

# Thesis/Dissertation Process: From Proposal to Defense.

The Graduate School

University of Rhode Island

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# THESIS/DISSERTATION PROCESS: FROM PROPOSAL TO DEFENSE

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a description of the steps required by the URI Graduate School for the preparation and approval of a thesis or dissertation. The entire process is covered, from the thesis proposal to the defense and publication of the thesis. The appendices contain online resources.

If you have any other questions, please contact the Graduate School's main office at 874-2262. For convenience, the document will focus on the thesis format, except when special conditions applying to a dissertation are described.

## THESIS PROPOSAL

### PURPOSE

A thesis proposal states a problem to be investigated and describes how the research will be performed and reported. An approved thesis proposal documents an agreement between the student, the academic department, and the Graduate School regarding the contents of a satisfactory thesis or dissertation. Approval signifies that it meets the standards of the University of Rhode Island for the desired degree. The preparation and writing of the thesis are of utmost importance and must comply with the agreed-upon research. Although the student is expected to seek guidance in the choice of topic and the method of solving the problem involved, responsibility for the proposal lies with the student who will, as much as possible, work independently and demonstrate the ability to plan and outline an acceptable research project. Adherence to the guidelines given here should assure the student that all information necessary for the satisfactory evaluation of the plans for master's or doctoral research will be included in the proposal.

### FORMAT

The thesis proposal should present the required information concisely and clearly. The ability to describe concisely a research problem and methodology is one of the skills that the proposal process is designed to develop. Therefore, all thesis proposals are limited in

length to the signature cover-sheet plus 15 or fewer double-spaced, single-sided or double-sided, numbered pages in a font size no smaller than 12 point. Proposals longer than this will not be accepted, however, appendices and references are not included in the 15-page limit, and must be numbered separately, using lower-case Roman numerals. Proposals will also be returned for revision if they do not contain the appropriate sections described in the Contents section of this document.

## CONTENTS

Thesis Proposals shall contain the following sections, presented in the order shown:

### A. Title of the Study

This is the title as the student conceives it at the time the proposal is submitted. It should be no more than 100 characters in length. This title must match exactly the title on the thesis proposal approval form. As the research develops, minor rephrasing of the title may prove better suited to the work. In such cases, the most satisfactory one will be used for the thesis, but in no case will a title that deviates substantially from the one approved in the original proposal be approved unless a revised proposal with the new title has already been approved. Any title used must be consistent with the contents and subject of the thesis.

### B. Statement of the Problem

Limit the statement, if possible, to two or three sentences, and note in precise language exactly what is to be investigated. To amplify the statement, it is usually desirable to list:

- The scope or limitations of the problem;
- Either one or more hypotheses the research seeks to test or the objectives expected as a result of the study.

Major assumptions that underlie both the study as a whole and the methodology to be followed should be indicated.

### C. Justification for and Significance of the Study

This section of the proposal includes:

- A brief statement of the reason for the selection of the problem;
- The relation of the principal literature to the proposal;
- An explanation of the study's importance to the advancement of knowledge and its significance to the student.

The problem selected should be substantial enough to constitute a good example of a report of a scholarly investigation. Completion of a project or several unrelated projects do not satisfy this requirement. At the PhD level the work should constitute a significant increase in the pool of knowledge.

#### D. Methodology or Procedures

This section describes the activities necessary to achieve the objectives. Methods should flow naturally from the problems and objectives, and may include depending on the field of study:

- A research design;
- General characteristics of the study population;
- Location or setting in which the study will take place, calendar events in carrying out the study;
- Sampling design and procedures;
- Data collection schedule;
- Brief description of instruments and tools for collecting data (validity, reliability, and pre-testing of the data collecting instruments);
- Definition of the most important terms and concepts;
- Data processing procedures and procedures of data analysis as appropriate.

#### E. Resources Required

This section of the proposal details the resources needed for the successful completion of the study and an indication of their accessibility to the student proposing to use them. Books, letters, manuscripts, raw data, technical reports, laboratory equipment, and existing and proposed measuring devices, as well as other facilities, are all possible aids to and resources for research and should be included as they pertain to the solution of the problem under investigation.

