

DEPARTMENT OF KINESIOLOGY MASTER OF SCIENCE OF HEALTH AND HUMAN PERFORMANCE THESIS POLICY

The primary purpose of a thesis is to train students in the processes of scholarly research/inquiry and writing under the direction of graduate faculty in the Department of Kinesiology. The policy below is developed from content taken from *Writing a Successful Thesis or Dissertation: Tips and Strategies for Students in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, by Lunenburg and Irby (2008). While the intent and construct of a thesis may vary by program area, its supervision is universally handled by members of the graduate faculty of the Department of Kinesiology serving as chair and committee members.

Selecting a Suitable Topic and Journal

The selection of a suitable topic is the first step in writing a thesis. Graduate faculty in the Department of Kinesiology have expertise in various academic areas and may assist in a broad range of topics related to the graduate student's interest. Based on guidance from a graduate faculty member, the student may begin his/her topic selection by identifying two or three broad areas in which different types of research may be pursued. By searching professional literature, a student may narrow these broad areas down to one or two specific topics that he/she might wish to research. Good sources for possible topic selection include textbooks, professional journals, dissertations, theses, theories, current employment, and existing databases. In selecting an appropriate topic for a thesis, the following criteria should be considered as important: (a) interest, (b) significance, (c) available data, (d) knowledge and skills, (e) manageability, and (f) funding. Concerning significance, the selected topic should make important contributions to the literature that include at least one of the following: (a) test an existing theory, (b) uncover new facts or principles, (c) challenge existing truths or assumptions, (d) suggest relationships between phenomena, (e) provide new insights into phenomena, (f) suggest new interpretations of known facts, (g) alter other people's perceptions about phenomena, and (h) extend a research methodology or statistical procedure. Once a suitable topic has been selected, the student and thesis chair should select a professional peer-reviewed journal (national or international level) in which the final paper would be viewed as a proper fit considering the scope and mission as stated by the journal. Concerning manageability, the average master's student requires from four to nine months to complete the master's thesis. Students should assess the amount of time he/she will need to complete the thesis early in the process.

Selecting a Chair and Committee

The selection of the thesis committee is an important step in the thesis process and will impact the quality of the finished product. Therefore, the selection of a thesis committee chair is one of the most important decisions relative to success in the thesis process. In collaboration with the thesis committee chair and committee members, the student will delimit his/her topic, develop a proposal, conduct research, and complete a thesis. The chair of the thesis committee usually has broad power and influence throughout the process of completing the thesis including:

- Agreeing to serve as thesis chair for the student's thesis project.
- Assisting the student in selecting the other members of the thesis committee.
- Assisting the student in selection of an appropriate professional peer-reviewed journal to which the completed thesis project may be submitted.
- Maintaining constant communication with all members of the thesis committee and seeking their input relative to all aspects of the thesis completion process.
- Consulting with the thesis committee members to determine when the student is ready to present his/her proposal as well as defend the thesis.
- Consulting with the thesis committee members to determine when the student has successfully completed his/her thesis through completion of the written document and a successful oral defense of the thesis content.

The Department of Kinesiology allows only those individuals who currently hold graduate faculty status to serve as a thesis chair and to serve on a thesis committee.

Composition and Role of the Thesis Committee

The thesis committee will consist of a chair and additional graduate faculty members as specified in the Department of Kinesiology Thesis Guidelines. Specifically:

- The committee must be comprised of a minimum of three current graduate faculty members, the chair plus two additional members who are graduate faculty at the University of North Alabama
- A majority of the thesis committee members must be members of the graduate faculty in the Department of Kinesiology.
- The chair of the thesis committee must be a member of the graduate faculty in the Department of Kinesiology.
- The student may elect to include up to five graduate faculty as members on the thesis committee if it is determined by the student, in coordination with the thesis chair, that additional members are needed to provide specific expertise.
- In rare circumstances, the addition of a graduate faculty member from another university to the thesis committee can be made when deemed necessary. Such appointments must be approved by the thesis chair and the Chair of the Department of Kinesiology.

