Graduate Committee

During their first year of graduate study, students enrolled in programs requiring a thesis, options to a thesis, and written and/or oral examinations should become acquainted with faculty in their department. Students will choose from this faculty a committee chairperson to oversee their final thesis or project. Students should consult with their committee chairperson in selecting additional committee members. This committee possesses both advisory responsibilities and judgmental abilities regarding the thesis, options to a thesis, and the written and/or oral examinations. All committee faculty must have current approved status as Graduate Faculty or Visiting Graduate Faculty.

For thesis, projects, and major papers, the Graduate Committee consists of the chairperson (usually the student's advisor) and 2-4 other members. The majority of the committee members must hold terminal degrees. No more than one visiting graduate faculty member may serve on a student's committee. All committees, regardless of size, must include one faculty member outside the student's program. This member may be from the same department but should represent a different discipline or focus of study. Each program has specific committee membership requirements; students should review departmental information and/or consult with their program coordinator for additional information. The program coordinator, department chair, and the head of the Graduate School must approve all persons on the Graduate Committee. The Graduate Committee form with all faculty listed must be filed in the Graduate School.

Comprehensive Examinations

(The following information is only pertinent to those programs that require preliminary, written, or oral comprehensive exams.)

A. Preliminary Written Exams

The preliminary examination, or first-year review, is designed to assess students' academic knowledge within the discipline and their ability to write in a coherent, organized manner. Questions for the written preliminary exams are written and scored by the program faculty. Students failing preliminary written exams may be required to participate in remediation prior to re-writing the examination. If the student fails preliminary exams a second time, the students will be required to meet with the program department, core department faculty, and outside members of the faculty as appropriate to discuss the student's standing in the program, continuation of remediation, and/or dismissal from the program.

B. Written Comprehensive Examination

The written comprehensive examination represents one of the milestones in a graduate program. The student is challenged to focus all their knowledge, ability, skill, analytic, and interpretive techniques on problems, difficulties, and questions of academic and practical concern. The student should be prepared to demonstrate in writing that they understand specific knowledge and its application within the discipline.

Students will complete written comprehensive exams at a date specified by their department.

In preparation for the examination the student should expect:

1. To be tested on all required course work, all related areas, all prerequisite materials, and communication skills,
2. To take the test that is structured by faculty with whom the student has studied and/or faculty who have expertise in the given areas,
3. To be graded by the professors of record or faculty members with the necessary competence in the discipline,
4. To review a delineation of expectations, grading, and guidelines for passing found in the appropriate department.

A student who does not pass the written comprehensive examination will be required to meet with their program coordinator or graduate committee prior to being permitted a second (final) attempt, in a manner determined by the program, on the regularly scheduled date within the prescribed time limit.

C. Oral Comprehensive Examination

An oral comprehensive examination is designed to simulate the circumstances of debate or professional discussion among colleagues. The oral examination should present a lively interplay of ideas, thoughts, and reasoned opinions between the candidate and committee. Students will complete oral comprehensive exams at a date specified by their department.

Although variable by program, the oral comprehensive examination must meet the minimal time allowance of approximately one hour in length. The individual can expect questions from the committee(s) which address the following:

1. The breadth, depth, and integration of the student's knowledge in the area of specialization.
2. The ability of the student to react and communicate in an oral situation.

A student who does not pass the oral comprehensive examination will be permitted a second (final) attempt during the semester, or subsequent semesters, within the prescribed time limit. The exact date for all examinations will be set by the program.

Thesis

Each student using a thesis option must submit a thesis to the Graduate School as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree. A thesis represents the student's capacity for detailed, in-depth research or advanced scholarship. The design of a thesis may be varied to fit the specialized needs of the discipline; however, no multiple authorships are accepted. A thesis must demonstrate the student's ability to clearly define a worthwhile problem, conduct a thorough investigation, organize and logically present the information, and draw defensible conclusions.

Credit is given for the writing of the thesis and for the research which was completed and incorporated into the thesis. The amount of credit varies and shall be determined by the department's concerned but usually is 1 to 6 semester credits. Students must enroll in Continuing Enrollment (http://catalog.minotstateu.edu/graduate/policies-regulations/active-status/continuing_enrollment_policy/) each semester until the student completes their thesis requirement.

When writing a thesis it is the student's responsibility to consult frequently with the Graduate Committee Chairperson during all phases of the thesis process including planning and preliminary activities, meet with the Graduate Committee members and solicit input from them, prepare the thesis in a scholarly manner as shown in the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Thesis and Major Papers* available on the Graduate School website, and meet the thesis deadlines as listed on the Graduate School calendar, also on the website. The Student Resources page (https://www.minotstateu.edu/graduate/current_students/index.shtml/) will take you to the following items:

1. Guide and Preparation of Theses or Project
2. Thesis Checklist
3. Final Submission Cover Sheet
4. Thesis Process After Defense

Please note: Editing services are not available in the Graduate School.

