The Thesis Track

The Department of Communication Studies has established procedures for the submission of a thesis that are designed to help the student and, at the same time, insure a high degree of quality in what is submitted to the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies. The decision regarding whether a student is permitted to write a thesis rests with the student’s major professor. The student’s scholarly writing skills and methodological competence are the primary factors influencing that decision.

Selecting a major professor to direct a thesis project is an important decision for the student and the department. The student wants to select a major professor with whom s/he can work effectively and efficiently. Further, that professor’s direction should contribute significantly to the quality of the study. At the same time, the department has a significant interest in distributing the workload associated with directing theses across all members of the graduate faculty in the department. Therefore, a student should consult with the Director of Graduate Studies for advice regarding which professors to consult regarding theses.

Preparing the Prospectus

1. When the major professor and the student decide that it is time to begin work on a thesis, the student registers for COMM 5950, designating the section number of the professor who is directing the thesis. Once a student registers for 5950, s/he must continue to register for that course each semester until the final thesis is submitted to the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies.

2. The student works with the major professor to select a topic, limit its scope, conduct preliminary research, determine the appropriate methodology, and prepare the thesis prospectus.

3. The written prospectus should be a fully developed explanation of the proposed thesis. In most cases, the prospectus will serve as the first three chapters of the thesis. Items that typically are included in a prospectus are:
   a. An introduction to the topic
   b. A review of pertinent literature in the area(s) being investigated
   c. A clear description of the methodology and procedures that will be used in conducting the study

Presenting the Prospectus

When the major professor is satisfied with the prospectus, s/he will notify the student to schedule a prospectus meeting and to distribute copies of the
A student must not schedule a prospectus meeting or distribute copies of the prospectus without approval of the major professor.

1. In consultation with the major professor, the other department committee members, and the department chair, the student selects a date and time for the oral presentation of the thesis proposal. Students must consult each committee member and the department chair regarding the date and time for the meeting. When the date and time have been established (the meeting will require one to two hours), the student is responsible for contacting the department administrative assistant to reserve a conference room for the meeting.

2. Prepare copies of the prospectus and the invitation (a sample prospectus meeting invitation is included as Appendix II). The student is responsible for all typing and reproduction costs associated with the prospectus and the thesis. Students may not use department equipment to reproduce copies of the prospectus or the invitation.

3. At least one week prior to the prospectus meeting, the student should distribute copies of the invitation to all members of the faculty.

4. At least one week prior to the prospectus meeting, the student should distribute copies of the prospectus to:
   - The Major Professor,
   - The Department Committee Members,
   - The Department Chair, and
   - The departmental library (as a reading copy for other faculty members)

5. The purpose of the prospectus meeting is to save the student from investing a great deal of work in a project that may have serious flaws or that lacks substantial scholarly merit. The prospectus meeting has two functions:
   - To determine whether the thesis, as proposed, is acceptable, and
   - To help the student with suggestions for completing the thesis.

Frequently, the committee will require amendments to the proposal and, in some cases, will require a second prospectus meeting.

The student must attend the prospectus meeting in person.
6. On the day of the prospectus meeting, the student should bring a personal copy of the prospectus for reference purposes.

7. The major professor chairs the prospectus meeting. He or she will ask the student to leave at the beginning of the prospectus meeting in order for the committee to discuss procedures and potential concerns. Upon reentering the meeting, the student will defend the prospectus orally. This process begins with a presentation by the student, followed by questions from faculty members in attendance. When the questioning ceases, the major professor will ask the student to leave the room again, whereupon the committee decides to accept or reject the proposed study. Upon reaching a decision, the committee calls the student back into the conference to disclose the decision.

