



Department of Defense and Strategic Studies
Non-Thesis Option Process and Project Guide

March 2023 – Non-Thesis Coordinator: Professor McGiffin

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.

The Non-Thesis Research Project should result in an original double-spaced, 20-page length (without footnotes), Non-Thesis Research Paper to 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 Research Paper should follow MSU recommendations for writing a thesis. To view MSU’s “Thesis Publishing Guide dated March 2023”, create a Thesis on Blackboard account by following the instructions here:

<https://graduate.missouristate.edu/currentstudents/ThesisResources.htm>).

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 Coordinator, Professor Curtis McGiffin. The Faculty Member serving as the student's Project Mentor and two (2) additional DSS faculty members will be the student's main points of contact throughout the Non-Thesis Exam experience. They also will serve on the student's Comprehensive Oral Examination Board. The student's Project Mentor and the student will establish a schedule and outline of expectations for completing the research project, 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.

By the beginning of the graduation semester, in consultation with the Non-Thesis Project Mentor, the student will select from among the DSS Faculty two (2) additional members for the Examination Board. The student's Project Mentor and the two additional DSS faculty members will constitute the student's 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 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 Paper Structure: The Research Paper usually has chapters 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 Problem
 - Articulation of the student's hypothesis or point of view
 - Literature Review
 - Explanation of research methods
- Substantive chapters:
 - 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

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 are to submit two 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 Examination Board. Students must be prepared to defend the views, logic, and research methods used in each of the 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 Graduate College 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 Examination Board Members to that time and date. The student is to promptly inform their academic advisor when the oral exam time/date has been 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 defend them.

At 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 your 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 Process, students may rely on the advice and support of the Thesis Coordinator, the Non-Thesis Coordinator, and other members of the Staff. Students are welcome to contact the Non-Thesis Coordinator by email (curtismcgiffin@missouristate.edu) 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.

Students are required to inform the Non-Thesis Coordinator and their advisor regularly of their progress in the Non-Thesis Project.

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

- Make a clear timeline for completing all phases of the Non-Thesis Process in consultation with the Non-Thesis Mentor
- Take personal responsibility for the work required and the end product
- Report progress and setbacks to the Mentor periodically
- Recruit requisite DSS faculty for your examination board
- Expect critically constructive feedback in the process of preparation and presentation of the Non-Thesis Paper and be receptive and responsive to suggestions from the student's Project Mentor
- Follow ethical guidelines and comply with all MSU 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 the Non-Thesis Mentors and Oral Examination Board Members are expected to help students understand the importance and expectations of each stage of the Non-Thesis Option 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 the student to discuss and facilitate the Non-Thesis Option process, give advice at all stages of the Non-Thesis Project, and help the student coordinate with other members of respective Examination Boards.

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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 exam should understand that they 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

Additionally, to establish students' proficiency in analysis and critical thinking, they may be asked to answer general questions on defense and strategic policy, 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?