

CSD Master's Degree Culminating Experience and Thesis Option [Handbook Appendix 3B]

Thesis Option

The optional master's thesis is a scholarly, well-formulated project that presents original research conducted by the master's student. A thesis includes a carefully argued, integrated summary of current research with primary sources for citations and then presents novel analysis of existing or newly collected data to answer novel research questions.

Every master's student in CSD will complete the comprehensive exam whether the thesis option is selected or not.

Thesis Process

Graduate students will work in collaboration with a selected faculty member in a shared area of interest (and faculty expertise) on an agreed-upon, feasible thesis topic that is substantial and meaningful. The primary faculty advisor works closely with the master's student to help focus the research, help the student to design the methods and to analyze the data, as well as edit drafts of the written manuscript.

A thesis committee of at least three members will lend content or methodology expertise. At least one of the other committee members must be from the School of CSD; the third member of the committee may be from within or outside of CSD. Committee membership shall be negotiated with the primary faculty advisor. The primary faculty advisor will work most directly with the student, and the roles of other committee members can be negotiated at the prospectus meeting.

The written thesis will be reviewed by the thesis committee, and students can expect to edit multiple drafts before the final written thesis manuscript is approved by the committee. In addition to the written thesis, master's students will also prepare and present a poster session at a CSD research forum, open to all, where they will summarize and explain their study and field questions in a professional research context.

Suggested Thesis Timeline:

Semester	To Do
1. Fall (first year)	N/A (get acquainted with the program!)
2. Spring (first year)	Begin discussing topics with faculty in areas of interest. Review literature on your topic. Apply for thesis no later than May 1.
3. Summer (first year)	Narrow your topic and formulate research questions. Complete literature review. Begin to formulate methods, based on previous literature.
4. Fall (second year)	Conduct prospectus meeting with thesis committee. Sign contract. <u>Early</u> : Finalize your methods, measurements, and analysis plan; submit IRB proposal. Allow at least 6-8 weeks for IRB approval. <u>Late</u> : Begin data collection.
5. Spring (second year)	<u>Early</u> : Complete data collection. Analyze data. Complete written manuscript <u>Late</u> : Complete final, edited manuscript. Poster presentation and oral defense.

What are the formal steps to completing a thesis?

1. Apply to complete a thesis with a specified primary faculty advisor in CSD. The application will require you to declare your interest, motivation to complete a thesis, describe your interest and focus, and explain a feasible timeline for completion. Faculty will approve or deny each application individually. Applications must be submitted no later than May 1 of the first year (earlier is acceptable).
2. Literature Review. An important starting point for any research is to conduct a thorough and comprehensive review of the relevant literature related to your current thesis. You must demonstrate that you have completed a thorough search and integrated the existing literature on your topic in order to both build on the existing literature and refine your thesis research questions. Your literature review should “tell the story” as you build on the previous literature and develop your research questions. You will work with your advisor to determine the best format to present your review of primary literature sources to demonstrate you have synthesized the existing literature on your topic.
3. Prospectus Meeting with thesis committee. This informal meeting will be an opportunity to verbally articulate your literature synthesis and research plans,

and to get feedback from your full committee. The prospectus meeting concludes with a written, signed contract that specifies the plan and the timeline for project completion. You and the committee will also come to agreement about the best option for the final product (manuscript or traditional thesis). This contract also specifies your commitment to completing the proposed project.

4. IRB Ethics Training *must* be completed prior to submitting your IRB proposal. This training is conducted online and usually takes 3-4 hours to complete. Students should save the certificate of completion for their files and provide a certificate of completion to the primary faculty advisor for the project.
5. IRB Proposal *must* be submitted before beginning any research with human participants. Your faculty advisor will assist with the IRB proposal, which needs to specify all of your procedures, instruments, consent, and measures. Allow at least 6-8 weeks for approval prior to beginning your study!
6. Conduct your study. Once you have IRB approval, you may begin your study. You will have worked out a feasible plan and timeline for completion. Our guideline is that once you begin data collection, you must complete the thesis project (see above). Once you have gathered your data, the next step is to analyze your data, summarize your findings, make conclusions, and discuss the findings.
7. Written Product*. You will have discussed the options for your final product with your committee at the prospectus meeting. The written product will be completed as either a manuscript for journal submission or a traditional thesis. You will work with your primary faculty advisor on the majority of the writing, and can expect several rounds of revisions and edits. The written manuscript will then be presented to the full thesis committee for review, who may suggest additional edits or revisions. The committee will reach consensus about a pass/no pass score for the written product.
8. Poster Presentation & Oral Defense. The student will also disseminate the thesis findings at a public research forum to describe the study, major findings, and contributions to the field. Students will have 30 minutes privately with the thesis committee for the oral presentation and Q&A defense before a public presentation. Students are also encouraged to submit the project to the OSHA state conference or other appropriate conference venues, typically as a poster session. The committee will come to consensus about a pass/no pass score for the oral defense.

