

## **THE MASTER'S THESIS**

A research-based Master's thesis is required of all HDFS doctoral students who enter our program. If you enter without a Master's degree, or with a non-thesis Master's degree, we expect you to complete your thesis by the end of your 2<sup>nd</sup> year in our program.

This requirement exists to give you practical experience in the design, implementation, interpretation, and written description of a research project. We strongly encourage you to write your thesis as a publishable manuscript.

### **The Thesis Committee**

For the Master's thesis you must select a 2-person thesis committee, consisting of a chair (usually your adviser) and a 'second reader'. Both committee members must approve your research proposal, supervise data collection, and evaluate the completed project as fulfilling the thesis requirement. You should form the committee in consultation with your chair/advisor. The student's chair/advisor should write a memo to the Thesis Checker or Director of Graduate Programs identifying the student and the members of the student's committee. The Master's thesis committee is approved by the Department Head. This step in the thesis process should be completed as soon as you have identified a thesis topic (no later than the end of your 1<sup>st</sup> year in our program).

### **Planning the Thesis**

Work with your chair/advisor to identify a thesis topic and prepare a research proposal by the end of year one. The proposal (approximately 10 pages) should include a succinct review of the literature building towards your research questions and method. Most commonly, thesis proposals are directly linked to your chair/advisor's past or present research, although it is acceptable to propose an independent project. The research plan should be approved by both your chair/advisor and the second reader before data collection or analysis occurs. In addition to rigor, your proposal should be evaluated in terms of feasibility; you should be able to complete the proposed research within 2 years.

All research must be approved by the University of Illinois IRB before data collection begins. The timeline of obtaining permission should be considered when planning the thesis.

### **Expediting Completion of the Master's Thesis**

HDFS expects students to complete their MS in 2 years (The Graduate College requires that all Master's degree requirements must be completed within 5 years of the 1<sup>st</sup> registration). Getting students through their MS work within 2 years largely depends on the interactions between students and their advisors. The following guidelines are recommended:

1. Follow the appropriate degree checklist closely so that you complete your MS coursework on time while working on the thesis.
2. Follow the suggested timeline for proposing and completing your thesis by the end of your second year.
3. Propose a thesis that can be realistically completed within the recommended time frame. Consider using existing data so that you are not delayed by lengthy IRB procedures or data

collection. If collecting your own data, the summer after your 1<sup>st</sup> year is a good time to start.

4. Write your thesis as a publishable manuscript (30 pages max, including references).
5. Develop a professional relationship with your adviser/chair. This includes openly addressing any questions or concerns in a timely and constructive manner. You may always consult with the Director of Graduate Programs for advice on managing professional relationships.

### **Submitting the Master's Thesis**

Your thesis must be approved by your committee. Both your chair/adviser and your second reader must sign the *Certificate of Committee Approval* (aka "red bordered form"). It should be noted that failure to complete the thesis or thesis equivalency satisfactorily may result in termination from the program. After your thesis is approved by your advisor/chair and second-reader, you must submit it to the HDFS Thesis Checker for our department approval process.

The Thesis Checker for HDFS is currently Dr. Bob Hughes ([hughesro@illinois.edu](mailto:hughesro@illinois.edu))

Early in the semester when you intend to submit, clarify submission deadlines with the HDFS Thesis Checker. To ensure that you graduate within the desired semester, you must submit your correctly formatted thesis to the HDFS Thesis Checker at least 3 weeks prior to the Graduate College deadline. He or she will help you complete the required *Application for Degree* form.

Before submitting your thesis to the HDFS Thesis Checker, you must format your thesis in accordance with Graduate College style requirements (see <http://www.grad.illinois.edu/graduate-college-thesis-requirements>).

In addition, you must follow HDFS formatting rules. We expect you to follow the publication guidelines of either the American Psychology Association (APA) or the American Sociological Association (ASA). One important difference between APA and Graduate College format is the placement of tables and figures. The placement of tables and figures must conform to the Graduate College requirements.

The HDFS Thesis Checker WILL NOT accept incorrectly formatted theses. It is your responsibility to know and use the required formats. Consult with the Thesis Checker *before* submitting if you have any questions.

The HDFS Department Head gives final approval to all Master's theses by signing the *Department Format Approval* form after a correctly formatted document has been submitted to the Thesis Checker.

The thesis must be submitted to the Graduate College, after approval by the thesis committee, thesis checker, and the Department Head. A checklist to complete before depositing the thesis is available at <http://www.grad.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/masterschecklist.pdf>. Consult with the HDFS Thesis Checker if you have any questions about forms.

An additional copy of your thesis **MUST** be submitted to the Thesis Checker before the degree will be granted.