

## **The Master's Thesis Option in the Department of Speech & Hearing Sciences**

*Why do a Master's thesis project?* First, it's an opportunity to explore the world of research and determine if it is something you enjoy. Second, it affords you the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of a particular topic. Third, you will have the opportunity to work closely with a faculty member (and likely other professionals in your specific area of interest as well). Fourth, if you have any interest in possibly pursuing a PhD at some point in the future, completing a thesis can give your PhD application a boost. Finally, you can use the thesis as an alternative to the comprehensive exam. **Undertaking a Master's thesis is a challenging but incredibly rewarding opportunity for academic, professional, and personal growth.**

Students choosing the thesis track should possess or be prepared to develop the following qualities:

- Strong writing skills
- Dedication and passion for a specific topic
- High degree of self-motivation
- Collaborative relationship with a faculty member who may wish to serve as an advisor
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*\*\*\*Students should not opt for the thesis track solely to avoid taking comps\*\*\**

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## Steps for Completing a Master's Thesis:

1. Successfully complete SHS 506
2. Engage a Thesis Advisor
3. Students who would like to complete a thesis should identify their areas of interest and talk with faculty members who may have interests in these areas. Faculty members may choose to serve as the thesis advisors as they see fit.
  - a. Students may not do a thesis if they cannot identify a thesis advisor
  - b. Occasionally a faculty member will invite a student to complete a thesis under their advisement
4. Regularly scheduled meetings with the thesis advisor are recommended throughout the entire thesis process
5. Once a faculty member agrees to serve as a thesis advisor, the student should inform the graduate advisor that they will follow the thesis track.

## Indicate the Thesis Track in Program of Study:

A Master's degree in speech-language pathology requires students to successfully complete either (1) a comprehensive exam or (2) a thesis for their program of study. *A student must indicate their chosen Program of Study no less than 5 months before their expected graduation date.*

1. Students choosing the thesis track must indicate their program of study by logging into <https://gradforms.unm.edu> using their UNM Net ID.
2. Select Show Program of Studies as indicated in the image to the right.
3. Fill out the required fields such as degree option and primary program. Then select "Plan I (with thesis)" and indicate expected graduation semester.
4. List all completed coursework for the degree, expected coursework, and major advisor. Then submit form for approval.
5. If there are errors in the completion of the Program of Study form, the SHS graduate advisor will contact the student to make the necessary modifications and re-submit.

## Identify an Area of Research:

1. The student and thesis advisor will jointly identify a thesis topic.
  - a. Students may inquire about planned or active faculty research projects to see if a current project interests them. Alternatively, the student and thesis

The screenshot shows the UNM Graduate Studies website. The 'SHOW Program of Studies' button is circled in pink. Below it, the 'SHOW Application for Candidacy' button is highlighted with a yellow 'New! Beta Version\*' tag. The 'SHOW Announcement of Examination' and 'SHOW Report of Examination' buttons are also visible. The 'Request for Non-UNM committee service' button is at the bottom. The form fields are: 'Select appropriate option:' set to 'Master's Degree', 'Primary Program:' set to 'Speech-Language Pathology', 'Concentrations:' with an 'Add Concentration' button, 'Minor (if any):' empty, 'Select appropriate option:' dropdown open with 'Plan I (with thesis)' selected and circled in pink, 'Semester & year expected' empty, and 'Requirements:' dropdown set to 'Plan I (with thesis)'.

advisor may work together to develop a new project for the student's thesis.

2. Students are not required to gather new data to complete a thesis project. The student may be able to use existing data as long as the project addresses a distinct independent research question.

### Select a Thesis Committee:

1. The thesis advisor and student jointly identify appropriate committee members. The student extends an invitation to the potential committee members. The invitation may be verbal, electronic, or written.
2. When inviting members to join the committee, student should give them an informal overview of the aim of the investigation and the roles that they hope the committee member will fulfill.
3. The student must follow current Graduate Student policies for committee members. A thesis committee must be composed of a minimum of 3 members. For a full description of committee member requirements, please review the following webpage:  
<https://grad.unm.edu/resources/gs-forms/committee-service.html>
  - a. At least two committee members must be tenured or tenure-track faculty members from the SHS department
  - b. One committee member can be an adjunct faculty member, an SHS clinical supervisor, or a tenured or tenure-track faculty member from another department or from another University. For this last category, check with Graduate Studies to see if this potential member qualifies for thesis committee service.
  - c. Student may have more than three committee members, but keep in mind the logistics and communication required for each additional member.
4. For committee members who are not in the SHS department, a *Request for Non-UNM Committee Service* must be submitted by the student through the online system.
  - a. Log into <https://gradforms.unm.edu> using UNM Net ID
  - b. Select "Request for Non-UNM committee service"
  - c. To complete the request form, student will need a copy of the committee candidate's CV or resume.
    - i. NOTE: for non UNM committee members or non-tenure track committee members, the thesis chair will be required to submit their vote and proxy signature.