#### F. Literature Cited in the Proposal

The most persistent difficulty with thesis proposals is lack of evidence that a search of the literature took place in framing the problem to be studied. The absence of evidence that the scholarly literature in the field has been consulted might be due to one or more of the following reasons:

1. That it was omitted because the student was not aware that it was required;
2. That the student was unfamiliar with the library as a resource in developing the research proposal;
3. That, having searched the literature of the field, the student found that the problem was unique, and therefore, could not be documented. If so, it is important to note where the literature stops and the proposed research starts, itself an intriguing scholarly problem.
4. That the thesis problem has been provided “ready-made” as a spin-off from a larger study, so that no literature search appeared to be needed. One

might question the wisdom of thus isolating the student from the scholarly literature, however valid and important the research topic.

## RESEARCH INTEGRITY

The URI Graduate School maintains the highest ethical standards in research and works with the Office of Research Integrity to ensure compliance with federal regulation guiding the ethical conduct of research. There are three programs overseen by the Office of Research Integrity:

1. Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR)
2. Institutional Review Board for Research involving Human Subjects (IRB)
3. Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee for research involving Vertebrate animals (IACUC)

All students who are writing a master's thesis or a dissertation are required to complete training in the Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR). This training must be completed BEFORE the submission of the thesis or dissertation proposal and certified by the Office of Research Integrity by a signature on the thesis/dissertation approval form.

For more information, please visit the [RCR website](#).

For students whose research involves human subjects or animals, the following additional steps are required to ensure compliance with URI ethical standards and federal regulations:

**Research Involving Human Subjects**, including the use of questionnaires to collect data, must be approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before the submission of the thesis/dissertation proposal to the Graduate School. For more information, please visit the [IRB website](#).

**Research Involving Vertebrate Animals** must be reviewed and pre-approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) before the submission of the thesis/dissertation proposal to the Graduate School. For more information, please visit the [IACUC website](#).

These approvals (RCR, IRB, IACUC) must be obtained during the thesis proposal process, and must be obtained prior to submission to the Graduate School.

## Submission to the Graduate School

There are two required items for submission of the thesis/dissertation proposal:

1. Digital copy of the proposal.
2. The Thesis/Dissertation Proposal Approval Form, signed by the committee members, the Office of Research Integrity, and the Graduate Program Director

Thesis proposals should be submitted before substantial research has been completed. Typically, it should be submitted before or during the first semester in which the student registers for research credits. In all cases, however, the proposal must be submitted at least one semester before the semester in which the thesis itself is to be submitted and defended. For dissertations, the proposal must be submitted at least six (6) months prior to the defense.

Students must submit a Thesis Proposal Approval form or a Dissertation Proposal Approval Form, with the required signatures, along with the proposal. These forms are signed by the student's thesis/dissertation committee, the Office of Research Integrity (to certify appropriate approval for RCR and if necessary IRB or IACUC), and the Graduate Program Director.

The Graduate School no longer requires submission of a hard copy Proposal." The proposal itself, along with the Dissertation/Thesis Proposal approval form can be submitted electronically to [gradforms@etal.uri.edu](mailto:gradforms@etal.uri.edu).

The Dean or Associate Dean of the Graduate School is charged with responsibility for review and approval or rejection of all proposals. Proposals that do not meet the standard of the Graduate School will be returned to the student for revision and resubmission. Once approved, one copy of the approved proposal is sent to the department and the original plus one copy is retained in the student's file at the Graduate School. The student is notified via e-mail once their proposal is approved.

### Revised Proposals

If, as the research proceeds, a significant change in subject or methodology becomes necessary, a revised proposal should be submitted. Sometimes an abbreviated format can be used for such changes. The student or major professor should contact the Graduate School for assistance in such cases.

