

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A MASTER'S THESIS FOR THE M.A. DEGREE

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What is a Master's Thesis?

A master's thesis is a piece of original scholarship written under the direction of a faculty advisor. A master's thesis is similar to a doctoral dissertation, but it is generally shorter and more narrowly focused. As a rule of thumb, a master's thesis should be publishable as a single article, though it might be longer than a typical article; a doctoral dissertation is generally equivalent to at least three articles. Students who chose to write a master's thesis rather than a bibliographic essay often do so because they are interested in pursuing further research, for instance in a doctoral program in political science or another discipline, or as a researcher in a public agency.

Like a good journal article, a master's thesis will respond to a debate in the political science literature, and will bring new evidence or arguments to bear upon the topic.

How Long Should it Be? How Long Does it Take?

A master's thesis is generally 40-80 pages, not including the bibliography. However, the length will vary according to the topic and the method of analysis, so the appropriate length will be determined by you and your committee. Students who write a master's thesis generally do so over two semesters.

Finding a Topic

Students who are interested in writing a master's thesis should begin thinking about possible topics early in their academic program. Good research questions often have their origins in seminar papers or class discussions. Keep an idea file where you jot down potential research ideas. Be on the look out for new data that might help provide new insights into a topic, or for past research that might be productively replicated in other circumstances.

Your Advisor and Your Committee

In order to write a master's thesis you must find a faculty member who is willing to be your thesis advisor. Faculty are not obliged to advise you but they are generally willing to do so for students who have clear ideas and who seem to have the necessary follow-

through to successfully complete a thesis. Students most often wind up working with a faculty member who taught them for a course, but this is not necessarily the case.

A master's committee consists of 3 faculty members. One member may be from outside the Department of Political Science. Your faculty advisor can help you assemble this committee. Your advisor will be your chief contact while you are writing the master's thesis, but you should stay in touch with the other members of the committee especially so that they are aware when you are close to completion. When you have a polished draft that is approved by your faculty advisor, you will arrange to have an oral defense of the thesis. The usual result of a defense is that the thesis is approved pending some more or less minor changes.

When scheduling the defense, please remember to allow time for faculty members to read the thesis after you give it to them: they cannot necessarily drop everything to read a 50 page document if you give it to them only 1-2 days before the defense.

Some other Formal Requirements

Follow the formatting requirements for Theses and Dissertations listed on the web site of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences.

You must maintain continuous enrollment while working on the master's thesis.

Be sure to check the schedule for graduation so that you hold your oral defense in time to complete and submit your finished thesis.

If you are planning to conduct interviews, surveys or do other research involving human subjects you **MUST** obtain prior approval from the University's Human Subject's Committee. You can find out more about this on the University's web page:
http://www.research.uh.edu/PCC/Protection_of_Human_Subjects.html