Master's Thesis Manual

School of Public and International Affairs

University of Pittsburgh

Office of Academic Advising

08/25

POLICY

1. Students may substitute the writing of a thesis for completion of a capstone seminar. The thesis is worth six credits. The six credits fulfill both the capstone requirement and one free elective. The thesis will be regarded as a requirement for graduation for those selecting this option. Any student wanting to pursue the thesis option **MUST** meet with their academic advisor to discuss the internal policies and administrative procedures governing the thesis process, **in their first term**, along with their faculty advisor (or potential committee chair) to discuss research proposal, develop a plan to complete a research project, discuss potential committee members, etc.

2. Students planning to write a thesis must have earned a minimum GPA of 3.6 and completed a minimum of 24 credits toward their master's degree when they begin the procedure described below. Students MUST complete PIA 2003: Seminar in Research Design & Methods, or an equivalent approved graduate research methods course (approval of committee chair and academic advisor). Students may be enrolled in PIA 2003 or equivalent approved graduate research methods course concurrently with the first three credits of the thesis course, PIA 2099: Thesis.

3. The thesis committee must consist of three faculty members, who are recommended by the student's faculty advisor and approved by the director of the student's degree program. The committee may have one adjunct faculty member. **The chair of the committee can only be a member of SPIA's faculty.** One member of the committee can be from another department in the University or from an appropriate graduate program at another academic institution.

4. Students must register for three thesis credits in their second or third term (based on academic program) under the sponsorship of a faculty thesis committee. In addition to chairing the committee, the chair will also monitor the student's academic progress and submit grades for the PIA 2099, thesis credit courses.

5. The student's thesis committee must accept the proposal by the end of the second or third term (based on academic program). If the proposal is accepted, the student will register for a further three credits (PIA 2099) in the third or fourth term (based on academic program) and undertake the appropriate research. If the proposal is not accepted, the student will enroll in PIA 2096: Capstone Seminar, during their third or fourth term (based on academic program).

6. The thesis as submitted must adhere to the standards and requirements of the University's *Electronic Theses and Dissertations* (https://etd.pitt.edu/) and be of potentially publishable quality.

7. After submission of the thesis, the student will work with their thesis chair to schedule a date for the thesis defense. After the defense, the committee will sign the Thesis Defense form and submit to their academic advisor. The chair will then award a grade of H, S or U (Honors, Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory).

8. After the committee has approved the thesis, the student must submit one electronic document prepared according to the *Electronic Theses and Dissertation* at the University of Pittsburgh, https://etd.pitt.edu/. You must use the University-approved ETD Template and follow the ETD format guidelines.

Submit final ETD in ETD Administrator

- Review the instructions for submitting ETDs
- Submit your final ETD in ETD Administrator

Submit your Receipt for ETD Processing Fee

- Initiate the ETD Processing Fee by emailing **payments@pitt.edu** and provide the following information: your student ID, the dollar amount ($50), and the academic term (ex: spring 2025)
- Once the fee is posted, you will see the charge in PittPAY on the Account Activity tab; the payment can be processed on the Make Payment tab.
- PittPAY will email you a receipt as soon as the payment is made.
- Forward a copy of your receipt to korade@pitt.edu

Additional Resources

- ETD Support Website
- ETD Template Tutorials and Resources
- Copyright Information
- Instructions for Copyright Permission Letters
- ETD Patent Form

9. The student will not be permitted in any circumstances to graduate until all procedures for the evaluation of the thesis have been completed.

10. If the thesis is not complete, the student is required to enroll in PIA 2096 Capstone Seminar for three credits to complete the graduation requirement.

PROCEDURES

Candidates for the master's degree thesis are required to demonstrate the capability to plan and complete a project of original research.

Thesis Overview
A student must be registered in the term during which the thesis overview meeting is scheduled. The thesis overview is a written proposal for the thesis. A student must prepare a thesis proposal for presentation to the committee. The overview requires the student to carefully formulate a plan and permits the committee members to provide guidance in shaping the conceptualization and methodology of that plan. A unanimous vote of the thesis committee is required for the overview. Once approved, the committee will sign the Thesis Overview Proposal form and submit along with a corrected copy of the overview to their academic advisor.

Approval of Research with Human Subjects
If the research proposed in the overview involves human subjects, the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) must approve the proposed research for the Protection of Human Subjects before it may be carried out. The student is responsible for ensuring that all appropriate regulatory approvals are obtained for the proposed research. Information on materials that must be submitted and the procedures that must be followed for an IRB review are available at http://www.irb.pitt.edu/.

Thesis Preparation and Final Oral Examination
The student completes the thesis research and prepares the master's thesis under the direction of the thesis chair, according to the approved overview. In preparing the thesis, the student must follow the University's *Style and Form Manual for Graduate Thesis and Dissertation Preparation* available online at www.pitt.edu/~graduate/style.html.

The completed thesis is submitted to the thesis master's committee for the Defense. The student must be registered in the term during which the Thesis Defense is scheduled. The defense is devoted primarily to the thesis, and an affirmative vote by the majority of the committee members is required to pass. One copy of the Thesis Defense form must be submitted to the Office of Academic Advising. These documents are due not later than the approved deadline day set each term by the Office of Academic Advising.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Responsibilities of the student
- Discuss recommendations for the thesis examining committee with faculty advisor and obtain approval of the committee from the degree program director.
- Obtain the agreement of a faculty member who will agree to serve as thesis chair (must be SPIA faculty member).
- Register for 3 credits of PIA 2099 Thesis during the terms in which the Thesis Overview Proposal and the Thesis Defense are undertaken.
- Submit signed copies of the Thesis Committee Approval Form and the Thesis Overview Proposal Form at the end of the first registered thesis term to their academic advisor.
- Schedule a date for the thesis defense, in consultation with the thesis chair.
- Submit all required documents and pay all required fees (see #9 under Policy)

2. Responsibilities of the thesis chair
- Direct the student's research activities.
- Chair the thesis committee
- Ensure that the thesis meets the requirements of the University's *Style and Form Manual for Graduate Thesis and Dissertation Preparation.*
- Submit a grade for PIA 2099: Thesis.
- Schedules a date for the thesis defense, in consultation with the student.

3. Responsibilities of the thesis examining committee
- Review the thesis proposal and final thesis.
- Vote on the student's thesis overview and thesis defense.

4. Responsibilities of the Academic Advising Office
- Provide student with the internal policies and procedures governing the thesis option.
- Update and distribute the requisite forms for the thesis option.

- Review and approve the ETD and all supporting documents.
- Enter results of the thesis committee approval, thesis overview proposal and the thesis defense into PeopleSoft, the Student Information System.