## SET-UP OF THE DEFENSE

Students must submit the Request to schedule an oral defense form:

Thesis: [Request to Schedule Oral Defense of a Master's Thesis](#)

Dissertation: [Request to Schedule Oral Defense of a Doctoral Dissertation](#)

To set up the defense, the request to schedule an oral defense form (found on the Graduate School website) must be signed by the entire oral defense committee. This form should be signed and submitted to the Graduate School electronically as specified on the form. Students are responsible to distribute defendable copies directly to faculty members. The Graduate School no longer requires submission of a hard defendable copy to our office

Once the set-up is complete, a memo will be sent to all parties regarding the details of the defense.

## PREPARATION OF THESIS

### ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION

All theses and dissertations must be submitted online to ProQuest. The uploaded documents must be in pdf format. This way, the document will be unambiguously represented by the uploaded file. The submission process is initiated on the web page. Be sure to complete the submission. Merely uploading a document will not place your work in the formatter's work queue.

## STANDARD AND MANUSCRIPT FORMAT

The thesis may be in either of two general formats: Standard or Manuscript.

### STANDARD FORMAT

If a thesis is not being prepared for publication in a specific journal, then the standard format should be used. The work will contain a single theme which may be organized into chapters and which **must** include a bibliography at the end that includes all the literature consulted in the work. The use of appendices is discouraged in the standard format except when it is necessary to explain essential elements in the main body of the thesis or dissertation. Examples would be:

The student would provide equations in the main body but place a lengthy digital computer program in an appendix.

The student might describe an instrument's use in the main body but place manufacturer's drawings and specifications of the instrument in an appendix.

The student may give the primary tabulated results in the main body but relegate extensive tables of raw preliminary data to an appendix.

Appendices appear at the end of the text, before the Bibliography. A Bibliography must also be provided which contains **ALL** the literature used for the entire work. The Bibliography must have complete citations to all works used; no abbreviations are allowed.

## MANUSCRIPT FORMAT

Manuscript format should be used when a thesis is being prepared for publication, or if it is already under review or if it has been published. A thesis in manuscript format contains one or more themes which may be organized into chapters (or manuscripts) which when combined constitute the entire work.

The use of chapter headings is preferred. The manuscript(s) should avoid extreme brevity and be understandable, even if this necessitates some condensing of the work afterward for submission to a scholarly journal. Although the information and material in a manuscript(s) may be identical to the material submitted to or published in a journal, the examining committee may require changes. A thesis or dissertation using the Manuscript format often contains appropriate appendices needed for detailed and ancillary information required by the University, but not usually presented in a published paper.

Each manuscript should be preceded by a page describing its publication status, co-authors, and the intended journal. Two examples are given Appendix 1. This page will be listed in the Table of Contents as the beginning of that manuscript. Each manuscript should also contain its own Abstract, Preface, and References, as they appear in the version already published, or to be submitted for publication. A Bibliography containing all the literature contributing to the entire work may be added at the end, but it is not required by the Graduate School.

The recommended organization for the manuscript format is as follows:

Title Page (Not numbered)

Approval Page (not numbered)

Abstract (Listed as page ii in the Table of Contents, but not numbered)

Acknowledgment

Dedication (optional)  
Preface  
Table of Contents  
List of Figures  
List of Tables

Manuscript(s)

Appendices (typical)

- A. Introduction and review of the problem
- B. Details of methods, instrumentation, techniques, etc.
- C. Speculative discussion
- D. Theoretical implications

The Preface should state that manuscript format is in use and contain other introductory remarks. The Abstract should summarize the entire thesis, including manuscript(s) and appendices. Each manuscript should contain its own List of References or Literature Cited section. Except for the text portion of a thesis written in the Manuscript form, the requirements and guidelines on thesis preparation as outlined in the Graduate School website shall govern.

The student and their major professor decide which of the two formats should be used. The major professor also supervises the preparation of the thesis. Regardless of style and format all theses must be prepared in accordance with accepted standards of academic integrity, including proper citation and attribution of all material which is not the original product of the writer.

