

MFT PLAN OF THESIS/PROJECT COMPLETION

STAGE 1: CHOOSING A TOPIC/PROPOSAL

Year 1: Fall	
Goal	Plan
Explore Potential thesis topics/areas	
Year 1: Spring	
Goal	Plan
Narrow your interest: thesis topics/areas Choose Thesis Chair; develop plan for what should be completed during the summer	
Year 1: Summer	
Goals	Plan
Finalize area of interest Begin more systematic and in-depth reading of literature (use template provided in RM to organize lit review)	
STAGE 2: THESIS WRITING/DEFENSE/GRADUATION	
Year 2: Fall	
Goals:	Plan:
Complete full draft of Chapters 1-3 Work with Thesis Chair to revise	
Year 2: Spring	
Goals:	Plan:
Hold Proposal meeting Secure IRB permission Recruit participants Begin data collection (or analysis of secondary data)	
Year 2: Summer	
Goals:	Plan:
Finish data collection Begin data analysis (quan: develop code book; input data; clean data etc.) (qual: complete transcriptions and multiple readings/immersion; begin open coding)	
Year 3: Fall	
Goals:	Plan:
Finish analysis, results and discussion section OR Alternative manuscript option *check with Program Coordinator about Spring deadlines dates for Grad School/graduation	
Year 3: Spring	
Goals:	Plan:
Complete manuscript portion Submit Application for Degree Card on Hokie Spa by March 1st Meet with Program Coordinator to make changes to Plan of Study Finalize thesis with your thesis chair and contact Prog Coordinator Submit Final Exam Request online Defend Submit ETD online Complete revisions & submit for publication	

RESEARCH METHODS PROPOSAL COMPONENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Problem and its Setting

What problem are you investigating?

What is the larger context of the problem?

Significance

Why is it important study this problem?

What contribution to knowledge and/or practice will studying this problem make?

Rationale

Why study this problem this particular way?

Why use your particular design and approach?

E.G. Why are you using a survey to study a broad sample instead of interviewing a small group of participants in depth?

Theoretical Framework

What theoretical framework guides your study and how? Describe your theoretical framework and its application to this problem.

Purpose of the Study

What do you hope to accomplish by conducting this study?

Research Question/hypotheses

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview Paragraph for what will be reviewed

Outline

Section headings

5-6 bulleted citations for each section

Research Questions/Hypotheses

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Design of the study

How will you investigate this problem?

What type of design will be employed?

Study Participants

Who, how many, where and how recruited?

Procedures

Provide chronological, step-by-step description of data collection events including obtaining consent

Instruments

Describe methods of measuring constructs

For qualitative studies, outline your interview and proposed questions. Address issues of validity and reliability

Proposed Analyses

How you will analyze data?

Ch: 4: results

Present summary of findings

Ch 5: Discussion

Summary of findings with comparisons to initial literature review/existing studies; critical analysis & conjecture

Limitations

Clinical implications

Future studies

Alternative Option:Manuscript Format in place of Ch 4-5: 30 page journal article**

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

How do I decide on a thesis topic?

- You should pick a topic that is of interest to you because you will be spending a great deal of time immersed in it!
- You can do an “original” study in which you collect your own data or you can use a pre-existing data set. Most of the faculty have existing projects and are usually happy to get students involved in secondary data analysis.

How do I decide who should be my thesis chair?

- You are assigned to a temporary advisor when you enter the program. When it comes to choosing a thesis committee chairperson, you can elect to change to another faculty advisor if your topic better aligns with someone else’s area of expertise or for whatever other reason. You may also choose to make your temporary advisor your permanent thesis chairperson. Any change from temporary to permanent (even if it is the same person as advisor) requires a discussion with and agreement from the faculty member.
- It is not a big deal (no feelings are hurt!) if you ask a different professor to be your chair. Know however, that each faculty member is limited in the number of theses he/she can direct at one time.

What is the process of working with my chair to complete the proposal?

