

International Relations Department

Graduate (MA) Thesis Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

This document is a departmental supplement to the Thesis Guidelines for Students at Webster Vienna Private University (WVPU), adopted by the Executive Board and approved by the University Council on October 7, 2016. This document is available on the International Relations Department website.

Writing a graduate thesis can be a rewarding academic experience, but it can also be stressful and challenging. This document will guide you through the process, explaining formal procedures and providing you with other helpful information. It is of utmost importance that you read this document thoroughly and well ahead of your intention to formally register as a thesis-writing student. Please note that you can register for two consecutive academic units (see timeline below).

Before beginning your thesis project, we suggest students review [WVPU's Academic Policies](#).

REQUIREMENTS

1. All core course requirements must be completed prior to registering for the thesis (at least 30 credit hours).
2. The Graduate Thesis Declaration of Intent Form, as well as the Proposal and Proposal Form must be submitted and approved by the end of the term prior to the term you wish to be registered as a thesis-writing student.
3. Attendance at Research Seminars & Guest Lectures during your studies is strongly encouraged. Events are announced on the WVPU [website](#) and via E-Mail.

RESEARCH TOOLS & UNIVERSITY SUPPORT

THE LIBRARY

As you begin to research and plan your thesis, it is crucial that you are familiar with the full array of research tools available to you. Subsequently, we recommended that students schedule a research consultation with the librarian, who will acquaint you with available resources on your subject, including both electronic and hardcopy sources. The library also offers useful materials on research methodology and academic writing.

THE LANGUAGE CENTER

Schedule an appointment at The Language Center to have a sample of your writing reviewed. The Language Center also runs various helpful workshops which are periodically announced in the Bulletin distributed via Webster email.

THE PROCESS

FIND A SUPERVISOR

Approximately **two or three terms before you intend to register for your thesis**, you need to start approaching eligible faculty members with your ideas about a thesis topic. From as early in your studies as possible, you should listen closely to suggestions about possible research topics in your courses. Instructors may mention that certain issues are worth researching in more depth, some areas have not been researched sufficiently, or particular studies could be replicated for a new region, different circumstances, etc. A well-tuned ear should take note of these research avenues.

It is your responsibility to find a thesis supervisor, as the department will not assign one for you. Please review *Supervisor Thesis Areas* document for faculty's research areas and methods. Hard copies are located outside office 2.05 and the document is available for download on the [Thesis – International Relations](#) section of the university website. Please note that not all teaching faculty are eligible to supervise your thesis, even though you are welcome to discuss your ideas with any faculty member. A supervisor must have a PhD in the field and be a permanent member of our faculty.

In addition to the supervisor you need to find another faculty member to be the second reader. Depending on your topic, this can also be a faculty member from a different department (e.g. Center for Liberal Arts, Business & Management) or an International Relations adjunct faculty member.

GRADUATE THESIS (MA) DECLARATION OF INTENT FORM

As soon as you have found a faculty member willing to supervise your thesis, you must fill out the *Thesis Declaration of Intent Form*. This form confirms that your supervisor approves of the topic of your thesis and has committed to supervising it. Please submit the completed and signed form to the department coordinator.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

If your research requires work with human subjects (surveys, interviews, experiments), you need to have clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before submitting your proposal. Approval from the IRB in St. Louis must be submitted with the Proposal and Proposal form. Please review the IRB Approval Process document (available at [Thesis – International Relations](#)).

GRADUATE THESIS (MA) PROPOSAL FORM

After submitting your *Thesis Declaration of Intent Form* to the department, you may begin to work on your formal thesis proposal. The expected length of the proposal is 3.000-5.000 words, but this figure can vary depending on your topic and/or your supervisor's preference. In your proposal you must present a complete working research design including the following components clearly organized and titled:

- A brief abstract of your research proposal (approx.. 250 words – to be entered on Form)
- Introduction; summarizing the research question, background on your research topic and why it is worthy of further inquiry
- Detailed outline of the thesis (chapters, paragraphs)
- Academic and practical objectives of your proposed research
- Initial Literature Review on the topic organized around all major concepts identified in the research question
- Contextually constructed hypothesis and null hypothesis
- Initial proposal on the methodology used to test the hypothesis and null hypothesis (How will the research be conducted and why? Sample size, sampling method, study design)
- A brief analysis of the limits and uncertainties involved in the research
- Statement of anticipated outcomes

Your supervisor may ask you to submit more than what is listed above. It is your responsibility to submit the proposal early enough so as not to jeopardize the registration process. Your Proposal and Graduate (MA) Thesis Proposal Form must be submitted to your supervisor, who will review and forward them to the department coordinator. The department head will grant final approval. Absent a proposal approval, you cannot continue the process, i.e. you will not be registered as a thesis-writing student.

Deadlines for Proposal Submission

To be registered in:	Proposal due to Supervisor:
Summer Term	Week 6 of previous Spring 2 Term
Spring Semester / Spring 1 Term	Week 6 of previous Fall 2 Term
Spring 2 Term	Week 6 of previous Spring 1 Term
Fall Semester / Fall 1 Term	Week 6 of previous Summer Term
Fall 2 Term	Week 6 of previous Fall 1 Term

Please note that deadlines for proposal submission are subject to change. If they change, communication will be sent to students accordingly.

