

URBAN 700: THESIS GUIDELINES

What is a Thesis?

A Master of Urban Planning thesis is an investigation that demonstrates a student's ability to conceive, conduct and report the results of a substantial individual study in the field of urban design and planning. The essential value of the thesis is in the process of doing it rather than in the product that results, though some theses do also make valuable additions to the literature of the profession. The educational values are, first, the opportunity to pursue some area of interest to a level of depth, completeness and conclusiveness that is not possible in other courses; and secondly, to work on an individual basis with faculty who are informed and interested in the subject. The topic of the thesis may be broad or narrow, academic or applied, synoptic or analytical, empirical or theoretical, and anywhere within the wide range of urban planning concerns. It is limited only by the need to focus on an area relevant to urban planning, by faculty interests, and by the resources of the University. Because urban planning is a broad field, the range of appropriate topics is very broad. Typically, the thesis topic relates to the student's area of specialization. Urban Design Certificate students, for example, are required to select an urban design-related thesis topic. Each student should examine carefully his or her choice of a topic, proposing work that can be accomplished within one or two quarters.

Each person must also find his or her own answers to questions such as: "What can I gain from this study?", "What may others gain?", and "Will I be able to utilize my skills and abilities in a way that will be academically enriching for me, my committee, and the University?" These and related questions require answers at the proposal stage.

Preparatory Work

Initial Topic Development

In summer quarter prior to the final year in the MUP program, students are advised to explore their topic of interest. Students should start reviewing the literature associated with the topic(s). Also, students may start to refine the topics to a series of questions.

URBAN 512 Research Seminar

Students are required to enroll in URBAN 512 Research Seminar in autumn quarter of their final year. URBAN 512 is designed for MUP students, and guides students through the research process through a series of assignments, which students can use to develop their thesis or professional project if their topic is confirmed. Prior to enrolling in URBAN 700 thesis, students must be enrolled in or have completed URBAN 512 Research Methods.

URBAN 598 Research Design for Urban Science may be taken as a substitute for URBAN 512 Research Seminar, although it is designed for PhD students. This course is acceptable for MUP students who have previous research experience, will pursue future doctoral study, or who are pursuing the Environmental Planning specialization (for which the course is a foundational requirement). If you are considering enrolling in URBAN 598 Research Design for Urban Science, talk to your faculty advisor or Prof. Branden Born (instructor of 512) about the appropriate class for you.

Collaborative Thesis

If the thesis is conducted as a collaborative one, involving other students and/or professionals, the contributions and work of each person must be clearly identifiable within the thesis. Students pursuing a collaborative thesis with another student should refer to Attachment E.

Registering for Thesis Credits

Overview

Students must register for and complete a minimum of 9 thesis credits in order to graduate from the MUP program. Students may register for more than 9 credits if needed, but only 9 will count towards the degree. Any excess thesis credits will not

count towards elective credit totals. Students typically enroll in thesis credit in winter and spring quarter of their final year in the MUP program. The 9 credits are usually divided between quarters. For example, a student may register for 4 thesis credits in Winter quarter, and 5 thesis credits in Spring quarter, for a total of 9 credits. The general rule of thumb is that students should enroll in credits commensurate to the amount of work they put in to the thesis. This can be roughly determined by considering the hours of work that one would do for another graduate-level course of the same credits. Students must be registered for a minimum of 2 credits during the quarter in which they graduate. Students pursuing a concurrent degree must follow the other program's guidelines in addition to the MUP guidelines, as guidelines may differ across programs.

Informal concurrent students should be aware that enrollment in thesis credits is not the same as enrolling in a class; it is independent work that the student executes on an agreed-upon schedule with the consultation of the supervisory committee.

Establishing the Supervisory Committee

Each student must assemble a supervisory committee to oversee their work. The supervisory committee must consist of at least two graduate faculty members. It may contain other members as well; the majority of the members must be on the Graduate Faculty of the University of Washington. Please see Attachment A regarding the policy, Attachment B regarding which faculty can participate,, and the UW Graduate Faculty page to confirm their status:

<https://grad.uw.edu/programs/find-graduate-faculty/>

Students should start to think about their committee in summer and autumn quarter of their final year. The student, rather than the Department Chair/faculty/staff, is responsible for assembling their supervisory committee, although the Department Chair/faculty/staff can advise on it.

