Thesis Guidelines for the School of Journalism and Mass Communication

A thesis consists of original research that contributes to the body of knowledge in mass communication. It is a scholarly study of communication behavior, the purpose of which is to broaden understanding of how mass media communicators do through what media channels, how they do it and with what effects. It may be quantitative (experimental design, content analysis, survey data) or it may be qualitative (interviews or focus groups).

Students are expected to demonstrate a commitment toward pursuit of the thesis, which will take at least two long semesters. Students interested in the thesis option are encouraged to develop their research ideas in the various classes. Students must have a clearly articulated research question. This option is recommended for those who may continue their education beyond the master’s degree.

In order to be approved to take the thesis option, students, in consultation with the Graduate Advisor, should identify a member of the mass communication graduate faculty with expertise in the research area who is willing to direct the thesis.

Enrollment in Thesis. Students must enroll for a minimum of two semesters of thesis credit, MC 5399A (Thesis A) and MC 5399B (Thesis B). Thesis credit is typically taken during the last two semesters before a student graduates. For example, a student graduating in the spring semester would take MC 5399A in the fall and MC 5399B in the spring semester. If the thesis is not complete after completion of MC 5399B, students must continue to register for this course (MC 5399B) each term. However, the maximum thesis credits they will earn is six (6) credits. The Graduate College expects the student to be enrolled in the correct number of hours. For example, if the student is not going to complete 120 hours of work (3 credits), the student should enroll in fewer credits.

Enrollment in Thesis During Summer Session: Students may not enroll in Thesis A or Thesis B credits during the summer. However, students who defended their thesis during the spring semester that did not get their changes made by the Graduate College deadline will be allowed/required to enroll in one (1) credit of thesis until it is completed and approved by the Graduate College.

Thesis Chair and Thesis Committee. The thesis committee will consist of three members of the Texas State graduate faculty. Students will consult with their thesis chair to select the other members of the committee. At least two members of the thesis committee must be members of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. One member may be a graduate faculty from another department if that faculty’s expertise directly contributes toward the student’s research. The Graduate Advisor and the outside-faculty member’s department chair must approve the outside committee member. The thesis advisor and thesis committee should be selected prior to enrolling in Thesis A credits. [See Committee Section of the SJMC Handbook]

Role of Thesis Chair: The thesis chair will be responsible for working with the student one-on-one to develop a complete thesis proposal. This means the thesis chair should be willing to read multiple drafts of the thesis and return them in a timely manner. The thesis chair should share a
common theory/method background as the student. The thesis chair will make sure to work with the student to identify other committee members. The thesis chair will email committee members to set up the thesis proposal defense, send out the final thesis proposal document, the final thesis document and prepare all the paperwork needed for the proposal and defense meetings (the student should not do this). The thesis chair will meet the internal thesis guidelines set by the SJMC Graduate Advisor at the start of each semester.

**Role of Committee Members:** The committee should be made up of a “theory” expert or a “method expert” to help guide the student’s research. The committee members may share expertise with the thesis chair, but the committee should complement each other. The committee members should provide feedback and answer questions prior to the thesis proposal meeting. The thesis chair may ask the student to meet with the committee members for advice/feedback while the proposal is being developed. The thesis committee members will be provided feedback on the final thesis proposal as well as the final thesis.

**Thesis Process and Proposal Meeting.** The student will complete multiple drafts of the introductory chapters of the thesis. The student will work on writing an introductory chapter that introduces the problem and the purpose statement. They will then provide a detailed literature review discussing the theory being applied. Students will work with their thesis chair to determine if a separate chapter is needed to posit the hypotheses and research questions, or if the arguments are easily made in a new section at the end of the literature review. The student will then write the methodology chapter. This chapter should be specific as possible about the participants and procedures.

Once the thesis chair is satisfied with the content of the thesis proposal (roughly 20-30 pages), the chair will set up a thesis proposal meeting with the other members of the thesis committee.

The students will provide committee members the complete thesis prospectus no less than two weeks prior to the thesis proposal meeting. At least two of the three members must be present at the thesis proposal meeting. The other member can participate remotely. *The student should make sure to take the Thesis Proposal Form to the thesis proposal meeting (available on the Graduate College Website).* The student and the thesis chair will need to make sure the Thesis Proposal Form is returned to the Graduate College immediately following the meeting. Thesis A credits are earned for the prospectus work. Students cannot enroll in Thesis B credits until the Graduate College has processed and approved the Thesis Proposal Form. The thesis proposal has to be approved by the Dean/Associate Dean of the Graduate College.

**Completion of the thesis.** Once the thesis proposal has been approved and the Thesis Proposal Form sent to the Graduate School, the student will work on carrying out the thesis work (collecting quantitative or qualitative data and writing the results and discussion chapters). The student is enrolled in Thesis B credits when completing this work. The thesis chair will once again read multiple drafts of the student’s work. Once the quality of the material meets expectations, the thesis chair will schedule the thesis oral defense and send the thesis to the other committee members. The thesis chair and the student should allow committee members at least two weeks to read the thesis. For the final thesis defense, only one committee member can
participate remotely. The other two faculty members should be physically present at the defense.

The student and thesis chair will need to make sure the oral defense of the thesis and thesis are sent to the Graduate College by the Graduate College deadline. **The student and faculty advisor will make sure the Thesis Submission Form (available on the Graduate College Website) is signed by the needed parties at the thesis defense and sent to the Graduate College by the deadline. Committee members may ask the student to make additional changes to the thesis. They may defer to the chair to sign off on the thesis changes, or they may ask to see the thesis again.**

**Master’s Thesis Format.** A master’s thesis is original research, which contributes to knowledge in the field of communication. In general, a master’s thesis is between 40 to 80 pages in length.