## THESIS FORMAT

Regardless of the format, a thesis must adhere to the following guidelines.

## PHYSICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>Font size</b> | Must be at least 10 point. We recommend 12 point. Typeface of an unusual or large format is not allowed. The only exception to this requirement is the use of special symbols required for scientific or mathematical expression, figures, graphs, and charts. One font size must be used throughout the thesis/dissertation including titles, and headings. |
| <b>Spacing</b>   | The entire thesis is double-spaced. However, figure text, captions, long quotations, and footnotes may be single-spaced. Reference and bibliographic entries may also be single-spaced within each citation, but must be double-spaced between each entry.   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Sections/<br/>Chapters<br/>Paper</b> | All major sections, such as chapters, acknowledgments, appendices, etc. , begin on a new page.<br>8. 5 x 11" white acid-free, paper. Unbound. Only one side of the paper may be used. Off-white or colored paper is not allowed.  |
| <b>Margins</b>                          | At least 1½" on left and 1" on all other sides. Margins may be greater than these specifications. The entire thesis must follow these specifications.   |
| <b>Page Numbering</b>                   | Must be consecutive throughout. Do not number the title page, approval page or abstract page(s). Preliminary page counting (only) begins with the first "Abstract" page being counted as ii. Actual pagination numbering begins with the first page after the abstract. Text begins with "1" (Arabic numeral). All pages except title page, approval page, and abstract must be numbered. Additionally, all tables and figures must be numbered consecutively as they appear throughout the thesis.                               |
| <b>Placement of<br/>Page Numbers</b>    | All preliminary page numbers are placed at the bottom of the page, centered, ½" from the bottom. Numbers within the body of the work may be placed in one of two locations. Whichever location within the text is chosen, the location must remain consistent throughout the document. If numbered at the top, numbers must be at least ½" from the top of the page and at least 1" from the right hand edge. If numbered at the bottom, at least ½" from bottom of page and centered. No dashes are allowed around page numbers. |
| <b>Headings</b>                         | No running headings are allowed.  |

#### ORDER OF ELEMENTS

For a thesis in **Standard Format**, the elements must appear in the following order, and follow the indicated numbering scheme:

**Preliminary material** is numbered in lower case Roman numerals, starting with the Approval Page. However, the Approval Page and the Abstract do not have page numbers on them. The elements must appear in this order:

1. Title Page
2. Approval Page
3. Abstract
4. Acknowledgments
5. Dedication (optional)
6. Preface (optional)

7. Table of Contents
8. List of Figures
9. List of Tables

**The main text** is numbered in Arabic numerals starting with 1 on the first page of the text, and ending with the last page of the Bibliography. These elements must appear in this order:

1. Text
2. List of References (optional)
3. Appendices (optional)
4. Bibliography (For Standard Format, this must appear as the last section. Optional for Manuscript Format.)

#### DESCRIPTION OF ELEMENTS

##### Title

The Title Page must conform to the Title Page sample included in Appendix 1. It must be double spaced. No bold face or italic fonts are allowed, except that italics should be used for foreign language words such as names of species, for example. It should follow the basic page layout and spacing as the sample.

##### Approval Page

The Approval Page included in the online document will have the typed names of the core committee and the Dean of the Graduate School without signature lines or digital signatures. A different Approval Page, along with a Library Rights Statement, will be created starting from the Gradforms website. Be sure to choose the specific Signature/Approval Page that corresponds to your degree type (PhD, DBA, MS or MA). These forms will be processed online and will not appear in your published thesis or dissertation.

##### Abstract

Immediately following the approval sheet, each copy of the thesis must contain an abstract which will contain a definite statement of the problem involved in the thesis, a description of the methods used in the development of the thesis, and a summary of the results of the findings reported in the thesis.

##### Acknowledgments

An Acknowledgments section must follow the Abstract. You must mention your major professor.

## Table of Contents

Wording in the Table of Contents must be exactly the same as the chapter or text headings. Page numbers must be accurate. All items following the Approval Page must be included in the Table of Contents.

