MASTER’S THESIS GUIDE

The master’s thesis is the final culmination of your work toward the degree. It constitutes an analysis of a specific topic that engages with the existing literature in media and which makes an argument supported by evidence and using the methodologies of the discipline.

You will have one faculty member as a thesis advisor who will read and approve the final version of your thesis. (Students wishing to have their thesis read by a second faculty member may contact the graduate advisor to make this request.)

Eligibility

Students must have a 3.75 GPA and the commitment of a faculty advisor in order to choose the thesis option. Some years, the department will offer a thesis class in the fall in order to guide students through the thesis writing process. Taking the course alone does not guarantee that a student has been approved to write a thesis.

Thesis Proposal

You should begin with a short proposal (500-750 words, 3 – 5 pages) that defines your topic and approach. A thesis proposal should have a tentative title, a discussion of your topic, argument, the kind of questions you seek to investigate, and the contribution you feel your analysis of this topic will make to the field. It is not expected that you will know all these answers before you have actually written your thesis, but a proposal should nevertheless begin to suggest them. It can be particularly helpful if you are working from a paper that you have written and submitted for a class.

Select a topic that is manageable within the limited framework of an MA thesis: to wit, 10,000 – 12,000 words, roughly 40 – 50 pages. Take the concept of a journal article as the model to work towards.

Topics are yours to define, but they should aim to be as specific as possible. For example, a student interested in book publishing will want to narrow the subject temporally, geographically, or by genre in order to give the research workable parameters. A student who works in visual culture might compile a ‘visual archive,’ a collection of images that will be at the heart of the thesis—this could center on one image with other supporting images, or it could be a collection of images to compare or some combination.

See a list of thesis titles and abstracts from MCC MA alumni at http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/mcc/masters/thesis_abstracts.

Your thesis proposal should contain the following sections:

Research Question
Identify the major question, issue or problem the thesis will attempt to address. This should be a clear and succinct formulation of a researchable question.
You might ask yourself: what theoretically-relevant question do I want to answer with my research? What do I want to learn that I don’t already know about Media, Culture, and Communication?

**Background/Rationale**

Provide the necessary background and justifications for your research. Clearly state and describe the approach; mention appropriate references to the relevant literature.

You might ask yourself: which theories of media, culture, and communication will I use to frame this study and why? What are the limits or boundaries of this inquiry? What theoretical and/or practical issues (whether social, economic, political, individual, etc.) will this thesis address and why? What is original about your research?

**Methodology**

Identify and justify the specific methodology you will use to answer the research question. Reflect on the broad analytical approach you will use and on the school(s) of thought or models of scholarship that will inform your investigation of the problem. Comment on the kinds of information you will need to address the research question. Also specify the steps you will use to collect and interpret that information.

You might ask yourself: what sources will be reviewed and how will information from these sources be used? Why would these methods of gathering and analyzing be best suited to this thesis project? How will I analyze media content? If I plan to conduct interviews, who will be interviewed? What questions will I ask and how will I gain access? If I employ observation as a methodology, what social contexts will be observed and how will data be organized?

**Bibliography**

Identify the sources that you will draw from to inform your thesis, both theoretically and methodologically.

Note: there are a number of ways to correctly cite sources; choose one style and be consistent.

**Methodology and Human Subjects**

Depending on the thesis topic, you may want to take a course that provides training in the methods you plan to use for your thesis research. Many of the courses in the department of Media, Culture, and Communication are designated as methods courses. Some projects may require approval from the University Committee on Activities Involving Human Subjects (UCAIHS); see http://www.nyu.edu/ucaihs for information about this process. You should talk with your faculty sponsor about methodology before beginning your thesis research.

**Thesis Structure and Format**

A thesis is typically comprised of:

- An introduction
- A short literature review
- A discussion/analysis of your topic supported by evidence
- A conclusion
A bibliography (include all the sources that you used and read).

You should make clear in your introduction what your methodology is, what comprises the broader data sources that you are drawing on to make your argument (books, journal articles, images, websites, interviews, etc.), and the significance of the research question.

It is important to remember that a thesis makes an argument by means of examples: it does not survey a field, a history or otherwise narrate a story.

A literature review should make clear that you are well grounded in the existing literature that is relevant to your project. In the case of an interdisciplinary topic in media, culture, and communication, this often means defining three to four overlapping and interconnecting literatures that are important to your argument. A literature review should not summarize texts, but rather should engage with the particular representative texts, concepts, and arguments that are most important to your project. While it may make sense to use a literature review to critique those aspects of existing theoretical arguments with which you disagree, it is more useful to focus on those concepts that you find most useful to your project.

The final thesis must be typed, double spaced, formatted with normal margins, and have a title page. Illustrations must be identified in the text and have captions. Submission of other materials, eg. Film, slides, artwork may accompany the written thesis but may not substitute for it. Consult your advisor in choosing a style guide for citing your work. Common styles used in media, culture, and communication are MLA, Chicago, and APA.

**Thesis Completion and Approval**

Drafts of your thesis (or sections of your thesis) should be submitted throughout the semester. It is up to you and your advisor to develop an appropriate schedule. A complete penultimate draft must be submitted to your faculty sponsor by April 1 for spring theses and November 15 for fall theses.

When you are near completion:
  1) Contact the graduate advisor who will assist your faculty sponsor with the grade submission
  2) Download and complete the thesis approval form (including signatures from your faculty sponsor)
  3) Submit the form and a final copy of your thesis to the graduate advisor.

Some theses are completed in one semester. If you would like to extend your thesis beyond one semester, you must get approval from your faculty sponsor and talk with the graduate advisor.

*Updated February 2011*