

Bridges Christian College & Seminary



Master's Thesis Manual

Introduction: Defining the Master's Thesis

The Master's Thesis is a culminating scholarly composition that demonstrates the student's ability to conduct independent research in their field of study. This research endeavor serves as the culmination of their degree program, allowing students to explore, in-depth, a specific topic related to either practical theology (for MDiv) or biblical studies (for MTS). The master's thesis should clearly define its goals, adhere to academic standards of citation and attribution, and should contribute new knowledge or insights to the existing body of literature. It is important to note that the nature of the thesis will differ depending on the degree, with MDiv theses being more applied and practical, and MTS theses leaning towards a more academic and scholarly approach. Both the MDiv and MTS degrees require students to successfully complete a master's thesis as a part of their degree requirements.

Preparing for the Master's Thesis

It is important for the candidate to understand that the preparation for the master's thesis begins on the first day of the program and not when the final thesis courses begin. As student's progress through courses, they should make note of topics of interest and corresponding research sources. At the midway point of the master's degree journey, the student's program director will begin the discussion of helping the candidate to hone a focus to a few topics of interest. MDiv students should also carefully consider their choices for elective courses and how they may relate to their future thesis. It should be noted that no candidate will be permitted to write a thesis that lies outside of the scope of their completed master's degree coursework.

The process of preparing for the master's thesis is a comprehensive journey that begins at the inception of the degree program, not merely when the final thesis courses commence. As candidates progress through the diverse course offerings, they should make note of topics that spark their intellectual curiosity and identify potential research sources that could later contribute to their thesis. However, students will not be permitted to resubmit work that has been previously submitted for a previous course. For more information on this see the established Seminary policies surrounding plagiarism and self-plagiarism.

At the halfway milestone in the master's degree, the candidate's program director will initiate discussions aimed at refining the candidate's focus to a select few topics that align with their academic and ministry interests. MDiv students should carefully consider elective courses, considering how these may intersect with their prospective thesis.

It is vital to note that the confines of the thesis must align with the scope of the completed master's degree coursework. No candidate will be granted permission to pursue thesis research that goes beyond the parameters of their accomplished studies.

Thesis Oversight

The supervision of the master's degree thesis is an integral component of the academic journey at Bridges Christian College and Seminary. The responsibility for this oversight lies with a faculty chairperson who is appointed by the Academic Department. In most instances, the Vice President for Academic Affairs will serve as the chairperson of the thesis committee.

The chairperson's role is multifaceted, encompassing guidance throughout the various stages of the master's thesis production. A crucial aspect of the chairperson's responsibilities is to discern when the master's thesis has reached a level of academic rigor and completeness suitable for final defense before the committee.

Evaluation of the thesis is undertaken by the thesis committee, which consists of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and two additional faculty members. The latter is selected by the Academic Department, in consultation with the chairperson. The third member of the committee will have expert knowledge of the specific thesis topic. All committee members will have accredited terminal degrees in compliance with the policies in the faculty handbook. Since the MDiv and MTS programs will involve biblical exegesis and theology, at least two of the committee members will have a PhD in biblical studies or theology for the MTS and at least one of the committee members will have a PhD in biblical studies or theology for the MDiv. This committee serves as the evaluative body during the final defense of the thesis.

The final presentation of the thesis to the committee marks a significant milestone in the student's academic journey. To pass the thesis, the student must secure a two-thirds vote from the committee members. This ensures that the thesis meets and exceeds the rigorous academic standards of Bridges Christian College and Seminary.

In cases where MDiv students wish to conduct external practical research that interacts with human subjects, the President, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and an additional faculty member will serve as the defacto Institutional Review Board (IRB). The role of this board is to review and approve the research proposal, ensuring the study is designed to protect the participants' rights and welfare. This process includes comprehensive scrutiny of the research design, participant recruitment strategies, and data collection methods. IRB approval must be obtained for any such research prior to it being implemented.

