

Culminating Experience for Graduate Programs

(Approved November 14, 2018)

A culminating experience is required for completion of a master's or doctorate degree program. The University recognizes the following types of culminating experiences: Theses, Dissertations, Graduate Projects/Artistic Performances and Comprehensive Examinations. Each graduate program permits one or more of the culminating experiences as described below. Where more than one option is offered, the specific type of culminating experience is identified on the student's formal program.

A Thesis/Dissertation is an original scholarly contribution to the student's field based on a systematic study of a significant problem or issue. Although it may be part of a larger research program, each Thesis is unique and written by a single student. The Thesis typically explains the problem; sets forth the methodology used to address the problem and the limitations of the methodology; reports the results, whether those are an analysis of data or a presentation of theory; and explains the significance of the findings in the context of previous work on the topic.

Thesis/Graduate Project/Dissertation Committee Selection: A minimum of three individuals who do not have a conflict of interest with the student, must serve on a student's committee. A conflict of interest is defined as a person who has an economic, sexual, and/or romantic involvement with the student or a member of the student's immediate family that could reasonably be perceived as impairing objectivity.

The chair of the committee must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member of the department or academic degree granting program. The majority of members of the committee must be active members of the department or program. Active members include all tenured and tenure-track faculty and lecturers affiliated with the department or program—as defined by the graduate coordinator. Faculty participating in the Faculty Early Retirement Program are considered active faculty members and, as such, can serve as either the chair or a committee member. Some departments or programs may have alternate policies approved by the Graduate Studies Committee.

A minority of committee members may be drawn from outside the department or program, either from within or outside of the university. Like all committee members, such outside members must (a) have a graduate degree in a related field, or (b) have extensive experience in the topic, and (c) demonstrate professional recognition through publications, creative activities, reports, papers or membership in a national professional organization and/or working committees in their institution. Individuals from outside the university must submit a CV to, and be approved by, the graduate coordinator of the department or program.

Once you have formed your committee, you will need to register through the Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) website. A curriculum vitae of a part-time faculty member or off-campus committee member must be uploaded electronically on the ETD website for approval by your committee chair, department graduate coordinator, and the Associate Vice President of Graduate Studies.

Graduate Projects/Artistic Performances represent the significant undertaking of a pursuit appropriate to professional fields and fine arts. Graduate Projects/Artistic Performances must represent originality and independent thinking, appropriate form and organization and a rationale. Graduate Projects/Artistic Performances may be individual or group efforts. Examples of appropriate projects include the development of curriculum, a market research study for an organization, the testing of a therapy on a particular population, or the design of an electronic device. In the arts, examples could include a music recital, a music composition, direction of a theatrical performance, or a gallery showing of works of art. The results must be described and summarized in a written document with an abstract.

A Comprehensive Examination will test the range of subject matter covered in the student's graduate program. The purpose of the examination is to allow students to demonstrate their ability to integrate content, knowledge, independent thinking and critical analysis. At least three committee members must certify to the success or failure of the student in the examination.