



Midwestern State University
Dr. Billie Doris McAda Graduate School

Thesis Tips, Expectations, and FAQs

❖ **Message from the Dean**

The thesis serves three purposes. First, it is a culmination of graduate work, demonstrating a student's knowledge of their field. Second, it provides excellent preparation for doctoral study and a successful career. Third, it demonstrates a student's research, writing, and critical thinking skills, as well as their ability to work independently. Graduate programs differ in their procedures and requirements for completing a thesis, so it is important that you supplement the information in this document with specific information from your graduate program. Such information can be provided by your Graduate Coordinator or the Chair of your Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC).

❖ **Thesis Enrollment**

Enrollment is required in each long semester (fall and spring) until the thesis is completed successfully. A one-semester leave of absence may be granted by the Dean of McAda Graduate School via the *Thesis Leave of Absence Request*. Thesis enrollment is not required in the summer unless a student will graduate in August.

❖ **Graduate Advisory Committee**

The Graduate Advisory Committee consists of three faculty members who guide and advise the student during the thesis process. Usually the faculty members have an academic background that is related to the student's thesis topic. One of the faculty members serves as the Chair of the GAC.

- **Appointment of the Committee:** After all leveling work and other conditions have been satisfied and nine graduate hours toward the degree have been completed with an average of B or better, the student should request the appointment of a GAC through the Graduate Coordinator of their program. The GAC assists in planning the remainder of the student's program, including enrollment, revision of degree plan, admission to candidacy, thesis title and proposal, thesis approval, type of research problem, and the final oral or written comprehensive examination.
- **Successors to the Original Committee:** If a member of a GAC leaves the university, the Graduate Coordinator shall appoint a successor immediately.
- **Substitutions on the Committee:** If a member of a GAC is absent during a time when approval, disapproval, or advice is needed by the student to meet officially scheduled deadlines, the Graduate Coordinator shall appoint a substitute.
- **Thesis Regulations for the Committee:** After the student submits a reading copy of their thesis, at least six weeks before their expected graduation date, the GAC shall return the copy with editorial comments within three weeks. No committee member shall hold the thesis longer than one week.

Until the student receives notice of the appointment of a GAC, the Graduate Coordinator of the student's program will be considered the thesis advisor.

❖ **Institutional Review Board**

A thesis with research involving human participants must have forms submitted for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). A copy of the IRB approval letter must be attached to the thesis as an appendix. Visit the [Institutional Review Board](#) website for details.

❖ **Tips for Choosing a Thesis Topic**

- Consider questions, problems, and topics that have piqued your interest in classes you have taken. Discuss these areas of interest with friends, professors, and fellow students.
- Choose a topic that interests and engages you. A long period of time will be spent working on your thesis, so it is important to choose a topic that will keep you interested and motivated throughout the process.
- Consider a topic related to your professional interests. Choose a manageable research problem that can be addressed or solved in a reasonable amount of time.
- Choose a narrow, well-defined topic.

❖ **Tips for the Thesis Process**

- Organizing meetings with your GAC is your responsibility. Email your GAC with suggested dates, times, and locations. Leave ample time for this process.
- Consult with your GAC Chair before bringing gifts or refreshments to meetings with your GAC.
- Do not ask your GAC Chair or program secretary to copy and distribute your drafts. Instead, send drafts electronically to each committee member.
- Do not send a draft for review until you have read it and corrected mistakes. It is frustrating for GAC members to read a version of a draft and then receive an email saying that the version needs to be replaced with a newer one.
- Do not expect your GAC members to be text editors. If you need assistance with grammar, spelling, or style, arrange for an outside editor. Your GAC Chair is your resource for research and substantive matters only.
- You may not be the only student with whom your GAC members are working. It may take ten working days for you to receive a thoughtful review. Be patient and do not wait until the end of the semester to submit your first draft of the semester.
- Follow your GAC Chair's suggestions and be sure to make corrections or explain why you did not make corrections on your next draft. It is frustrating for your GAC Chair to make the same suggestions repeatedly because you fail to make corrections.
- Keep notes on your discussions with your GAC Chair. Notes may be helpful to you if you have a difference of opinion or memory.
- You are paying for your education. If you feel that you are not receiving the feedback and support you need to be successful, have a discussion with your GAC Chair. If you do not resolve your

issues jointly, you are free to change your GAC Chair and/or committee members. Before taking that step, it may be a good idea to discuss your needs with your Graduate Coordinator.

❖ **Thesis Expectations**

- The thesis should reflect graduate-level scholarship.
- The thesis should be well organized and professional.
- The thesis should include proper English.
- The thesis should be free of errors (grammar, punctuation, spelling, et cetera).
- The thesis should be consistent with the style manual chosen by the student's program.
- The thesis should include only the student's original work and should be free of plagiarized material.

❖ **Frequently Asked Questions**

- **What is a research proposal?** Before beginning your thesis, you may be required to write a research proposal, which should clearly state the intended purpose of the proposed research. Depending on individual program requirements, the research proposal may include a literature review, a description of the intended research methodology, a proposed timeline for the completion of the thesis, and/or other information. Note that the requirements for research proposals vary for different programs. Refer to your program's thesis guidelines or ask your Graduate Coordinator or GAC Chair for program-specific requirements.
- **What is a literature review?** A literature review is an overview of the most relevant and significant literature that has been published on a topic. It is not the same as an annotated bibliography. A literature review summarizes the knowledge and ideas that have been established on a topic, and it familiarizes readers with the state of research in the field and any contrasting viewpoints on the topic.
- **What is an abstract?** An abstract is a brief summary of the thesis that appears at the beginning of the manuscript. The abstract is used to help readers quickly determine what the thesis topic is.
- **What is a references page?** A references page gives detailed information about the sources that have been referenced, summarized, or quoted in the thesis and where the sources were found. A references page gives credit to the authors of the sources and helps readers track the sources for themselves if they want to read more on the thesis topic.
- **What is a thesis defense/oral examination?** Typically, the thesis defense/oral examination centers on matters pertaining to the thesis, but it can include other areas of graduate training, as well. During the thesis defense, a student should be prepared to conduct a formal presentation of the thesis and respond to any questions from their GAC. The thesis defense/oral examination takes place within the few weeks prior to graduation.