Missouri State
U N I V E R S I T Y

School of Defense and Strategic Studies

NON-THESIS OPTION PROCESS AND PROJECT GUIDE

By: DSS Non-Thesis Consultant, Visiting Professor Curtis McGiffin, July 01, 2023

Non-Thesis Option for DSS Students: Pursuing the Non-Thesis Option for graduation at the MSU Department of Defense and Strategic Studies is available to all qualifying DSS students, on par with the Thesis option (See: "Thesis Project and Process"). The Non-Thesis option should not be viewed by students as a "less demanding" or "less time consuming" alternative to writing a thesis. Students choosing the Non-Thesis Option must complete a Research Project to be defended as part of the Comprehensive Oral Examination. Moreover, a student's knowledge of broad security and defense issues, verbal and analytic skills may be tested thoroughly during the Comprehensive Oral Examination. At the examination, students are also expected to demonstrate to the Examination Board their work ethic, commitment, and academic skills to successfully obtain a post-graduate degree.

Non-Thesis Research Project and Paper: The Non-Thesis Research Project offers students selecting the Non-Thesis Option an opportunity to demonstrate the analytic and writing skills gained from the DSS graduate education. Students are strongly encouraged to start the Project in their first year, especially during their second semester, when they should declare their preference for the non-thesis option. Please note that students seeking the **DSS/WMD option** master's degree must select a WMD-related topic for their Non-Thesis Project and Paper.

The Non-Thesis Research Project should result in an original Project Paper that is double-spaced, and 20-pages in length (not including Cover, Abstract, and Bibliography pages). Student should appropriately add pages to account for excessive foot notes to honor the 20-page requirement. Non-Thesis Project Paper must be submitted to the Examination Board in electronic form no later than two weeks before the Comprehensive Oral Examination. The choice of the subject-matter, research methods, bibliographic sources as well as structuring, organizing and formatting the Project Paper shall follow DSS requirements posted at the end of this guide.

Selecting the Non-Thesis Project Mentor and the Examination Board: While contemplating the subject area for their Non-Thesis Research Project, students should

consider what they find intriguing and what fuels their passion in the arena of defense and security studies. In the process, they are welcome to interact with multiple faculty members.

Students need to get the agreement of one faculty member to serve as their Non-Thesis Project Mentor and on their Examination Board. This faculty mentor should be familiar with the student's work.

Once the faculty member agrees to serve as the student's Non-Thesis Project Mentor, this arrangement must be approved by the Non-Thesis Consultant, Professor Curtis McGiffin. The faculty member serving as the student's Project Mentor will be the student's main point of contact throughout the Non-Thesis Project experience. The student's Project Mentor and the student will establish a schedule and outline of expectations for completing the research project and paper, typically as part of a Regular DSS seminar course or as part of a Directed Reading course. The student must coordinate with their mentor any plans to change the direction or format of the Non-Thesis Research Project Paper.

By the beginning of the graduation semester, in consultation with their Non-Thesis Project Mentor, the student will select from among the DSS Faculty two (2) additional members for their Oral Examination Board. The student's Project Mentor and the two additional DSS faculty members will constitute the student's Oral Examination Board. It is the student's responsibility to recruit and secure the two additional board members.

When selecting their Research Project Mentor and additional two members of the Oral Examination Board, students should take into consideration which faculty members would best serve the student's needs in terms of overall guidance and constructive criticism. Some general considerations include:
- Faculty members' current and previous research and their familiarity with the student's interests and academic accomplishments.
- Faculty members' familiarity with the student's course work.
- Faculty members who will provide constructive criticism of the student's work

Non-Thesis Research Project Paper Structure: The Research Project Paper template is posted at the end of this guidance and usually has sections organized as follows:
- Abstract:
  - Succinct statement summarizing key elements and most salient findings of the Non-Thesis Project and their potential ramifications
- Introduction:
  - Statement of the research project's problem
  - Articulation of the student's hypothesis or point of view (thesis statement)
  - Literature review (as appropriate)
  - Explanation of research methods

- Substantive body:
  - Review of the background and/or history of problems under analysis
  - Analysis specific to the chosen subject matter
  - Assessment and critique of opposing views
- Conclusion:
  - Discussion of research results and their implications
  - Scenarios of future evolutions
  - Recommendation of policy or strategy

Use of a Regular Seminar or Directed-Reading Course Paper to Advance the Non-Thesis Research Project: DSS allows students to integrate directly into their Non-Thesis Research Project one particular paper produced by them during a Regular or Directed Reading DSS course, especially a paper completed for this purpose and under the guidance of the student's Non-Thesis Mentor. This course paper may serve as the methodological and/or substantive foundation of the Non-Thesis Research Project. The use of this paper in this fashion must be cited explicitly in the Non-Thesis Research Paper and discussed in advance with the Non-Thesis Mentor. Unless directed by or coordinated with the Non-Thesis Project Mentor, the citation should follow *Chicago*-style format.

