. For example:

“On the other hand, the relationships between people and place lie at the heart of physical design, and that is why design should have a meaningful role in planning education (Kreditor 1990; Pivo 1989).”

References should be alphabetized by the author’s last name. For example:

“Hoch, Charles. 1993. Racism and Planning, *Journal of the American Planning Association* 59, 4:451-60.”

Numbered explanatory endnotes should be used sparingly. For style *The Chicago Manual of Style* (1993), chapter 15 should be consulted.

² The title page must strictly conform to the attached sample title page.

³ The approval page must strictly conform to the attached sample approval page.

⁴ The title of the abstract should be the same as that used for the thesis itself. In addition, at the head of the abstract's first page the name of the student, the title of the thesis, the degree being sought, the month and year of submission, and the names of the Department of Urban and Environmental Planning, School of Architecture, and University of Virginia must appear.

IV. Appendices (if any). While never necessary, appendices can be useful in some cases. Placed immediately after the Bibliography, an appendix can provide an opportunity to discuss a topic relevant to the general subject of the thesis but not essential to its argument (all essential argument must be in the body of the thesis text). Sometimes an appendix is a very long note or a copy of an original document useful for validation and explanation that goes beyond that included in the main body of the thesis. Reference to an appendix can be made either directly in the text, in a parenthetical reference, or by means of a note.

F. Physical Standards for Preparation of Masters Theses

The Department of Urban and Environmental Planning requires the physical thesis standards of the University. Please see:

http://artsandsciences.virginia.edu/grad/degree/physical_standards.php

Neighborhood Economic Development Planning:
A Case Study of a Southern African American Community

Mary DuBois-Harding

B.A., Howard University, 2002

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of the Department of Urban and Environmental Planning
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree
Master's of Urban and Environmental Planning

School of Architecture
University of Virginia

May, 2005

The thesis of _____ is approved:

Chair Date

Committee member Date

University of Virginia
(month, year)

