**THESIS PROPOSAL GUIDELINES**

The Thesis is the culminating experience for our Master of Science in Architecture students.

The following document provides some guidance to students on the nature of thesis and the requirements for preparing a proposal.

SELECTION OF A THESIS TOPIC

Thesis topics may vary in scope and depth, limited only by the need to focus on an area concerned with architecture. Because architecture is a broad field, the range of appropriate topics is broad. Faculty interests and capabilities, as well as available resources, can also be considerations in selecting a topic. The best theses often build on and develop some aspect of the student's course of study in the graduate program. For instance, a thesis may be an empirical or theoretical investigation based on previous course work. Or it may be an outgrowth of a particularly challenging studio or other course. Interdisciplinary studies are also appropriate. Students are cautioned to not select a topic that is new to them.

Students frequently begin with thesis topics that are unclear and much too general in scope, and are, therefore, not amenable to rigorous development. Through preliminary study and discussion with members of the faculty and others, the topic can be refined in such a way as to be accessible to investigation and manageable by the student. For a design thesis, a thesis proposition (or set of propositions) which might be demonstrated by virtually any approach to design, will not prove very significant.

In selecting a topic and developing the thesis proposal, the student must find their own answers to pertinent questions such as: "What can I gain from this study?" "What may others gain?" "Will I be able to utilize my creative skills and abilities in a way that will be academically enriching?" In addition, each student should ask, "Is this a thesis I can thoroughly and competently complete?" An explicit and honest exploration of these questions at the proposal stage will help the student in preparing for the actual development and subsequent presentation of the thesis.

THESIS COMMITTEE

A Master’s Thesis is supervised by a Supervisory Committee comprised of a thesis chair, who must be a member of the UW Architecture Graduate Faculty, and a committee member who need not be a member of the graduate faculty and may also be a faculty member from another department whose expertise relates to the thesis topic.

To help you identify potential committee members, the Architecture faculty research profiles page will help: <https://arch.be.uw.edu/research/faculty-research/research-profiles/>

Please note that the selection of the members of the Supervisory Committee can be particularly important to the success of the thesis. Committee members who may challenge the student's assumptions and demand a high level of performance can aid in achieving fully developed thesis. Students are encouraged to consider faculty for the Supervisory Committee who can provide insight to resources pertaining to the thesis topic as well as direction in preparing the thesis. Students are also encouraged to consult local practitioners and faculty outside of the Department that may have experience or expertise not available from departmental faculty. Additional consultants may be brought on board and their contributions to the research can be addressed in an acknowledgements page of the thesis.

PREPARING THE THESIS PROPOSAL

The proposal should be thought of as a succinct but thorough statement of the student's intentions in undertaking the thesis study. Thesis proposals must be prepared and submitted in accordance with the list of topics in Parts I and II presented below. The pages of the thesis proposal must be numbered.

### PART I: Scholarly Framework

1. Title: A simple but descriptive title is best. An appropriate title will lead readers to select the thesis correctly when reviewing literature on a given topic. For example, the title may consist of two parts; the first part should announce the evocative thrust of the thesis, and the second should contain the shortest descriptive summary of thesis, containing the “keywords” that can be used to tag thesis*.*

2. Thesis Statement: This statement should be a succinct summary of the precise topic of the thesis that gives a brief but clear idea as to its scope and its focus; this is where the student should put in the thesis proposition. A short paragraph should suffice.

3. Theoretical/Conceptual Framework: In this section, the student should elaborate upon the theoretical and/or conceptual positions and concerns that will frame the thesis. Typically, this section advances a proposition, or a “school of thought,” concerning the nature of architecture. It is best to advance this proposition by actively referring to existing academic and/or professional theoretical and conceptual positions concerning architecture. Such references should mostly be drawn from the field of architecture, but may also be drawn from other fields. Students do not have to singularly “subscribe” to a particular school of thought, but may actively bring their own ideas into constructive dialogue with those of others.

The Theoretical/Conceptual Framework that a student adopts has long term implications for project. Consequently, the student should carefully consider this section, and discuss it extensively with their Adviser, prior to submission. In the same spirit, the student should anticipate re-visiting and possibly modifying this framework as the thesis develops.

Please note that the Theoretical/Conceptual Framework must not be too brief—a single paragraph is seldom adequate. A complete statement may run a full page or more (double-spaced.)

4. Methodology: This section should describe the methodology by which the thesis will be pursued. The methodology advanced by the student must contain its own justification—why is the methodology appropriate or best for the proposed thesis? Typically, the conceptual/theoretical framework should suggest a methodology.

The creative process itself is probably not susceptible to analysis; we accept the “creative moment” uncritically. But the evaluative and transformative methodologies that structure that creative process must be subject to critical examination, and their examination is integral to the successful defense of a design thesis. Design methodologies, like theoretical/conceptual positions, are often habitual or assumed rather than stated, but a thesis requires a student to examine these assumptions.

