

Overview of Thesis Process

Nature of project

As a student approaches the seventh or eighth course in the Liberal Studies program, he/she should start thinking about doing the thesis. This thesis experience is intended to provide the student with the opportunity to become deeply involved with a topic of personal interest and relevance. The thesis topic is pursued under the guidance of a faculty member. A student must have at least a 3.0 grade point average after taking seven courses in the program before submitting a thesis proposal.

Format of the proposal. There are three forms that a thesis can take.

► The first type of thesis is a research paper. In this case the student should have a specific question he/she plans to address and research. The paper should be centered on developing an original line of argument with evidence to support it.

► The second type of thesis is a research project. In this type of thesis, a student collects data either in the form of interviews, from primary resources, or from people being studied. In this case, the Liberal Studies student should have a specific question he/she wishes to investigate. The data is collected and the student then uses this data to answer the question being considered. A student who works with human subjects is required to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before collecting data. There are deadlines for submitting the Application for Research Approval to the IRB, and these dates are listed on the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs website (<http://www.wfu.edu/rsp/irb/>). The advisor can help with this submission.

► The third type of thesis is an original creation. In the past, there have been interesting creative productions in many forms, including an oral history of a college, a novel, a suite of piano compositions, a one-act play, collections of short stories, a series of prints, a collection of poetry, and the staging of a medieval play. Regardless of the format of presentation, a project must be able to be recorded for the library on slides, audio-tape, or video-tape. The recorded version has to meet library standards of quality as it will remain permanently in their files. When a student does a non-traditional thesis, there still needs to be a written component. In this written section, the student develops an intellectual context for the creative production. This written component should also indicate the way in which the project was produced and recorded. The minimum length of this paper is 25 pages. Please note that lesson plans, instructional manuals, business plans, or technical papers are not appropriate as thesis projects.

Examples of Theses

The Liberal Studies Office has a complete set of past theses. Students are welcome to come into the Liberal Studies Office and review them in the office. Copies of all theses are also available in the Z. Smith Reynolds Library for check out.

Faculty advisor

Every thesis project involves having a thesis advisor. The advisor helps the student identify resources and shape the project, and provides feedback. The advisor also works with the student to ensure that the thesis is at the appropriate level of graduate work.

Sometimes a student will have some general idea of the area in which he/she wishes to do the thesis. This might be the result of a Liberal Studies course, or a life experience, or a long standing interest. On the other hand, a student may not have a clear idea about a topic. In either case, a student might not be clear whom to approach as an advisor.

Whatever the scenario, the first step in doing the thesis is to make an appointment with the Liberal Studies Director to talk over the thesis ideas. The Director can help to formulate a topic if necessary, and will explore possibilities for finding an advisor. Advisors should be chosen from the University's Graduate Faculty list, which is available online:
<http://graduate.wfu.edu/faculty/directory.html>

If the advisor is not a member of the Graduate Faculty, he or she can receive a temporary appointment to the Graduate Faculty by submitting a curriculum vitae ("CV") to the Liberal Studies Director with a cover letter requesting this approval. The qualifications for temporary appointment to the Graduate Faculty are 1) having the appropriate terminal degree for the discipline (such as a Ph.D. or Master of Fine Arts) and 2) having published or produced professional-level works appropriate to the discipline. The Liberal Studies Director submits the request with the supporting materials to the Dean of the Graduate School for final approval.

The most important considerations when selecting an advisor are that the faculty member should have expertise in the topic or in an area related to it, and that he/she should be someone the student is comfortable working with. To find an advisor, a student might consider a faculty person whom he/she had as an instructor. The Liberal Studies Director should also be able to help identify other possible advisors. Advisors receive an honorarium from the Liberal Studies program for working with students.

It is the responsibility of the student to approach potential thesis advisors to inquire about their availability and interest. A professor may decline the opportunity to serve as an advisor because the topic is not a good match with the professor's areas of expertise, or he/she does not have the time available in the immediate future. Students should be aware that serving as a Liberal Studies advisor is overload work for faculty. Students also need to realize that it is possible to select a topic for which there is no local expert. In this case, the student will have to be flexible about choosing another topic.

Liberal Studies and Graduate School Approval of the Advisor

All advisors must be approved by the Director of the Liberal Studies program before the student begins work with the advisor. When a student finds a faculty person who agrees to be the advisor, the student should contact the Liberal Studies Office with the advisor's name.

University Approval of the Advisor

The Dean of the College has indicated that any faculty person working outside his/her department should have permission of his/her departmental chair to take on the extra obligation. This means that once an advisor has been located, the advisor should obtain the signature of the departmental chair on the thesis proposal form indicating that it is acceptable for the faculty person to supervise a Liberal Studies thesis.

