

Working with Your Thesis Chair and Committee:
Advice for Students Seeking the Master of Arts in English
4/19/18 – V.2

Working on a graduate thesis affords you the opportunity to explore a subject in greater depth than is possible within the time constraints of graduate seminars. It also allows you to develop professional habits that will enable you to continue to succeed after completing our program.

We therefore recommend the following “best practices” for working with your committee:

- **Become acquainted with the Graduate School’s website at <http://www.uaf.edu/gradsch> (especially the calendar at <http://www.uaf.edu/gradsch/calendar>)**
- **By May 1 of your first academic year,**
 - Identify a topic for your thesis.
 - Form your committee; look for committee members whose expertise positions them to advise you effectively about your topic. Find out how involved committee members not serving as chair would like to be in responding to drafts of your thesis.
 - Once you’ve finalized your committee, fill out the “Appointment of Graduate Advisory Committee,” “Graduate Study Plan,” and “Annual Report of Graduate Advisory Committee” forms, available at <http://www.uaf.edu/gradsch/forms/>
 - Work with your committee to create a reading list of 15-20 texts that addresses your thesis topic from a variety of angles.
 - Think about strategies for keeping your thesis manageable within the time you will have available to write. Aim for a minimum of 30-40 pages. You may develop new material for your thesis or else rework material from seminar papers, so long as it has been substantially revised, expanded and recontextualized.
- **At the beginning of your second year,**
 - Schedule a meeting with your committee chair to discuss your timeline for the year. You should also discuss expectations, both yours and those of your chair; deadlines, both those of the Graduate School and the College of Liberal Arts; and schedules, both for the submission of work and the reception of feedback. Attend the Graduate School’s Formatting Meeting; for the date, see <http://www.uaf.edu/gradsch/calendar>
- **On the last Saturday of September in your second year,**
 - Take the comprehensive exam on your reading list.
- **By October 31 of your second year,**
 - Submit the Prospectus for your thesis to your committee chair and committee members. The Prospectus should be 5-10 pages and should outline the area of research you intend to pursue in your thesis. The prospectus should be focused on a central concern, and articulate the questions that you would like to explore in your thesis. It should be accompanied by a Bibliography of texts you intend to use in your thesis; you may cite some or all of them in the Prospectus if you see fit.

- **By December 1 of your second year,**
 - By the end of the semester before the one in which you plan to graduate (typically the semester during which you pass the comps exam), fill out the “Advancement to Candidacy: Master’s Degree” form, available at <http://www.uaf.edu/gradsch/forms/>

- **In the semester you intend to defend (typically spring of your second year),**
 - Identify a date for your defense and a due date for the final version of the thesis that is at least two weeks before the defense, not including the week of spring break; please also bear in mind that defenses happen in fall and spring semesters because faculty are on nine-month contracts. Once you have a date and time for your defense, work with the English Department’s Office Manager to schedule a room. This will give your committee sufficient lead time to read your thesis carefully before your defense and prepare thoughtful questions about it.

- **Once you’ve defended your thesis,**
 - Congratulations! There is more paperwork for you—the “Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form”—available at <http://www.uaf.edu/gradsch/forms/>
 - Submit your thesis to the College of Liberal Arts’ Dean’s Office at least two weeks before the Graduate School’s deadline for filing theses.

- **Tips for completing your thesis in a timely manner:**
 - Information about faculty interests is available on the English Department’s website.
 - The committee chair and members are responsible for discussing your ideas with you, reading your materials, and responding to them. You are responsible for managing your time so that you meet the deadlines you have set with your committee.
 - You should strive to meet the deadlines that were originally agreed to with your chair and committee. If an emergency arises that interferes with your progress, consult with your committee as soon as possible to agree upon a revised schedule.
 - Be sure to discuss faculty leave plans with all of your committee members when you set and reschedule deadlines so that you know everyone will be available when you need them.
 - If you would like to change your topic partway through the year you plan to defend, you should talk to your chair about this as soon as possible.
 - If you need to take a Leave of Absence while working on your degree but intend to return and complete your program, fill out the “Temporary Leave of Absence Request” form, available at <http://www.uaf.edu/gradsch/forms/>
 - As you work on your thesis, be mindful of work/life balance. It’s fine to say no to extracurricular activities and other commitments that could make it harder to complete your degree on schedule.