MScN Thesis Guidelines

Completion of a master’s thesis is a required milestone in the MScN program. By participating in the generation and dissemination of new knowledge, students are expected to:

a) Develop a positive attitude about research that may ultimately enhance practice;

b) Acquire an understanding of the research process and initial competency in conducting research.

The master’s thesis is completed under the direction of an advisory committee consisting of: a) the student’s supervisor, and b) one additional faculty member who has expertise in the thesis area. In consultation with the supervisor, each student should select a topic of manageable scope which fits within the supervisor’s research program. Members of the advisory committee are selected to complement the supervisor’s expertise. It is not possible for faculty members to supervise student research in areas which are not aligned with their own work. Secondary analyses, replication studies, pilot studies, and original projects that are limited in scope are all appropriate for master’s theses. A written report of the thesis, prepared in integrated article format, is the basis for the oral examination.

Full-time students should begin to actively work on their thesis proposal in the summer of their first year of study and should complete the thesis exam by the summer of second year (approximately 12 months later). Part-time students typically begin to work on their proposals around the time of completing required course work and, while they make take longer to complete thesis requirements, they are expected to complete the thesis by the end of the 4th year of study.

Thesis Completion Process

The process for research completion is described below. The precise sequence and approach may vary based on decisions made jointly by the student and supervisor.

Identify a Topic and Seek a Supervisor

Master’s students are not expected to have a thesis supervisor in place or to have identified a specific research question when they begin the program in the fall. These decisions are normally made in the first year of study. However, many students begin the program with good ideas about what they would like to study.

1. Make an appointment early in your first term of study to introduce yourself to faculty members in your field of study. Discuss your reasons for enrolling in the graduate program, and the topics that interest you. These discussions can help you start to develop your thinking about your field of study before you begin course assignments.
2. Use course assignments as an opportunity to review the literature in areas of interest. This will help you become more familiar with current issues and gaps. Many students use the proposals they prepare as assignments in the research methods courses as a first step in working toward a thesis proposal.

3. As your interests start to take shape, identify one or more faculty members who are conducting research that fits with your interests. Contact each faculty member to set up a time to discuss your interests and how these might “fit” with their research, as well as their availability for thesis supervision (based on the number of students they are already supervising). During these meetings, faculty members may suggest ways in which you can develop your interests which can be helpful in refining a focus.

It is important to note that meeting with a professor to talk about your research interests does not oblige you or the professor to begin working together. This decision needs to be a mutual one, based on fit, availability, working style, etc., since a productive working relationship provides an important foundation for completing your thesis.

4. When a good match is found, negotiate an agreement for research advisement with your supervisor.

Full-time students should select a research topic and have a supervisor in place by the end of the second term of study (May). Part-time student should complete these steps by the time they complete required courses.

**Develop the Proposal**

When a thesis topic has been selected, begin to develop your proposal using the following guidelines:

1. Begin meeting with your supervisor to discuss the research problem you wish to address.

2. Draft a brief summary of the problem and research plans so that the supervisor can provide feedback. Continue to refine the problem and general plan for the study based on feedback from your supervisor.

3. When the focus of your thesis has been determined, identify a potential second advisor for your thesis in consultation with your supervisor. Discuss your thesis with this faculty member and invite them to join your advisory committee. Meet with your advisory committee (supervisor, second advisor) to develop a plan and timeline for the thesis, including a schedule of committee meetings and process for providing feedback. Faculty members have different supervision styles and no two committees work in precisely the same way.

4. Develop your research proposal according to the format discussed with your supervisor and advisory committee. Faculty members’ expectations about the format and length of
the proposal vary. For example, some require a detailed proposal which can serve as the basis for the written thesis, while others ask for a shorter (5-10 page) summary.

5. Submit the proposal to your advisory committee for feedback, making revisions as needed to refine the proposal. This iterative process continues until the committee determines that the proposal is ready to proceed (i.e. the proposal is approved).