Writing the Thesis

1. After approval of the prospectus, the student writes the thesis under the direction of the major professor. Faculty members differ in the way they handle this role, but it is the responsibility of the student to seek whatever help is needed, submit drafts for approval/correction, and meet university deadlines. A thesis may be the most important task before a student at a given moment, but it is only one of the many tasks a faculty member must negotiate. Therefore, a student should not expect instantaneous responses to requests. In addition, faculty members are not expected to be available to work on thesis projects when they are not on staff (e.g., during summer terms or while on sabbatical leave). The degree to which the other graduate advisory committee members become involved in the writing of the thesis varies. To avoid misunderstandings, committee member involvement during the writing phase of the thesis should be discussed and understood by all parties during the prospectus meeting.

2. Obtain a copy of the thesis and dissertation preparation guide in the main office of the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies. Following the guidelines set forth in this publication from the beginning of the writing process will save a great deal of time and effort. Students who do not use the guide often must reformat the entire document for submission to the graduate school.

3. Graduate students should consult with their advisor about which style manual to use for their theses.

4. When the student begins work on the thesis, s/he is required to enroll for thesis hours (COMM 5950) every semester until the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies approves the thesis. Only one enrollment is required during the summer sessions. The total number of semester credit hours recorded for a thesis may not exceed six, regardless of the number of enrollments in COMM 5950.
Defending the Thesis

Only after the thesis has been completed to the satisfaction of the major professor, may preparations for the final thesis defense be made. A student must not schedule a thesis defense or distribute copies of the thesis without approval of the major professor.

1. You may wish to seek the help of an editor (the Graduate School can supply a list) before submitting the thesis. The major professor can assist in many ways, but s/he cannot be expected to rewrite a poorly written thesis. Employing an editor may save time, money, and frustration.

2. In consultation with the major professor, the other graduate advisory committee members, and the department chair, the student selects a date and time for the thesis defense. Students must consult each committee member and the department chair regarding the date and time for the meeting. When the date and time have been established (the meeting will require one to two hours), the student is responsible for contacting the department administrative assistant to reserve a conference room for the meeting.

3. Prepare a reading copies of the thesis for distribution.

4. Prepare an abstract of the thesis. In his or her abstract, the student summarizes the study and his or her findings. The thesis abstract, which must be attached to the notification of the final thesis defense, must not exceed 150 words.

5. Prepare a “Notification of Thesis Defense” (see sample in Appendix III).

6. At least one week prior to the final thesis defense, copies of the notification of thesis defense, the abstract, and reading copies of the thesis must be distributed to:

   o The Major Professor,

   o The Department Committee Members,

   o The Department Chair, and

   o The departmental library (as a reading copy for other faculty members)

7. At the same time (at least one week prior to the thesis defense) a copy of the notification of thesis defense and the abstract must be delivered to all other Communication Studies faculty members.
8. The thesis defense affords the student an opportunity to explain the study, the methods used, the findings, and any conclusions drawn from the study. The defense also is a time for the thesis advisory committee to ask the student questions raised by the study. The department chair and other members of the Communication Studies faculty may participate in the examination.

9. It is the responsibility of the student to see that the final thesis defense is scheduled prior to the filing deadline. This date usually occurs approximately six weeks before the end of the semester. The candidate should schedule the defense at least one week prior to the deadline to allow time for any revisions required by the committee.

10. On the day of the thesis defense, the candidate should bring a personal copy of the thesis for reference purposes. The major professor chairs the thesis defense. In addition to answering questions, the candidate should make notes or changes suggested or required by committee members.

11. The thesis defense begins with a presentation by the student, followed by questions from faculty members in attendance. When the questioning ceases, the candidate and all other persons not on the student’s thesis committee will be excused from the room, whereupon the committee decides whether to approve the thesis. Upon reaching a decision, the candidate is informed of the decision and of any conditions attached to the decision.

**Submitting the Thesis**

1. In consultation with the major professor, the student incorporates any changes specified by the graduate advisory committee. The final copy is then prepared and is delivered in person by the candidate to the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies.

2. When notified by the Graduate School, the student picks up the thesis and a correction list prepared by the official thesis reader. It is wise to review the correction list with the major professor. After corrections have been made, the student returns a final copy of the thesis to the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies in the format they specify.

3. The candidate provides a bound copy of the thesis for the major professor.