Ideally, committee members should supplement the academic expertise of the thesis chair. For example, if the student thesis requires complex statistical procedures and the chairperson is not a statistician, the student may add to his/her thesis committee a faculty member with statistical expertise or technical skills relative to the study.

Specifically, concerning research method, graduate faculty often differ concerning their preferences for a particular research method. A research method comprises the strategy followed in collecting and analyzing data. The major distinction in classifying research by method is the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research.

Thesis students need to examine the match between his/her preference and the potential thesis chair's preference for a research method. The issue is not which method is better but rather which method (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods) will best answer the particular research question or direction of inquiry.

General roles of the thesis committee include the following:

- The committee provides consultation to the student throughout the process of the research
- Committee members establish the direction of the study by approving the thesis proposal and assisting the thesis chair in providing direction for the study
- Committee members offer additional assurances to the university, college, and department that the thesis standards have been met
- Committee members make judgments relative to the student's written work, including substance, style, and usage.
- Committee members examine the student's work and approve the final oral defense

Responsibilities of Thesis Committee Chair

- Provide timely and thorough guidance to a student on the various elements necessary for the planning and execution of a thesis study.
- Recommend appropriate members to serve on the thesis committee and oversee circulation of all drafts of the thesis manuscript to committee members.
- Advise the student on proposal and final defense protocols.
- Ensure that the student and his/her manuscript is adequately prepared for the proposal and the defense.
- Facilitate the defense, take notes for the student at the defense, and discuss what revisions may be needed after the defense has been concluded.
- Be accessible to the student for dialogue and formal meetings as needed.
- Respond to all drafts of the thesis document submitted by the student in a timely basis. A reasonable guideline is no more than ten (10) working days turnaround time upon receipt of a draft or a response to a student if more than ten (10) working day window is needed for a response.
- Be intimately familiar with the materials found in the Department of Kinesiology Graduate Thesis Guidelines and University of North Alabama Faculty Handbook, the core documents that describe what is expected in a thesis. This includes all pre/post-proposal and post-final defense steps that are required for the student.
- Maintain their graduate faculty status and human subjects research certification.
- Provide the editorial and citation support that the student needs to prepare a final, correctly edited manuscript or to make a referral to an outside resource which the student can access for this purpose.
- Respect the power differential that exists between the student and the thesis committee chair and not abuse the trust placed in him/her as a member of the graduate faculty for the appropriate conduct of a thesis project.

Responsibilities of Committee Members

- In collaboration with the thesis committee chair, provide timely and thorough guidance to the student on project development and/or manuscript drafts.
- Respond to all student thesis drafts in a timely basis. A reasonable guideline is no more than ten (10) working days turnaround time upon receipt of a thesis draft or a response to the student if more time is needed within that ten (10) working day period. It is also important to keep the thesis chair informed of feedback being provided to the student outside of the formal defense settings.

- Respect the power differential that exists between the student and a committee member and not to abuse the trust placed in him/her as a member of the graduate faculty for the appropriate conduct of a thesis project.

Thesis Preparation and Formatting

A “journal-format” thesis is required for student completing a thesis. Journal format requires the student to obtain the “information for authors” or similar author guidelines for the identified journal and format the thesis exactly as outlined by the journal. This should be done from the initiation of the thesis project (i.e. from the proposal stage forward) as opposed to following the traditional five-chapter format. By correctly following this model the thesis will result in a final project which is correctly formatted and ready for immediate submission to the previously-identified journal following successful defense before the thesis committee. The “information for authors” or other author guidelines must be printed from the journal website or photocopied from a printed version of the identified journal and submitted with the thesis proposal for review by the committee. The final bound copy of the thesis should be submitted with the following components in the order listed:

- Title page (formatted as per: pg. 9)
- Table of contents (formatted as per: pg. 10)
- Thesis proposal approval form (with thesis committee member signatures)
- Thesis defense approval form (with thesis committee member signatures)
- Acknowledgments (if student chooses)
- Copy of author guidelines from selected journal
- Final thesis paper in precise journal format*

*This may include an additional title page as required by the journal

The Proposal and Final Oral Defense

The Department of Kinesiology requires that a student meets formally with the full thesis committee at least twice, during which the he/she will present and defend the thesis proposal and when he/she will present and defend his/her final thesis project. The final thesis defense is to be announced to the entire University, including the faculty, staff and students of the Department of Kinesiology at least two weeks (10 working days) prior to the scheduled defense. The date, time and location of the thesis defense should be scheduled a minimum of two weeks (10 working days) prior to the defense by the student. Once schedule of the defense has been established, the thesis chair is responsible for forwarding the thesis announcement to the Department of Kinesiology administrative assistant to be announced to the University community. The thesis defense announcement should include student’s name, major, department, thesis title, date, time, location, and chair’s name.