6. When the proposal has been approved by the advisory committee, seek ethical approval for your study using the guidelines provided on the Research Western website (www.uwo.ca/research/ethics). This requires a written application to the Review Board for Health Sciences Research Involving Human Subjects using standard forms. Discuss the appropriate level of approval for your study with your supervisor before completing the application. In some instances (e.g., secondary analysis of data), ethics approval is not required. Submit the completed application to your supervisor for feedback and approval. The supervisor must sign this form as the application is made by the supervisor on behalf of the student.

7. Obtain permission to conduct the study at the relevant agency(ies)(as needed).

The length of time needed to develop and approve a proposal depends on many factors (e.g., the student’s ability to identify a focus and research question and to synthesize the literature; the availability of existing measures or approaches for data collection; level of writing skills). In general, it should be possible to develop a coherent proposal for a master’s thesis in 3-4 months of active work. This timeframe must also take into account the time faculty members need to provide feedback on the proposal and for the student to complete revisions based on feedback.

Full-time students should plan to work on their proposals in the spring/summer of their first year of study with the goals of beginning the thesis in the fall term of 2nd year.

Conduct the Research

1. Conduct the study, keeping your committee informed about your progress.

2. Every researcher (even those who are very experienced) encounters challenges in their work. Consult with your committee about challenges as they arise. On occasion, the research plan may need to be adjusted due to unexpected events of challenges. Changes to the approved proposal must be approved by the committee and by the ethics review board before they can be implemented. Without prior agreement, you will be in violation of ethics approval.

The length of time needed to conduct the research varies based on many factors. In general, more time is needed to recruit your own sample and collect data from them than to conduct a secondary analysis of existing data. Secondary analyses are completely acceptable for a master’s thesis and can be an effective way of completing the thesis within a reasonable time frame.

Approved by GPC – January 2012
**Prepare the Written Thesis Report**

1. Review the guidelines for preparing the thesis in integrated article format (see below).

2. Discuss the contents of each chapter with your supervisor. Submit an outline for each chapter to your committee for feedback.

3. Submit drafts of the thesis to your advisory committee for feedback as negotiated. It is customary for committee to ask students to work on one chapter at a time, often beginning with the article (chapter 2).

4. Revise the thesis based on feedback, until the committee approves the thesis for examination.

**Prepare for the Oral Thesis Examination**

1. In the final stages of writing the thesis, meet with your committee to:
   a. review the timeline for completion
   b. identify a firm date for submission of the written thesis for examination
   c. Identify 4 -5 possible dates for a thesis exam. These dates should be no sooner than one month after submission of the thesis.

2. Once approved by the advisory committee, submit four copies of the thesis to the Graduate Programs Assistant. The Graduate Programs Assistant will work with the Graduate Chair and your supervisor to confirm the examiners as well as the date and time of the examination.

3. The examination consists of 2 components:
   a. A 20-minute public presentation of the research (plus 10 minutes for questions/discussion. If a public presentation exceeds 20 minutes, the Chair will be flexible and provide the student with a 5 minutes warning.
   b. A private, oral examination with a committee of 3 examiners (2 internal examiners from Nursing, neither of whom are members of the thesis committee, and 1 examiner who is external to the program).

Discuss the thesis examination process with your committee and seek feedback on your presentation. You may find it helpful to do a ‘dry run” of your presentation for your supervisor and/or peers.

4. Prior to your thesis examination, book an appointment online with the Thesis Coordinator in the School of Graduate and Post-Doctoral Studies (SGPS) to review and approve the format of the thesis. Make this appointment for about one week after the oral examination to allow time for revisions.

Approved by GPC – January 2012
After the Oral Examination

1. Meet with your supervisor to discuss the examination and any changes that are required in the thesis. Any changes required by the examining committee must be completed and approved by the supervisor before submission of the final thesis to SGPS.