Questions such as the following may help clarify this section: Should the design methodology be based on precedent, convention, or architectural typology; on functional analysis, original research, or systematic investigation of design parameters; or on some combination? Should the mode of design inquiry to be more cultural or scientific? Should it be more linear and rational or more iterative and intuitive? Should it be more programmatic and realistic, or more speculative and exploratory? What relative role will be played and how much weight will be given to topics that program such as, site, users, program, climate, community, history, context, tectonics or budget? By what criteria will success be determined? How will provisional design solutions or alternatives be evaluated? Not all of these questions need be answered, but they are the type of questions that must be addressed.

The description of the proposed methodology should be brief but sufficiently thorough so that the Supervisory and Review Committee can understand the student's approach and point out potential problems.

Identification of the methodology will also begin to suggest the list of tasks, schedule and points for interaction with the Supervisory Committee. If a site has not been chosen, or program has not been developed prior to submitting the thesis proposal, the methodology section must also include the specific steps that will be taken to choose the site or to write the program.

5. Scope of Investigation: This statement will generally be a paragraph or paragraphs setting forth the limits of the thesis. The more clearly the thesis elements and limits are identified and described, the better the Supervisory Committee and the Review Committee will be able to judge the feasibility of completing the thesis in the time available.

For a design thesis, this section must include the identification of the project site and a summary of the project program. Brief background information will also be provided: How was the program generated? Will this program be tested or altered as part of the thesis work or is the program fully established? (The complete project program and a map locating the project site should be appended to the thesis proposal.)

The site selection and/or program development may be part of the actual thesis process itself. In this case, the proposal must include a detailedwritten description of the specific process by which the program will be developed and/or a written set of detailed site selection criteria indicating exactly the specific process by which the site will be chosen.

This section should explain the breadth of exploration anticipated as part of the thesis. What is the design or planning horizon? For example, does the thesis assume constraints and opportunities that apply today or does it anticipate ones that may apply 20 or 40 years in the future? Or, if the thesis is on a project for an urban site, how much will the focus be on urban planning issues, how much on urban design, and how much on architecture? To what extent will the context be explored? This section should also define what aspects are to be taken as "givens" and what aspects will be explored by the student. If the design will be explored in a hierarchical sequence (e.g. developing drawings of a large area to a small scale,) this should be described as well.

6. Preparatory Study: In this paragraph (or paragraphs), the student's preparation for the thesis project should be described. This will often include an outline listing of course work that the student has taken that has had relevance to the selected thesis topic. A sentence or two about the relevance of each course should be provided. In particular, the student must reference the work done in the Arch 592: Research Methods class. In most cases where a design thesis is intended, the Arch 592 class should lead to the preparation of a project program and selection of a project site.

1. Annotated Bibliography: An annotated bibliography listing onlythe texts that have been read or are likely to be read and actively referred to in the thesis must be attached. The annotation must briefly describe:
2. The theme of the text, and
3. The specific importance or anticipated use of the text with respect to the thesis.

8. Supporting Material: Students may attach additional material as evidence of preparation to undertake the proposed thesis. This material should include:

a. Site Maps, drawings, photographs and complete program;

b. Research reports and supplemental material generated in ARCH 600 or similar thesis preparation process;

c. Other appropriate supplemental material.

PART II: Logistical Framework

1. Outline of Tasks: In outline format, the student should identify (step-by-step) the tasks to be completed. There should be a clear relationship between the Methodology and this list of tasks. Design should not be listed simply as "Design," but should be broken down into definite steps. Preparation of the graphic elements, preparation for the public presentation, preparation of the text and assembly of the thesis document should also be listed.

2. Schedule: The outline of tasks provides the basis for developing a sched­ule of the work. Thus, this schedule should be clearly related to the Outline of Tasks (described under 8) and reflect thesis registration (number of credits per quarter). This may be presented as a bar graph or in an outline. The thesis schedule must be tied to the academic calendar of the University and should be targeted to preparation of the public thesis reviews, which will be scheduled during the final weeks of Spring quarter.

3. Available Resources: The student should list resources in these areas: Supervisory committee, and Faculty Support and special resources.

APPROVAL FORMS

Forms can be downloaded from the Student Resources page of the department website:

* [Approval to Register for ARCH 599 Thesis Prep (MS Arch only)](https://arch.be.uw.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2020/11/ARCH-599_thesis-option-form_MS-DC-HT.pdf)
* [Approval to Register for ARCH 700 Master’s Thesis](https://arch.be.uw.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2020/11/ARCH-700_approval-to-register-for-thesis.pdf)

Approval forms are due by the last day of instruction during the quarter prior to when the student will enter ARCH 599 Thesis Prep or ARCH 700 Thesis. The [UW Academic Calendar](https://www.washington.edu/students/reg/calendar.html) will identify these dates.

Email signed form to your academic adviser: Claudine Manio, [claudine@uw.edu](mailto:claudine@uw.edu)