The proposal meeting is to be held before the student begins collecting data for his/her thesis. Prior to the thesis proposal meeting the student must make sure his/her thesis chair and the entire thesis committee has read and approved the final draft of the proposal to be presented. The student will increase the chances that his/her proposal meeting will go well if he/she prepares a well written document. The student may not pressure his/her thesis chair or committee members to hold a proposal meeting or the

final oral defense if the written documents require any major revisions. The final oral defense will be held after the student has collected and analyzed his/her data and has completed the final draft of the thesis. The Department of Kinesiology requires a "journal-format" thesis. The final draft of the thesis must be well written and carefully prepared (e.g., no spelling errors or poor grammar, no missing references, tables and figures match text, clear printed copies).

Concerning a thesis proposal meeting, the committee chair will begin the proposal meeting by:

- Introducing the committee
- Explaining the procedures for the thesis proposal meeting.
- Asking the student to introduce himself/herself and make a brief statement about his/her professional background.
- Asking the student to present a 20 to 30 minute summary of his/her thesis proposal. This summary should cover all major aspects of his/her research plan—the problem, purpose, theoretical framework, research questions or hypotheses, and methodology. The presentation should be clear and concise.
- Questions from the committee follow the student's thesis proposal presentation. Each member should have an opportunity to ask questions on any aspect of the proposal with the thesis chair acting as moderator.
- After the thesis committee has completed questioning the student, the thesis chair will call for further questions.
- If there are no further questions, the student will be asked to leave the room.
- The committee will then deliberate, concerning both the student's performance during the proposal defense and the adequacy of his/her research plan.
- Finally, the thesis committee will vote on the acceptability of the thesis proposal. Specific voting procedures are presented in the Department of Kinesiology Thesis Policy.

When the thesis is complete and approved by the thesis chair and the entire thesis committee, the student may schedule a defense of the thesis before the entire thesis committee. All members of student's thesis committee must be physically present for the thesis defense. If a committee member cannot be present, the student is expected to reschedule the defense. In extenuating circumstances, the student may petition through the thesis chair to the remaining members of the student's thesis committee to have a member participate in absentia, through Skype.

Concerning the thesis defense, the thesis chair and all thesis committee members will follow the guidelines below:

- All thesis committee members are to inform the thesis chair when they consider the thesis ready for defense.
- Upon approval of all thesis committee members, the thesis chair will inform the student that his/her thesis is acceptable for defense and to set a date, time and location for the defense.
- The thesis chair will assist the student in setting the time and date for the thesis defense and scheduling the location of the defense.

- The thesis chair will arrange for the thesis defense time, date and location to be announced to the University community a minimum of two weeks (10 working days) prior to defense.
- All committee members must approve ALL corrections of the thesis prior to defense.
- All committee members will be expected to be prepared to discuss the content of the thesis during the defense, but NOT making suggestions for improving content or publication preparation since these issues should have been addressed to the satisfaction of all committee member prior to the defense.
- The thesis committee chair will facilitate the thesis defense to insure questions and discussion are focused toward the student's ability to defend the content of the thesis as completed.

The oral thesis defense is similar to the proposal defense in that much of the expectations provided thus far regarding scheduling and presenting will apply. The student will be asked to:

- Present a 30 to 40 minute summary of his/her thesis during which he/she will describe the problem, purpose, brief literature review, theoretical framework, research questions or hypotheses, method, results, and interpretation.
- The focus of the thesis defense will be less on the literature, rationale, and method of the study and more on the results and interpretation of those results.
- Thus, questions from the members of the thesis committee during the thesis defense will be on a description of what the student did, what he/she found from the data analysis, and what the analysis means and its importance to the profession.

