

# The Thesis Option

## Requirements

A Candidate selecting the Thesis option to complete the Master's Degree is required to complete the following:

- (1) The equivalent of *two* full-courses (i.e., *four* half-courses). Up to one full-course equivalent may be taken outside of the program, in other graduate programs at York, or in an acceptable graduate program at another university (with the prior approval of the Candidate's advisor and the Faculty of Graduate Studies).
- (2) A Thesis, the nature of which and its procedures are described below.

**NOTE: As per Faculty of Graduate Studies regulations (see Faculty of Graduate Studies Calendar), all Candidates are reminded of the importance of the timely completion of their programs (coursework requirements and Thesis). Full-time students have a maximum of 2 years (6 terms) and part-time students a maximum of 4 years (12 terms) in which to complete their programs.**

## The Nature of the Thesis

The Thesis is a formal academic exercise that critically extends and expands upon scholarly thought. In this way, a Thesis is an original academic work which describes and critically comments on a field or theoretical perspective in relation to a Candidate's own interests.

The Thesis represents an in-depth, analytic discussion of a problem, educational event, theoretical argument, philosophical orientation, conceptual dispute, educational experiment and/or innovation, historical event, and qualitative or quantitative inquiry. A Thesis provides the opportunity to engage in the conceptualization, activity, and presentation of educational research in a format that conforms to scholarly conventions and citation practices. Upon completion, the Thesis is bound and stored in the York Library.

A Thesis has five distinguishing qualities:

- (1) A critical discussion of the problem or area of study with attention to a clear articulation of the questions that structure the investigation;
- (2) A review of the relevant research literature and discussion of the range and limits of scholarly thinking on the problem or area;
- (3) A theoretical discussion of the methodological approach in engaging the problem;
- (4) Primary research analysis or textual analysis of the data;
- (5) Critical discussion of the significance of the work and future directions.

A Thesis allows Candidates to engage in independent in-depth inquiry while working closely with a Graduate Faculty member who serves as Supervisor and with a Supervisory Committee.

A Thesis is also distinguished by its supervisory and evaluative procedures. The Thesis is supervised by a Supervisory Committee and culminates in a formal Oral Examination by an Examining

Committee. The Examining Committee evaluates the Thesis on a Pass/Fail continuum relating to the degree of revision required before the Thesis is deemed satisfactory. During the Oral Examination, the Candidate is expected to present and discuss the Thesis with the Examining Committee.

The standards for the presentation of the Thesis must follow those outlined by the Faculty of Graduate Studies. [www.yorku.ca/grads](http://www.yorku.ca/grads) and [forms](#) can also be found online.

## **Thesis Supervision**

### ***(1) Selection of the Supervisor***

Full-time Candidates, by the end of their *second semester*, and part-time Candidates by their *fourth semester*, should have started to formulate their Thesis. Full-time Candidates by the end of the *second semester* and part-time Candidates by the *fourth semester*, are expected to have approached a faculty member in the Graduate Program in Education (who must be a member of the Faculty of Graduate Studies) to serve as a Supervisor.

There are obvious factors to consider in choosing a Supervisor, such as a faculty member's knowledge of your area of interest and her/his familiarity with the methodology or conceptual frameworks you are considering. Further, interpersonal and work style factors that influence close working relationships are important considerations. Previous contacts with faculty members and advisors should guide you. Candidates are encouraged to talk to several potential Supervisors before making a decision.

### ***(2) Supervisory Structure***

When an agreement to work with a Supervisor has been reached, the next step is the formation of a Supervisory Committee. A master's supervisory committee consists of a minimum of two faculty members from the Faculty of Graduate Studies:

- (1) the supervisor from the candidate's Graduate Program; and
- (2) a minimum of one other faculty member from the candidate's Graduate Program or from any other graduate programs who is a member of the Faculty of Graduate Studies; and
- (3) in exceptional circumstances, and with the prior approval of the Dean, one additional member may be appointed who is not a member of the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

Candidates are in consultation with the Supervisor over the choice of members. Typically, the second member is one who can contribute to the development of thought around the Thesis. This initial committee approves the Candidate's Thesis Proposal and decides when the Thesis is ready for examination.