2. Meet with the Thesis Coordinator in the SGPS at the appointed time. Take one copy of the final thesis, a "Thesis Submission Checklist," one "UWO License," and two "Certificates of Examination" (one of which has the required original signatures and one with only examiners names typed on). The required forms are available from the Graduate Programs Assistant.

3. Once approved by SGPS, submit three official copies of the thesis, along with completed forms, to Graphic Services for micro-fiching and binding (two bound copies will be held in Western Libraries and the third will be housed in the Nursing Research Unit). Enclose the thesis in a letter-size file folder labelling according to instructions on the SGPS website.

4. If you and/or your supervisor would like to have a bound copy of the thesis, make arrangements for these extra copies to be bound when you contact Graphic Services.

5. The School of Nursing will pay for binding one copy of the thesis; the student is responsible for the costs of binding all other copies.

Research Advisement

The exact nature of the research advisement process varies for each student and advisor. The frequency of meetings, the intensity of the supervision, and the deadlines that are established will depend on student need and advisor committee preference. In general, the more explicit the expectations, the more productive will be the relationship. Both student and faculty advisor(s) share responsibility for defining the advisory process.

Advisory Committee Roles and Responsibilities:

(A) Supervisor

The supervisor has primary responsibility for mentoring the student through the thesis process. The supervisor must be a faculty member in the School of Nursing who has been approved to supervise master’s theses by the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. The supervisor provides ongoing input into the development, conduct, and reporting of the student's research. The responsibilities are described below:

1. Reach an agreement with the student about the nature of the advisory process, including deadlines for each phase.
2. Suggest a second faculty member to join to advisory committee.

3. Chair advisory committee meetings.

4. Facilitate the development of the research proposal.

5. Supervise and approve the preparation of the required documents for the Review Board for Health Sciences Research Involving Human Subjects.

6. Facilitate the student's conduct of research.

7. Review and provide feedback on drafts of the thesis.

8. Notify the Graduate Chair and Graduate Programs Assistant when the thesis is ready for examination.

9. Consult with the Graduate Chair about possible examiners and potential dates for the student's oral examination.

10. Consult with the student about the public presentation of the research.

11. Attend the public presentation of the research and oral examination.

12. Work with the student to prepare and submit a manuscript for publication in a scholarly journal.

**(B) Second Advisor**

A faculty member is asked to join the advisory committee because of particular expertise that is relevant to the student's research. The second advisor must be approved to act in this role by the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. Specific responsibilities are to:

1. Assist in determining the feasibility of the research and the scope of the study.

2. Provide consultation about the research proposal as needed.

3. Participate in advisory committee meetings.

4. Approve the proposal.

5. Provide consultation during the conduct of the research, as requested. This includes feedback during writing of the thesis and, with the supervisor, determining when the
thesis is ready for examination. Depending on the second advisor’s level of contribution to the study, they may be asked to collaborate on a manuscript of the thesis findings.
Format of MScN Thesis

All MScN theses must be prepared in integrated article format containing 3 chapters. Each chapter contains its own reference list and APA format should be used. The general format of the full thesis should follow the guidelines posted on the SGPS website.

Chapter 1: Introduction
This sets the general context for the thesis, including development of the research problem and its significance to Nursing. The usual length of this chapter is 7-10 pages (exclusive of references).

Chapter 2: Manuscript
This is a full report of the study. The contents of this chapter should stand alone and be consistent with the requirements for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. To aid in the examination of the thesis, the report may include more detail than would be expected by a journal. However, the maximum length of this chapter (excluding references, tables and figures) should not normally exceed 30 pages.

Chapter 3: Conclusion and Implications
This chapter contains a summary of key findings and a focussed discussion of the implications for Nursing research, practice, education, administration, and/or policy (as appropriate to the topic).

Appendices: Include the Letter(s) of Information and Consent(s), copies of data collection tools and/or other materials that support the presentation but cannot be included in Chapter 2.

Curriculum Vitae (single page summary of professional background and contributions). See the SGPS website for samples.