Additional Submissions to the Examination Board: Together with the Non-Thesis Research Project Paper, students will submit two additional papers (of at least seven pages in length each) completed in previous DSS courses, two weeks prior to the exam. These additional papers will also be reviewed and critiqued by the Oral Examination Board. Students must be prepared to defend the views, logic, and research methods used in each of their papers during the examination period.

Non-Thesis Comprehensive Oral Examination: The Oral Examination under the Non-Thesis Option must take place during the student's final (graduation) semester no later than the Non-Thesis Research Project submission deadline set by the MSU graduation calendar for that semester.

Exams will take place in one of the DSS Department's classrooms or virtually via Zoom. The student is responsible for coordinating a specific time and date for the examination, with his or her mentor and for securing the commitment of the second and third Oral Examination Board Members to that time and date. The student is to promptly inform their Academic Advisor and the Non-Thesis Consultant when the oral exam time/date has been scheduled and confirmed by all board members.

The examination is intended to provide the student with an opportunity to demonstrate his or her ability to think critically and articulate thoughts cogently, analyze competing schools of thought, express opinions, and articulately defend them.

During the exam, the defense of the Non-Thesis Research Project is to be followed by oral questions covering the student's main areas of study while at DSS. The duration of the Comprehensive Oral Exam is 2-3 hours and the student will be informed of the outcome at the conclusion of the exam.

Any student who fails the oral exam will be allowed to retake the exam the following semester. The student must register for an additional course during that semester. That is, if the student fails or otherwise does not complete the Non-Thesis Report or Comprehensive Oral Exam in the intended semester, the student must register for an additional course the following semester (suggested course: DSS 794). Non-Thesis students may not take course *DSS 799: Thesis*, in fulfillment of their credit requirements.

Grading: MSU grades for the Non-Thesis Comprehensive Oral Examination are "pass" and "non-pass." DSS evaluations include "pass," "non-pass," and "pass with distinction." Passing and non-passing grades will be decided by a majority vote of the examination board membership. Passing "with distinction" requires a unanimous vote of all members of the examination board. Students will not be informed of how each board member voted. As a result, graduates with a "pass with distinction" will be able to convey that fact on resumés and CVs to show potential employers their ability to produce impactful work. A CV -- short for the Latin "curriculum vitae," meaning "course of life," is a detailed document highlighting your professional and academic history.

A *Comprehensive Oral Examination Results* form will be prepared by the student's Academic Advisor and provided to each oral exam board member to indicate their vote of "pass", "non-pass" or "pass with distinction." The academic advisor will report the results of the oral exam to the MSU Graduate College for posting to the student's academic record. There is also a letter grade assigned for the DSS 796 course a student completes with their mentor.

DSS administrative support: At every stage of the Non-Thesis Project process, students may rely on the advice and support of their Project Mentor, their Academic Advisor, the Non-Thesis Consultant, and other members of the Staff. Students are welcome to contact their Academic Advisor and/or the Non-Thesis Consultant to discuss:
- Complying with MSU and DSS requirements
- Making a choice between the Thesis and Non-Thesis options for graduation
- Identifying areas of non-thesis research
- Preparing and filing all documents related to the Non-Thesis Project
- Interacting with DSS Faculty Members in establishing the Examination Board, etc.

Student Responsibilities: The Non-Thesis Option Process and Project takes serious preparation to complete successfully. Students should expect to exert considerable academic effort to produce an acceptable Non-Thesis Option Research Project paper. It is the student's responsibility to do the following:

- Recruit requisite DSS faculty for your Non-Thesis Research Project and Comprehensive Examination board: Mentor, plus two (2) readers/board members
- Make a clear timeline for completing all phases of the Non-Thesis Option Process and Project in consultation with their Non-Thesis Project Mentor
- Take personal responsibility for the work required and the end product
- Report progress to their mentor periodically
- Report project setbacks/delays to their mentor quickly
- Notify the Non-Thesis Consultant and their Academic Advisor of any issues/problems that might delay their timely/projected completion of their Project Paper or Oral Comprehensive Exam ASAP and thus potentially delay graduation.
- Expect critically constructive feedback in the process of preparation and presentation of the Non-Thesis Project Paper and be receptive and responsive to suggestions from the student's project mentor and readers
- Follow ethical guidelines and comply with all MSU and DSS policies and procedures
- Most importantly, ask for help when needed and in a timely manner.