Registration

To register for thesis credits, students must first complete the URBAN 700 Student/Faculty Agreement Form located on the MUP Forms webpage: <https://urbdp.be.uw.edu/programs/mup-graduate-degree/forms/>

The student obtains the signatures of the committee chair and member(s) on this form, and then submits it to the Graduate Program Advisor by the **3rd day of the quarter** in which they plan to register to allow time to process the request before the free add/drop week ends. (Students can register for thesis credits beyond the first week of the quarter, but late fees will apply. Please refer to the UW Academic Calendar for further details:

<http://www.washington.edu/students/reg/calendar.html>) The Department Chair or Graduate Program Coordinator/MUP Program Director will then review and sign the form. Once signed, the Graduate Program Advisor will email the add code to the student who will then register for URBAN 700 thesis credits; staff do not enroll students in the credits.

Students need only submit the Thesis Agreement Form once. They do not need to keep submitting it for subsequent quarters. The only exception is if the student changes their committee members. If any committee member is added/dropped to the committee, then the student must submit a new Thesis Agreement Form signed by all committee members.

Students will be issued an add code specific to their committee chair, and may continue to use the same add code to register for thesis credits in subsequent quarters. The only exception to this is if the student changes their committee chair. If so, they will need to submit a new Thesis Agreement Form signed by all committee members, and receive a new add code from the GPA.

Students pursuing a concurrent degree must follow the other program's guidelines in addition to the MUP guidelines, as they may differ.

If a student enrolls in more than 9 credits for their thesis or professional project, only 9 will apply to the degree requirements. Excess thesis or professional project credits will not apply to the degree and cannot fulfill elective credit requirements for the degree.

If a MUP student decides to change their thesis to a professional project or vice versa, please be aware that it is not possible to retroactively change the course designation on the transcript for previous quarters. Please speak to the GPA for options.

Roles and Responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities are general guidelines. They are not exhaustive, as other criteria may apply.

Committee Chair

The committee chair takes on the lead advising role within the committee. In general, they are responsible for reviewing agreed upon drafts and taking on the bulk of advising. Together, the committee members and student should lay out a schedule that determines how many drafts will be produced, when they will be due, and when comments will be returned.

Committee Member(s)

Committee members generally serve in a supportive role. They may review drafts but may also defer to the committee chair for the bulk of advising regarding the drafts. They may advise on specific content or methods related to the thesis. They read a final draft of the work.

Student

Students are expected to work proactively on their thesis and manage their own workload and productivity. Students are expected to lead in communicating with their committee. This may include proactively contacting faculty to schedule meetings, following up with faculty about draft reviews, sending reminders for meetings, and so forth.

Students are expected to stick to their agreed upon schedule. They are also responsible for scheduling the defense and coordinating signatures on their final paperwork, and submitting their final paperwork by the deadlines.

Thesis Schedule

It is highly recommended that students follow a schedule as they work on their thesis. A schedule provides structure and helps students stay on target for timely completion. It also establishes expectations for both the student and the supervisory committee, although it is the responsibility of the student to keep to the schedule. The following is provided as a guideline, although each student's experience may differ.

Summer Quarter (prior to the last year in the MUP program)

- Explore topic of interest. Develop a reading list.
- Consider the faculty who can serve on the supervisory committee. See Attachments A and B and the Graduate Faculty Locator (<https://grad.uw.edu/programs/find-graduate-faculty/>) regarding who can serve.