TIMELINE

While working on your proposal, you should think about how much time you will realistically need to complete your thesis. Students may choose to register for the 6 thesis credits as two consecutive terms or semesters. Here are just some examples:

Registration Period 1 (3 credits)		Registration Period 2 (3 credits)
Fall 1 Term	—→	Fall 2 Term
Fall Semester	—→	Spring 1 Term
Fall 2 Term	—→	Spring 1 Term
Fall Semester	—→	Spring Semester
Spring Semester	—→	Summer Term
Spring 2 Term	—→	Summer Term

Before deciding, you should speak with your supervisor and faculty advisor about your options.

After you've been registered, you should work out a timeline with your supervisor for regular meetings and submission of your drafts and in-progress work. Choosing a "first draft" deadline, for example, is a good idea, but these types of informal deadlines are up to you and your supervisor. The earlier you submit meaningful drafts to your supervisor, the more time your supervisor will have to provide feedback and the more time you will have to incorporate that feedback into your thesis.

THESIS FORMAT

A Thesis Formatting Template, which incorporates the formatting guidelines, is available on the [Thesis- International Relations](#) section of the university website.. You can download it, "Save-As", and begin writing your thesis directly into the document. Your thesis has to follow APA conventions. An APA style guide is available on the Citation Styles page of the Webster University Library website.

The length of the thesis is not a measure of quality; however, the International Relations Department expects the average thesis to have a minimum length of approximately 20.000-25.000 words (ultimately, the length will be determined by your supervisor and your topic), excluding appendices, notes and references. The length requirement may be modified only upon consultation with your supervisor.

PETITION TO GRADUATE

Before you submit your final draft and defend your thesis, you need to submit a [Petition to Graduate](#), this formally informs the university that you are about to complete your studies. All you have to do is to complete this online form:

<http://www.webster.edu/advising/student-resources/grad-petition-graduate.html>

SUBMISSION OF FINAL DRAFT

The deadline for submission of the final version of your graduate thesis will be determined by your thesis supervisor, but should be no later than week 7 of the last graduate term of your 2nd registration period. Here are some examples:

Registration Period 2	Final Draft Due	Defense
Fall 1	Week 7 of Fall 1	Week 9 of Fall 1
Summer	Week 7 of Summer	Week 9 of Summer
Spring 2 / Spring Semester	Week 7 of Spring 2	Week 9 of Spring 2

If your supervisor does not approve your final draft, meaning you are not scheduled for a defense, a new deadline will be determined by your supervisor and you will receive an incomplete grade in the meantime. If you do not finish within one calendar year from the term in which you registered, the incomplete grade becomes a ZF grade, which is equivalent to a failing grade.

DEFENSE

After you have submitted your final draft, you will be asked to publicly defend your thesis as a final step. The defense must take place no later than week 9 of the last graduate term of your 2nd registration period. A minimum of three faculty members must sit on the committee, which includes your supervisor, the reader, the Department Head, and if available the Director / Associate Director. Once you have submitted your final draft, you and your supervisor will find a date and time that suits you both as well as the second reader and the Department Head.

At the public defense you will give a short presentation of your main findings (approximately 20 minutes), after which committee members (and other persons present) will ask questions. The defense is scheduled for 45 minutes, but may last for up to an hour.

Please bring at least two copies of the *Thesis Approval* page (page 2 in the Thesis formatting Template) as you will need to gather the committee's signatures after you defend to be included in your hardbound thesis copies. If you wish to keep one signed copy for yourself, please bring extra copies.

AFTER THE DEFENSE

You will need to prepare two hardbound copies of your thesis (please no spiral binding) and bring them to the department. One copy is kept in the department and the other copy is delivered to the library and becomes publically accessible.

Within one week of completing your defense you will need to schedule a meeting with the librarian to upload your thesis to the ProQuest database. Your presence at the meeting is required, and failure to upload to ProQuest will lead to a hold on your account and the withholding of your diploma until the task is completed.

UNEXPECTED DIFFICULTIES

As mentioned before, thesis writing can be a challenging undertaking. This is true for students as well as professional academics. A researcher cannot predict the twists and turns of the research journey, as data may not be available or be incomplete, results may not support a hypothesis, further research could reveal that somebody else has already had the same idea, or you simply get stuck. These setbacks may seem like bad luck, but they are a normal part of academic research. For that reason, you will need to establish a good rapport with your supervisor. That means that you regularly inform him or her about your progress (or lack thereof). It is important to be open and transparent with your supervisor about the trajectory of your research and writing.

Please adhere to mutually agreed-upon deadlines for submissions of drafts. It is your responsibility and in your best interest to do so, as the supervisor will not remind you of deadlines and it would only be to your detriment to miss them. If your supervisor does not hear from you, or if you do not meet a deadline for a draft as agreed upon, please note that the supervisor is at liberty to terminate their supervision of your project.

On behalf of the entire department, we are committed to your academic success and wish you all the best in your research efforts.

If you would like to discuss this document or any related issue, please contact your faculty advisor, thesis supervisor, or the department coordinator.