



Department of Defense and Strategic Studies Non-Thesis Option: Requirements and Process

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 choosing 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 their second semester, when they should declare their preference for the Non-Thesis Option.

The deadline to declare the Thesis or Non-Thesis Option is immediately following completion of 18 credits.

The Non-Thesis Research Project should result in a 30-35-page Non-Thesis Research Paper to be submitted to the Examination Board in electronic and hard-copy versions 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 (See MSU’s “Thesis Guide”). All or part of this Research Paper may be completed as part of a Regular DSS seminar course or as part of a Directed Reading course.

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. By the time of announcing their preference for the Non-Thesis Option (by the end of the second semester), students need to get the agreement of at least one Faculty Member to serve as their Non-Thesis Project Mentor and on their Examination Board. They are expected to take one or more Regular or Directed Reading Courses from this Faculty Member. In all cases, this faculty Mentor should be familiar with the student’s work, and optimally will have served as the professor of the DSS seminar or DR course that enables the student to work most effectively on the Non-Thesis Research Paper.

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, Dr. Andrei

Shoumikhin. The Faculty Member serving as the student's Project Mentor and Dr. Shoumikhin will be the student's main points of contact throughout the Non-Thesis Exam experience. They also will serve on the student's Examination Board. In coordination with Dr. Shoumikhin, 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 his or her 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 and Dr. Shoumikhin, the student will select from among the DSS Faculty one additional Member of the Examination Board. Dr. Shoumikhin, the student's Project Mentor, and this third faculty member will constitute the student's Examination Board. When selecting their Research Project Mentor and additional third member 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. The citation should follow MSU citation and attribution rules (See also: MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th Edition by Modern Language Association (Mar 9, 2009).

Additional Submissions to the Examination Board: Together with the Non-Thesis Report, students are to submit 2-3 papers (of at least 7 pages in length each) completed in previous DSS courses two weeks prior to the exam.

Non-Thesis Comprehensive Oral Examination: The Oral Examination under the Non-Thesis Option is to take place during the student's final (graduation) semester no later than the thesis-submission deadline set by the MSU Graduate College for that semester. Exams will take place in one of the Department's classrooms. The student is responsible for coordinating a specific time and date for the examination with his or her Mentor and Dr. Shoumikhin, and securing the commitment of the third Examination Board Member to that time and date.

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. (See sample questions in Appendix I). 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 796).

Non-Thesis students may not take 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 grades include "pass," "non-pass," "pass with distinction" and "pass with reservation." Passing "with distinction" requires a unanimous opinion of all members of the Examination Board. "Pass with reservation" may be assigned with the agreement of a majority of the exam committee.

A Comprehensive Oral Examination form will be provided to the student prior to the exam. This form must be completed and submitted just prior to the exam.

Deadlines:

- End of First Semester: Meet with Dr. Shoumikhin for an initial consultation regarding choosing the Thesis or Non-Thesis option
- End of Second Semester: Declare Thesis or Non-Thesis Option
- End of Second Semester: Select first Board Member and receive confirmation
- Beginning of Fourth Semester: Select second and third Board Members and receive confirmation
- Middle-End of Forth Semester: Submit Non-Thesis Project paper
- End of Forth Semester (before MSU Thesis Submission deadline date): Execute Comprehensive Oral Exam

DSS administrative support: At every stage of the Non-Thesis Process, students may rely on the advice and support of the Thesis Coordinator, Dr. Shoumikhin, and other members of the Staff. Students are welcome to contact Dr. Shoumikhin by email (ashoumikhin@aol.com), or set up personal meetings with him during Office hours 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 Dr. Shoumikhin 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 effort to produce an acceptable Non-Thesis Research 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 and DSS Office (Dr. Shoumikhin) periodically
- 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 and Dr. Shoumikhin
- Follow ethical guidelines and comply with all MSU policies and procedures
- Most importantly, ask for help when needed!

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 process. They should clearly 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 process, give advice at all stages of the Non-Thesis Project, and help the student coordinate with other members of respective Examination Boards.

Acknowledgment:

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 statement will be circulated to all DSS Faculty Members and students for information. It will be signed by Non-Thesis Mentors and students upon the formation of the Examination Board.