

Information about thesis vs. project

The Master's thesis and the Master's project serve as a capstone toward the Master's Degree. They provide the opportunity to bring together disparate aspects of an academic discipline and incorporate a greater depth of analysis or application. Regardless of whether one chooses to complete a thesis or a project, the process is as important as the product created. Both a thesis and a project allow students to demonstrate and build on abilities to reflectively apply knowledge and expertise. Both are completed under the guidance of faculty and carried out in accordance with standards and procedures appropriate to the area of study.

The thesis or project topic should:

- add to the body of knowledge or creative work in the field;
- be clearly defined in terms of the context of existing work in the field;
- be feasible in scope and design;
- demonstrate original thinking or original creative work.

A thesis explores one or more research questions or tests a hypothesis. It is important that the thesis be conceptualized and structured so that the following aspects are explicit:

1. The problem and question(s) being pursued.
2. The theoretical base and the literature within which the question(s) has been framed.
3. The process or method of investigation.
4. Findings or observations.
5. Conclusions.

A project is similar to a thesis. It too involves a supervised independent endeavor that is built on an explicit theoretical foundation. A project, however, is more focused on the application of theory. Generally a project will include a product (such as videotape or a course of study). This product will usually be accompanied by a bound document describing the theoretical basis upon which the product is built. In addition, the document will describe, in summarized fashion, the development process. When appropriate, it will include a report of trial testing, with results and theoretical implication. Advisors will assist in selecting appropriate procedures, standards, and format. When developing a project, the following should be made explicit:

1. The problem and/or question(s) being pursued.
2. The theoretical base and literature from which the question(s) has been framed.
3. A description of the purpose of the project, a discussion of the process used in its development, and the final "product" (usually included as an appendix.) If the project is implemented, a description of that process along with observed results should be included.
4. A concluding discussion that places project activities and learning within the theoretical context of the literature.

Each project may have additional requirements that are more detailed and discipline-specific. Unless otherwise approved by the program advisor, the project should be written using the third person format. Although the content and structure are more flexible for a project than for a thesis, all projects, whether creative or applied, consist of two distinct components: (a) the project itself, and (b) an explanation of the project presented in a scholarly framework. The project itself may be placed in an Appendix. The scholarly framework introduces, justifies, and validates the applied or creative project.