

MASTER'S THESIS

Guidelines for Political Management and Legislative Affairs Students

More and more Political Management and Legislative Affairs students are considering the Master's Thesis as part of their graduation education. Here are a few guidelines, deadlines, and suggestions for those considering this option.

PMGT299-300; PSC299-300.LH

The Thesis is a two-course sequence, PMGT299-300 (for Political Management students) and PSC299-300.LH) for Legislative Affairs students. The courses may be taken in one semester or spread over two semesters. Each course carries 3 credit hours. We strongly suggest that you complete your thesis over a two-semester period of time; cramming a thesis into one semester is a very difficult proposition, and can often lead to disappointing results. The PMGT299-300 sequence will fulfill the GSPM core course requirements; students not taking the Thesis option will take PMGT295-Advanced Strategy, for 3 credits. PSC299-300.LH fulfills the requirements for the Masters degree in Legislative Affairs.

You must have completed 24 hours of master's degree studies before you can sign up for PMGT299, and you must have a grade point average of 3.33 (B+) in those first 24 hours. There is no such grade point or number of hours requirements for Legislative Affairs students. Suffice it to say, a Legislative Affairs student should sign up for the thesis in the last two semesters of study.

Steps for Signing Up for PMGT299 of PSC299.LH

1. Discuss thesis ideas with the Dr. Dennis Johnson, who directs all Master's thesis work. In preparation for this meeting, you should have a five-page outline of your proposed thesis. As Thesis Director, Dr. Johnson will advise you and assist you through all phases of your research and writing. He will also be responsible for seeing that your final product is worthy of 6 credits and is an outstanding example of academic research and writing.
2. Thesis Proposal. You are to write a Thesis Proposal, of up to five pages, that clearly states your Thesis (Example: "The Sarah Palin phenomenon is a clear indication that the Republican Party has moved into permanent minority status.")

Then a short outline of how you intend to develop your thesis. (See below, for a sampling of chapters).

3. Contact Suzanne Farrand, director of student services, who will register you for the course. You will not be able to register for PMGT299 or PSC299 until your topic has been approved by Dr. Johnson

Periodic Meetings with Thesis Director

You should have a clear understanding with Dr. Johnson as to when chapters will be completed and when you will meet to discuss your progress. When writing a thesis, you are essentially on your own, but you should always be in contact with your Thesis Director. Normally, you should e-mail or give him a call once every few weeks during your first semester.

Grades for PMGT299-300

You will automatically receive the grade of "IPG" ["in progress"] for the PMGT299 and PSC299 courses. When you have finished your thesis and it is approved by Dr. Johnson (Thesis Director), a full-time faculty member who serves as Thesis Reader, you will receive the grade of "CR" ["credit"]. There is no oral examination associated with the Master's Thesis.

Academic Expectations

The Thesis demands your best analytical, research and writing skills. You will need to spend considerable time and thought in coming up with an acceptable thesis topic. You need to be thoroughly familiar with the methods of conducting scholarly research, of writing persuasive and clear prose, and reporting solid conclusions. This should be the best writing and research work you have conducted thus far in your academic career. Your final thesis should be between 75 and 150 pages of text, with additional pages for endnotes, bibliography and appendixes.

The Completed Thesis

The completed thesis (an original and one copy) must be submitted to Suzanne Farrand's office by the date indicated in the academic calendar, accompanied by the Report on Master's Thesis form signed by the Thesis Director and the Thesis Reader.

Extension of Time for Thesis

If your thesis takes longer than two semesters and you are still within your five year degree time limit, and you have completed all other requirements for graduation, you are required to stay continuously enrolled to keep your degree status active. Check with

Suzanne Farrand to make sure you are within the enrollment length guidelines.

Suggested Readings

Consider purchasing the following books from the GW Bookstore; they are all listed under PMGT299.

- Joan Miller and Bruce Taylor, *The Thesis Writer's Handbook* (Alcove Publishing, paperback, 1987)
- Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* (Chicago, paperback, most recent edition).
- William Zinsser, *On Writing Well* (Harper Perennial, paperback, 4th edition)
- Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research* (Chicago, paperback, 1995)

These books will be very helpful as you think about a research topic, formulate your thesis and major concepts, and as you begin the task of writing.

