

Your thesis/dissertation will be the single greatest aspect of your graduate program. The thesis will represent your ability to identify a specific problem or topic, to assemble pertinent and necessary data, to do original research, to organize ideas and data acceptably, and to prepare a written report in clear and effective English.

- It is not a “research paper” that you write after you finish your course work; nor is it a project that you undertake during the last semester of your program. Instead, you should be working on your thesis throughout your program. Naturally it will occupy most of your time during the later stages of your program, but expect to work on it a minimum of 1/3 to 1/2 of your total time in your graduate program.
- Prior to starting work on your thesis, you should have formed your Examination Committee (i.e., chair and supporting committee members) and have an approved Degree Program of Study.
- How do you select your thesis topic? There is no one answer to this question. However, your thesis topic could be developed through reading literature, discussions with faculty, attending seminars and special lectures, and attending other thesis presentations, for example. In general, engage yourself in discussions – don’t be afraid to ask questions!
- The idea of completing a thesis can be overwhelming for many students. To alleviate some of the fears, create a calendar working backward from your anticipated graduation date. Set yourself a timeline for completion of certain aspects of your thesis (see example) – and stick to it!

| <b>Example time line</b><br><b>IMPORTANT: Check the academic calendar for official deadlines!</b> |                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| May 1                                                                                             | Pre-prospectus meeting w/ committee       |
| Oct. 21                                                                                           | Prospectus meeting – committee signs form |
| Oct. 22                                                                                           | Request Human Subjects approval           |
| Dec. 15                                                                                           | Pilot work completed                      |
| Feb. 1                                                                                            | All data collected                        |
| March 23                                                                                          | Final draft of thesis due to committee    |
| April 1                                                                                           | Thesis defense                            |
| April 15                                                                                          | Final thesis due to graduate school       |
| May 15                                                                                            | Graduation                                |

How does your thesis time break out?

- Most graduate students will spend 40% of their time developing the problem (about 1-1.5 semesters), 20% collecting data (less than a semester), and 40% analyzing the data and writing the final document (about 1-1.5 semesters).
- Plan for lots of time up front, and following data collection. Students who do not plan out the entire thesis timeline get rushed at the end.
- Many students incorporate a significant study prior to completing the study. You should work closely with your chair to determine the need for a pre-thesis study as well as a pilot study.