### Pre-Prospectus Meeting:

1. Once the student and thesis advisor create a clear plan for the thesis project, at least one pre-prospectus meeting that includes the student and full committee is highly recommended. This is a relatively informal meeting that affords multiple benefits: (a) allows the student and thesis advisor to take advantage of the committee's expertise and answer any questions that have arisen; (b) brainstorm various aspects of the project (i.e., research questions and methodologies); (c) ensure that the scope of the project is appropriate; (d) allows students to experience the collaborative nature of strong research projects, and (e) prevents the student from major project overhauls after the formal prospectus meeting.

2. The student schedules a meeting time for all members of the thesis committee to meet and discuss the project. The committee may require a pre-prospectus document prior to the meeting.
3. The pre-prospectus meeting also provides an avenue for the student to identify areas where help is needed.
4. Committee members may ask questions and make recommendations for the final draft of the prospectus.
5. Other appropriate professionals may be invited to the thesis pre-prospectus meeting.
6. Methodology and expectations of student and committee members are discussed.

### **Prepare a Thesis Prospectus:**

1. The completed thesis prospectus is an overview of the thesis project, with particular attention to the methods to be used. The prospectus should be brief with a maximum of 20 double-spaced pages plus references and appendices and should follow APA formatting guidelines. Although the prospectus itself is the student's work, it is based on discussions with and guidance from the thesis advisor, who will determine when it is ready for distribution to the committee.
2. **Note:** The full committee must formally approve the student's prospectus prior to starting data *collection* and data *analysis*. This protects the student from the possibility of collecting unusable data and/or contaminating the data pool – both of which result in extra work for the student.
3. The following headings should be included in the thesis prospectus.
  - a. Aims of the investigation (1-2 pages) This is a brief overview of the question(s) to be addressed in this project and why the question(s) is interesting.
    - i. This is a brief overview of the question(s) to be addressed in this project and why the question(s) is interesting.
  - b. Literature Review (approximately 4-5 pages)
    - i. Provide brief support for the question using current literature. What is already known?
  - c. Methodology
    - i. Participants
      1. Include selection and/or exclusion criteria for subjects, number of subjects to be recruited, and how they will be recruited.
    - ii. Include data collection and data analysis procedures.
      1. Describe procedures. If there is a treatment phase, describe the treatment in detail.
      2. List and define your outcome measures. Describe how they will be collected and analyzed.
      3. Support your choice of methodologies (including treatment procedures) with current literature.
    - iii. Describe your statistics approach.
  - d. Timetable
    - i. Indicate in a table what will be accomplished each semester and the number of credits committed to thesis each semester.

- ii. The department recommends that students plan on a **minimum** of three semesters (12 months) to complete a thesis. Typically more are needed.
  - iii. Student must **register for 6 credits of SHS 599** under the thesis advisor's section number. These credits must be continuous once begun.
  - iv. Student must be registered for a thesis credit during the semester they defend. If final paperwork (manuscript) is not submitted by the deadline set by Graduate Studies, the Student will be required to add an additional thesis credit to their program plan. *Note that while you can defend during your last semester this is not advised as your clinical internship should be your primary focus. If your committee approves for you to defend during your final semester, you must do it early in the semester to ensure completion before the Graduate Studies deadline.* Check with Graduate Studies for deadlines.
- e. Resources
  - i. Indicate resources needed
    - 1. Examples
      - a. The data collection procedure may require instrumentation that is not contained within the SHS department. What resource outside the department will be utilized to complete your data collection?
      - b. The subject inclusion criteria may be disorder- or disease-based. Will you recruit from a disorder- or disease-specific clinic? If so, indicate that clinic as a resource.
- f. Approval Statement
  - i. The following statement should be included at the end of the prospectus, followed by signature lines.
    - 1. The signature(s) below indicates approval of the proposed thesis.
- 4. In the case that IRB paperwork has been filed prior to the thesis prospectus meeting, the thesis advisor can sign the prospectus to be submitted with the IRB paperwork. However, when this occurs a modified prospectus or prospectus addendum should be completed after the prospectus meeting. This addendum will incorporate any changes to the prospectus based on IRB review as well as the signatures of all the committee members.
  - a. If changes are made to the data collection methods as a result of the prospectus meeting, student may need to complete an IRB modification.

