

Guidelines for Preparing a
Professional Report or Thesis
for the
Master's in City and Regional Planning

School of Urban and Public Affairs
University of Texas at Arlington



Guidelines for Preparing a Professional Report or Thesis for the Master's in City and Regional Planning

There are three exit options for the MCRP degree:

Thesis Substitute Options:

- i. comprehensive exam (1 credit hour)
- ii. professional report (3 credit hours)

Thesis Option:

- iii. master's thesis (6 credit hours)

Options (ii) and (iii) require the preparation of a written report or manuscript. This handout discusses the guidelines and requirements for preparing either the professional report or thesis.

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All master's students must be aware of preparation requirements, components and deadlines associated with the professional report or thesis, final defense and submission of the final copies and forms to the Graduate School. The deadlines for each semester are published in the Graduate School Calendar at <https://grad.uta.edu/leftMenuPages/gradcalendar.asp>.

A. The Difference Between a Professional Report and Thesis, and How To Choose

Professional Report (3 credit hours): This option is recommended for students who are interested in gaining additional “hands-on” experience, beyond the Project Planning courses, by preparing a professional project report. Professional report students identify a problem or issue related to their emphasis area that can be examined via benchmark studies and reports from other cities or regions, and supplemented by original empirical or applied research by the student. Conclusions, implications, and recommendations are drawn based upon the student's research.

All professional report students must submit a written copy of their project and defend their professional report in a final oral examination directed by the student's professional report committee. The scope, content, and form of the oral defense shall be determined and administered by all members of the student's supervising committee.

Master's Thesis (6 credit hours): This option is recommended for students who are interested in research, who intend to pursue a career in research or private consulting, and/or who intend to obtain another advanced degree. Thesis students identify a problem or issue related to their emphasis area that can be examined via scholarly research and review of relevant academic literature, and supplemented by original empirical or applied research by the student. Conclusions, implications, and recommendations are drawn based upon the student's research.

All thesis students must defend their thesis in a final oral examination conducted by all members of the student's supervising committee but which is also open to all members of the faculty. Questioning of the candidate will be directed by the student's master's thesis committee. All members of the student's committee must be present at the defense. Although the defense is concerned primarily with the thesis research and its interpretation, the examining committee may explore the student's knowledge of areas relevant to the broader core of the thesis problem.

Thesis students may want to attend the Thesis seminar offered by the UT Arlington Graduate School. The Thesis seminar is designed to help with understanding the formatting requirements of the Graduate School. More information, including a sign-up form, is available here: <https://grad.uta.edu/currentStudents/seminar.asp>.

B. Suggested Timeline for Preparing the Professional Report or Thesis

SUGGESTED TIMELINE	
Five weeks <i>before</i> the semester starts	Check the Graduate School calendar for deadlines for the semester of graduation (https://grad.uta.edu/leftMenuPages/gradcalendar.asp) Review the Graduation Checklist for Thesis or Non-Thesis students (checklist for Thesis students: https://grad.uta.edu/pdfs/Current/Graduate_CheckList_Thesis-Dissertation.pdf) (checklist for Non-Thesis/Professional Report students: https://grad.uta.edu/pdfs/Current/Graduate_CheckList_Non-Thesis.pdf) Consult with prospective chair of the thesis or report committee to ensure s/he will serve as chair; enroll in appropriate thesis or professional report course
Weeks 1-3	Submit preliminary proposal to chair for comments; revise and resubmit proposal to chair; upon approval by chair, submit proposal to committee for comments; revise and resubmit proposal to committee for final approval; obtain signatures on Proposal Signature sheet; file Application for Graduation (see the Graduate School calendar for Last Date to File Application for Graduation)
Weeks 4-6	Complete major sections of thesis/report (optional: submit draft of major sections to chair for feedback [this step is arranged between student and committee chair])
Week 7	Submit first written draft to committee
Weeks 8-9	Collect comments from committee and revise based on comments
Week 10	Submit revised draft to committee
Week 11	Collect comments from committee and revise again based on comments; schedule defense if committee approves (see Graduate School calendar for Final Date to Request Master's Exam); Submit "Request For Scheduling of the Final Master's Examination"
Week 12	Submit completed revised draft to committee in preparation for defense
Week 13	Hold oral defense no later than week 13 (see the Graduate School calendar for Final Date to Hold Master's Exam); submit "Final Master's Examination Report" to committee chair; thesis students only: submit draft to Graduate School for first mechanical check
Week 15	Distribute copies of final version to committee; submit "Final Master's Examination Report" (this is done by the committee chair); Thesis students only: submit approved thesis to Graduate School (see the Graduate School calendar for Final Date to Submit Approved Thesis and Submit Final Master's Exam Report)

