

How to Prepare for the Thesis

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Key Topics

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- Thesis Requirements
- Finding a Thesis Advisor
- Navigating Data Procurement
- Drafting a Literature Review

Thesis Requirements

- Must be an original research topic that extends existing social science research theoretically or empirically
- Must utilize one or more computational methods
- Length: 40-45 pages (double spaced), not including references or appendices
- Quality: The research question, design, and execution should approximate the quality of a high quality journal publication in the social sciences.

Fall Deadlines

- MA Thesis Proposal Due by End of Third Week: October 18th
- Literature Review (10-15 pages, 40-80 references) Due End of Week 5: November 1st.
- Signed MA Thesis Proposal Due: November 15th
- MA Research Data and Methods Description: December 13th

Winter Deadlines

- Preliminary Data Analysis: February 7th
- Full Rough Draft of the MA Research Thesis: March 2nd

Spring Deadlines

- Full Draft (Second Draft) of the MA Thesis Sent to Advisor/Preceptor: April 1st
- Final Draft of the MA Thesis: May 1st

Finding an Advisor

Who Can Be My Advisor?

Anyone with the following attributes:

- A completed Ph.D.
- Who has an appointment at the University of Chicago *when* they agree to supervise the project, i.e. sign the MA Proposal Form given to E.G. Enbar.

Who Can Be My Advisor?

Examples include:

- Tenure track (assistant, associate, full professors) in the Social Sciences Division, Computer Sciences, Harris, Booth, among other options.
- Post-docs, Visiting Professors, Research Professors, in these departments, divisions, or schools.

When to Find an Advisor?

- Start NOW
- Should Have a Confirmed Advisor by the Third Week of October.
- That Advisor MUST APPROVE AND SIGN your MA Thesis Proposal before November 15th.

Advisor Selection Process

- Pick <u>at least three</u> potential advisors
- Attempt to set up meetings with them during office hours
- What you will discuss will vary, <u>but you should not bring up</u> the MA thesis or asking them to supervise your project in the first meeting.

Advisor Selection Process

First Meeting, possible topics could include:

- Discussing a project or research design for their course
- Additional research article suggestions related to the course or their own research that you find interesting (and hopefully relevant to your thesis).
- In the meetings you should try to demonstrate that you are intelligent, can grasp complex research or theoretical ideas, and be an independent scholar

Advisor Selection Process

In later meetings:

- You should begin to discuss your specific research interests and begin to scope out what you are thinking about for a research project, thesis idea.
- When talking about an idea, you should be able to concisely frame your research question and how you would try to answer it in an elevator pitch. Have additional details ready, but have a clear description up front.
- Do they seem interested and engaged? Supportive of your general ideas?

Cultivate Relationships with 3+ Possible Advisors

After you have had, perhaps at least three meetings with an advisor:

- They should know you are a MACSS student, writing a thesis, have some idea what that thesis would be about, and have some insight into your independent research capacity...
- Then, during a meeting, politely ask them if they would be willing to supervise your MA thesis.
- Understand that they might say no. Hopefully they say yes.

Research Question

Selecting a Social Science Research Question

- Does your research question theoretically extend a social science research question?
- If not, you need to come up with a question that addresses a social science theory.
- Generally, your research question should involve both a dependent and independent variable, and these should have origins in social science literature.

Selecting a Social Science Research Question

Simply using a method to predict a social science dependent variable does not make it social science. Examples:

- NOT SOCIAL SCIENCE: Can we predict/use ML to better predict housing inequality?
- SOCIAL SCIENCE: What is the effect of neighborhood crime on property values and population density?
- SOCIAL SCIENCE: What is the effect of housing inequality on early labor market success?

Data Procurement

What Data Will You Use?

- You should already have some idea of what data or type of data you will use for your thesis research. If not, start thinking about it now.
- Do you expect to use another professor or researchers' data? Are you already working in their lab?
- Do you need to run your own survey or experiment? This can be a very time consuming process and typically requires IRB approval, both of which you need to start thinking about now.
- Is your data open source or easily downloadable from an institution?

Literature Review

Literature Review

- The literature review should clarify how your research question will contribute to existing theory in your social science subfield.
- Often, the literature review will include testable empirical hypotheses or theoretical suppositions, either of which should be grounded in existing theoretical arguments and empirical evidence.
- Where necessary, you may need to provide a section establishing the "background" providing necessary context for your study.
- Within your literature review, include all the relevant in-text citations when referencing others' work.

Literature Review - Requirements

- Consider beginning this over the summer.
- Due November 2nd.
- 10-15 pages not including the references.
- Should include 40-80 citations from your social science field of interest (journal articles and books).



Thank You

