

Clarifying Thesis versus Non-Thesis Options for Master's Programs in the College of Education: General Guidelines for Students, Faculty Advisors, and Staff

Graduate students completing their master's degree in the College of Education are expected to complete a "final culminating experience." The culminating experience can include a thesis, a project (loosely defined) or exam, or internship. Some programs within the CoE require a particular culminating experience for all students, whereas others provide more flexibility for students to choose, in consultation with their faculty advisor.

For programs that provide flexibility, this document is intended to help master's students, faculty advisors, and staff understand the key differences among these options in terms of their basic requirements and processes. Students and faculty advisors are encouraged to discuss these options as early as possible in the program. This document also offers some insight into the benefits of the different options, as well as past examples from CoE graduates, to assist students with their decision-making.

Culminating Experience Type	Thesis	Project/Exam	Internship
Students should register for:	EDUC 700 credits (minimum 9 required)	EDC&I or EDLPS or EDPSY or EDSPE 600 credits (6-9 <i>project</i> credits depending on program)	EDLPS or EDPSY or EDSPE 601 credits (6-9 credits depending on program)
General Description	As defined by the graduate school, a master's thesis "provides evidence of the graduate student's ability to carry out independent investigation and to present the results in clear and systemic form." A thesis is ultimately submitted to the Graduate School and published as "original research." "Original research" means the student produces new knowledge through conceptual or empirical inquiry. Conceptual inquiry involves synthesis and argumentation using theory and literature. Empirical research involves analysis of quantitative or qualitative data.	For the project/master's exam experience, students choose one of the following: A project should draw on, synthesize, and/or advance a student's learning from their program coursework. Examples could include a research paper, report, portfolio, creative project (e.g., podcast, blog), or presentation. What form the project takes and what specific components it includes are determined in collaboration with the student's faculty advisor and in consultation with a second reader. A master's exam can be oral or written, depending on specific program requirements.	An internship involves working with a specific organization to gain practical experience related to the student's professional interests, and presenting what was learned at the end to the faculty advisor and a second reader/committee member. Students may choose to complete internship hours over the course of the year (approximately 10 hours/week), two quarters, or just one quarter (approximately 30 hours/week). What students do at their internship should be established and agreed upon at the outset by the student and their internship sponsor at the organization. Students taking internship credits should plan on working 3 hours per week for every academic credit earned (e.g., students would work 6 hours per week for 2 credits).

Benefits	Possible benefits of choosing the thesis option: • More standardized expectations around thesis components and process • Opportunity to make a formal scholarly contribution • Creates a foundation for students who intend to pursue academia or research (e.g., doctoral programs) • Great end product for job market	Possible benefits of choosing the project option: • More flexibility for student to design the product and its components • Opportunity to present learning in creative ways, beyond traditional academic writing • Opportunity to make contributions to practice, policy, communities, partnerships, etc. Possible benefits of choosing the master's exam option: • Provides clear structure and timeline for student to study and prepare • Opportunity to demonstrate learning in one sitting, or over a set number of days (if take home)	Possible benefits of choosing the internship option: • Gain professional and practical experience to inform future work • Opportunity for practical application of theoretical knowledge gained in coursework
Process and Requirements	The steps for completing a thesis include: • Take relevant methodology coursework (if research is empirical) • <i>In some programs:</i> Apply for approval to complete the thesis option • Write a thesis proposal, to be approved by the faculty advisor • Formally establish thesis committee, usually advisor + second reader • Complete IRB (for empirical studies involving human subjects) • Conduct the thesis research • Write the final thesis	The process for a project includes deciding on what kind of project will be completed and what structured deadlines are necessary to support student progress, in collaboration with the faculty advisor and in consultation with the “second reader.” The steps for completing a project often include: • Write a project proposal • Submit a final project • Present / engage in conversation with advisor and second reader about what was learned The steps for completing a master's exam often include: • Discuss areas of interest with advisor and second reader • Advisor and second reader prepare exam questions	The steps for completing an internship often include: • Identify an organization where student can complete an internship, with support from and/or in consultation with their faculty advisor • Create a scope of work with internship sponsor • Present what was learned in presentation/discussion with faculty advisor and second reader/committee member

	• Share final draft with advisor and second reader for feedback, and • Defend the thesis in an oral exam • Obtain Committee Approval Form signed by thesis committee to be uploaded with thesis • Submit the final thesis online to the Graduate School	• Complete written response addressing the questions, either as a timed essay (College of Education designates location and time) or as take-home exam • Submit completed exam to advisor and second reader for review and approval	
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