Thesis Guidelines
M.A. in International Studies

I. What is a thesis?
A thesis is essentially a lengthy research paper that makes an original, well-supported argument. The body of the thesis is normally divided into chapters and may include an introduction. There is no set page limit, but generally theses are no shorter than 60 pages, not counting documentation, and no longer than 120 pages.

II. When should I start to think about my thesis?
If you are on the thesis track, you will begin to think about ideas for your thesis during your first year of graduate study. The sooner you select a thesis topic, the sooner you can begin the process of putting together your thesis committee and doing research on that topic. Researching and writing a thesis can be a very time-consuming process, so beginning early can make it less stressful for you and your committee.

III. How do I know what to write about?
You should choose a topic that interests you because you will be spending a lot of time researching and writing about that topic. Also, your topic must be original. The thesis will be, in effect, published by Dissertation Abstracts International, and you would frustrate future scholars who obtain copies of your thesis only to find that much of it repeats earlier scholarship.

Many students choose to expand on a research paper that they wrote for a course. If you choose not to expand a paper, it is helpful, once you have an idea or two, to do some preliminary research to see what kinds of things have already been written about your topic. If you think, after investigating your topic, that you can make an original argument on your chosen topic, then you should discuss your idea with a faculty member to get feedback.

It would be a good idea to look at some theses to get a sense of the kinds of topics people choose, how they organize their arguments, and so on. A selection of maroon-bound theses is available in the Alkek Library.

IV. Are there any limits on the topics from which I can choose?
Yes. You need to work with a text or texts in English rather than translations into English. So much of a text is lost in translation that scholars cannot really say they know a text unless they have read and studied it in the language in which it was written. Even if you are fluent in another language and wish to write about a text in that language, chances are that you will not be able to find three committee members who are also fluent in that language. For these reasons, you should avoid translated texts when choosing a thesis topic.

V. How do I put together my thesis committee?
Once you have an idea for your thesis, you should consider which faculty members are experts on, or at least knowledgeable about, your topic. One faculty member will act as the chair of your committee, also called the thesis director, and two additional faculty members will act as readers. You will be the most involved with the chair of your committee, so you should choose a professor with whom you feel comfortable and whose academic methods and viewpoints you respect. The chair of your committee will want to read and comment frequently on your thesis as you write it; the two additional readers, on the other hand, may choose to read and comment on your writing less frequently, and may become involved relatively late in the writing process. You should discuss with them what they would prefer.

You should meet with the faculty member whom you would like to direct your thesis. After discussing your idea with him or her, ask if he or she would be willing to direct. Please note that professors might not be in a position to accept this responsibility. For example, they may be planning a sabbatical, or may already be chairing too many theses. If this is the case, approach your second choice. When a professor agrees to chair your thesis, discuss with him or her other possible readers. At this point, invite the other two professors to be readers on your committee.

VI. Am I limited as to who can be on my committee?
You should note that only Graduate Faculty may serve on a thesis committee. For a listing of the Graduate Faculty members in the each department, go to that specific departmental website, or if you are still unsure whether a professor is a member of the Graduate Faculty, consult the Graduate College's on-line list of approved Graduate Faculty at http://www.gradcollege.txstate.edu/Fac_Resources/Grad_Fac.html

VII. What if I can’t find anyone who will agree to chair my thesis?
While this circumstance is rare, sometimes the topic you have chosen doesn’t correspond with the areas of expertise of the professors in the International Studies curriculum. In this case, you may need to revise your topic, perhaps with the aid of a faculty member who can advise you. If you find that you are unable to revise your topic or select a new topic, you may want to consider the non-thesis track option for graduation.

VIII. Once I have a committee, what’s next?
When you have established at least your thesis director, you should permission to enroll in the first thesis course 5399A in the department of that discipline. For
example, if your thesis director is Graduate Faculty in the History Department, you will need special approval to register for HIST 5399A and HIST 5399B. Departments who are approved to offer theses for International Studies majors are: Geography, History, Mass Communication, Political Science, Sociology, and Spanish. You will register for thesis hours from the same department (5399A and 5399B, each worth 3 credits) in two semesters. You will not meet in a formal class setting for these credits, but will rather work with your thesis chair and readers as you write your thesis in your own time.

IX. When should I register for 5399A (Thesis A) and 5399B (Thesis B)?

If you are moving through your program at the typical pace of two years, you should register for 5399A during your third semester and 5399B during your fourth semester. You can only register for 5399A once, but you can, if need be, register for 5399B as often as necessary, even during the same semester as other 5399A or 5399B hours. However, considering the early deadlines discussed in Section XIV below, it is essentially impossible to complete the entire thesis in a single semester.