Autumn Quarter

- Enroll in URBAN 512 Research Seminar (URBAN 598 Research Design for Urban Science may be taken as a substitute)
- Present a preliminary proposal of their thesis to their proposed committee chair for review:
 - Tentative title
 - Intent of purpose of the work
 - Scope of the work
 - An indication of the available literature or other resources to be used (including faculty)
 - The methodology or approach to be taken
 - An outline of tasks to be accomplished
 - A schedule of milestones and committee meetings to be completed within one or two quarters
- Confirm both the Chair and Member on the supervisory committee
- Submit Thesis Agreement Form

Winter Quarter

- Register for Thesis credits
- Develop a timeline with the committee chair at the beginning of winter quarter.
- Complete the first 3 chapters by the end of winter quarter (if they are not completed, the likelihood of graduating in spring quarter may decrease)

Spring Quarter

- Register for Thesis credits
- Schedule the defense to occur later in the quarter
- Prepare a PowerPoint presentation or poster
- See Attachment C: Checklist for Graduation Quarter

Summer Quarter

If the thesis is not completed by spring quarter, then the student will need to enroll in a future quarter. Students should consult with their committee members about the possibility of enrolling in summer or autumn quarter to complete the work. Many faculty are not available in the summer, so enrollment in autumn quarter is more typical. International students must consult with International Student Services to determine their eligibility for extending their time to earn the degree.

If a student has completed all degree requirements and has successfully presented and defended their thesis but are not able to meet the submission deadline, they may be eligible for the Graduate Registration Waiver Fee (also known as the two week extension). This option is only available for thesis students, not professional project students, and certain criteria apply. To determine eligibility, students should refer to the Graduate School's website and consult with their supervisory committee: <http://grad.uw.edu/policies-procedures/general-graduate-student-policies/graduate-registration-waiver-fee/>

Professionals Council Capstone Event

In the spring quarter of the academic year in which a student completes their MUP program, the Professionals Council sponsors a capstone celebration event to recognize the professional project and thesis work done. **All students who plan to graduate in spring or summer quarters are expected to present their capstone work during this event.** All students, faculty, and Professionals Council members are invited to attend. Details (date, time, place, presentation template, etc) are provided early in spring quarter from Department staff. Students should plan to make a PowerPoint presentation or a poster of their work. These can later be used during the defense.

Required Paperwork

There are two main required administrative forms:

- **Master's Supervisory Committee Approval Form**
This form is required by the Graduate School. Students obtain the form from the Graduate School's webpage: <https://grad.uw.edu/for-students-and-post-docs/thesisdissertation/>. Students must obtain signatures from all of their committee members on this form to confirm that their thesis is finished. Students must then upload it to the UW ETD Administrator Site along with the finalized electronic version of their thesis (see link above) no later than the last day of the quarter in which they graduate.
- **Committee Signature Form for the Master's Degree**
This form is required by the Department. Students obtain the Committee Signature Form by submitting a Master's Degree Request with the Graduate School: <https://grad.uw.edu/for-students-and-post-docs/mygrad-program/>. The MUP Academic Advisor will then be able to access the Committee Signature Form and email a copy of it to the student. Students must obtain signatures from all of their committee members on this form to confirm that their thesis is finished. Students then submit the Committee Signature Form to the MUP Academic Advisor no later than the last day of the quarter in which they graduate.

Students pursuing a concurrent degree must check the other program's guidelines, as there may be additional requirements for the other degree.

Oral Examination – aka “the Defense”

A final oral examination by the supervisory committee is required. The nature and format of this exam is determined by the chairperson of the committee. The oral examination will primarily concentrate upon the thesis topic, although the committee's discussion with the student may range more widely in endeavoring to establish the student's general competence.

The defense is, on average, one hour long. It is recommended that students hold their defense two weeks prior to the last day of the quarter. The Gould 410 conference room is available for students to use. The defense may be held virtually or in person, depending on the committee's preference and availability. ALL members of the committee must be present in some form during the defense. It is the student's responsibility to schedule the defense and coordinate the schedules of their committee members. Students are advised to confirm their defense date with their committee months ahead of time to avoid scheduling challenges.

Be prepared to explain: (a) What you did, (b) Why you did it, (c) How you did it, (d) What you found, and (e) What the results mean. The defense may include visuals in the form of a PowerPoint presentation, poster, etc. Typically, they should include (a) An overview or outline of your presentation, (b) Introduction (including research question, rationale and hypothesis, if any, and definition of key constructs), (c) Method (including design, methodology, etc.), (d) Results (including tables or figures summarizing your findings) and (e) Discussion (including reasons for new or unexpected findings, contributions and limitations, and practical implications).

