

Thesis Guidelines for Gerontology

Gerontology students may elect to write a research thesis based on independent research in order to fulfill the requirements of the MS in Gerontology degree. The thesis is a demonstration of the culmination of your gerontology education experience. It is an independent, theory-based inquiry in which you apply knowledge and skills acquired to the scholarly study of gerontology. The thesis comprises up to 6 hours of credit; however, unlike a course, a thesis does not end automatically with the completion of the thesis credit hours or at the end of a semester. It is completed when, in the opinion of the thesis committee, it is of acceptable quality and is successfully defended.¹ Students with a strong interest in a specific specialty area or who are considering continuing on for a PhD are strongly encouraged to write a thesis. Students choosing the thesis option may, but are not required to do so, reduce elective hours.

To meet the basic requirements of the research thesis students must:

- Review the literature on the selected topic,
- Frame a research question,
- Develop and apply a methodology,
- Analyze the information with appropriate analytical methodology,
- Report results,
- Discuss the findings in relation to the research question and within a broad gerontological context,
- Prepare a scholarly manuscript, and
- Present the material in a formal setting.

An important part of the thesis is the literature review, the foundation for your work and for how your work relates to the context of other known research. It is important to demonstrate how this research fits into the overall gerontological context.

In completing a research thesis, students conduct one of two types of data analysis:

- Primary data analysis –in which students use data they generate themselves through original research they design and implement, or

¹ Examples of MA theses from multiple disciplines are available in the UNCG Jackson Library

- Secondary data analysis –in which students use data that has already been generated by another individual or organization in order to answer their original research question.

Regardless of whether one does primary or secondary data analysis, the research must be well designed and limited to realistic objectives. It should be precise enough to be completed in one to two semesters of concentrated effort.

The following are necessary steps in the preparation of a thesis:

Selection of Committee: The student must select a thesis committee. After determining your thesis topic, the student must select the committee chair, who cannot be an adjunct member of the graduate faculty. The committee chair is the person most closely associated with the area and faculty/director of the gerontology program. The student and the chair then select 2 additional members. At times, it may be that the student and chair determine a third additional member is necessary based on the research thesis question or design. At least one committee member from outside the program must serve on the committee. Only graduate faculty can serve on thesis committees and prior approval is required to add a faculty member from another institution. Students must determine whether committee members will be in residence (not on research assignment) while the thesis is in progress. The **Recommendation for Thesis Committee Appointment** form² used for the initial recommendation of the committee is submitted to the gerontology program director. The form must indicate a tentative thesis title. The **Recommendation for Thesis Committee Appointment Revision** form is used when recommending revisions to the original committee.

Thesis Chair responsibilities: Approves the final research topic, the committee members and helps determine when the student's thesis is ready for defense. The chair is also responsible for advising you on the research approval process with the IRB, reviewing thesis drafts before sharing with the committee, ensuring your writing and thesis work reaches an adequate literary and scientific standard required for defense and that the Thesis Committee maintain a high standard of ethical behavior throughout the student's thesis process.

Thesis Committee Members responsibilities: To add their expertise to guide the student's research and commit the time necessary to review and comment on the student's work.

Student's responsibilities: To provide all materials to the Thesis Committee at least two weeks in advance of proposal defense, additional meetings and the thesis defense. The student is responsible for determining with the chair the process for submitting work to committee members (e.g. all drafts must go through the chair first or the student may work with a committee member on a thesis area independently), obtaining and completing forms, and following The Graduate School's deadlines and ETD guidelines found at http://www.uncg.edu/grs/forms/T_dguide.pdf. Students should review the "Guide for the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations" carefully and apply the

² Forms may be found at the end of the document

formatting requirements to their document during the early states of writing. The student is also responsible for informing the chair of any issues arising during the thesis process. Finally, the student is responsible for conducting ethical research within the university and IRB guidelines.

Thesis Proposal: Under the thesis chair's guidance, the student presents a written thesis proposal to the committee. The thesis is a navigational tool for developing your research program and functions to facilitate a student's progress through graduate training. It is possible that some of the specific shape of your research design will change as your research evolves. However, the proposal serves to trace the evolution of scholarly work and to provide you with valuable experience for future research aspects and professional experiences. Frequently the proposal, with some additions and guidelines from the committee, become the first few thesis chapters. A formal oral defense of the proposal to the thesis committee is required. At the defense of the proposal the student will prepare a short presentation on the proposed study and be able to defend the materials in the proposal successfully. The date of formal oral defense of the proposal is recorded in the student's permanent record in the Gerontology Program office. After receiving approval by the thesis chair, students are responsible to contacting committee members to determine a time that all are available for the defense and to provide the committee with the proposal at least *two* weeks in advance of the meeting.