You can register for thesis hours in the summer instead of a long semester, but this can be tricky to schedule, especially for Thesis B. Your entire committee will need to be available on key dates, and many faculty members travel through part or all of the summer. If you want to try to take thesis hours in the summer, get a firm commitment from all three committee members. If you do this, you register for the hours at the time of registration for Summer Session I, but you are registering for the one course for the full summer, rather than for a single Session.

X. What should I accomplish during the semester in which I am enrolled for Thesis A?

You need to do at least three things:

1) If you have not already done so, invite two graduate faculty members to be second and third readers on your thesis committee;
2) Complete a thesis proposal, and submit it for approval (see Section XII below) within the first couple of weeks of the semester;
3) Write a substantial portion of the thesis itself.

XI. What is a thesis proposal and how do I write one?

The Graduate College has very specific requirements for the thesis proposal. It need not be lengthy, but it should include the following in this order: 1) a detailed description of the problem or question you will be approaching in your thesis; 2) an overview of the contents of your thesis; 3) a bibliography that follows the latest edition of Kate L. Turabian’s A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations.

XII. How do I submit my thesis proposal?

Your thesis proposal needs to be approved first by your thesis committee. Have each member of your committee read it and use their feedback to make any necessary revisions.

Cover sheets are available on-line from the Graduate College at http://www.gradcollege.txstate.edu/Thes-Diss_Inf/T-D_Forms. Be sure to type the names of the professors in your committee followed by the department to which they belong (e.g. Dr. Paul Hart, History). After typing everything in, make two copies of the cover sheet, and sign the cover sheets before you turn them in. You will need to obtain the signatures of each member of your committee on each of the three cover sheets. All signatures must be originals, not copies.

Once your thesis proposal and cover sheets are completed and signed by your committee members, you will submit one copy of the proposal and all three copies of the cover sheet with original signatures to Director of Graduate Studies, Dr. Dennis Dunn, who in turn will the proposal and all of the signed copies of the cover sheet to the Graduate College for review by the Dean. The Graduate College will return a copy of the approved thesis proposal form to Dr. Dunn and will retain the original approved proposal form and proposal. You will be notified by the Graduate College when your thesis proposal has been approved.

XIII. Are there specific guidelines for writing a thesis?

Yes. The Graduate College holds seminars to help students with the many requirements involved in writing a thesis. You can contact the Graduate College at 245-2581 to find out when these seminars will be held.

The Turabian style formatting rules are quite complex, and you must follow every one to the letter or your thesis will be rejected. Look up everything; assume nothing.

Also, you must consult the Texas State Graduate Thesis and Dissertation Handbook at http://www.gradcollege.txstate.edu/Thes-Diss_Inf/T-D_Guide. This Handbook, available in both HTML for on-line use or PDF format for downloading, contains a wide array of information that will be crucial for you to have on hand as you write your thesis.

In the unlikely event of a discrepancy between the style manual and the Texas State Graduate Thesis and Dissertation Handbook, the Turabian style manual normally takes precedence, but you should check with your director and/or the Graduate College.

XIV. When do I need to finish writing my thesis?

Yes.
You need to finish writing your thesis early in the semester in which you are enrolled for Thesis B, and turn in the final, complete thesis to your committee at least 41 working days before the commencement date on which you plan to graduate. You need to schedule an oral defense of your thesis with your committee for about 33 days before commencement. This gives your committee time for the final reading. When you and your committee have settled on a convenient date and time, ask Dr. Dunn (dd05@txstate.edu) to reserve a room, and let your committee know. After the defense, you will make any final changes requested by the committee. Then at least 24 working days before commencement, you will turn your thesis in to the Graduate College. The deadlines for submission to the committee and to the Graduate College are firm; don’t risk failure to graduate.

XV. What is the Oral Defense?

During the one-hour oral examination, the student will answer questions, concentrating on the thesis, posed by the committee. With the student’s approval, observers may attend the Defense. Committee members may also have revision suggestions for the thesis that will need to be completed in time to turn in your completed thesis to the Graduate College.

XVI. What happens if I don’t pass my Oral Defense?

If your committee approves, you will register for 5399B again the following semester and retake the Defense then. That would normally be the final attempt, unless extraordinary circumstances lead your committee to make special arrangements with you.

XVII. What happens if I get behind and can’t finish the thesis on time?

If you are unable to finish writing your thesis during the semester in which you register for Thesis B, you will need to register for it again the following semester. While there is no limit to the number of times you can register for Thesis B; however, repeating this course multiple times can get expensive. Further, there are limits on how long you have to complete your master’s degree, and delayed completion may mean that you have to appeal to the Committee Chair, Program Director, and the Dean of the Graduate College for a time extension to complete your degree program requirements. Set realistic writing goals for yourself and strive to finish writing your thesis on time.