C. Details for Each Step on the Timeline

Five weeks before the semester starts:

- Check the Graduate School calendar for deadlines for the semester of graduation (<https://grad.uta.edu/leftMenuPages/gradcalendar.asp>).
- Review the Graduation Checklist for Thesis or Non-Thesis students (checklist for Thesis students: https://grad.uta.edu/pdfs/Current/Graduate_CheckList_Thesis-Dissertation.pdf) (checklist for Professional Report students: https://grad.uta.edu/pdfs/Current/Graduate_CheckList_Non-Thesis.pdf).
- Consult with prospective chair of the thesis or report committee to ensure s/he will serve as chair (see section D for details about choosing a committee chair and members).
- Enroll in the appropriate course. All students must be enrolled in credit hours the semester of graduation (unless the student intends to graduate *In Absentia* (https://www.uta.edu/gradcatalog/general_info#inabsentia). Students completing the Professional Report must be enrolled in CIRP 5397 Professional Report under the chair of their committee. Students completing the Master's Thesis must be enrolled in CIRP 5698 under the chair of their committee.

All master's students must be aware of the requirements, components, and deadlines associated with the thesis, professional report, final defense and submission of appropriate paperwork to the Graduate School.

All proposals, professional reports, and theses, including the bibliography, must comply with one of the stylistic formats reviewed in section G of this handout.

Weeks 1-3:

- Submit preliminary proposal to chair of the committee for comments: Students should work closely with their chair, as needed, to develop the proposal. The proposal should be approximately 5-7 double-spaced pages. **All proposals must comply with one of the stylistic formats reviewed in section G of this handout.** The proposal should clearly and concisely state the following:
 - ✓ Background or contextual information, and/or initial literature review
 - ✓ Statement of problem
 - ✓ Statement of purpose or contribution

- ✓ Details of how the project or thesis will be accomplished (e.g., information gathering, types of data that will be used, methods of analysis that will be used, anticipated findings and recommendations, etc.)
- ✓ Preliminary timeline, deadlines, schedule, etc.
- ✓ Proposed chapter outline explaining the content of each chapter in paragraph format
- ✓ An initial bibliography or list of relevant references
- Revise and resubmit proposal to chair: Students should receive comments from their chair and revise the proposal as necessary until the committee chair is satisfied with the proposal.
- Upon approval by chair, submit proposal to committee for comments: Once the committee chair has approved the proposal, the proposal should be circulated to other committee members for comments.
- Revise and resubmit proposal to committee for final approval: Upon receiving comments from committee members, students should continue to revise the proposal until all committee members are satisfied with the proposal.
- Obtain signatures on Proposal Signature sheet: Once all committee members are satisfied with the proposal, students must submit the final version to all committee members along with the Proposal Signature sheet (see section H of this document). Once complete, the original Proposal Signature sheet, along with a copy of the final proposal, must be submitted to the SUPA Graduate Programs secretary for placement in the student's file. Also, students must give a copy of the final proposal and the signed Signature sheet to each member of the committee. **Do not proceed to the next steps until all committee members approve the proposal, and the Signature sheet and copy of the proposal have been submitted to the SUPA Graduate Programs secretary.**
- File Application for Graduation (see the Graduate School calendar for Last Date to File Application for Graduation). The form is available from the Graduate School website or can be downloaded here: <https://grad.uta.edu/pdfs/Current/ApplicationForGraduation.pdf>

Weeks 4-6:

Complete major sections of thesis/report (optional: submit draft of major sections to chair for initial feedback [this step can be worked out between student and committee chair]): This is the time to complete the bulk of the work for the major sections of the report or thesis. Students should work closely with their committee chair to stay on track and may choose to submit drafts of the major sections to the committee chair for initial feedback. By the end of week 6, the first draft of the report or thesis should be complete. Students should not circulate the draft to other committee members until approval to do so is given by the chair.

All professional reports and theses, including the bibliography, must comply with one of the stylistic formats reviewed in section G of this handout.

Week 7

Submit first written draft to committee: Once the chair approves the first draft of the report or thesis, students should submit the draft to other committee members requesting feedback and comments. Students should allow a minimum of one week and an average of two weeks to receive comments from committee members.

