**Steps for Completing a Thesis**

Chicana and Chicano Studies

California State University, Northridge

**Step 1:** **Find a Thesis Chair and Committee**

Upon entering the graduate program students should begin to consider a thesis research topic and potential chair. In order to complete the program in two years, it is critical that a faculty member agree to be your chair no later than the second semester in the program. At this point, you and your chair can decide which other faculty are best suited to serve on your committee. Your chair must be a full-time faculty member from the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department at CSUN and one other member must be from the department. However, the third committee member can be a part-timer from our department or a CSUN tenure track or tenured faculty member from another department or an expert outside of the university. Once all members have agreed to serve on your committee, they must sign an electronic *Thesis/Graduate Project Planning Form*.

**Step 2:** **Thesis Proposal**

There is no page requirement for thesis proposals because it will vary in length due to topic and existing literature on topic. However, the following outline is a framework to assist you in developing your thesis proposal.

I. Introduction to the Subject of Interest and the Research Question

1. What is the goal of the research project?
2. What is the topic, issue or focus of your research?
3. What is your research question(s)?
4. What are the important terms to be defined?
5. What is the significance of the issue or topic?
   * Do you want to extend a theory?
   * Do you want to correct previous research that was conducted in an inadequate manner?
   * Do you want to resolve a practical problem?
   * Do you want to test a method or methodology?
6. What are the limitations and delimitations of such a study?

II. Review of Literature

1. What does previous research reveal about the different aspects of the topic?
2. What research questions and/or hypotheses have emerged from the literature review?
3. What is the theoretical framework for the investigation?
4. Are there complementary or competing theoretical frameworks?

III. Method

1. What will constitute the data for the research?
2. What materials and information are needed to conduct the research?
3. Who will provide the data for the research? What is the population being studied? Who will be the respondents for this research? What is the sample size?
4. How will the data be collected?

IV. Create timeline for completion of thesis

1. Determine due dates for completing each chapter of your thesis.
2. Inquire and determine which human subjects deadline best meets your timeline.
3. Determine which date(s) your full committee will be meeting to review your work and complete thesis.
4. Inquire and determine graduate office deadlines for the semester you plan on completing your thesis. There are two deadlines you should be aware of. The first deadline is an appointment with your graduate evaluator regarding the format of your thesis. The graduate advisor will make sure you have followed the university guidelines on how the thesis should be formatted. The second deadline is the date your final thesis is due. This includes a completed signature page and your thesis printed on 100% white cotton paper.

Ideally, the thesis proposal will be completed either at the end of spring year 1 or fall year 2 of the program. **Please understand that you will probably write several, if not many, versions of your thesis proposal** before your thesis chair approves it and it is reviewed by the full committee. You, with the assistance of your committee chair, should schedule a meeting with the complete committee so all four of you can discuss your proposal. This will allow for a conversation regarding strengths, weaknesses, and next steps for your thesis. This includes a discussion pertaining to the responsibilities of committee members. For example, when will they next read a draft of your thesis? How much time do they need to read and provide you with comments on your draft? Will certain members beside your chair play an active role in certain chapters or areas of your thesis?

**Step 3:** **Writing the Thesis**

**Relationship with Chair and Committee Members**

It is critical that you schedule regular meeting times with your thesis chair as you work on your thesis. Preferably, you would meet on a weekly basis. At a minimum, you should meet twice a month. It is also important that you understand that your thesis is a work in progress. **You will edit and complete many drafts**. The comments and feedback provided by your chair are constructive feedback on thesis content, conceptualization of topic, and/or writing form/style. The thesis is a team effort and clear communication between you and your chair will assist with this process.

There are times when a working relationship between a graduate student and thesis chair becomes problematic. If this occurs, please schedule an appointment with the graduate program coordinator to determine next steps and a resolution to the problem. If your thesis chair is the graduate program coordinator, please schedule an appointment with the department chair to address the problem.

If the problem cannot be resolved you can change chairs. However, we do ask that out of professional courtesy you inform your thesis chair about the problem and your decision to change chairs. This can occur one on one or a meeting can be scheduled so the graduate coordinator or department chair are present to support both the student and faculty member during the meeting. Once your thesis chair has been informed of the change, schedule an appointment with the graduate coordinator to complete a new thesis project planning form.

**Social Science Format**

Below is an outline of how a social science thesis is organized.

1. **Abstract** *-* This is a paragraph that introduces your topic, research question(s), and thesis research findings. This is written when you have completed your thesis.
2. **Chapter 1 Literature Review** *-* A literature review is an analysis and synthesis of the empirical and theoretical literature on a particular topic. A literature review requires the use of many skills such as library research, logical arrangement of information, and scientific writing. The role of a good literature review is to find and present pertinent work from the most recent primary literature in a logical and organized manner.
3. **Chapter 2 Method** *-* The method section of a paper describes in detail how the study was carried out. It should be detailed enough so that readers would be able to replicate the study if they wanted. There are three main sub-topics of discussion for the Method section.
   1. **Participants or subjects:** It is important to identify the participants in the study so that one is able to make comparisons across groups. Report the total number of participants in the study, how they were selected, major demographic characteristics (age, sex, race, etc.), and where appropriate, characteristics such as socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, etc.
   2. **Measures:** This section describes the protocols which were used for the study.
   3. **Procedure:** This section summarizes the steps taken to collect data for your study and instructions given to participants.
4. **Chapter 3 Results** *-* If the study is quantitative in nature it briefly states in technical and statistical terms the main findings of your research project and discusses whether or not you found support for your hypothesis or research question(s). If the study is qualitative, in lieu of measures, identify, and describe the type of qualitative methods you are applying (e.g., feminist ethnography). Offer a brief review/synopsis of the methodological literature within that particular area of qualitative research. The research findings may be organized around themes that emerge from the data, explaining how the themes address the research question(s) with attention to the social context of participants interviewed or observed.
5. **Chapter 4 Discussion***-* This is an opportunity to highlight the main findings from your project in lay terms. There is also an opportunity to provide recommendations for future research regarding the topic and limitations of your research project.

**Step 4 – Final Thesis Committee Meeting**

The final thesis committee meeting should occur two to three weeks prior to the final thesis submission to the university. In order to be prepared for this meeting your full committee must receive a complete draft of your thesis at least two weeks prior to the final thesis committee meeting date. That is, you should have a complete draft of your thesis to your committee by week ten or week eleven of the semester you intend to graduate.

The purpose of the final thesis meeting is for your full committee to read and comment on a full draft (all four chapters) of your thesis and for the committee to determine whether or not your thesis is complete.

You are responsible for contacting members of your committee to find a mutually agreeable date and time for the final meeting. The final meeting takes approximately 30-60 minutes. Your thesis chair will arrange for a room for the final meeting.

At the meeting you will be asked to briefly summarize your research. You should also be prepared to answer questions on the purpose and design of your research, the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology, the analysis, and the implications of your findings.

If your committee does not deem your thesis ready, committee members will share what additional work they believe is necessary for completion. The committee must also determine whether or not it is possible for you to meet the university binding deadline given their concerns regarding your thesis. If the committee believes you need more time, a new timeline will be determined for thesis completion