The core components of a thesis proposal include the following:

- Title Page
 - A well-chosen title direct at the specific nature of the proposed student
 - Contact information for the student
- Research Question(s)
 - A set of scientifically and intellectually relevant questions or objectives
 - Or a hypothesis which may be tested
- Must not be overly general or narrow but rather should be presented as viable research undertakings for a master's candidate, expressing an awareness of important questions in gerontology, their significance, and the ability to complete the research in a timely fashion
- Rationale of the Study and its Significance
 - Scholarly research does not occur in a void. Although research seeks to be original, innovative, and important, its foundations and rationale are based on previous scholarly efforts. Good, responsible scholarship acknowledges the body of work from which it is developed and attempts to articulate its relevance through a dialogue with established research and scholarly efforts. Thus the proposal must provide evidence that the student is familiar with, or at the minimum, aware of relevant intellectual discussions and debates. This generally involves
 - A statement of the specific issues and problems to be addressed by the study
 - A brief review of relevant literature, schools of thought, and/or theoretical frameworks, properly cited in a working bibliography. The literature and bibliography usually grow through out the research toward an exhaustive citation of the relevant literature.

- A statement as to why your research is significant: What will we learn that we have not already? What misconceptions might this research correct? What original insight will it provide? Why is it a useful exercise?
- Research Plan
 - An overall outline of the study as it is projected, including a clear identification of the method or critical perspective to be applied and relevant data sources
 - Methodology—What methods or approaches will you use that are appropriate to your research questions and your data?
 - Materials/Data –What specific sites will serve as the source(s) for your data? What kinds of materials/data will you incorporate and why?
 - How will the data be analyzed?
- Timeline of Project
 - Provide a reasonable timeline with key deadlines for data collection, analysis, and completion of the writing of the study with careful researching of graduation requirements and deadlines
 - See http://www.uncg.edu/grs/forms/T_dguide.pdf for university thesis guidelines and requirements
 - If possible , provide an outline of thesis chapter
- Bibliography
 - Use APA format and follow it consistently. See the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (most current edition)

Human Subjects Review: If the thesis project involves human subjects or primary data collection, the student must undergo review by the UNCG Institutional Review Board (IRB) before data collection commences. The thesis chair is responsible for directing the student through the IRB process. The University and the Gerontology Program are very serious that all aspects of the IRB process be followed and that the student and faculty research is conducted ethically and approved by the university when appropriate. If the student does not follow the appropriate IRB guidelines and/or violate ethical conduct concerning research, the student might not be allowed to use the data for the thesis or publication and may also result in the student being asked to leave the university. IRB forms and information may be found at www.uncg.edu/orc/humanres. Students should also review materials on university compliance at the Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at www.uncg.edu/orc for links and details on research policies.

Data Collection and Analysis, Writing the Manuscript: Unless the student is using secondary data, the student is responsible for the data collection and the costs incurred. Students seeking external funding for thesis support should allow additional time for thesis completion. It would be optimal and in the student's best interest, to have data collection funding in place prior to initiating data collection. The student must consult frequently, as determined by the thesis chair, throughout the process of data collection and analysis. It is critical to work with your thesis chair and/or committee members with expertise in the area to design an individual plan to guide the student through completion of the thesis. This work plan will include deadlines for finishing data analysis, completing the literature review, and submitting drafts of your thesis to your

advisor/committee. All drafts must be submitted first to the chair unless otherwise notified by the chair. When writing a research thesis, the student should keep in mind how the thesis might become a future manuscript. The final submission of the thesis to The Graduate School must confirm to all the university regulations and timelines.