It is expected that the student, chairperson, and all members of the committee be present at the defense. Students may invite others to the defense in circumstances that warrant it. Please check with your committee chair for their preference.

Please bring the following to your defense:

- Copy of your final thesis (digital or print)
- Committee Signature Form
- Supervisory Committee Approval Form

The Committee Signature Form and supervisory committee approval form may be signed at the defense if your committee agrees that you have successfully completed the thesis, or signed afterwards if you need to incorporate edits into your final draft. Be careful to coordinate signatures with your committee members' respective schedules, as all signatures are required and no committee member may sign off on a thesis without having read it in its final form.

Please see the “Checklist for Defense” – Attachment D

Submitting the Thesis

MUP students must upload their thesis to the ETD by the quarterly deadlines in order to graduate. This is usually 5pm on the last day of the quarter, although students should begin the ETD process sooner since the process takes time. See the Graduate School's required sections of the thesis and electronic thesis submission process here: <http://grad.uw.edu/for-students-and-post-docs/thesisdissertation/>

In general, the thesis is complete once the student:

- produces a defensible thesis, as defined by their committee
- has completed a minimum of 9 credits of URBAN 700
- has obtained signatures from their committee members on the Committee Signature Form.
- has uploaded their thesis to the Graduate School website by the deadline
- has completed all requirements for the MUP degree (students can verify this by running a degree audit in MyPlan)

Theses are available to the public, and are accessible to the public via online searches and the UW library.

See Attachment C - "Checklist for Graduation Quarter" - for a comprehensive timeline.

Late Submission of Thesis Document

Students who have completed all degree requirements and have successfully presented and defended their thesis but are not able to meet the submission deadline may pursue the Graduate Registration Waiver Fee, oftentimes referred to as the Two Week Extension. To determine eligibility, students must refer to the following webpage and discuss it with their committee: <https://grad.uw.edu/policies/3-6-graduate-registration-waiver/>

International students must consult with International Student Services to determine their eligibility for the two week extension.

Students using the Two Week Extension must upload their thesis to the ETD, submit their signed Committee Signature Form to the MUP Academic Advisor, and pay the \$250 fee by the deadline in order to graduate. The deadline is usually 5pm two weeks after the last day of the quarter, although students should begin the ETD process sooner since the process takes time. See the Graduate School's page for further detail: <https://grad.uw.edu/policies/3-6-graduate-registration-waiver/>

Students on leave, or those who have not maintained student status, are not entitled to extensive faculty and staff counsel for their thesis or professional project.

ATTACHMENT A - SUPERVISORY COMMITTEES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

Applicable portions of the Graduate School Policy 4.2 have been excerpted and modified for these guidelines as follows:

- A. A Supervisory Committee is expected to function to give responsible advice, guidance and assistance to a graduate student working for an advanced degree at the University of Washington, and to evaluate the student's performance. For these purposes it is desirable that the Supervisory Committee be established in the quarter preceding the start of the thesis.
- B. Supervisory Committees for graduate students should be appointed in the manner and with the composition set forth below:
 - 1. For theses and professional projects, the supervisory committee shall consist of two to four members. At least two of the committee members must be graduate faculty members; and at least one of the graduate faculty members must be from the Department of Urban Design and Planning.
 - 2. For students completing the MUP degree only or an informal concurrent degree, the supervisory committee chair must be an Urban Design and Planning graduate faculty member and the other graduate faculty member(s) may be from the Department of Urban Design and Planning or any other UW department(s). Additional members may be graduate or non-graduate faculty members from the Department of Urban Design and Planning or any other UW department.
 - 3. For formal concurrent degree students, the supervisory committee must include at least one graduate faculty member from each department. The committee chair must be a graduate faculty member and may be from either department. Additional members may be graduate or non-graduate faculty members from the Department of Urban Design and Planning or any other UW department.
 - 4. Prior to enrollment in URBAN 700, the student must propose the Chairperson and Supervisory Committee to the Department Chair for approval. The student shall obtain written signatures of the committee members to serve using the URBAN 700 Student-Faculty Agreement Form.
- C. Names and titles of all Supervisory Committee members should, as a matter of courtesy, appear in the Acknowledgement section (or elsewhere) in the thesis.

