

Werklund School of Education: Guidelines for a Masters Manuscript Based Thesis

1. Purpose

A manuscript based thesis is intended to provide an alternate format for those students who are both inclined toward and adept at writing articles for peer review and publication. The term “manuscript” is used here in the sense of an article, sufficiently prepared, so that it is ready for submission to a reputable professional or academic journal for peer review. The judgment of “ready for submission” and what constitutes a “reputable professional or academic journal” shall be decided, in consultation with the student, by the supervisory committee.

2. Definition

A masters manuscript based thesis is a coherent and organized document that (1) contains an introduction that contextualizes the research, sets out the problem or phenomenon under investigation, and contains major questions for investigation that frame and delineate the study; (2) a *related* set of papers judged to be publishable, of which the student is the sole or first co-author; (3) an original discussion/conclusion, composed entirely by the student, that integrates the findings of the study into a coherent narrative. The thesis must also adhere to the Manuscript Thesis Guidelines (Section 2.8 of the Graduate Calendar) and meets the criteria specified below. A manuscript based thesis is not simply a collection of manuscripts, book-ended by an introduction and conclusion.

3. Principles

- a. The student and supervisor need to make an *informed decision* about choosing the manuscript based thesis format. Before a decision is made to pursue this kind of thesis, both the student and supervisor need to be aware, in particular, of the benefits and challenges involved in completing a manuscript based thesis. In addition, an alternate completion strategy needs to be considered and addressed in the proposal for doing a manuscript based thesis. In the event that the plan and actions taken to complete the manuscript based thesis are not working, the student needs to have the option and a plan for completing a traditional thesis.
- b. The preparation of the articles for submission should not significantly impede the student’s progress toward timely completion of their program, which must remain the priority of the supervisor and the student.
- c. The manuscript based thesis route should be planned within the first year of the student’s program, ensuring full agreement among the supervisory committee members and between the committee and the student.
- d. The workload must be distributed appropriately across the two papers in order to ensure steady and timely progress toward completion of the MA/MSc. The overall workload and the distribution of effort needs to be decided in close consultation with the supervisory committee.
- e. It is imperative that intellectual property rights be discussed and agreed upon, and the decision around what constitutes first authorship be clarified prior to the creation of any of the papers, the disclosure of any findings at conferences, or in any other way knowledge is disseminated that places creation or invention in the public domain. See also 4(f) in this regard.

4. Requirements

- a. A supervisory committee is required for any MA or MSc student choosing the manuscript route.
- b. As stated in 3d, the supervisory committee must be in agreement that: (i) the topic is worthy of study; (ii) the format of the thesis is appropriate to the purpose and scope of the research; (iii) the proposed papers have sufficient depth and relevance to the research and the thesis; (iv) the proposed journals are appropriate for submission; (v) the plan for completing the papers and the thesis makes sense; and, (vi) that the student is capable of what is required. Such agreement will be indicated by a formal signature of the supervisory committee.
- c. A proposal (including a plan for the structure and anticipated content of the thesis) is required for anyone wishing to complete an MA or MSc in manuscript form.
- d. The format of the thesis should be flexible. However, the manuscript based thesis must contain a minimum of: (i) two papers, ready for submission, where the student is the sole or the first author; (ii) an encompassing narrative that properly introduces and contextualizes the study, and ties the manuscripts together into a coherent whole; and, (iii) an independent and original general discussion, composed entirely by the student, that integrates the most significant findings of the thesis into the coherent narrative.
- e. In cases where there are differences between supervisor and student, and/or student and supervisory committee, either about the decision to do a manuscript based thesis, or the content and form of the manuscripts, the Graduate Program Director will be consulted so that a workable solution can be determined.
- f. Only manuscripts generated in the course of completing an MA or MSc will be considered eligible for inclusion in the thesis. In cases where manuscripts have been published prior to the completion of the thesis, students and supervisors need to confirm with the specific journal/publishing house to ensure that they have copyright clearance to include the published manuscript in the thesis. Given that each journal/publishing house has different restrictions on copyright, some being open, others with limited restrictions, and those with stringent copyright regulations, each case must be investigated and the proper steps taken to ensure that inclusion of previously published material in the thesis does not violate specific copyright guidelines.
- g. The supervisory committee is fully entitled to require changes and additions to the material in the thesis, whether published or not, in order to meet the expectations of the external examiner and the examining committee, who are also entitled to request changes.