Any delay in the completion of the Non-Thesis Research Paper and/or the Non-Thesis Comprehensive Oral Examination may result in the DSS staff's inability to support with MSU's grade submission and graduation timelines.

Faculty Responsibilities: Faculty members serving as a non-thesis mentor and oral examination board members are expected to help students understand the importance and expectations of each stage of the Non-Thesis Research Project and Process. They should clearly and quickly communicate their availability (or lack thereof) to students.

The non-thesis mentors have special responsibilities working most closely with the student and giving the most guidance. This may be done during a regular DSS seminar course or a Directed Reading course. Mentors are expected to meet personally with their student to discuss and facilitate the Non-Thesis Project Option process, give advice at all stages of the Non-Thesis Project and paper, and help the student coordinate with other members of respective Examination Boards.

John P. Rose

Dr. JOHN P. ROSE, Department Head
Defense and Strategic Studies
Missouri State University

Acknowledgment of Non--thesis Project Requirements

A.   I certify that I have read this document and understand all components.

_____

Non-Thesis Student Name   Date

_____

Student Signature

B.   I certify that I will be available under reasonable circumstances to the student for assistance in the completion of the thesis process.

_____

Non-Thesis Mentor   Date

_____

Mentor Signature

This document will be signed by Non-Thesis Mentor and student upon the formation of the Examination Board and submitted to the student's DSS academic advisor.

Sample Questions for the Comprehensive Oral Examination

Students who opt to take the Non-Thesis Comprehensive Oral Examination should understand that they will be asked to "defend" the views, logic, and research methods used in each of their submitted papers. Additionally, students may be asked a range of questions on a variety of issues covered during their academic pursuits at DSS, for example:

- Key authors and publications that influenced your studies at DSS
- Theories explaining Waltz' analysis of why nations go to war
- Theories of deterrence, including Schelling and Kahn
- The basic parameters of the Just War Doctrine
- The relationship between deterrence theory and U.S. Cold War arms control policy
- Key emerging strategic challenges to U.S. and global security
- U.S. approaches to counterproliferation, unilateral and multilateral
- Evolving roles of intelligence and counterintelligence
- Methods and prospects of counterterrorism

Finally, to establish students' proficiency in analysis and critical thinking, they may be asked to answer general questions on defense and strategic policy in the context of current events, for example:

- Having studied a range of issues at DSS, which issues do you believe are the most significant for US national security? What do you think are the biggest national security challenges facing the United States today? Do you think US policymakers are addressing these issues properly?
- What US national security policies, if any, would you change and why?
- Describe an issue you studied at DSS that led you to challenge your previous assumptions about the topic. Have your opinions changed as a result?
- What is your understanding of the relationship between "defense" and "national security"?
- How do you define "strategic" in the context of your studies at DSS?

Next Page -- Non-Thesis Paper Template and Format

[cover page template]

TITLE OF THE NON-THESIS PROJECT (DOUBLE SPACED, UPPER-CASE, BOLD,

AND CENTERED – INVERTED PYRAMID, IF OVER 48 CHARACTERS)

By

[Student Name]

A Master's Non-Thesis Project
Submitted to the School of Defense and Strategic Studies
Of Missouri State University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Science, Defense and Strategic Studies

[Month, Year] (This date must match in all iterations)]

Approved:

Dr. or Professor [First Last name], Non-Thesis Project 1st Reader/Mentor

Dr. or Professor [First Last name], Non-Thesis Project 2nd Reader

Dr. or Professor [First Last name], Non-Thesis Project 3rd Reader

Dr. John Rose, Ph.D., Chair of the School of Defense and Strategic Studies

In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this non-thesis project indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the non-thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this non-thesis project are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its School of Defense and Strategic Studies, or its employees.

Paper Format:

[cover page template]

ABSTRACT

[Text: single-spaced, Times New Roman font, 12 pitch, left aligned; Text should not exceed one page. May include Keyword list if desired.]