ATTACHMENT B - GRADUATE FACULTY ROSTER – DEPARTMENT OF URBAN DESIGN AND PLANNING

Daniel B. Abramson

Marina Alberti

Christine Bae

Rachel Berney

Branden M. Born

Christopher Campbell

Manish Chalana

Qiuzi Cynthia Chen (adjunct, Civil and Environmental
Engineering)

Karen Tzu-Hsin Chen

Gregg Colburn (adjunct, Real Estate)

Andrew Dannenberg (adjunct, Public Health)

Sofia Dermisi (joint, Real Estate)

Gregory Keith Harris

Joaquin Herranz, Jr. (adjunct, Public Affairs)

Edward D. McCormack (adjunct, Civil and Environmental
Engineering)

Rick Mohler

Jeffrey K. Ochsner (adjunct, Architecture)

Helen Pineo

Vikramaditya Prakash (adjunct, Architecture)

Mark H. Purcell

Qing Shen (sabbatical Spring 2026)

Dylan Stevenson

Jan M. Whittington (sabbatical Autumn 2025 & Winter
2026)

Kenneth P. Yocom (adjunct, Landscape Architecture)

ATTACHMENT C

CHECKLIST FOR GRADUATION QUARTER

Weeks 1-2:

- ☐ Submit a Master's Degree Request with the Graduate School: <https://grad.uw.edu/for-students-and-post-docs/mygrad-program/>
- ☐ Review requirements of thesis submission process: <http://grad.uw.edu/for-students-and-post-docs/thesisdissertation/>
- ☐ Schedule reviews of your drafts with your committee for the quarter
- ☐ Submit draft thesis to committee chair

Weeks 3-4:

- ☐ Committee Signature Form emailed to you as a pdf. To receive your Committee Signature Form, you must first submit a Master's Degree Request, linked above
- ☐ Schedule your defense no later than two weeks before the end of the quarter and inform the Graduate Program Advisor of your defense date. You can book the 410 Gould conference room for your defense.

Week 5-6:

- ☐ Get comments back from committee chair
- ☐ Incorporate edits into your thesis draft
- ☐ Create a PowerPoint presentation or poster of your work. This will be displayed at the Professionals Council Capstone Event in spring quarter.

Weeks 7-9:

- ☐ Submit thesis draft to committee member(s)
- ☐ Get comments back from committee member(s)
- ☐ Incorporate edits from committee member(s) into your draft
- ☐ Submit final thesis to your committee for their review prior to your defense
- ☐ Participate in Capstone Event

Week 10:

- ☐ Print the "Supervisory Committee Approval Form", located on the Graduate School's website prior to your defense: (<http://grad.uw.edu/for-students-and-post-docs/thesisdissertation/>)
- ☐ Hold your defense. Bring a copy of the thesis (digital or print), the Committee Signature Form and Supervisory Committee Approval Form. Sometimes the committee will sign the forms at the defense, or they may delay signing until you incorporate edits. Carefully coordinate getting their signatures so you can submit the paperwork electronically by the deadline.
- ☐ Incorporate edits from defense into final thesis
- ☐ RSVP for the College of Built Environments' Graduation Ceremony, if attending (further details will be emailed by the CBE Dean's Office in spring quarter). This is the main graduation event for MUP students.

Week 12:

- ☐ Return the signed "Committee Signature Form" either in-person or via email to Diana by 11:59pm on the last day of the quarter.
- ☐ Upload your completed **Thesis** and signed **Supervisory Committee Approval Form** to the UW ETD Administrator website by 11:59pm on the last day of the quarter: (<http://grad.uw.edu/for-students-and-post-docs/thesisdissertation/>)
**Note: you do not need to submit an electronic version of your thesis to the MUP program.
- ☐ Vacate your Gould Hall locker, if applicable
- ☐ Provide Diana with your preferred email address, so you will receive job announcements from the MUP program.

ATTACHMENT D – CHECKLIST FOR DEFENSE

Use this checklist as you count down towards your defense.¹

One month prior to defense...