**Style:** Use APA style ([http://guides.library.txstate.edu/writing-citation-style-guide/apa](http://guides.library.txstate.edu/writing-citation-style-guide/apa)) throughout the thesis.

**Format:** The final thesis is *regimentally* formatted by the University. Please consult with the Graduate College guide on preparing, formatting and submitting a thesis for precise, required details on the front matter, appendices and references page. *The thesis proposal will not be approved by the Graduate Advisor unless the proposal adheres to the Graduate College thesis format.*

Following is a suggested guideline:

**Chapter I: Introduction**
- Title and Introduction (title can evolve and change)
- Introduce the topic and the problem and provide a context.
  - Why is it important? What are the broad research questions? Provide relevant support (may include cites from industry/trade or news sources and not just academic sources).
  - State the significance of the thesis project and its purpose.
- It should refine, revise or extend existing knowledge.
- It should also include purpose statement clearly articulating goal of the thesis
- Provide support for the importance of this project and unique addition to the field
- Reference theory and how it is going to be used.

**Chapter II: Theoretical Background and Literature Review**
Theoretical background should include information about the appropriate theory that will provide the framework for your study.
- The literature review should include seminal and relevant past research on the theory; focus on what the researchers found.
- Theoretical rationale for study based on previous research
- Integrate evolution of the theory being used (origin to current day)
- Weave previous research together to support the arguments, should not read as an annotated bib.
- Incorporate findings from previous research to support the arguments and help direct the creation of directional hypotheses and research questions.
- Use subheads to create a clear flow.
Chapter III: Methodology
What research methodology will be used to research the topic and to collect data? Describe the design (i.e. experiment, survey, content analysis, focus groups). Provide details of all the steps of the research. For example, describe the sample (i.e. five local newspapers, 300 college students); describe when, where and how the research will be conducted.
- IRB application started but will not be turned in until after the proposal meeting.
- Explanation of why method is appropriate
- Description of sample (who is the sample and why; sample size (quantitative or qualitative); recruitment procedure; funding if applicable;
- Identification of all variables (IV and DV) and justification for these scales (list all questions and where they came from – never develop measurement questions – use established scale measures)
- List types of interview questions used for interviews/focus groups
- Proposed data analysis for each research question and hypothesis (will remove for final thesis)

This section should be as complete as possible so the committee knows exactly what will be done for the study.

****Chapters 1-3 will be needed for the proposal meeting.

Chapter IV: Results
This section usually starts by restating the purpose of the study. Then each hypothesis or research question will be addressed in order, in its own paragraph. State the statistical test used to test/answer the hypothesis or research question. Report the findings and move on to the next hypothesis or research question. Include statistical analysis and supporting tables or illustrations (in APA format) if appropriate. Findings need to be clearly stated for each research question and/or hypotheses.

Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusion
Presentation and analysis of results: This is the “how and why” section.
- Provide a brief introduction to this section and briefly revisit findings.
- Expound on how the results relate to the literature review: Were the results similar to those found in past research or were they different? Did the work build on a theory, a model, a research method? Explain the results – good and bad?
- Discuss implications of your findings, for your population and beyond. What is the impact of the research on the field and on the industry? (For example, can results be used in the industry to improve strategic communication?)
- Note the limitations of the research (e.g., did enough people participate? Would a change in method help?)
- Make recommendations for future research.

Appendices
Include any “instruments” involved in the research, including surveys, experimental interventions, focus group or interview questionnaires, content-analysis codebooks, etc.
The Thesis Checklist

- Meet with mass communication Graduate Advisor to seek approval to pursue this option. Obtain a copy of the Graduate Thesis Handbook from the Graduate College website.

- Preferably one semester before registering for MC 5399A, with the assistance of the Graduate Advisor, identify a member of the mass communication graduate faculty with expertise in the research area who is willing to direct the thesis and be the supervisor.

- Consult with the thesis supervisor to select the other two graduate faculty members of the committee.

- Develop a thesis proposal along with a timeline with the help of the thesis chair.

- Complete the SJMC Thesis A paperwork to register for MC 5399A.

- Work with thesis chair by sending multiple drafts of thesis proposal before it goes to committee. Complete the thesis proposal. Send to committee two weeks before meeting. The thesis chair should send the proposal and schedule the proposal meeting on behalf of the student.

- At the thesis proposal meeting, complete the Graduate College thesis proposal form. The proposal meeting is a formal meeting. The student should give a 5 to 10-minute presentation about the project and then take questions from the thesis committee. The student should prepare a PowerPoint or visual aid for the presentation.

- Submit the proposal paperwork along with the completed forms signed by appropriate faculty to the Graduate College.

- Complete the SJMC Thesis B paperwork.

- Gather and analyze the data and compile the results.

- Work with thesis chair on multiple drafts of the final thesis. The chair will work with members of the committee to set the oral defense and send a final copy of the thesis document two weeks prior to the defense.

- After successfully completing the oral defense, get signatures of the thesis committee members on the Thesis Committee Approval form and the Comprehensive Examination Report form. Submit the forms to The Graduate College.

- The student will make any final changes requested by the thesis committee before
submitting the final version of the thesis to the Graduate College.

✓ Meet all requirements for format and style as published in the Graduate College Guide to Preparing and Submitting a Thesis or Dissertation.