

Latin American Studies Program Guidelines for Completing your Thesis

Thesis Committee

The Thesis Committee will both guide and evaluate the independent scholarly work that you develop throughout the Masters program and that is ultimately reflected in your thesis. Your thesis should be a reflection of the expertise, methodological skills, and theoretical knowledge you developed throughout the program. As such, it should be an original, independent piece of research informed by faculty experts that form part of your committee.

Because of its role in guiding your research, you should aim to form your thesis committee as soon as possible. This requires knowing faculty members in Latin American Studies and allied departments. Do Independent Readings (298s) to become familiar with the different working styles and accessibility of the faculty. Ask them about their work. Talk to other students about their experience working with them. And invite those who you feel will best support your research. You must have all three committee members before you fill out your Advance to Candidacy paperwork You file this form by the second week of the quarter that you wish to graduate.

Chair

You want someone for your Chair who will motivate, support, and encourage you to finish, versus someone who encourages you to continue modifying your work until it is a perfect thesis. There is no such thing as a perfect dissertation and a good chair knows this well. As an assessment of your degree, the thesis is meant to demonstrate the skills, knowledges, and competencies that you could realistically develop in the fewer-than-2 years of the program. The chair dictates how your committee is run. If there is a conflict of opinion regarding the quality of your work, it is up to the Chair to make the final decision.

Other Committee Members

You must have a total of three assistant, associate, or full professors from UCSD. Two must be affiliates of Latin American Studies. An adjunct professor, lecturer, or professor from another University may take the fourth or even fifth position, but you must get a letter of exception from the Student Affairs Officer and submit it to OGS.

There are several guidelines to keep in mind when selecting your committee:

- 1) Anyone can advise you and they do not need to be on your committee.
- 2) If a committee member is unable to come to the defense, they are still obligated to ultimately agree with the general opinion of those present at your defense. They do this by signing off on the Final Report of your thesis.
- 3) It is worthwhile to select professors from multiple disciplines so that your thesis will be well-developed.
- 4) You can work with your committee members throughout your tenure here or you can work with some of them when you are in the process of drafting your thesis. It is entirely up to you and your Chair.
- 5) Lastly, you should know the personalities and expertise of your committee. You should pick people that have a history of working with MA students. They should also have a history of working well with each other.

Reconstitution of Committee

If you have a valid reason for reconstituting your committee, then you are permitted to do so by the University. The request to reconstitute the membership of a committee, you must submit the Reconstitution of Committee form to the dean of Graduate Studies. Requests must be approved by the department chair and committee chair, and submitted to OGS no less than two weeks prior to the qualifying examination or defense of the dissertation.

Independent Study (LATI 299) versus Leave of Absence

You can usually complete all of the course requirements during your first year, with the exception of the LATI 299 requirement, which is an independent study taken your second year with a member of your committee to write your thesis. Some students find that, after completing the one course of 299 and all other requirements early on in their second year, they want to go on a leave of absence in order to save money.

It is worthwhile to weigh this decision for several reasons:

- 1) International students must obtain approval from the International Center to go on leave of absence.
- 2) A student seeking to maintain health coverage must contact the Student Health Center to purchase insurance.
- 3) While on leave, a student may not be employed by UCSD, UCSD Extension, or UCSD Medical Center or hold a fellowship, traineeship, or similar appointment administered by the University.
- 4) Students may not use any University facilities or place demands on faculty. This includes not being able to use the library.

Most students decide to take 12 units of 299s their entire second year. By doing so, they have full access to their faculty committee members and can continue having health insurance and access to the library resources. In addition, you still receive financial aid.

If you do decide to take a leave of absence for the quarter that you defend, you can pay a filing fee and readmit fee on the day that you defend. These fees readmit you as a student and allow you graduate without being registered that quarter.

Writing the Thesis

Be realistic about a Master's thesis. This is not a PhD dissertation and you should not let faculty members turn it into one. Don't be afraid; it is not a monster. Just think of it as the kind of research papers that are published in most academic journals. While the typical journal article is around 8,000 words, we expect your thesis to be slightly longer, between **9,500 and 12,500 words** (excluding bibliography and appendices). This is consistent with the length of theses at comparable Latin American Studies Masters programs (e.g. UT Austin).

Quantitative theses may be on the shorter side of this range, while qualitative/historical theses might be on the higher side. What ultimately matters are the soundness of your arguments and their backing in theory and evidence. This is what the committee will evaluate, not length. This length is entirely consistent with the scope of research that can be conducted in less than two years of part-time work. Some of your faculty members may encourage you to publish your thesis. This is beneficial, especially if you plan to stay in academia and pursue a PhD.

Requirements for Formatting Your Thesis

There are several requirements that you must take care of before you submit your thesis to OGS. In early April, the Graduate Academic Affairs Adviser from OGS will come to LAS to talk to the students about the formatting requirements of the thesis. This is a mandatory meeting. After the meeting, you will be required to make two

appointments with the Graduate Academic Affairs Adviser from GEPA during the Spring quarter of your second year or your last quarter here. The meetings will be to conduct the preliminary thesis check and the final thesis check (when you submit the final copy of your thesis). There are several formatting requirements of the thesis and they can be a huge headache. The guidelines for formatting your thesis can be found at:

The Defense

You will need to reserve a 2 hour timeslot in the Cramb Reading Room for your defense. The LAS team will make calendar available for everyone to sign up for a time. This obviously needs to be cleared with all members of the committee. Remote defenses may also be possible, with prior authorization and coordination.

You cannot graduate until you have defended and turned in the final copy of your thesis to GEPA. You have until the last week of school to have your name printed in the Commencement booklet. Otherwise, you have until the last day of finals to participate in Commencement, but not have your name printed in the booklet.

On the day of your defense, there are several pieces of paperwork that you need to complete:

- 1) Degree and Diploma Application
- 2) Final Report of the Thesis
- 3) Graduate General Petition (for filing fee if on leave of absence)
- 4) Alumni Information Sheet

The defense is typically run in the following ways:

- 1) We will aim to provide refreshments.
- 2) We will have audiovisual equipment but cannot provide a computer. Please bring your own.
- 3) LAS defenses are open to family, friends, colleagues, and other faculty members, although it is your decision to include these people if you care to.
- 4) You should arrange to present for 15 minutes. You should cover very general points of the thesis, address why you did not choose to cover some topics, and also highlight strengths of the thesis. 5) The committee will then ask you a series of questions.
- 6) Then, you will be asked to leave the room while they discuss if you should pass or fail.
- 7) You are then asked back into the room and you find out about any necessary revisions that you need to make and if you have passed or failed.

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