Also, pick up from the Graduate Student Services Office a pamphlet called "Information Concerning Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations."

Calendar for Thesis Work

Spring Semester 2010

- March 26: Master's Thesis *final* copy must be submitted to Dr. Johnson for Spring 2010 graduation (this is our departmental deadline). ***This means that your Thesis director should have had the opportunity to see earlier drafts, made comments and suggestions, and that the final copy you submit on this day is as close to perfection as you can make it. Do not show up on your Thesis director's door on March 26, showing your Thesis to him for the first time.***
- April 30: Last day to submit master's thesis for Spring 2010 graduation. This means that Dr. Johnson has read your thesis, marked it up, you have made the appropriate changes; the Thesis Reader has read your cleaned up version, has commented on it, and has given it back to you for revisions. Once all the revisions have been made, and Dr. Johnson and the Thesis Reader have approved the thesis, then you are done.

Summer Semester 2010

- July 9: Master's Thesis *final* copy must be submitted to Dr. Johnson for Summer 2010 graduation (this is our departmental deadline). ***This means that your Thesis director should have had the opportunity to see earlier drafts, made comments and suggestions, and that the final copy you submit on this day is as close to perfection as you can make it. Do not show up on your Thesis director's door***

on July 9, showing your Thesis to him for the first time.

- July 23: Last day to submit master's thesis for Summer 2010 graduation. This means that Dr. Johnson has read your thesis, marked it up, you have made the appropriate changes; the Thesis Reader has read your cleaned up version, has commented on it, and has given it back to you for revisions. Once all the revisions have been made, and Dr. Johnson and the Thesis Reader have approved the thesis, then you are done.

Fall 2010 Graduation:

- November 12: Master's Thesis *final* copy must be submitted to Dr. Johnson for Fall 2010 graduation (this is our departmental deadline). ***This means that your Thesis director should have had the opportunity to see earlier drafts, made comments and suggestions, and that the final copy you submit on this day is as close to perfection as you can make it. Do not show up on your Thesis director's door on November 12, showing your Thesis to him for the first time.***
- December 10: Last day to submit master's thesis for Fall 2010 graduation. This means that Dr. Johnson has read your thesis, marked it up, you have made the appropriate changes; the Thesis Reader has read your cleaned up version, has commented on it, and has given it back to you for revisions. Once all the revisions have been made, and Dr. Johnson and the Thesis Reader have approved the thesis, then you are done.

Writing an Excellent Thesis

You should consider the Thesis as the academic high point of your Master's degree studies. It will be a research product that in years to come you will be able to look back on and admire how well you were able to think, research, and write. The Thesis can also be a good product to show current and future employers: this is my best, extended writing, and you will be proud of it!

The Basics of the Thesis

When writing a Thesis, you are essentially looking at a campaigning, public policy, or legislative problem, critically examining the issue, and writing an extended paper on it. Here are some examples of recent Theses:

“Self Interest and Interest Groups: A Case Study on the Efficacy of Anthony Downs's Rational Choice Theory in Congress.”

“Minority Female Lobbyists in Washington.”

“Presidential Campaign Communication: Democratic Challenges for the 2008 Presidential Election”

“Immigration Reform: Republican Values and Policy Conflict.”

“Mental Health Care in America: The Importance of the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996 and Next Steps to Improving Care.”

“Early Childhood State Governance Structure Recommendations: Improving State Services for Young Children by Developing an Infrastructure for Early Childhood Care and Education Systems.”

You may write about something you are passionate about, you may write about something that interests you employer.

The most important thing is finding a topic that will be interesting and doable. The biggest mistake, usually, is to try to cover too much ground. A focused topic is the best approach.

Length of Thesis

The Thesis should be between 75 pages and 150 pages. In addition, you will include a bibliography, charts, and so forth.

What a Thesis Looks Like

The Thesis has a very standard look to it, and students will be expected to follow this carefully.

Title Page
(must strictly conform to style)
Acknowledgements
(optional)
Table of Contents
The Thesis Statement
(what this Thesis is all about)
Chapter 1
(which should be a literature review)
Chapter 2 through Chapter x
(normally, about 6 or so chapters)
Appendixes
(optional)
Bibliography

Best way to get a feel for a Thesis is to look at one or two recent ones. You can contact Suzanne Farrand for a recent example.