The formatting of this abstract should be one paragraph without indenting and single spaced. The length of the abstract is limited to this space so that everything fits on this one page. There must be at least two single-spaced blank lines between the abstract and the line with keywords. Abstract is expected to cover the introduction, methods, and overview of results' discussion of the research. Use of the pronoun "I" is acceptable; use of we here is only acceptable if multiple authors are listed on the title pages.

[optional] KEYWORDS: list at least five to ten keywords here, use lowercase (except proper nouns – even for the first word), separate keywords with commas, use no ending punctuation, do not indent any subsequent line, this section is single-spaced

INTRODUCTION

[Text: Double-spaced, Times New Roman font, 12 pitch, left aligned; first line of paragraphs will be indented; must include the "thesis statement;" Foot Notes will be 10-pitch Chicago style]

This is where you begin your non-thesis project paper. Your introduction is an important road map for the rest of your paper. Your introduction conveys a lot of information to your readers. Announce what your topic is, why it is important, and how you will proceed with your discussion. Moreover, the introduction presents the kinds of information you used to make your argument and the general organization of the paragraphs and pages that will follow. Your introduction must contain a thesis statement or question that will assert your main argument. The thesis is both the purpose and the "hook" of your paper. After reading your introduction, your readers should not have any major surprises in store when they read the main body of your paper.

[Substantive Body]
SUBTITLE HEADERS

*[Organized via subtitled headers (centered and **bold** font), as desired or appropriate]*
[Text: Double-spaced, Times New Roman font, 12 pitch, left aligned; first line of paragraphs will be indented; Foot Notes will be 10-pitch Chicago style]

Recommendations: As a rule of thumb, limit yourself to only the most relevant recommendations: ones that stem directly from your work. While you can have multiple recommendations for each issue researched, it is also acceptable to have one recommendation that is connected to more than one issue researched.

These recommendations should be targeted at your readers, those in the field that work on similar subjects to your paper or dissertation topic. They can account for any limitations you found while conducting your research, or recommendations that might require certain parameters in the future but might not exist today.

CONCLUSION

[Text: Double-spaced, Times New Roman font, 12 pitch, left aligned; first line of paragraphs will be indented]

The conclusion should briefly review the argument you've built, but it's not a summary – it's your final pitch to the reader for your thesis and recommendations. A conclusion should remind the reader what you have just told them, return to the "hook" used in the introduction; reiterate any recommendations, and possibly pose questions for future study. Take care not to repeat your words exactly in the conclusion. At the same time, do not introduce any new concepts or parts of your argument in this section. You are synthesizing and commenting on the ideas you've presented, but not making any substantially new points. By the end of your paper,

readers should already understand your position and the evidence used to support it. The conclusion provides readers a sense of completion, a reminder why your paper was worth reading.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unless directed by or coordinated with the Non-Thesis Project Mentor, the citation should follow Chicago-style format for footnotes and bibliography. Use the link for various sample citations: https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html

Sample:

Foot Notes – 10-pitch (internet citation)
1. "Privacy Policy," Privacy & Terms, Google, last modified April 17, 2017, https://www.google.com/policies/privacy/.
2. "About Yale: Yale Facts," Yale University, accessed May 1, 2017, https://www.yale.edu/about-yale/yale-facts.
3. Katie Bouman, "How to Take a Picture of a Black Hole," filmed November 2016 at TEDxBeaconStreet, Brookline, MA, video, 12:51, https://www.ted.com/talks/katie_bouman_what_does_a_black_hole_look_like.
Shortened foot notes (internet citation)
4. Google, "Privacy Policy."
5. "Yale Facts."
6. Bouman, "Black Hole."

Bibliography entries (in alphabetical order, 12-pitch) (internet citation)
Bouman, Katie. "How to Take a Picture of a Black Hole." Filmed November 2016 at
    TEDxBeaconStreet, Brookline, MA. Video, 12:51.
    https://www.ted.com/talks/katie_bouman_what_does_a_black_hole_look_like.
Google. "Privacy Policy." Privacy & Terms. Last modified April 17, 2017.
    https://www.google.com/policies/privacy/.
Yale University. "About Yale: Yale Facts." Accessed May 1, 2017. https://www.yale.edu/about-
    yale/yale-facts.

Any and all questions regarding the Non-Thesis Project Paper style and format beyond the guidance provided in this document should be addressed with your faculty mentor/1st reader.

END