- ☐ Have you clearly stated and defined your central question, hypothesis, or creative challenge, in terms that can be answered or addressed with your available data, analytical/creative methods, and time?
- ☐ Have you explained why your question/hypothesis/challenge is important to you, personally?
- ☐ Have you explained why your question/hypothesis/challenge is important to the world?
- ☐ Have you identified your audience?
- ☐ Have you cited the existing literature and/or practice to summarize what the world already knows about your question/hypothesis/challenge?
- ☐ Have you included your bibliography (list of cited references), and are all references in the bibliography cited in the body of the thesis, or in the sources of figures?
- ☐ Have you identified what information is needed to answer/(dis)prove/address your question/hypothesis/challenge in your particular case?
- ☐ Have you gathered/generated and analyzed that information?
- ☐ Have you included your conclusions, and distinguished between “implications”, “lessons learned” and/or “recommendations”?
- ☐ Does your analysis and presentation of information support your conclusions?
- ☐ Have you presented your information and analysis in a logical sequence?
- ☐ Have you made optimal use of graphics and tables to present your information and analysis?
- ☐ Are graphics (including text and labeling) all at a readable size and printable resolution?

One week prior to defense...

- ☐ Does the thesis title match the substance/message of the thesis?
- ☐ Are all sentences complete, and checked for spelling and grammar?
- ☐ Is the thesis formatted according to Graduate School guidelines (title page, abstract, etc.)?
- ☐ Is a bibliography or list of references included?
- ☐ Are all footnotes, endnotes and bibliographic references complete and properly and consistently formatted?
- ☐ Do all references to internet sources include your access date and a permanent URL (e.g. by using <http://www.webcitation.org>, or other permanent internet referencing tool, if necessary)? Research which tool/service seems most stable and use that. Ask the UW library for advice.
- ☐ Do all figures and tables have numbered captions with complete sources, and are they cited in the text? (Tables and Figures have separate numbering sequences; table captions are above the table; figure captions are below the figure.)
- ☐ Is the table of contents, list of figures, and list of tables all included?
- ☐ Are all figures and tables properly located on the page, and near the relevant text?
- ☐ Are font color, size, style and numbering consistent for each type of text (e.g. headings, subheadings, main text, captions, etc.)?
- ☐ Are page breaks in appropriate places in the text, e.g. no orphaned or widowed headings and leading/ending lines of paragraphs?
- ☐ Have you scanned the whole text for spelling and grammatical errors?
- ☐ Have you eliminated passive voice, repetitive statements, vague language and jargon? (E.g. write “use” instead of “utilize” except when you mean “to make useful”; instead of writing “impact” as a verb, write “affect,” “influence,” “degrade,” “reduce,” or whatever more precise word is appropriate; etc.)

¹ This list is not exhaustive; it is merely a partial compilation of considerations commonly needing attention.

ATTACHMENT E

COLLABORATIVE THESIS REQUIREMENTS

By special permission of the Graduate School, two or more students may collaborate on certain aspects of their theses, provided the character of the work is such that each participant is assured sufficient opportunity for individual contribution as well as responsibility to the study as a whole. In this case a concise account of the contributions of each collaborating individual should be included in the preface or acknowledgement section of the thesis. The thesis will be identical, and it is up to the committee chair to assign and monitor each student contribution.

Rules Governing the Presentation of Collaborative Theses

1. Permission to present a collaborative thesis must be obtained in advance from the Graduate School by means of petition. Each student must contact the Graduate Program Advisor to request submission of the petition in the first quarter of enrollment in thesis credits. One petition needs to be submitted for each student.
2. The students must graduate the same quarter and submit the thesis the same quarter/year.
3. All authors' names must be acknowledged in the thesis. A "collaborative thesis statement" should be included; a copy of statement is shown below.
4. Each student will submit their thesis through ProQuest site following the current guidelines.
<https://grad.uw.edu/for-students-and-post-docs/thesisdissertation/>

SAMPLE - Collaborative Thesis Statement

This thesis is the result of a collaborative effort of _____
and _____ and _____,
by the authority of the Graduate School.
All work was done under the direction of Professor _____.