Literature Search

The first chapter should be a review of the literature. Who has written about the subject you are investigating? What are the dominant strains of argument? Are you filling in a gap where no one else has written something? Or are you updating the writings of others?

Footnotes

Ah, those pesky footnotes. Not endnotes and not notes within the text, but footnotes. Single spaced, but double spaced between notes, using a 10-point font (the default for Word). All notes will be in *Chicago Manual of Style* Format, humanities version. (See the examples in the attached sheet).

Research and Writing

It takes a lot of time and energy to write a decent Master's Thesis. You cannot rush it and try to do it in one semester. And as a basic rule of thumb: it will take you a lot longer than you had thought. It's not just the research and writing, it is making sure all the footnotes are proper, editing, proof-reading, making sure that the bibliography is in good shape. I've never met a student who has said, "This was so simple that I don't need all the time." I've met many students who've said, "Please, I need extra time. I didn't realize how hard this was."

Electronic Master's Theses

The GW library no longer houses hard copies of Master's theses. Rather, they are stored in an electronic archive used by universities across the country. Please see the following web site for information on how to submit your thesis electronically:

<http://www.gwu.edu/~etds/theses.html>.

When It is Finally Over

You will get no letter grade (like A, B+, B), but you will simply "Pass" and get "Credit." Thus, the "grade" for PMGT/PSC 299-300 is not computed in your overall grade point average.

Once Dr. Johnson and your Thesis Reader have approved the final version, you have submitted two copies to Suzanne Farrand, and you have submitted an electronic copy through the library's system, then you are finished!!

Master's Thesis

Footnotes, according to Chicago Manual

This is the preferred way of doing footnotes for your paper; this should cover about 90 percent of your footnote needs. My comments are in **bold, italicized**. Follow this and I'll give you no grief.

1. Francis S. Philbrick, *The Rise of the West: 1754-1830* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 130. **Book citation, first time.**
2. Louise Phelps Kellogg, "France and the Mississippi Valley: A Resume," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 18 (1) (June 1931): 4. **Journal article, first citation.**
3. Ibid., 5-8. **Refers to citation immediately preceding it.**
4. Philbrick, *The Rise of the West*, 145. **Book, second citation.**
5. Ibid., 145-46. **Book citation, following directly a previous citation.** (Note: page number is 145-46, not 145-146).
6. Jay Gitlin, "Children of Empire or Concitoyens? Louisiana's French Inhabitants," in *The Louisiana Purchase: Emergence of an American Nation*, ed. Peter J. Kastor (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2002), 25. **A book chapter in an edited book, first citation.**
7. Peter J. Kastor, "Introduction" in *The Louisiana Purchase*, ed. Kastor, 2. **A first citation of a new chapter, but in a previously cited book.**
8. Marc Mahan, "The Life of Nathan Dane," The Nathan Dane Archival Collaborative. Available at <http://primaryresearch.org/PRTHB/Dane/biography.htm>. **An article from a website. Note, no underlining of URL. If the website is time-sensitive, add the date accessed ("accessed March 14, 2007.>"). Further, "website" is the preferred spelling for CMS; other spellings of course are around: "Web site," "Website," "web site." The thinking is that in a few years, we'll all be uniform around**

“website,” so you might as well be ahead of the curve. The word “e-mail” is still the preferred designation, although “email” is probably where we are headed.

9. When citing an online source, be sure to give the name of the website. Here’s an improper cite: “Best Web Practices Determined,” www.acd.org. Here’s the correct way: “Best Web Practices Determined,” available from the American Computing Developers website, www.acd.org.
10. Kellogg, “France and the Mississippi Valley,” 5. ***Second citation of an article***
11. “Futurama at Fair is Viewed in Test,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1939, 3. ***Newspaper article, first citation***
12. Mahan, “The Life of Nathan Dane,” 3. ***Second citation of article from website.***
13. “Futurama at Fair is Viewed in Test,” 3. ***Newspaper article, second citation.***
14. Jeremy S. Jones, interview, Washington, D.C., March 27, 2001. ***First citation.***
15. Jones interview. ***A later citation*** (if it directly followed footnote 14, of course, it would be ***ibid.***).