It should also be noted that the Provost of WFU has stated that faculty members who are carrying a reduced teaching load either for research leave or because of administrative duties cannot take on additional work during the semester the reduced load is given. Please check with your advisor about this.

Thesis proposal

Once a student and the advisor have agreed on a topic, the student must work with the advisor to develop his or her ideas into a manageable plan. This plan will be written out in a two to three page proposal. The proposal indicates the nature and scope of the topic, the approach which will be used in developing the topic, any research which will be conducted and research materials available, what results the student hopes to achieve, and the validity of the topic as a thesis. The guidelines on completing the Thesis Proposal are located on the MALS website:

<http://www.wfu.edu/mals/docs/Thesis%20Proposal%20Guidelines%20&%20Form.pdf>

Once the proposal is finished, it should be submitted to the Liberal Studies Director for approval. The Thesis Proposal form requires signatures from the advisor indicating approval of the project, as well as the departmental chair (indicating approval for the faculty member to supervise a thesis). If the proposal is approved by the Liberal Studies Director, the student will receive a letter to that effect and the student may begin work on the thesis. If the proposal is not approved, it will be sent back to the student for revision. **Students should allow plenty of time to complete the thesis proposal, as well as address any needed revisions, well before the given deadline at the beginning of each semester.** It is therefore recommended that a student begin the thesis proposal process well before the beginning of the semester in which they would like to begin the actual thesis work.

Once the thesis proposal is signed by the appropriate parties and approved by the MALS Program Director, the student will be signed up for MLS 791 (Thesis Research). This is a 3 credit hour course, but is treated as a directed study between the student and the advisor. This is not an actual class that meets like the typical MALS courses.

One point worth making is that the proposal is not a document set in stone. As a student works on the thesis, he/she will find that changes will certainly occur in the original plan, some minor and some major. This is to be expected in a developing idea. The proposal is thought to be a broad guideline, not a straight-jacket. The approval of the proposal is on the basis of the topic, the general approach to the topic, and the depth at which the topic will be handled. It is assumed the final product may differ from the proposal as stated. However, if the developing thesis turns out to be radically different from the original proposal, a new description should be submitted to the Liberal Studies Director for additional approval. A radical change would be defined as a new topic, a new approach, or the addition or deletion of a major portion of the proposed work.

After the proposal is approved, the thesis advisor and student should meet at regular intervals to maintain progress on the work. The advisor should encourage the student to explore his/her ideas, direct the student to relevant resources, and provide standards so that the student can produce a thesis within the Liberal Studies guidelines. The student should realize it is his/her responsibility to maintain contact with the advisor. A thesis is not like a course paper which is written by the student alone. All theses should involve an ongoing interchange of ideas and guidance from the advisor. The advisor helps the student shape the thesis to meet the appropriate graduate standards for content, level, and format.

Committee Selection

The Liberal Studies student will also need to form a thesis committee. This can be done once the thesis work is underway. This committee will include the advisor and two other members of the faculty. The other two faculty persons should either be members of the Graduate Faculty or have received approval for Temporary Graduate Faculty status as described in the prior section of this document. No more than one faculty member of the three individuals serving on a MALS thesis committee may have Temporary Graduate Faculty status.

Typically the two thesis committee members (also referred to as "readers") do not work with the student on the thesis. Rather, their role is evaluative, and their contribution to the thesis is through their participation in the defense meeting. There is no remuneration for serving on the thesis committee of a Liberal Studies student. Please inform the Liberal Studies Office of the names of your thesis committee members as soon as you have determined who they are. The MALS Program Director does not normally sit on the committee, but does review the thesis before the defense takes place.

Time Frame

A student should sign up for Thesis Research for the semester in which the actual writing work is being done. The advisor is required to turn in a grade (Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory) indicating whether the student is making progress on the thesis. Obviously if the student is not working on the thesis that semester, the instructor cannot turn in a grade. Many Liberal Studies theses take slightly more than one semester to complete. A common pattern is to start on the proposal before the semester in which the Thesis Research course (MLS 791) is taken, and then finish by the end of the following semester. If the thesis cannot be finished in the semester the student has signed up for Thesis Research, the student can enroll in "Graduate Fee" for the extra semester (\$30 per semester). A student must be enrolled in the semester in which he or she graduates.

Paper Length

Most research papers and research projects are at least 50-60 pages in length, though they can be longer if the student wishes.