Weeks 8-9

Collect comments from committee and revise based on comments: Students should revise their report or thesis based on the comments from their committee members. Students may choose to meet with individual members of the committee to discuss and clarify comments, although this may not be necessary if the student understands the revisions that are expected of them.

Week 10

Submit revised draft to committee: Students should submit the revised report or thesis to the chair and committee members for further comment, feedback, and/or approval. Students should allow a minimum of one week to receive comments from committee members.

Week 11

- Collect comments from committee and revise again based on comments: Students should continue to revise their report or thesis based on comments until the committee chair and all committee members are satisfied with the report or thesis.
- Schedule defense if committee approves: If the chair and committee members agree that the student is ready to schedule a defense, then the student should make arrangements to schedule their defense at this time.
- All arrangements for the defense must be made by no later than the "Final Date to Request Master's Exam Defense." This exact date varies semester to semester and is available from the Graduate School calendar (it is generally 3-5 weeks prior to the end of the semester but be sure to check the Graduate School calendar for the exact date the semester of graduation). To arrange for the defense, students must fill out the form entitled "Request For Scheduling of the Final Master's Examination" and submit it, along with all required signatures, to the SUPA Graduate Programs secretary by the deadline. This form is available from the Graduate School website, or can be downloaded here: <https://grad.uta.edu/pdfs/Current/RequestForSchedulingFinalMastersExamination.pdf>

Week 12:

Submit completed revised draft to committee in preparation for defense: Students should complete all remaining revisions and submit the final report or thesis to the chair and all other committee members by no less than one week prior to the defense.

Failure to give each member of the committee a copy of the final draft report or thesis at least one week prior to the defense may result in postponement or cancellation of the defense by the committee. Permission to present (and subsequent presentation) at the defense does not imply a passing grade. Additional substantive work on the report or thesis may be required by the supervising committee at the time of, or following, the defense.

Week 13

- Hold oral defense no later than the last date to holds a master's exam: Students must be aware of the Graduate School deadline for holding a master's exam (it is generally 2 weeks prior to the end of the semester but be sure to check the Graduate School calendar for the exact date the semester of graduation).
- Prior to the defense, students must complete the form "Final Master's Examination Report" and submit it to the committee chair who will obtain the necessary signatures and submit it to the SUPA Graduate Programs secretary who in turn will submit it to the Graduate School. The form is available from the Graduate School website or can be downloaded here: <https://grad.uta.edu/pdfs/Current/FinalMasterExamReport.pdf>
- Thesis students only: submit a copy of thesis to Graduate School for first mechanical check (check the Graduate School calendar for deadline). All theses submitted for mechanical check must also be accompanied by one of the forms found here: <https://grad.uta.edu/currentStudents/VirtualGraduateSchoolAdvisor.asp#ThesisDissertation>.

Week 15

- Distribute copies of final version to committee: Students must complete any remaining revisions required on the thesis or report and distribute copies of the final version to all members of the committee.
- Submit "Final Master's Examination Report." The chair submits this form to the SUPA Graduate Programs secretary.
- Thesis students only: Submit approved thesis to Graduate School (check the Graduate School calendar for deadline).

D. Instructions for Forming a Committee

All Professional Report and Master's Thesis students must form a supervising committee. The committee must consist of at least three full-time SUPA faculty. If the student so desires, one qualified external person who is not a member of the SUPA faculty may serve as a voting member of a supervising committee. The supervising committee is responsible for guiding the student through the writing of the professional report or master's thesis. The supervising committee also conducts the final thesis or report defense.

The first step in forming a supervising committee is to select the chair. It is recommended that the chair be the student's mentor and/or a faculty whose research most closely relates to the topic of the student's thesis or report. Be sure to check with this faculty five weeks before the start of the final semester to ensure he or she will be available to serve as chair of the professional report or master's thesis committee. Consult with them about the report or thesis topic and plans for completing the report or thesis. Also, consult with them about which other two faculty to select as members of the supervising committee.

E. Tips for Presentation of Professional Report or Thesis at the Defense

All professional report students must defend their professional report in a final oral examination directed by the student's professional report committee. The scope, content and form of the oral defense shall be determined and administered by all members of the student's supervising committee.