## Illustrative Material

All graphs, figures, charts, diagrams, computer printouts, photographs, and illustrations must be clear and legible. Computer-generated illustrations are acceptable if they are clear. The illustrative pages must meet all margin requirements.

## Captions

Captions for illustrative materials (figures, tables, charts, graphs, photographs, drawings, etc...), may be placed on the illustration page. The page must be numbered consecutively following the format used throughout the text, centered (on the bottom) or in the upper right hand corner, according to the rules for the location of page numbers.

## High Resolution Materials

To reduce the size of the pdf file, high resolution figures may be added as supplementary files during digital submission. Thumbnail figures may be used in the pdf document.

## Lists of Tables and/or Figures

Lists of Table and/or Figures (if used) follow the Table of Contents page. Page numbers (as they appear in the text) should be given for each table or figure.

## List of References

A List of References is not required by all disciplines, but if used appear at the end of each chapter. This "List" is confined to those works mentioned in the chapter or manuscript in order of their appearance. It is located at the end of each chapter or manuscript. In Standard Format, even if you use a "List of References" at the ends of chapters or manuscripts, you MUST provide a complete Bibliography at the end of the thesis.

## Appendices

Appendices are not required by all disciplines, but if used appear at the end of the thesis text, before the Bibliography. Appendices are numbered consecutively as part of the text and are listed in the Table of Contents.

## Bibliography

Every thesis in Standard Format must end with a Bibliography which lists all the sources used or consulted in writing the entire thesis and is placed at the very end of the work.

The complete citations are arranged alphabetically by last name of the author. Individual citations are not numbered. No abbreviations in titles of published works will be accepted. The full title of a book, journal, website, proceedings, or any other published work must be *italicized* or underlined. Citations must follow standards set by the style manual that the student is using. The bibliography for URI theses is not broken into categories.

#### Web Page Citation

If a thesis contains citations to a web site, following the author and title attribution, the entry must also include the complete URL (Uniform Resource Locator) of the web site and **the date the web site was accessed**.

## SUMMARY OF REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

The following documents are required by the Graduate School for Master's Theses:

Your final submission will be via email to [gerheim@uri.edu](mailto:gerheim@uri.edu). The text of this email should include your student ID number, and the short title of your work. The short title must be 40 characters or less, and it should "make sense". It will appear in the commencement program. A digitally signed Approval Page and a Digitally signed Library Rights Statement must be attached to the email. These forms are available via links on this [checklist](#). **Do not send this email until your committee's comments have been incorporated and your format has been "Accepted" at [www.etdadmin.com/uri](http://www.etdadmin.com/uri).**

#### Electronically submitted copy

A PDF version of the thesis or dissertation must be uploaded via the ProQuest web site, and be approved for upload by the URI administrator via that web site. The formatting process is iterative. The formatter will communicate with the student via email. If you wish to work on your thesis or dissertation up to the deadline, please be aware that you may have to communicate with the formatter online for a few days.

#### Approval Page and Library Rights Statement

A digitally signed Approval Page, along with a digitally signed Library Rights Statement, will be created starting from the Gradforms website. Be sure to choose the specific Approval Page that corresponds to your degree type (PhD, DBA, MS or MA). These forms will be processed online and will not appear in your published thesis or dissertation.

## **Survey of Earned Doctorates**

Doctoral students (only) must complete the Survey of Earned Doctorates. The Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) is a federal agency survey conducted for the National Science Foundation and five other federal agencies (National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Education, National Endowment for the Humanities, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration).

We will require you to complete the survey online at <https://sed-ncses.org/GradDateRouter.aspx>. Access is password protected, and you may exit the survey and complete it later. The Graduate School will receive an email confirmation when you complete the survey. If you don't complete it, you will be reminded when you submit your final submission email.

## APPENDIX 1: EXTERNAL LINKS

Here are links and URL's for a number of useful documents and pages.

- [Checklist for Final Submissions](#)
- [Formatting Guidelines](#)