- You should schedule an initial meeting with your Chair to develop a timeline of your writing process (use the provided form). While all theses generally follow the format provided, Chairs may have different strategies for helping you to complete the process. Work closely with your Chair to determine what makes sense for your particular study.
- It is expected that after the plan is completed, you will provide the Chair with drafts of your thesis to critique. Committee members only see the final proposal—not iterations in process. This is a process between you and your Chair only.

Who should be on my thesis committee?

- The University requires 3 committee members (including the chair). Usually the committees are comprised of 3 of the 4 full-time faculty members in our MFT department.
- It is possible to include faculty members from the Blacksburg campus or other universities (if expertise is appropriate)—but scheduling can sometimes be an issue.
- While supervisors or the associate clinical director can sometimes be included, this can be difficult because they must get approved by the graduate school (involves another set of paperwork—possibly resulting in delays).

Where can I find examples of other students’ theses?

- Students are required to submit their final thesis to VT’s “electronic thesis and dissertation (ETD)” site. This means you can access previously completed theses. This data base is accessible via the main campus library webpage (www.lib.vt.edu). Or <http://www.lib.vt.edu/find/byformat/etds.html>

What is the difference between a “regular” thesis and the “manuscript” format?

- We have been moving toward adopting a “manuscript” format for theses. This format encourages students to publish their study upon completion. In this format, chapters 1-3 are done in the traditional format; ch 4 becomes a condensed version of chapters 1-3 and chapter 5 becomes a condensed “results” and “discussion” section. The final manuscript version is usually limited to about 30 pages (as per journal publishing guidelines).

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How many pages should my thesis be?

- *Outside of manuscript version (see above), there are no firm page limits to the thesis. In general the first chapter is about 8-12 pages. The length of subsequent chapters completely depends upon the topic and the methodology. In the literature review, the student needs to demonstrate a critical analysis of the relevant literature and a compelling case for why/how their study furthers the field. The methods chapter should describe the study protocol in sufficient detail such that someone else could replicate the study. The format for the results section will be determined in part by the methodology chosen. The discussion should include discussion of how the current study is consistent with or differs from studies cited in the literature review; conjectures as to why this may be; limitation; clinical implications and suggestions for future studies.*

When do I submit my IRB application?

- *The submission to the IRB CANNOT occur until AFTER the proposal defense meeting. The IRB process should be completed with your Chair. DO NOT do any formal submission without your Chair's approval.*
- *The online submission process can be found at <http://www.irb.vt.edu> ; click on "Researchers"*

How long will the IRB review take?

- *Review times vary based on the nature of the project. In general, if you are proposing working with an existing data set or are not including protected populations (e.g. minors, prisoners, pregnant women) the process is usually completed within 10 days.*
- *NOTE: Be aware that if you are working with an outside agency (e.g. A Community Services Board), you may need to allow additional time for the proposal to be cleared by their governing agency. Make sure to find this out early in the process to allow adequate time.*
- *Inclusion of protected population must be reviewed by a full panel which meets monthly. Check the IRB website for meeting dates and submission deadlines.*

Who do I list as "primary investigator" in the IRB process? Must I list all my committee members on the IRB proposal?

- *Your Thesis Chair MUST be listed as the "primary investigator" on the IRB form. You are listed as the Secondary Investigator. This has to do with the Chair's faculty status and their liability for the quality of the research that is conducted.*
- *Your additional committee members are NOT listed on the IRB forms.*

What information do I need to give to Program Coordinator about where I am in the process? When does this need to happen?

- *Completed plan of study (by beginning of second year)*
- *Program Coordinator needs to be informed of your defense date 4 weeks prior to the event (or as soon as possible). This allows time for her to request and complete the appropriate paperwork from the graduate school.*

If I want a May graduation date, when is the last day I can do my proposal?

- *The proposal must be completed (or at least scheduled) prior to March 1st (at the very latest).*

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Can I propose and defend in the same semester?