As noted before, a written portion ("context paper") for all original projects is required. This context paper should be substantial in length (at least 25 pages) and should be conceptual and analytic in nature.

Deadlines

A Liberal Studies student can graduate in August, December, or May. For each semester, there are deadlines that must be met. The dates for the deadlines for each semester can be found on the Calendar page of this website.

Candidacy for the Degree and Intent to Graduate

When the student determines in which semester he/she wishes to complete the degree and graduate, there will be specific deadlines that will need to be addressed.

► **Intent to Graduate Form:** The first is the deadline for the "Filing the Candidacy for the Degree and Intent to Graduate" form. Please note this form requires the signature of your advisor and the Liberal Studies Director. This form is turned in to Graduate School Office (Reynolda Room 6) near the beginning of the semester.

► **Format approval:** The second deadline is the date for passing in to the Graduate School Office one copy of the title page and one chapter for a check of the format. The Assistant to the Dean will look over these materials to confirm that the format of the thesis is correct. The full thesis must also be reviewed in the Liberal Studies office. When the student submits the copies of the thesis to his/her committee for the initial review (usually at least 2 weeks prior to the defense meeting) an additional copy should be provided to the Liberal Studies office.

► **Completed thesis:** The third deadline is the final date for passing in the completed and approved thesis. Students should plan to have their thesis defense at least one to two weeks before this final deadline. This arrangement will give the student enough time to make any changes requested at the thesis defense meeting.

Thesis defense meeting

Scheduling the meeting. In consultation with the advisor, second and third thesis committee members, students should schedule a time and place for the defense meeting of their thesis. Please inform the Graduate School and Liberal Studies Office of the day and time. If at all possible, the Liberal Studies Office should be used for holding thesis defense meetings. The defense must be held at least ten days prior to graduation, although it may be held at any time during a semester.

Please give the thesis committee members and the MALS program director a reasonable amount of time to read the thesis. Two weeks is preferable; students may consult with their advisors about this. Don't forget that a copy of the thesis also must be turned in to the Liberal Studies office at this same time.

Students should bring copies of their title page to the thesis defense meeting, in order to get original signatures on all copies. A minimum of one copy of the title page must be on 100% rag paper.

Nature of the meeting

The description below is a general one. The student should discuss with his/her advisor the expectations he/she has for the specific meeting. Having this discussion is especially important if the thesis is an original project. In that case, the student and the advisor will need to work out the details on how to have the thesis committee members evaluate the work.

The defense meeting is presided over by the senior thesis committee member who is not the advisor. However, it is the advisor who begins the session with the first question. An advisor's typical first question is for the student to describe briefly what the thesis was about. This is done to give the student a chance to relax into the situation. For the sake of the examiners who have already read the paper and know this question is for the student's benefit and not theirs, the response given should only last three minutes or so. The advisor may or may not wish to begin the meeting this way, so this should be discussed with him/her ahead of time.

After the first question, the defense usually develops into a give and take discussion between the student and the three thesis committee members. Students should keep in mind that the thesis committee members are usually in a sympathetic and interested frame of mind rather than feeling highly evaluative and antagonistic. They want to ensure that the student actually did the thesis, and they want to hear the student elaborate on what he/she has done and defend it (hence "defense"). They will probably also ask speculative questions to which there are no right or wrong answers, but they want to observe how the student approaches the question. Although Liberal Studies students may have visions of a grilling somewhere between a Harvard Law School class and a doctoral dissertation defense, that is not the typical tone of a master's thesis meeting. On the other hand, this is not just a friendly conversation but an examination, so the student should be prepared to answer questions. Also, unless it is the norm in the home department, do not bring food, drink, or gifts to the meeting. As noted before, the student needs to discuss the process with the advisor until both are comfortable about what to expect.

The defense usually lasts about an hour, after which the student leaves the room while the examiners discuss the quality of the thesis and its defense. The examiners will formally vote to "approve," "approve with changes," or "not to approve" the thesis. The vote "not to approve" means the student has failed and will have to do major revision before the paper can be defended again. This is extremely rare. Usually an advisor will not allow a student to schedule a defense if he or she has any doubts about the acceptability of the thesis. Remember, the quality of a thesis also reflects on the advisor. It is most typical for the student to pass and be required to make numerous small changes of both content and typographical nature.

As soon as the committee has made the decision, the advisor will invite the student back into the room where he/she will be told the outcome. If there are changes to be made, the advisor will want to schedule a time to go over them with the student. These changes must be made and submitted to the advisor for approval. The final draft must be passed in before the Graduate School deadline.