The Master's Thesis Courses

During the final two trimesters of a student's enrollment, they will be registered for a thesis course. MDiv students who plan to integrate content from elective courses into their thesis should complete at least three of the four elective courses prior to enrolling in the first thesis course. The first thesis course will be focused on helping students refine their final topic, compose the thesis statement, conduct bibliographic research through a literature review, and write the thesis prospectus. The thesis prospectus and its presentation to chairperson shall serve as the final examination for the first thesis course. In the first thesis course, students will also be required to make a 20-minute presentation of their proposed thesis before students and faculty online. A final grade of a "B" is required for a student to progress to the second thesis course. In the second thesis course, students will write the remainder of the master's thesis under the supervision of their committee chairperson. The final defense of the thesis before the committee shall serve as the final examination for the second thesis course.

The Master's Thesis Prospectus

The thesis prospectus demonstrates the breadth and depth of the student's research within their respective area of study. The initial thesis statement should serve as the guiding direction for the prospectus. The content of the prospectus will be included in the final thesis.

The thesis prospectus will include the following components:

- A. Title page
- B. An abstract of the entire work, double-spaced, of no more than 150 words
- C. Section I: Introduction
 - a. Significance of the problem (justification for the project)
 - b. Thesis statement

- c. Scope/limits of the investigation; definition of key terms; method by which the master's thesis will be prosecuted
- d. Description of the logical structure supporting the thesis statement (i.e., the logic and progression of each chapter from the introduction to the conclusion using one or two sentences for each chapter)

D. Section II: Review of the Literature or History of Research

E. Section III: The Working Outline

F. Section IV: The Conclusion

G. Bibliography

Organizing the Master's Thesis

The master's thesis contains multiple vital aspects. These include:

I. Opening Aspects

- Title Page (see Appendix)
- Copyright Page (see Appendix)
- Signature Approval Page (see Appendix) – this document will not actually be signed)
- Abstract (see Appendix) - an abstract is a concise statement of no more than 150 words that provides the reader with the essence of the master's thesis. It is wise to use as many clear descriptor words as possible to identify thoroughly the aspects of your master's thesis.
- Acknowledgments (Optional) - It is appropriate to acknowledge assistance from individuals and institutions that have provided significant support for the master's thesis project.
- Contents (refer to Turabian)
- Index of Tables (if any)
- Index of Figures or Photos/Illustrations (if any)
- List of Abbreviations - The standard for abbreviations in biblical studies can be found in *The SBL Handbook of Style*. For other master's theses, the abbreviations likewise are listed in Turabian's *A Manual for Writers*.
- Glossary (Optional)

II. Thesis Body

- Chapter 1: Introduction. (Much of this chapter may come from the prospectus).
- Additional chapters as determined by the thesis chairperson and the needs of the thesis. Typically, an additional four to five chapters is warranted.

III. Bibliography

IV. Appendices as needed

Formatting & Writing the Master's Thesis

The length of the master's thesis is required to be between 15,000 and 20,000 words. It is important for the candidate to realize that effective academic writing necessitates impactful and thoughtful writing. It must be robust enough to address the topic sufficiently and yet succinct enough to present the arguments efficiently. A thesis falling outside of this range will be rejected.

The standard to be used for the master's thesis is the latest edition of Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual of Style for Writers of Term papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). MTS students writing a thesis focused in biblical studies may use the *The SBL Handbook of Style* if directed to do so by their chairperson.

A fundamental aspect of the master's thesis is the robust documentation that is used to justify arguments. Footnotes should be included at the bottom of each page and conform to the footnote style of Turabian. A thesis or prospectus with insufficient documentation of research will be rejected. A candidate should approach the thesis with the mindset and goal of formal publication.

The thesis should follow the established master's thesis template published by the Seminary. This template can be found in BridgeCampus within the thesis course materials. Included in this template are the guidelines on font, spacing, pagination, etc.

Most importantly, candidates should work carefully with their chairperson to establish goals and a timeline for completing the thesis. Incomplete theses will not be considered for final evaluation regardless of the time left before graduation. It is the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that milestones are being met with sufficient time for revision and adaptation.

Thesis Templates

THESIS/DISSERTATION TITLE 1 INCH (72 POINTS)

BELOW TOP MARGIN WITH SUCCESSIVE
LINES FORMATTED IN A “V” SHAPE

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of
Bridges Christian College & Seminary
New Orleans, LA

In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of [Degree Name]

By
First M. Lastname
Month, Year

Thesis Process