Thesis Proposal

One of the first steps when writing a thesis is devising the thesis proposal. The thesis proposal is a detailed outline of the proposed research and includes an introduction, review of the literature, problem description, statement of objectives or hypotheses, listing of possible tests or measures to be used in the study, descriptions of the proposed sample, research design, chronological description of the procedures to be used in carrying out the project, and plans for analyzing the data.

When the student and the Committee Chairperson agree that the Thesis Proposal is ready for committee review, the student schedules a thesis proposal meeting at a place, date, and time agreeable with the members of the Graduate Committee. At least seven (7) days prior to the proposal meeting, the proposal is presented individually to the Graduate Committee members for their consideration. At the proposal meeting the student seeks approval of the thesis concept and suggested methodology. Questions from the committee members will vary and appropriate questions may include examining the following: general purpose and rationale for the study; review of the literature; organization of the proposal, methods, techniques, and research design to be employed; and chronological description of the proposed techniques.

At the conclusion of the thesis proposal meeting, the Graduate Committee members evaluate the proposal in the absence of the student. The committee may approve or reject the proposal. The student is notified immediately by the committee of its decision. The committee will discuss the rationale for the decision with the student. If the committee approves the thesis proposal, members should sign the student-prepared "Thesis Major Paper/ Project Proposal" form. The program coordinator also will sign this form and then submit the form to the Graduate School.

Thesis Defense

At the conclusion of the thesis research and writing process, the student schedules a thesis defense, in compliance with the dates given in this catalog. It is the student's responsibility to schedule the defense with the Graduate Committee at an agreeable place, time, and date.

At least seven (7) days prior to the defense, the student presents the thesis individually to the Graduate Committee members for their review. The student must file the "Thesis Defense" notification form in the Graduate School at this time. This form includes the defense place, time, and date. Thesis defense meetings are open to the MSU community.

Although questions from the committee members will vary, the defense shall not be concerned with mechanical problems. Typographical problems and grammar shall be dealt with prior to the defense. Appropriate questions are typically directed at the following: major discoveries or interpretations, potential for future research, strengths and weaknesses of the study, implementations of research tools and methodology used, publication potential, and contributions to the field of knowledge.

At the conclusion of the thesis defense, the Graduate Committee members evaluate the defense in the absence of the student. The committee may approve or reject the thesis. One member of the committee may have a dissenting vote, and the thesis will be considered approved. The student is notified immediately by the committee chairperson of the committee's decision. If the thesis is approved, members should also sign the student prepared "Thesis or Project Defense" form. A committee member who has a dissenting vote must indicate this on the "Thesis Project Defense" form. The program coordinator will also sign the form and he/she should then submit it to the Graduate School.

See "Archiving" for instructions for final printing and publication of the Thesis.

Thesis Grading

The chairperson of the Graduate Committee grades the thesis at the end of the term. If the student has not successfully completed the thesis, including the defense, the committee chairperson shall award an “X” (in progress) grade. The chairperson will replace the “X” with the appropriate grade upon completion of the project. These grades are submitted to the Registrar’s Office. A student receiving an in-progress grade is expected to register for Continuing Enrollment each consecutive semester including summer until the thesis is complete.

Options to a Thesis

Some degree programs offer students the option of completing a final project or major paper(s). Students completing projects or papers will follow procedures similar to those outlined for completing the thesis. Students completing projects or papers should consult the section in the catalog pertinent to their specific degree. Credit is awarded for these options. The amount of credit varies and shall be determined by the departments concerned but usually is one to four semester credits.

Capstone Course

Some degree programs offer students the option of completing a capstone course. The instructor of the capstone course, following departmental guidelines, establishes the requirements of the course and the grading mechanisms. Capstone courses are typically designed to address significant program learning outcomes and usually involve some type of project or other deliverable.

Archiving

Thesis and master’s projects have value as records of scholarship at MSU. Therefore, the University preserves and makes available thesis and project reports to scholars and the public by completing a search with ProQuest. All approved theses or projects completed by an MSU student is permanently archived through submission to ProQuest.

Please refer to the document "Thesis Final Review Process After Defense" (https://www.minotstateu.edu/graduate/current_students/index.shtml/) on the Graduate School website which will assist in submitting a thesis for the final review in the Graduate School.