### **Schedule Prospectus Meeting:**

1. The student schedules a meeting time for all members of the thesis committee to meet and discuss the final thesis prospectus.
2. The thesis prospectus should be distributed to committee members at least 2 weeks prior to the prospectus meeting.
3. The goal of this meeting is to finalize the research prospectus. Committee members may sign prospectus at this time or request changes.
4. The student should document any changes noted during the thesis prospectus and include those changes in the updated thesis prospectus or in a prospectus addendum.

5. The thesis prospectus is signed by all members of the committee once the document incorporates all the proposed changes.
6. The student must provide the departmental administrative assistant with a copy of the signed thesis prospectus along with any thesis prospectus addendums to be placed in the SHS department student folder.
7. Although not required, it is good practice to write up a summary of the thesis prospectus meeting to serve as an addendum to the prospectus. The thesis committee may ask the student to write up a revised thesis prospectus. The thesis committee may ask the student to write up a revised thesis prospectus as opposed to a prospectus addendum.
8. If student writes a prospectus addendum:
  - a. In a written document list the issues discussed. Indicate any changes to the prospectus.
  - b. Distribute the addendum for comments to all committee members
  - c. The committee may require the addendum to be rewritten until all the proposed changes are clear.
9. Once an approved draft is completed, all members of the thesis committee must sign the prospectus addendum. This indicates that each committee member agrees to the project's aim(s) and methodology.
  - a. A copy of the signed addendum document should be attached to the original thesis prospectus and given to the departmental administrative assistant to be placed in the SHS department student file.
  - b. If student writes a revised thesis prospectus, follow the guidelines noted above. The committee will require student to rewrite the prospectus until all members agree to sign the document.

### **Submission of IRB Application:**

1. The student may need to complete and submit an Institutional Review board (IRB) application. It must be submitted and approved prior to any subject recruitment or data collection.
  - a. All forms can be found in the "IRB Library" at <https://irb.unm.edu/>.
  - b. An IRB modification must be submitted and approved prior to any change in subject recruitment or data collection procedures.
2. If IRB paperwork is submitted prior to the thesis committee prospectus meeting, and during the prospectus meeting the thesis committee recommends changes to the subject recruitment procedure, data collection procedure or in the case of a treatment phase, the treatment procedure, an IRB modification must be submitted
  - a. Depending on the project's methodology, additional IRB forms from other institutions may be necessary.
3. Proof of Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) needs to accompany IRB.
  - a. Student must complete CITI training prior to the submission of IRB paperwork.
  - b. Full instructions for IRB-approved CITI training can be found at: <https://irb.unm.edu/library/documents/guidance/citi-instructions.pdf>.
4. A copy of the signed thesis prospectus must accompany the IRB paperwork.
5. In the event that student thesis takes longer than one year, student may need to submit a progress report to IRB.

- a. IRB may request copies of completed consent forms, HIPPA forms and completed data collection forms

### **Collect & Analyze Data:**

1. The student organizes data collection
  - a. The student maintains communication with the thesis advisor regarding any concerns or comments related to data collection.
2. Although the student is responsible for data analysis, the thesis advisor will provide guidance and assistance.
  - a. In addition to the thesis advisor or committee members, students may seek statistical advice from the Stats Clinic offered through the Department of Math & Stats.

### **Writing Thesis Manuscript:**

1. Writing of the document should occur in stages throughout the course of the thesis project.
2. The thesis document is divided into chapters. Suggested chapters for the thesis document are described below. However, the final selection of chapters will be at the discretion of the thesis advisor.
3. The first three chapters are typically drafted early in the thesis timeline and include the following:
  - a. Introduction
    - i. The introductory chapter generally introduces the problem and indicates its importance and validity. It sets forth the context, the hypotheses to be tested (or the question to be addressed) and the research objectives to be attained.
  - b. Literature Review
    - i. This is a critical review of literature related to the topic. It is meant to act as a base for the experimental/analytical section of the thesis. Literature selected must be up to date, analyzed and synthesized logically. It is not a mere summary of works of different authors. The research questions/hypotheses should be supported by the literature review and should be stated explicitly at the end of this section.
4. The Introduction and Literature Review should be completed before the data collection begins.
  - a. Method
    - i. This chapter describes the planned methods and techniques used. A typical method section contains the following information (with variations depending on the nature of the project): research design, participants, setting, materials and instrumentation, dependent variables, independent variables, procedures, data collection, data analysis, and data fidelity/reliability.
5. The remaining two chapters are completed at the end of the thesis process (after the completion of data collection and data analysis) and include the following:

- a. Results
    - i. This chapter presents a complete account of results and analyses of the study in the form of figures, tables, and text so that the key information addressing each of the research questions is highlighted.
  - b. Discussion
    - i. This chapter discusses the results of the study in relation to the hypotheses, with explicit discussion of how the findings relate to the existing literature. It highlights the main findings, their significance and implications. Conclusions and recommendations may be presented here or under a separate chapter. Limitations and ideas for future research should be included.
6. Document format should follow the GRADUATE STUDIES thesis guidelines.
- a. Formatting guidelines and templates for the manuscript can be found at <https://grad.unm.edu/degree-completion/thesis-dissertations/guidelines.html>
  - b. It is recommended that students attend the free GRADUATE STUDIES Manuscript-writing seminar for formatting of the thesis document.
  - c. The student is responsible for the formatting and all required forms (aka. front matter).

### Setting a Defense Date:

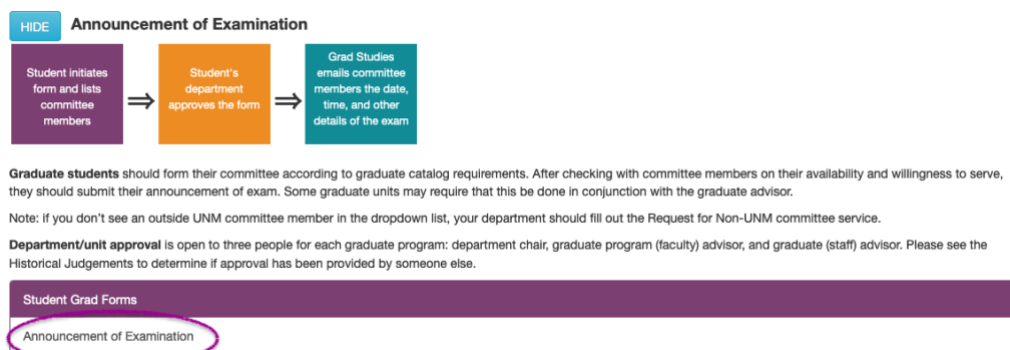
1. Agree upon a defense date with the thesis committee members.
  - a. Student must be registered for at least 1 credit of SHS599 during the semester in which they defend their thesis.
  - b. The defense date cannot be later than November 1 for a Fall graduation, April 1 for a Spring graduation and July 1 for a Summer graduation. To ensure timely graduation, earlier defense dates are strongly recommended. Students and committee members require time to complete post-defense meeting edits.
  - c. In the event that a student defends late in the semester in which they plan to graduate, and/or the thesis committee requires manuscript revisions, the graduation date may be altered.
2. Complete manuscript document and submit it to the thesis committee for review at least 2 weeks prior to the defense date.

### Announcement of Exam:

1. The student must notify GRADUATE STUDIES of the defense date by **completing the Announcement of Examination** form.
  - a. This must be completed at least two weeks before the defense date, (and no later than November 1 for Fall graduation, April 1 for Spring graduation or July 1 for Summer graduation).

The screenshot shows the Graduate Studies website interface. At the top, the URL is <https://gradforms.unm.edu/home>. The header includes the UNM logo and the text 'THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO' and 'Graduate Studies'. Below the header, there is a list of forms with 'SHOW' buttons. The 'Announcement of Examination' form is circled in red. Other forms listed include 'Program of Studies', 'Application for Candidacy' (marked as 'New! Beta Version'), 'Report of Examination', and 'Request for Non-UNM committee service'.





