

## **Master's Thesis Proposal Guidelines**

**Preamble:** The purpose of a Master's thesis is for a graduate student to demonstrate her/his/their ability to conceptualize, design, and analyze a meaningful piece of research with guidance from a mentor. A knowledge of the relevant literature and theory, the ability to integrate the proposed study into the existing literature and theory, and an ability to recognize the limitations, strengths, and implications of the study also are critical parts of the second-year project proposal. Publication of the project in a peer reviewed journal is typically a goal.

A student who enters with a Master's degree where an empirical thesis has been completed and defended before a committee may be deemed exempt (see Policy to Waive Masters Requirement for Students in the Clinical Psychology Doctoral Program).

1. A Master's Thesis proposal and oral defense of the project should be the work of a graduate student with the guidance of a faculty mentor. Students who work with existing data are expected to conceptualize a novel research question as opposed to addressing the primary question(s) the Principal Investigator designed the original project to answer (i.e., the study aims).
2. The proposal should be in the best shape possible prior to submission to a 3-person committee (consisting of the faculty mentor, a chairperson, and one other). See the Department's Master's Defense Committee policy for committee member requirements and roles.
3. The candidate should know her/his data analytic plan and be able to justify it.
4. The Master's Thesis proposal should be submitted to the committee two weeks before the proposal meeting unless all committee members agree to waive the two week period. The proposal should consist of the following: (a) a 4-6 page introduction, rationale, and hypotheses; (b) a Method section; and (c) proposed data analyses.
5. The candidate should present an oral overview of the proposal that should last approximately 10-15 minutes. A brief literature review, rationale for and hypotheses of the study, methods, and data analytic strategies should be presented.
6. The great majority of the proposal meeting should focus on committee member questions for the candidate.
7. A final meeting among committee members without the candidate present should occur to make one of the following decisions:
  - a. Proceed with the study;
  - b. Proceed with the study with a list of changes to the proposal;
  - c. Re-write aspects of the proposal and re-submit to committee members.
  - d. Re-write aspects of the proposal and hold another proposal meeting;
  - e. Hold another proposal meeting;
  - f. Start on a new proposal.
8. The proposal meeting should be no longer than one hour.

9. Timeline: We encourage students to begin on the Master's Thesis during their first year in graduate school. The proposal and oral defense cannot occur during the summer, defined as beginning one week after commencement in May and ending one week before classes start in August.

Approved 09/26/2018