Upon conclusion of the oral defense of the thesis, the student will be dismissed from the room and the committee will vote regarding successful completion of the thesis. If accepted, the approving members of the committee will sign the Thesis Approval Form provided by the student. The chair of the student's thesis committee will retain a copy of this document for his/her files, return the original to the student to be included in the bound copy of the thesis to be retained by the Department of Kinesiology, and provide a copy of the signed document to the following individuals; the graduate student, other members of the thesis committee as requested, the department advisor of graduate students, and the department chair. If the student is unsuccessful in the thesis defense, the committee will provide specific instructions to the student regarding necessary changes, additions, etc. that must be completed to the satisfaction of all thesis committee members prior to an opportunity for a second oral defense attempt. Successful completion of the thesis will require a majority vote by the members of the thesis committee.

Appendix 1: Student Checklist
University of North Alabama
Department of Kinesiology
Completing a Graduate Thesis

The following is for students who wish to complete a graduate thesis in the Department of Kinesiology. Students must select a thesis chair and committee members, select a topic, and complete a thesis according to the specified guidelines. The following checklist will help students stay on track when completing the thesis requirements.

Student Checklist

1. Select a thesis chair and additional committee members.
 - It is recommended that the chair have expertise in the research topic selected.
2. Topic has been selected **AND** approved.
3. Thesis Proposal date confirmed.
 - Proposal paper must be submitted to all thesis committee members at least two weeks (10 working days) prior to proposal date.
 - Week one: Committee provides feedback to student
 - Week two: Student makes corrections necessary to be ready for proposal defense
4. IRB Approval
 - Student should wait for IRB until proposal has been approved
5. Data collection and manuscript preparation
6. Format paper for selected journal (see above formatting directions, pg 4)
7. Select a tentative defense date
 - Submit final draft of thesis to all thesis committee members two to three weeks prior to the defense date.
 - Committee must have one to two weeks prior to defense date to read and provide feedback on final draft.
 - Student makes corrections necessary prior to defense date.
 - Set up a “mock defense” if wanted
8. Thesis Defense/Completion of Defense Approval Forms
9. Submit Completed Thesis

REFERENCE

Lunenburg, F. C., & Irby, B. J. (2008). *Writing a successful thesis or dissertation: Tips and strategies for students in the social and behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Title Page Example

The Influence of Interval Training vs. Constant Load Cycling on Markers of Muscle
Damage in Collegiate Cross-Country Runners

Author's full name

A THESIS

Completed in the Department of Kinesiology University of North Alabama

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science Degree

Date: month, day, year (ex: 02/05/2010)

Table of Content Example

Table of Contents

Thesis proposal approval form

Thesis defense approval form

Acknowledgments (if included)

Copy of author guidelines for selected journal

Final thesis paper (journal format)

Thesis Proposal Approval Form

Student _____

Degree Sought/Concentration _____

Date of Thesis Proposal Meeting _____

Department _____

Topic/Title of Thesis _____

Estimated Date of Completion _____
(semester) (year)

Signatures: Signature below reflects agreement of graduate faculty member to serve on the student's thesis committee and the approval of each committee member that the thesis project be pursued as proposed by the student including any contingencies as outlined in the proposal meeting on the date specified.

Name (typed or printed)

Signature

Committee Chair

Member

Member

Member

Member

Department of Kinesiology
College of Education and Human Sciences
University of North Alabama
Box 5073, Flowers Hall
Florence, AL 35632-0001

Thesis Defense Approval Form

Student _____

Degree Sought/Concentration _____

Date of Thesis Defense _____

Department _____

Topic/Title of Thesis _____

Signatures: The undersigned confirm that we have reviewed the student's (named above) thesis project including the written document and the oral defense and we agree that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation pursuant to the degree sought. In the case of approval pending certain contingencies, each committee member may either sign with expectation that the committee chair ensure appropriate edits prior to submission or provide signature after they are offered the opportunity to review and approve edits as discussed during the oral defense.

Name (typed or printed)

Signature/Date

Committee Chair

Member

Member

Member

Member

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