



Department of Defense and Strategic Studies
Thesis Project and Process
for DSS students only

Thesis Definition: A thesis is an empirical research and analysis project that provides students with an opportunity to demonstrate mastery over one particular topic of study. Components in the Thesis process include developing clear research questions, writing a quality literature review, forming theoretically-based expectation and hypothesis, constructing a sound research design, collecting data, demonstrating appropriate analysis techniques, and articulating the importance of the thesis findings to areas of Defense and Security. A thesis makes a unique contribution to the scientific literature, either by addressing an issue from a new angle or validating existing research through a replication study. More substantive than a research paper, the thesis articulates an argument or position that the student defends with logical reasoning and rigorous analysis, including an examination and critique of opposing points of view.

Thesis Structure: A thesis usually has chapters organized as follows:

- ⌚ Abstract:
 - One-page statement summarizing key elements and most salient findings of the 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

One of the best ways to better understand the form and requirements of a thesis is to review completed theses with topics similar to your own. The DSS Library has bound copies of theses from a wide range of subjects completed by DSS alumni located in Classroom B.

Why do a thesis? A thesis is one of the most time-consuming and work-intensive aspects of graduate school and its size and scale can be intimidating. However, there are several benefits with this option. First, for those students considering Ph.D. programs, a thesis prepares one to write a dissertation, an unavoidable capstone of doctoral studies. A completed thesis will help demonstrate to admission boards your desire, work ethic, commitment, and academic skills to successfully obtain a doctoral degree. Second, publications are often generated as a result of thesis research.

In addition, the thesis offers a platform upon which to sharpen and reinforce the skills gained from graduate education. The organizational skill necessary for drafting an informative literature review, the critical thinking and problem solving skills utilized to create a research design and analyze data, and the writing skills involved in persuasively communicating the contribution of the project are all strengthened and polished through the thesis. Students who complete a thesis also receive a bound document that becomes part of the Missouri State University and DSS Libraries.

Thesis Process: The student's first step is to choose a topic of desired research. Thesis students should consider what they find intriguing and what fuels their passion in the subject arena of defense and security studies. Consider specific issues and problems from these topics that you would like to explore, as well as how your interests can be framed in the context of a research question that will guide the development of the thesis. Students are strongly encouraged to start the thesis process in their first year, especially their second semester given the rigorous timeline of completing the Master's program in two years.

DSS administrative support: At every stage of the Thesis Process, students may rely on the advice and support of the Professor in Charge of the Thesis Process, Dr. Andrei 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 Thesis Requirements;
- 🕒 Making a choice between the Thesis and Non-Thesis Options for graduation;
- 🕒 Identifying areas of thesis research;
- 🕒 Preparing and filing all documents related to the Thesis Project;

- ⌚ Developing and presenting the thesis Concept Paper;
- ⌚ Interacting with DSS Faculty Members in establishing Thesis Committees and assuring their efficient functioning;
- ⌚ Keeping up with thesis-submission schedules, etc.

Students are required to inform Dr. Shoumikhin and DSS Staff regularly of their progress in theses preparation, approval and submission.

Working with a mentor: As students begin to gather ideas, narrow them down, and craft research questions, it is important that they search for a faculty member who will serve as a mentor in this process. A faculty member can help students with a number of things, such as:

- ⌚ Identifying good places to start with a literature review
- ⌚ Challenging a student to refine ideas and questions so that they are suitable for scientific study
- ⌚ Offering ideas about how similar topics have been examined in past research
- ⌚ Providing links to agencies which might be receptive to students collecting data for a thesis or assisting with the identification of databases suitable to the needs of a research project
- ⌚ Motivating students to keep moving forward with their thesis framework

Selecting the Thesis Committee and First Reader: Students are welcome to interact with multiple faculty members in a mentoring capacity, but eventually will select a First Reader. At the beginning of the second but not later than the third semester, the student will form a Thesis Committee with three Readers; composed of full time or adjunct DSS faculty. Dr. Andrei Shoumikhin, Thesis Coordinator, will serve as a Reader on each student's Thesis Committee unless a student requests otherwise. Exceptions to this may be approved by the Department Head upon written student request. Once the faculty member agrees, this will be approved by Professor Shoumikhin. The First Reader will be the student's main point of contact throughout the thesis experience. With the Thesis First Reader, a student will establish a timeline, including hard deadlines, and outline expectations for completing the research project. In addition, the First Reader is the primary authority and should be consulted with any plans to change the direction or format of the thesis.

In consultation with the First Reader, the student will also select a Thesis Committee, comprised of the First Reader, Second Reader, and Third Reader. The purpose of the Committee is to offer constructive input and feedback in the development and refinement of the thesis product. The First Reader has primary responsibility in this regard. The student and First Reader will work together to keep the full Committee informed regarding the stage of the research project and the

status of drafts or revisions. When selecting the Committee, the student should take into consideration which faculty members would best serve the student's needs in terms of thesis topic and overall guidance.