- While nothing is impossible, this is not a good practice. First, depending on the nature of your thesis, data collection can be an issue. Sometimes recruiting participants is more difficult than anticipated. Second, keep in mind that faculty are working with multiple students, are part of multiple theses committees and have a number of other responsibilities. Scheduling meetings may be difficult and not on the same timeline as you would prefer. Faculty do the best they can to accommodate, but there are clearly limits.

When is graduation?

- Virginia Tech holds commencement twice a year, December (in Blacksburg only) and in May (ceremonies are held both in Blacksburg and in Northern Virginia). Fall graduates have the option of going to Blacksburg for December graduation or of waiting until the next May to participate with fellow Northern Virginia MFT graduates.

What is “defending student status”?

- If you have completed all program requirements but are just not able to defend in May, you may defend in the first 3 weeks of the fall semester under Defending Student Status. This means that you pay for one credit hour only and this one credit does not show on your transcript.

What if I do “defending student status”? Does this impact my ability to become an MFT resident?

- There is a problem for some MFT students who choose to do Defending Student Status and defend in the first 3 weeks of either fall or spring. No matter when in a semester a student defends, his/her diploma is not ordered and the final transcript stating the degree does not come out until the end of each semester. This is university policy and we do not anticipate it changing. The Licensing Board requires the final transcript with the degree stated on the transcript before an MFT graduate can register their residency with the Board. This can cause a 3-4 month wait for those students who defend in August or September because they will have to wait to receive their official transcript in December. While, the Graduate School will write a letter to any company or Board stating that the student has graduated, past experience suggests that this does not suffice for the Licensing Board. They have to have the final transcript reflecting the degree.

Why can't I propose during the summer months?

- The MFT program does not hold thesis or project defenses during the summer because several of the core faculty members are only academic year (Aug-May) contracts.

How do I schedule a proposal meeting?

- With your chair's approval, go to <http://doodle.com> to set up potential dates and times for the meeting
- Proposal meetings usually last about an hour
- The committee needs 1 week to read the proposal prior to the meeting
- Proposal meetings usually take place in the Group Room

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What happens during a thesis proposal meeting?

- You will be asked to present an overview of your proposed study, focusing on what you are planning to do. Committee members will ask clarifying questions, often suggesting/brainstorming ideas for improvements. This is intended to be a collaborative meeting with the outcome being a stronger design and an overall better project.
- Your Chair will take notes on this process so that by the end of the meeting you have the Committee's Consent to begin the study. In some cases, the committee may ask to see another version of the protocol before consenting to study initiation.

How do I schedule a thesis defense?

- Once you have approval from your thesis chair, talk with him/her about narrowing down potential dates. Then, using <http://doodle.com> send out potential dates and times to the rest of the committee members.
- Talk with Program Coordinator about scheduling a room for the defense.
- You must submit your Final Exam Request online. Contact the Program Coordinator for assistance with this process.

What happens during a thesis defense?

- It is highly recommended that students come to other students' thesis defenses before they have their own. This will help you support your colleagues and will "demystify" the experience!
- The student will do about a 30-40 minute powerpoint presentation of their study and results.
- The committee members are the first to ask questions at the end of the presentation.
- The audience members are invited to ask questions when the committee is finished.
- Your chair will take notes for revisions.
- The student and audience are asked to leave the room at the end of the questions so that the committee can deliberate about the defense.
- All are invited back in to hear the results!

What is the deadline for applying for graduation? How do I do this?

- Deadlines for each year are posted on the Program Coordinator's door. The date is typically March 1st
- You must let the Program Coordinator know of your intent as soon as you have your chair's approval.

What is ETD? How do I complete this? What is the deadline?

- Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD) is Virginia Tech's online warehouse of final documents. Once you have uploaded your final document to ETD, it will be available for viewing via the internet.
- The ETD must be submitted online 2 weeks after the date of your defense. Contact the Program Coordinator for assistance with submitting the ETD online.