Format of Project

The thesis will be bound in hard cover and placed permanently in the Wake Forest University Library. As the thesis will represent the student's scholarly work for a very long time, the student should be very careful in its preparation. The thesis must be printed with a good quality printer and error free. Whether the student prepares his/her thesis or has another person prepare it, the student is ultimately responsible for the paper's physical appearance. The format of the Liberal Studies thesis is dictated by the guidelines given by the Graduate School on its website. <http://graduate.wfu.edu/students/dissertation.html>

A traditional thesis follows a specific format. It is organized with the following sections.

Title page: This identifies the paper by title, author, and "submitted to" statement. It will be signed by members of the thesis committee.

Acknowledgments: Recognize and express appreciation to those the student wishes to acknowledge for encouragement, contributions, and assistance in his or her graduate education and research.

Table of Contents: Outlines the major section headings with their page numbers. Headings should be worded identically to those used in the text.

List of Illustrations: List any charts, tables, diagrams, figures which will be used. Items should be listed in the same order in which they appear in the text.

Abbreviations: Group as a list if a large number are used in the text.

Abstract: Summarizes the thesis. Single spaced, no more than 200 words.

Text: This is the main body of the paper. The specific sub-organization will depend on what type of paper is being written. The student should check with the advisor for the appropriate sections. As an example, a research paper would have introduction, method, results, and conclusions.

Bibliography: Lists every book, article, thesis or dissertation abstract, etc. mentioned in the thesis with complete publishing information. Non-print sources such as web sites, interviews, videotapes are listed also. Use the bibliographic system from the advisor's major discipline.

Appendix: Includes any supplementary materials that support or are relevant to the thesis but which have no logical or appropriate place within the body of the text.

Biographical statement: Summarizes the student's educational background, academic or other awards, memberships in major societies, and other meaningful aspects of his/her life.

Typographical details. Margins to be used are as follows: 1.0 inch at the top, right, and bottom of each page (except the title page) and 1.5 inches on the left side. The standard is 12 characters per inch. Double spacing throughout the text permits approximately 25 lines per page. New paragraphs should be indented five spaces. All pages are numbered. The material before "The Introduction" is numbered in Roman numerals. The title page is page one but is not numbered. The second page starts with "ii" and the third page "iii" and so on. Arabic numerals start with the first page of the introduction. Pages with either Roman or Arabic numerals are numbered in the top right corner, even with the margin.

Paper quality. The thesis should be printed on 8 1/2 inch by 11 inch typing paper. One copy of the final thesis should be on 100% rag paper; the other copies may be on xerox quality paper (25% rag bond). The heavy rag bond is required to prevent the pages from yellowing and the print from fading over the years of residence on the library shelves.

Bound copies of the thesis. Students are required to provide one copy of the thesis, printed on 100% cotton/rag paper, to be bound and archived at the Z. Smith Reynolds Library. Students are requested to provide an additional copy (on plain printer paper) which will be bound and housed in the Liberal Studies office. The Liberal Studies program will pay for the binding of this copy. Students may wish to have copies made to be bound for themselves, family members, and/or their advisor. The cost of binding these copies as well as the Library copy, is up to the individual student.

Electronic Version of Thesis. In addition to the printed version of the thesis, the student must enter his/her thesis in electronic form. Having the thesis in electronic form allows interested parties nationally and internationally to access the thesis.

Details about most of these items (thesis formatting, deadlines, thesis binding, Electronic Thesis, graduation, caps & gowns, fees, etc.) will be sent on a regular basis to the student from the Graduate School via email.

EXAMPLES OF THESIS TOPICS

Anthropology	Navajo dry painting as medicine Initiation rites: Sudanese passages from pain to purpose
Art	Visual interpretation of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue (several oil paintings)* A 19th century architectural tour of the Staunton River Valley
Economics	The relationship between capitalism and democratic freedoms The changing economies of Winston-Salem
Education	Afro-centric education New teachers: Why do they go?
History	Women in Sport: The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League The North Carolina stagecoach house: 1805 to present
Literature	Death to the market (a novel)* Study of Four Modern Jewish-American novels
Music	The origins of Wagner's Ring Nine character pieces for piano solo (a musical composition)*
Philosophy	The critical tradition Gandhian philosophy and the 21st century
Psychology	The Quality and Quantity of Life Between 1980-2000 in the United States: Ethnic Differences
Religion	American religious perspectives on the human spirit and nature Freud and religion: An argument against atheism
Sociology	Hospice volunteers – The changes in their attitudes about life and death Italian and Japanese Immigrants before World War II The changing role of women in Amish society

*Indicates a non-traditional thesis