Some general considerations include:

- ⌚ Faculty members' current and previous research and their familiarity with the student's interests and academic accomplishments.
- ⌚ A representation of different specialization areas and analytic expertise
- ⌚ Persons who would provide a critical eye to the student's work

Starting the Thesis Project: The Concept Paper

A student starts working on the Thesis Project by developing a Concept Paper to be discussed with and approved by the First Reader. The Concept Paper includes:

- ⌚ A Comprehensive Abstract of the thesis defining the student's hypothesis, areas of proposed research, potential courses of action, an explanation of the aim, purpose, milestones and focus of the study
- ⌚ A concise chapter-by-chapter outline of the thesis explaining how different problems will be addressed
- ⌚ Bibliography of primary and secondary sources that will support the student's ability to study and research the problem statement, with an emphasis on the primary sources

The Concept Paper may take time and multiple rewrites to obtain clarity and mutual agreement with the First Reader on all aspects of the proposed Thesis Project. Please allow time for this process.

Thesis Presentation: Students should consult with their First Reader regarding the Concept Paper. Once the First Reader has accepted the Concept Paper, a student needs to begin working on the thesis presentation. The presentation should be completed no later than the middle of the third semester. A Thesis Presentation must achieve the following:

- ⌚ Clearly articulate the significance of your proposed research and the hypothesis you propose to defend
- ⌚ Introduce key concepts and dilemmas connected to the proposed study
- ⌚ Provide a short overview of the study you envision, and the tentative chapter breakdown
- ⌚ Explain the methods to be used in the research
- ⌚ Identify key bibliographic and other sources for the study

Students should invite all Committee members to the Thesis Presentation. Participation and input by the First Reader to the Thesis Presentation is essential. The student and First Reader are responsible for coordination among Readers at all stages of writing and reviewing the thesis.

Completion of the Thesis Project: Once a student has written a Concept Paper, had it reviewed and accepted by the First Reader and coordinated with the other Readers, and completed the Thesis Presentation, permission will be granted by Professor Shoumikhin to enroll in DSS 799 Thesis and complete the thesis project. Collection and analysis of data, and writing of the thesis draft (approximately 80 pages) must be completed by the student's graduation (usually fourth semester) at DSS.

Use of Course Papers to Advance the Thesis Project Process: In a major change from past practice, DSS has decided to allow students to integrate directly into their Thesis a paper produced for a Regular or Directed Reading DSS course, especially a paper completed under the guidance of the First Reader and on a matter related to the thesis subject. Only one previously-completed paper may be used; it may serve as the methodological and/or substantive foundation of the Thesis. The use of this paper in this fashion must be cited explicitly in the Thesis and discussed in advance with the First Reader. 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).

Thesis Submission Schedule: All data and information collected, including work on statistics, graphs and tables, is to be submitted to the First Reader 11 weeks before the MSU thesis submission deadline (see MSU submission deadline for each semester). The following timetable is a guideline for submission of drafts and revisions:

- ⌚ Baseline- 4 weeks after the semester begins (approximately February 10 for Spring graduates and September 16 for Fall graduates) submit 1st assembled draft to First Reader
- ⌚ +2 weeks- 1st assembled draft back from First Reader
- ⌚ +3 weeks- 2nd draft to First Reader
- ⌚ +5 weeks- 2nd draft back from First Reader
- ⌚ +6 weeks 3rd draft to 1st, 2nd, 3rd Readers
- ⌚ +8 weeks- 3rd draft back from 1st, 2nd, 3rd Readers
- ⌚ +10 weeks- Thesis finalized in coordination with the First Reader and posted to MSU Graduate College

Students are required to inform Dr. Shoumikhin as they successfully move through these steps.

Formatting Guidelines: The Graduate College has very specific guidelines for formatting the final thesis document. It also has instructions for making final copies and binding the finished

project. Please go to the following web address to review these guidelines:

http://graduate.missouristate.edu/thesis_information.htm.

Student Responsibilities: A thesis is time consuming and takes great dedication and hard work to complete. Students should expect to exert considerable effort to produce an acceptable thesis. To complete a thesis, it is the student's responsibility to do the following:

- ⌚ Make a clear timeline for completing all phases of the project in consultation with the First Reader
- ⌚ Take personal responsibility for the work required and the end product
- ⌚ Report progress and setbacks to the First Reader and DSS Office (Dr. Shoumikhin) periodically
- ⌚ Notify the First Reader and DSS Office (Dr. Shoumikhin) if deadlines are delayed
- ⌚ Expect critically constructive feedback at each stage of the thesis process and be receptive and responsive to suggestions from the Committee
- ⌚ Work with the First Reader to address any comments from other members of the Committee that seem unreasonable
- ⌚ Follow ethical guidelines and comply with all MSU policies and procedures
- ⌚ Recognize that the Thesis Committee needs sufficient but reasonable time to answer questions and review drafts
 - Allow for sufficient time at various stages of the process to make corrections or re-direct research efforts in response to Thesis Committee feedback: this provides a “buffer” to deal with unanticipated delays and avoids placing the students or the thesis readers in a time crunch where the paper must be “rushed to completion” to meet the necessary timeline.
- ⌚ Understand that the quality of submissions will greatly influence the nature of the feedback received and the effort necessary to address that feedback. If a poor draft is received, a faculty member will hand it back and require a more acceptable draft before taking any further steps.
- ⌚ Most importantly, ask for help when needed!

Faculty Responsibilities: Faculty members serving as First Readers and Committee Members (i.e. Second and Third Readers) are expected to help students understand the importance and expectations of each stage of the thesis process. Thesis Committee members are also expected to clearly communicate their availability to students, including summer semester schedule, travel, sabbatical, and other commitments. In addition, all Thesis Committee members should respect