The membership of each Candidate's Supervisory Committee must be recommended by the Graduate Program Director to the Dean of Graduate Studies for approval. The form is available on the [FGS website](#).

The [Thesis Proposal](#) must be in at least three months before the Oral Examination. The Thesis Office

will notify the Program Director of the Dean's approval by way of a copy of a form signed by the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

### ***(3) The Role of the Supervisory Committee***

The role of the Supervisory committee is to aid the Candidate in the shaping of the Thesis Proposal and to approve the final Proposal. Additionally, the Supervisory Committee reviews the Candidate's progress on the Thesis and reports to the Graduate Program Director. If the Committee reports unsatisfactory progress, the Candidate may be required to withdraw from the graduate program. Therefore, it is crucial for Candidates to be in contact with their Committee and to work through any difficulties encountered.

The second role of the Supervisory committee is to agree that the Thesis is ready for examination. They are to ensure that a copy of the Candidate's Thesis is sent to each member of the Candidate's Thesis Examining Committee as far as possible in advance of the Candidate's Oral Examination but no later than three weeks prior to the date set. (See Faculty of Graduate Studies calendar for regulations on Examining Committees.)

### **Preparing the Thesis Proposal**

The Thesis Proposal is an important part of the thesis process; for it is here that the problem is articulated, the area of literature review outlined, the methodologies specified and justified, and the timetable sketched. The Proposal is submitted to the Graduate Program in Education Office and to the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and is made available to the graduate community. It may be helpful to consider the Thesis Proposal as an outline of the Thesis.

Below is a set of guidelines to aid in proposal development; the actual sections of the proposal are best determined by the nature of the thesis topic and in consultation with the Supervisor.

### **The Thesis Proposal:**

#### **(1) Cover page**

Signed by the student, supervisor and committee member.

(See section IX. *Research Involving Human Participants* to see what additional forms need to be submitted if your research involves human participants.)

#### **(2) Title page**

Include: The proposed title, the Candidate's name, the name of the institution, the degree sought, and the date of submission.

#### **(3) Statement of the problem**

This section conceptualizes and contextualizes the topic to be investigated. It states the problem to be explored, the boundaries of the topic as they are understood at the time of the proposal, the rationale for the significance of the topic, and the purpose of the study. In this section, Candidates are also asked to sketch out a brief overview of the theoretical issues and the working theories to be employed in the Thesis.

#### (4) Review of relevant research and scholarly writing

Typically, in this section, the Candidate is asked to thematize relevant writing in terms of its relation to the Thesis topic. Candidates are expected to engage in thinking with the work of a scholarly community and to consider arguments that in some way develop the Candidate's thinking on the problem. Thus in discussing how the problem has been conceived by other scholars, the Candidate is also evaluating this work for her or his study. More than a working bibliography, this section of the Proposal is a dialogue with other authors in the field. It maps out the context of the study. It is appropriate here to consider two kinds of writing. One has to do with describing the work of others. But more than description, the second kind of writing moves to a critical perspective where the Candidate comments on the limits, tensions, and possibilities of the work under review.

It must be noted, of course, that thesis topics and methodologies may vary in terms of the point at which a discussion of relevant research is appropriate or the manner in which the relevant research is engaged.

#### (5) Description of methodology and or research design.

This section will be determined by the kind of study in which one engages. It describes how the thesis research will be conducted. Most importantly, the methodology should make sense in relation to the question or problem posed.

If the study is one that is grounded in qualitative or quantitative methods, the study should include descriptions of:

##### (a) Research participants and setting

Describe the participants, how they will be selected and invited to participate, where the research will take place, how access to participants will be obtained, and any ethical considerations involved.

##### (b) Data gathering procedures

Describe the research methodology and strategies for engaging with the research problem. For example, specify the type of research method employed (archival research; observation; survey; interview; ethnographic; narrative; feminist; phenomenological; textual; philosophical; case-study; quasi-experimental; re-analysis of existing data and so on).