Options for the written thesis product

The master's student, in consultation with the primary faculty advisor must reach agreement with the thesis committee about the final written product with two options available:

Option A: Manuscript

If the student and committee agree that the final written product will be a manuscript to be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for publication, the student will work with the primary faculty advisor to select an appropriate journal for submission, and will follow publication guidelines outlined by that journal. In order for the thesis to be considered "complete" and for a pass/no pass grade to be assigned, the manuscript must be suitable for submission, and will have been submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for publication. The student should discuss with the thesis committee how edits, revisions, and resubmissions will be handled to take the manuscript through to publication. Note that the ideal outcome is that the manuscript be published in the journal, but for purposes of the thesis requirements, submission is sufficient.

Option B: Traditional Thesis

If the student and committee agree that the final written product will be a traditional thesis (not submitted for publication), the student will submit the final written product to the Pacific University library archives (Common Knowledge) following APA formatting. In order for the thesis to be considered "complete" and for a pass/no pass grade to be assigned, the manuscript must have been submitted to Common Knowledge. The traditional thesis consists of the following components:

- Title page
- Signature page
- Abstract
- Acknowledgements
- Table of Contents
- Chapter 1: Significance/Introduction
- Chapter 2: Review of the Literature
- Chapter 3: Methodology
- Chapter 4: Results
- Chapter 5: Discussion
- Appendices
- References

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the Thesis Option

What is “original research”?

Master’s theses will present original research, meaning they cannot simply summarize an existing body of literature. The student completing a thesis will analyze empirical data by either gathering his/her own data or analyzing a data set not previously analyzed by a faculty member (existing data may also be obtained from a source outside Pacific if approved by the primary faculty advisor). There is no restriction on research methodology, which could include surveys, focus groups, case studies, single-case experimental designs, group designs, and/or qualitative methods. The research questions must be meaningful and significant such that they would contribute to a body of knowledge in the profession.

Who should do a thesis?

A thesis is not for every student. A master’s student with a strong writing background who is interested in clinical or basic science research should consider a thesis. The topic must match an area of interest and expertise of a current faculty member within CSD at Pacific University. Students particularly interested in potentially pursuing a PhD in the future are encouraged to consider the thesis option (NOTE: a master’s thesis is not required to pursue the Ph.D. later!). The thesis is an “over and above” option for students who wish to develop further expertise.

When should I start thinking about a thesis?

You should begin discussing the thesis option with a faculty member in your first year of the graduate program. You should narrow down your topic and research questions no later than the summer between the first and second year.

What is the IRB?

IRB stands for the Institutional Review Board. The IRB at Pacific University is our local research ethics body that must approve your proposed methods before you begin your research to ensure you are meeting current ethical standards for conducting research with humans. This applies even if you are using an existing data set. You will be required to complete a three-hour online training on behavioral research ethics developed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) before you submit an IRB proposal, and you will work with your faculty advisor to submit the IRB proposal that describes your research. Find out more about the Pacific University IRB online at: www.pacificu.edu/irb

How will the thesis be evaluated?

The thesis will be graded Pass/No Pass, separately for both the final written product and the poster presentation. The members of the thesis committee will reach consensus. A student must pass both components to pass the thesis. If a student does not pass the thesis, s/he meets with the primary advisor to make a plan.

What if I don't finish in time for May graduation?

Students who opt for the thesis will register for three credits of CSD 599 (Thesis) in the final semester (spring of the second year). If you do not complete both portions of the thesis (written and oral), you will need to take an incomplete grade, and make arrangements with your thesis committee to complete the thesis within one year.

IMPORTANT NOTE: You cannot apply for your provisional SLP license or begin your clinical fellowship (CF) until you have completed your master's degree (i.e., no incomplete grades).

What if I change my mind?

The thesis is optional, and requires a commitment from the student and the committee. Several check-points are in place to help support the student with making the best individualized decision about whether or not to complete a thesis. However, a student may consult with his/her committee and withdraw at any point before data collection (or data analysis if using an existing data set) has begun. Once data collection has begun, the student must complete the thesis. Unforeseen circumstances may arise; all concerns shall be discussed with the thesis committee.