All thesis students must defend their thesis in a final oral examination conducted by all members of the student's supervising committee but which is also open to all members of the faculty. Questioning of the candidate will be directed by the student's master's thesis committee. All members of the student's committee must be present at the defense. Although the defense is concerned primarily with the thesis research and its interpretation, the examining committee may explore the student's knowledge of areas relevant to the broader core of the thesis problem.

Both professional report and thesis students should prepare a brief (± 10 minutes) oral presentation of the professional report or thesis. The presentation can include a power point presentation, or other visual/graphic components. The presentation should include only a brief summary since it is assumed the committee will have already read the thesis or report. The presentation should include highlights of the statement of problem, contextual background information, methods, major findings, and conclusions, recommendations, and implications.

Permission to present (and subsequent presentation) at the defense does not imply a passing grade. Additional substantive work on the report or thesis may be required by the supervising committee at the time of, or following, the defense.

The presentation at the defense should be of a professional nature, similar to a presentation one would give at work.

F. A Note on Plagiarism and Submitting an Electronic Copy of the Thesis or Report to TurnItIn

Students are responsible for ensuring their theses/dissertations are their original work and for respecting intellectual property of others. Students found guilty of plagiarism or other improper procedures (such as using thesis/dissertation writing services) are subject to appropriate disciplinary actions. Please see the Graduate Catalog on Academic Dishonesty for further information.

Prior to submitting their theses, dissertations, professional reports, and other end-of-degree projects and reports to their faculty supervising committees for final review and approval, students shall submit such reports and projects to a SUPA-approved plagiarism detection service and will provide their committee chair with an electronic version of the final manuscript and a 'clean' plagiarism report, which the chair in turn will share with all committee members. Student access to such a detection service will be facilitated by the SUPA Graduate Programs secretary.

G. Stylistic Guidelines and Requirements

All MCRP proposals, professional reports, and theses, including the bibliography, must comply to one of the following stylistic guidelines.

All Proposals: all formatting and style for the proposal must comply with some recognized style. Do not mix and match styles. Choose one style and apply it consistently throughout the document **including** the bibliography.

Theses: all formatting and style for the master's thesis must follow Turabian or *CMS*.

Professional Reports: all formatting and style for the professional report must comply with Turabian or *CMS*, or some other recognized style (e.g., APA, MLA). Do not mix and match styles. Choose one style and apply it consistently throughout the document including the bibliography.

It is strongly recommended that students purchase one of the following books since they will help with writing and formatting the professional report or master's thesis as well as with written reports and projects at work or on the job:

K. Turabian. 2007. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Seventh Edition*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

University of Chicago Press Staff. 2003. *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Additional formatting guidelines:

- Margins: Choose a set of top, bottom, and side margins and use them consistently throughout. Do not change margins from section to section. All margins must be at least 1.25" and may not be more than 1.5". On some pages the bottom margin may of necessity be more than this to accommodate the requirement that subheadings be followed by at least two lines of text or be moved to the next page.
- Fonts: Most conventional fonts are acceptable; novelty styles such as script, italics (except for titles), and all-capitals are not acceptable. Times New Roman or Arial are most easily converted to PDF, so these fonts may be preferable. Normally, 10 pt. or 12 pt. font should be used in professional reports or theses. Fonts up to 14 pt. may be used in illustrations if the overall appearance of the thesis or report is uniform and appropriate. Smaller font sizes may be used in large tables as long as the table is easily read.
- Line Spacing: All proposals and master's theses and professional reports must be double-spaced.
- Illustrations: All illustrative material must be of high standards. Computer graphics, scanned photographs, or similar material must be clear and legible.

For additional information on stylistic requirements for professional reports and theses, please consult Turabian or *CMS*, or visit: <https://orgs.uta.edu/CurrentStudents/raft.asp>.

Writing help, including help with formatting, is available from the UT Arlington Writing Center: <http://www.uta.edu/owl/>

Students may want to attend the thesis seminar offered by the UT Arlington Graduate School. The thesis seminar is designed to help with understanding the formatting requirements of the UT Arlington Graduate School. More information, including a sign-up form, is available here: <https://grad.uta.edu/currentStudents/seminar.asp>.

H. Proposal Signature Sheet (To Be Included with the Final Proposal for the Professional Report or Thesis)

Master's in City and Regional Planning
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**PROPOSAL SIGNATURE SHEET FOR
PROFESSIONAL REPORT OR THESIS**

NAME OF CANDIDATE _____

TITLE OF PROJECT OR THESIS _____

DATE _____

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' APPROVAL

TYPED NAME

SIGNATURE AND DATE
