Master's Thesis Guidelines
Department of Urban and Environmental Planning
University of Virginia
September 2018

Summary
This document provides information on the optional master's thesis in the Department of Urban and Environmental Planning.

A master’s 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) and examine the topic through well-designed, academically-rigorous research. There are unique rewards to developing and completing a master’s 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) preparation for entering a PhD program; (5) the possibility of co-authorship of papers with faculty; (6) an opportunity to apply knowledge gained in courses to actual problems of a “client”; and (7) extending a summer internship or externship experience into a significant piece of academic research. Students are encouraged to examine theses filed in previous years at the Fiske Kimball Fine Arts Library (paper, pre-2012) or in the UVA Library Libra repository (online) before embarking on their own project.¹

A masters thesis committee must be established that is composed of at least two faculty members. The chair of the committee must be a full-time faculty member with an appointment in the Department of Urban and Environmental Planning. A third committee member can be on faculty but may also be a professional practitioner from the field with knowledge relevant to the thesis.

Graduate students should sign-up for PLAN 8994 during the second year of the program, 3 units in the Fall Semester and 3 in the Spring Semester, a total of 6 units overall. The thesis committee chair should be specified as the instructor for PLAN 8994. Students, alternatively, should consider whether an independent study course (PLAN 8993) 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.

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.

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

¹ More examples of planning theses can also be found on the ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Global database: https://search-proquest-com.proxy01.lts.virginia.edu/pqdtglobal/index?accountid=14678
member. 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 double-spaced pages have been acceptable.

The thesis generally involves six (6) credit hours (with a letter grade) and will normally be taken during the second year of the MUEP program, 3 credits per semester. 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 faculty member 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 them. That person supervises the work to assure that it is of a high standard and monitors progress leading to the completion of the work. The student should begin discussing the idea of completing a thesis, as well as the likely topic, with the Committee Chair in the Spring Semester of their first year in the MUEP program.

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 all before 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 with an appointment in 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 or similar content, based on a research design approved in advance by the Committee Chair:

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 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 MUEP Program Director. 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 (see Table 1): Students should plan to earn 6 units of PLAN 8994, 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Thesis Preparation Step-by-Step Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timing for completion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Semester, Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer between Year 1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Semester, Year 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By class drop date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Semester, Year 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By class drop date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No later than last day of classes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 in the first year of the program, 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 6040, Quantitative Planning Methods that provides an opportunity to begin thinking about quantitative research design. If the student plans to use qualitative methods for the thesis, PLAN 6020 also provides background in many methods used for qualitative research.

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 8994):

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) By the end of the semester, meet again with the Committee Chair (regular meetings should occur throughout the semester) to present intermediate results and to discuss progress. An update should also be sent to other committee members.

3. During the spring semester, the second semester in which 3 units of thesis credit are taken:

a) Prior to last drop date, send the committee a memo describing plans for completing the thesis. If any difficulties have been encountered, work with the Committee Chair to develop alternative plans for completing the thesis or withdrawing from the thesis track.

b) Eighth week: submit a draft of the entire thesis, including text, notes, and visual material, to all committee members.

c) Tenth week: meet with committee members to receive comments on the draft and to discuss the needed revisions and/or additional work.

d) Thirteenth week of classes: submit final manuscript, 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, the student will present the thesis to the Committee, as well as additional faculty and students invited by the thesis student. At the completion of the presentation, one paper copy of the final manuscript (with all corrections), signed and approved by the committee chair and member(s), must be submitted to the DUEP Departmental Assistant. The Departmental Assistant will inspect the formatting of the thesis to ensure that it conforms to the requirements in this document, and if satisfactory, will initiate the process for the thesis to be uploaded to the UVA Library's Libra repository. The student will then receive an invitation to upload a PDF of the thesis to the UVA Library's Libra repository, following all instructions for electronic thesis submission (https://www.library.virginia.edu/libra/etds/etds-checklist/). Finally, the link to the uploaded thesis must be sent to the Departmental Assistant and your Committee Chair in order to receive a final grade for the thesis.

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, housed either at the Fiske Kimball Fine Arts Library (paper theses filed before 2012) or online in the UVA Library’s Libra repository.

2. All material submitted by students should use an easy-to-read font (agreed upon with Committee Chair) 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.**

4. All pages must be numbered in the upper right corner.

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, or similar as agreed upon with the Committee Chair:

I. Preliminary Pages
   - Title page
   - Approval Page
   - Abstract (250 words or less)
   - Table of contents
   - List of figures, tables, and illustrations
   - Acknowledgements

II. The Thesis Text
   A. Introduction and Statement of Research Problem
   B. Literature Review
   C. Thesis Objectives / Statement of Hypotheses
   D. Description Research Approach/Methodology
   E. Presentation of Results and their Significance
   F. Conclusion (including Key Contributions, Recommendations and Implications for Planning, Limitations of Current Research, and Future Research)

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

III. Bibliography. An appropriate, accepted citation and bibliographic format should be used, upon consultation with the Committee Chair. Common formats in planning include APA and Chicago Manual of Style. Bibliographic management software, such as Zotero, which is free to use and has an add-in for Microsoft Word, makes citations and bibliographies much easier to assemble and revise.
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. Standards for Preparation of Masters Theses

The Department of Urban and Environmental Planning requires the electronic thesis standards of the University. Please see: https://www.library.virginia.edu/libra/etds/
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
Month, Year

The thesis of ________________________________ is approved:

Chair ___________________________________ Date

Committee member __________________________ Date

(month, year) University of Virginia