##### (c) Data analysis procedures

Describe the strategies employed to analyse the data. Again, the strategies depend upon the specificity of the research methodology and the interpretive style of engaging with the data. It is helpful if the Candidates sketch out the central questions posed to the data interpretation and analysis.

#### (6) Timetable

Propose a timetable for completing the Thesis.

(7) A reference list and working bibliography

It is helpful to construct two sections of references. The first section is a Reference List with bibliographic entries for every cited work in the Proposal. The second section, a Bibliography, anticipates further references of value. Consult a style manual for correct citation form.

(8) Human Participants Form

Should the Project involve interviewing and/or fieldwork, a Human Participants Form must be completed prior to the commencement of the actual research (see section IX. *Research Involving Human Participants*) and must be reviewed by the York University's Human Participants Review Sub-Committee *prior* to the commencement of the study.

**Only after the Thesis Proposal has been accepted by the Supervisory Committee and has been approved by the York's Human Participants Review Sub-Committee (if applicable), may the Candidate commence data collection.**

**Oral Examination and Evaluation**

Once the Supervisory Committee indicates that the Thesis is ready to go to an oral exam, an Examining Committee is set. The thesis examining committee consists of at least **three** voting members, including the Chair as follows:

1. Two graduate faculty members chosen from the program and/or supervisory committee, at least one of whom must be from the supervisory committee;
2. One graduate faculty member at arm's length from the thesis, normally from outside the program.

These are minimum requirements with respect to the composition of and quorum for thesis examining committees. Individual graduate programs may include one additional voting member on examining committees, in accordance with program requirements and procedures. The Chair of the examining committee shall be chosen from among the voting members. Members of the student's thesis supervisory committee may be members of the examining committee, but the principal supervisor may not serve as the Chair of the examining committee.

In addition to the voting members, the thesis examining committee may include the following ex-officio members (non-voting, unless present as one of the voting members named above): Vice-President Academic & Provost, Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies or his/her representative, Graduate Program Director.

The membership of each committee, including designation of the Chair, must be recommended by the graduate program director for approval and appointment by the Dean of Graduate Studies as soon as possible and no later than three weeks before the date set for the oral examination. Members of the student's thesis supervisory committee, including the principal supervisor, may be members of the examining committee, but the principal supervisor may not serve as the Chair of the examining committee. In exceptional circumstances, the Dean may approve a program director's recommendation that a York University faculty member who is not a member of the graduate faculty serve as a member (but not the Chair) of an examining committee.

The Oral Examination centres on the Thesis. The specific regulations relating to the Oral Examination may be found in the Faculty of Graduate Studies calendar; however, what follows is a brief overview of typical procedures surrounding the Oral Examination.

Usually, once the Examining Committee and the Candidate have met, the Candidate is asked to leave the room and the Examining Committee then comes to consensus on the following points: (a) whether the Thesis is examinable, (b) the order in which questions will be asked, and c ) the approximate length of the examination. Once these decisions have been made, the Candidate is invited back into the room.

Usually, a Masters Candidate is asked to present a brief overview (about 10 minutes in duration) of the thesis. Then the Examining Committee begins the process of asking questions and discussing the Thesis. Typically, the convention is that those with least familiarity with the Thesis will begin the questioning. The Chair of the Examining Committee seeks consensus to determine when questioning and discussion have been exhausted. Once the Chair is satisfied that this is the case, the Chair asks the Candidate to leave the room once again.

At this point, the Examining Committee determines the evaluation category for the thesis. The categories of evaluation are:

- Accepted with no Revision,
- Accepted pending Specified Revisions,
- Referred Pending Major Revision, and
- Failed.

For detailed information on these categories, please consult the Faculty of Graduate Studies calendar. The follow-up to the Oral Examination depends upon the evaluation category assigned to the Thesis by the Examining Committee.

### **Submission of Final Copies**

Upon completion of the Thesis, an electronic copy of the approved thesis must be forwarded to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Details of the general time lines and procedures may be found in the [Faculty of Graduate Studies Calendar](#) to download all the forms and samples of title page, table of contents, etc. To ensure convocation and avoid the need of registering for a further term, check with the Graduate Program in Education Office.