

Appendix B: Thesis

Selecting Your Thesis Topic

The thesis is a major component of the program, as it provides the in-depth research experience necessary for students to enhance their knowledge and research skills in a chosen area of interest. In thesis research, students identify an interesting question and then pose and test a hypothesis. Through close collaboration with a major professor, thesis research lets students develop close, professional ties with faculty members widely recognized in their fields while learning first-hand about the research process. You learn to:

- Define a problem; identify and review appropriate literature; develop a realistic schedule; and carry out the steps necessary to find a solution to the problem.
- Prepare a written report that presents the results of the study comprehensively to others.
- Understand the rigor entailed, the time and work involved, the resources required, and the problems that can arise when conducting research.
- Explain and defend research approaches when questioned by others in an oral presentation.

Topics for a thesis can come from many sources. Discussion with other students, faculty, classroom lectures, and prior or current work or assistantship experiences are just a few. Reading and reviewing the literature in your field of study provides valuable leads to ideas for possible subjects. Faculty members may have ideas they are interested in pursuing with you. However, do not depend upon faculty to choose your topic; that is your responsibility. Work with faculty to develop your ideas.

It is never too soon to begin thinking about your thesis. If you identify a suitable topic early in your program, it is possible to tie some class projects to your topic. You can develop more depth in your area of specialization and likely produce a stronger thesis. Although the department does not have a specific timing policy about thesis topic selection, we encourage you to begin thinking about the thesis project during your first semester.

As you choose a topic and plan your thesis, you should be in regular contact with your major professor. Major professors have different styles of work and personalities, but it is your responsibility to schedule appointments, solicit advice when needed, and keep them informed on your work. Thesis research is time-consuming; you can expect to spend at least nine months of concentrated work on your thesis.

Preparing a Thesis Proposal and Completing the Thesis

The thesis helps students develop skills in all aspects of the research process, including conceptualizing a research question, developing a research design, collecting data, coding and analyzing data, and interpreting and communicating results. The thesis provides the structure through which these skills are developed. Your committee, therefore, will expect you to demonstrate that you have acquired skills in each of these areas. It is the prerogative of the committee to ask questions regarding any or all of these skills.

A thesis proposal is the plan of action that results in a final thesis. As such, the Introduction and the Review of Literature will remain largely the same from proposal to final thesis. In most

cases, the Method section will be changed only by conversion from future to past tense. Thus, the proposal is not a "draft" of something that will be "polished up" later.

Students should understand, however, that many theses will confront unanticipated problems that will necessitate substantive changes to the proposal before the final draft of the thesis is submitted. Students should consider the proposal defensible (i.e., ready for a proposal meeting) only when the Introduction, Literature Review, Method, References, and appropriate Appendices have reached a finalized stage in the judgment of the student's major professor. All research in which human subjects are used must be approved in advance by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Use of Human Subjects in Research. This includes research based on data already collected by others. The required training pertaining to human subject protections, called CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative), is part of your first class in research methodology. If a thesis student and major professor submit a research protocol to the IRB before the formal proposal defense meeting with the student's advisory committee, the committee may still require changes to their procedures. These changes will require further IRB review and approval. Such requests can be submitted to the IRB as an addendum after the proposal defense has occurred.

Forms for the IRB are found at the following website:
<https://cws.auburn.edu/OVPR/pm/compliance/irb/home>

Note that after your thesis research is complete and the final product has been defended in the formal meeting with your advisory committee, a final report is due to the IRB. The form for this final report is also found at the above website and should be submitted before you graduate.

The APA Publication Manual and the APA website below provides guidance for most sections of a thesis (but not the review of literature or proposed analysis sections).

Consult: <http://www.apastyle.org>

Below are brief descriptions of the elements of a typical thesis with some of the ways in which the Auburn University Thesis guidelines differ from APA practice. Please use the APA Manual or website and the Auburn University Thesis guide as you prepare your document.

<http://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/electronic-thesis-dissertationguide/>

A thesis normally consists of:

Prefatory Material: Stipulated by the Auburn University Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Guide (certificate of approval, title page, table of contents, etc.)

The **Introduction** is a brief statement of the problem and an overview of the logic for the development of the problem (including supporting literature). It may help to think of the Introduction as a section that could (with little editing) become the Introduction to a published article. Specific hypotheses may be presented in the Introduction, or may be held for the Literature Review section (a decision students should reach with their advisor).

The **Review of Literature** is an extensive review of extant literature on all topics directly related

to the thesis problem (e.g., theoretical and empirical background, a discussion of conceptual issues related to measures, any critique of previous literatures and/or methodologies). The Literature Review should build logically to a statement of the specific research hypotheses or questions that will guide the analytic strategy for the study.

The **Method** is organized by subheadings that provide information about the following topics: Participants, Procedure, Measures, and Proposed Analysis. (The proposed analysis should be linked directly to the research questions or hypotheses.) Generally this section includes estimates of reliability and validity for all measures.

The **Results** section is, at a minimum, a presentation of the outcome of all the proposed analyses. It may be organized (a) by research questions or hypotheses, (b) by issue or content area, or (c) some other logical criterion. In some cases, the planned analyses raise other interesting questions, and thus, the Results section may contain analyses beyond the originally-planned analyses.

The **Discussion** is a brief presentation of each finding or group of findings together with explanations and alternative explanations of their meaning. The Discussion should be related to the Introduction by connecting the findings with the driving issues that originally sparked the project. Furthermore, implications, limitations, and caveats of the results should be considered.

The **References** section includes all materials cited in the text. They are listed according to APA guidelines for references.

Footnotes, according to the Graduate School, may be placed at the bottom of the relevant page or the end of the section in which the footnote appears.

Appendices present pertinent material that one would not want directly in the text but that would help a reader understand some part of the thesis better (e.g., copies of questionnaires or surveys, the informed consent letter, a bibliography beyond the references, observational coding forms, additional analysis not presented in Results). Separate appendices present each kind of supplementary material (e.g., the questionnaire belongs in its own appendix) and are identified alphabetically at the end of the thesis (i.e., Appendix A, Appendix B, ... Appendix X)