Thesis Defense: A thesis requirement is to present your work in a public forum. Once the chair and student have determined the student's work has sufficiently meet the requirements for a scholarly work in gerontology, the student needs to schedule a defense date. The student must provide the committee with the completed thesis at least two weeks in advance of the defense date. The student must make available a copy of the thesis that is available to all interested for review that is place in the gerontology program's main office. The thesis defense is open to the academic community and the chair will invite the program's advisory committee, faculty and students affiliated with the gerontology program to the thesis defense. The student, with guidance from the chair, will prepare a presentation for the defense. After the presentation, the student will be asked to leave the room while the committee reviews the presentation and determines issues, questions, or considerations that should be considered by the student. The academic community will also be allowed to provide comments at that time. Upon returning to the meeting, the student may be questioned by the committee. If the chair feels it appropriate, the chair will present any concerns raised by the university community. After addressing the committee's questions, the student will be asked again to leave the room. At that time, the committee will determine if the student has successfully completed the criteria. Unanimous approval is required for passing the defense. Approval may be conditional on the completion of minor edits/changes as required by the committee. Upon successful completion of the defense, the department submits the **Results of Oral Examination** form The Graduate School.

Submission of Thesis to The Graduate School: The final thesis must be submitted to The Graduate School following university regulations. Theses are submitted electronically and gerontology students are required to take The Graduate School workshop on ETD submission and to follow appropriate guidelines. Gerontology students are required to provide the thesis chair and the Gerontology Program with a bound copy of the student's thesis. The signed approval page and title page for the student's thesis must be submitted by the student to The Graduate School after the defense and before the appropriate final deadline for that semester.

Bound Copy of Thesis to Thesis Committee Chair: A copy of the final thesis as submitted to The Graduate School is to be bound and provided to the Thesis Committee Chair for departmental records in a timely fashion.

Additional Information: Each calendar year, The Graduate School issues a call for The Fisher Master Thesis Award. It is for student master thesis or projects that add the scholarly literature in gerontology. Theses/projects completed in the previous **calendar year** may be submitted upon approval of the thesis chair and with recommendations from the committee. The award carries a \$500.00 cash prize. Students should consider placing their thesis into consideration for this award.

Acknowledgements: UNCG Sociology Thesis Guidelines, UNCG School of Nursing Guidelines, Ohio University, Duke University, and The Pennsylvania State University



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Greensboro, NC 27402-6710
Phone 336.256.1020 Fax 336.334.4113

**RECOMMENDATION FOR
MASTER THESIS COMMITTEE APPOINTMENT FOR THE GERONTOLOGY PROGRAM**

Date: _____

Student's Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Tentative title of thesis: _____

The following graduate faculty members are recommended to The Graduate School as master thesis committee members for the above-named student and each one has agreed to assume this responsibility:

Please sign below

Graduate Faculty Status
(Member, Assoc, Adjunct)

Chair: _____

Member: _____

Member: _____

Member: _____

Program Director: _____

Date: _____

Original to Student File:

- C: Program Director
- Committee Chair/members
- Student



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RECOMMENDATION FOR REVISION
MASTER THESIS COMMITTEE APPOINTMENT FOR THE GERONTOLOGY PROGRAM

Date: _____

Student's Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Tentative title of thesis: _____

Revision justification: _____

The following graduate faculty members are recommended to The Graduate School as master thesis committee members for the above-named student and each one has agreed to assume this responsibility:

Please sign below

Graduate Faculty Status
(Member, Assoc, Adjunct)

Chair: _____

Member: _____

Member: _____

Member: _____

Program Director: _____

Date: _____

Original to Student File:
 C: Program Director
 Committee Chair/members
 Student



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SIGNED PROPOSAL DEFENSE FORM
MASTER THESIS THE GERONTOLOGY PROGRAM

Date: _____

Student's Name: _____

Tentative title of thesis: _____

The following graduate faculty members have approved the above student's thesis proposal and recommend the student to move forward to complete the thesis:

Please sign below

Graduate Faculty Status
(Member, Assoc, Adjunct)

Chair: _____

Member: _____

Member: _____

Member: _____

Original to Student File:

- C: Program Director
- Committee Chair/members
- Student



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SIGNED THESIS ORAL DEFENSE FORM
MASTER THESIS THE GERONTOLOGY PROGRAM

Date: _____

Student's Name: _____

Title of thesis: _____

The following graduate faculty members have approved the student's thesis and thesis defense and recommend the student for graduation:

Please sign below

Graduate Faculty Status
(Member, Assoc, Adjunct)

Chair: _____

Member: _____

Member: _____

Member: _____

Original to The Graduate School:

- C: Student File
- Program Director
- Committee Chair/members
- Student