- b. Log into <https://gradforms.unm.edu> using UNM Net ID and select “Show Announcement of Examination.”
  - c. This flow chart illustrates the steps for completing the Announcement of Examination. Select “Announcement of Examination” as indicated in the photos.
  - d. Fill out all required fields for the defense date and submit for approval.
2. Create an **announcement flier** that must be posted in visible areas in the department and sent to the other departments and other individuals who may be interested in the defense.
  - a. Include date, time, place (Zoom link if necessary), and title of presentation.
  - b. This announcement should be distributed/posted 2 weeks prior to the defense date.

### Thesis Defense:

1. In the event of a pandemic/unprecedented chaos, or if any committee members do not reside in Albuquerque, the thesis defense may take place over a video-conferencing platform. The student is responsible for arranging this platform.
2. All thesis committee members must be present (physically or electronically) at the defense.
3. The thesis defense is a public meeting with the exception of selected portions.
  - a. The department administrative assistant will notify the department faculty, staff and student via email about the date and topic of the defense.
4. The thesis defense format (approximate times with a total max of 60 minutes for the entire defense) is as follows:
  - a. Oral presentation not to exceed 20 minutes.
  - b. Maximum of 10 minutes of questions from the public.
  - c. Public is excused from the defense.
  - d. Approximately 20 minutes of questions from the thesis committee (more time is permitted if required).
  - e. Defending student is excused for approximately 10 minutes while the thesis committee meets to determine the outcome of the defense. Options include: (a) Pass with Distinction, (b) Pass, (c) Conditional Pass (typically meaning that some revision of the thesis is necessary but not an additional defense), or (d) Fail.
  - f. The student is called back in and the results are shared.
  - g. The thesis advisor completes the *Report of Examination* (all committee members sign it).
5. After the defense, the thesis advisor completes a Report on Thesis and all committee members complete and sign their portion of the document.

6. The thesis advisor distributes the Report of Examination form for completion and signatures by each committee member.

### **Results of Thesis Defense:**

1. In the event that the student **Fails** the defense, or the student receives a **Conditional Pass**, a plan will be clarified by the thesis committee and shared with the student.
  - a. For a conditional pass, the conditions should be clarified on the *Report of Examination* and the report should be signed by all committee members. For relatively minor revisions, the committee may delegate responsibility for approving the revised version to the advisor. The form is then given to the department administrative assistant within two days of the defense.
  - b. A failed defense or a conditional pass may result in a delay in the graduation date.
  - c. The results of the thesis defense (via the *Report on Examination*) must be submitted to GRADUATE STUDIES by the administrative assistant no later than two weeks after the announced date of the thesis defense.
  - d. Once the student passes the defense and thesis, the thesis advisor distributes the *Report on Thesis* form to each committee member (one form per committee member). These forms are completed by each member and given to the thesis advisor who seals them in a confidential envelope and gives them to the administrative assistant to deliver to GRADUATE STUDIES.
2. In the event that the student receives a **Pass** for the defense and manuscript.
  - a. The thesis advisor distributes the *Report of Examination* form for completion and signatures by each committee member. This form is then given to the departmental administrative assistant within two days of the defense. This form must be returned to GRADUATE STUDIES by the administrative assistant no later than 2 weeks after the defense.
  - b. The thesis advisor distributes the *Report on Thesis* form to each committee member (one form per committee member). These forms are completed by each member and given to the thesis advisor who seals them in a confidential envelope and gives them to the administrative assistant to deliver to GRADUATE STUDIES.
    - i. The results of the thesis defense must be submitted to GRADUATE STUDIES no later than two weeks after the announced date of the thesis defense.

### **Graduation Requirements:**

There are several Graduate Studies requirements pertaining to the submission of your thesis manuscript that must be completed in order for you to graduate. Follow all of the steps at this website for the formatting and submission of your manuscript, <https://grad.unm.edu/degree-completion/thesis-dissertations/guidelines.html>. Failure to complete all of the submission steps by the Graduate Studies deadlines will delay your graduation. Deadlines are November 15 for Fall graduation, April 15 for Spring graduation or July 15 for Summer graduation. However, it is highly encouraged that you submit your manuscript well before the deadline in case there are requested revisions or submission challenges. It is also encouraged to follow up with Graduate Studies after submission to ensure that all steps have been completed.

**Deadlines & Extensions:**

1. Students should be aware that under certain circumstances it is possible to obtain extensions on the deadlines mentioned above. However, requests for such deadlines must be made through the department, with the assistance of the departmental administrative assistant, and approval is not guaranteed. Approval is also required from Graduate Studies if the announcement of exam has already been submitted.