

Best Practices for Advising a Thesis in the College of Arts and Sciences

Guidelines from an Ad Hoc Committee

Spring 2017

The committee encourages departments to use this as a starting point for their own department's guidelines.

Thesis Advisors' Responsibilities

- Help student identify a second thesis advisor.
- Work with your student and thesis co-advisor to develop shared expectations for the project in terms of scope of topic, methods and resources to be used.
- Sign the student's prospectus (if you agree to advise and approve of the project as described) and make sure it is approved by the student's major department chair or director and is then delivered to the Dean's office.
- Make sure you and your student are aware of college-level policies concerning theses and distinction, especially the following: "To determine the level of distinction, the committee uses the cumulative grade point average based on all credit hours taken at UNL prior to the beginning of the term in which the student receives his or her degree." See <http://cas.unl.edu/degrees-distinction> for details on college-level policies. Please note, the college requirements are distinct from the [Honors program's requirements](#).
- Make sure you and your student are aware of any department-level policies, guidelines, and options concerning theses. For example, some departments allow students writing a thesis to enroll in 3-6 credit hours of independent research.
- If your student is planning to conduct research that involves human or animal subjects, you should initiate (or work with your student to initiate) the appropriate University review processes (e.g. IRB, IACUC) prior to data collection.
- Communicate with your student and thesis co-advisor about the project as it is in progress.
- Check in with the student if you haven't heard from him or her as planned.
- Read the thesis with care prior to the thesis defense. In many departments, it is critical to give students feedback on an early draft.
- Hold a thesis defense (30 minutes to 1.5 hour) in which you and the co-advisor ask questions about the thesis (topic, question, scope of project, methods, findings, implications, etc). Schedule the defense with enough time for the student to complete revisions prior to the college deadline.
- Complete the [Thesis Evaluation Form](#) (final form on the site) and submit it to the college by the deadline.

Student's Responsibilities

- Talk with faculty about advising your thesis before asking them to sign the prospectus form.
- Ask both thesis co-advisors to sign the prospectus form, submit it to your major department or program for the chair/director to sign and submit to the college.
- Check with your department's major advisor to see if the department has its own guidelines for theses.
- Meet with both thesis advisors early (a year before the thesis is due) to discuss their expectations for the thesis and to make sure you submit the prospectus by the college deadline.
- Develop a timeline with your advisors in which you set deadlines for completing portions of the work and sharing it with both (if they co-advise) or one (if there is a primary advisor).

Suggestions for faculty working with the thesis co-advisor

Thesis co-Advisors should meet to determine

- What roles will you play? Will you operate as co-advisors or as a primary advisor and reader?
- Who is responsible for keeping student apprised of deadlines and requisite forms?
- How often do you plan to meet? With one or both thesis advisors?
- What are your shared expectation for this work? (This list may be discipline-specific)
 - Scope of project
 - Page length / range
 - Methods
 - Resources / sources used
 - Timeline

Other resources students might use

- The Writing Center – In addition to encouraging ongoing one-on-one appointments to discuss undergraduate theses, the Writing Center has begun helping students form thesis writing groups. Email writingcenter@unl.edu to find out more about thesis writing groups and visit <http://www.unl.edu/writing/home> learn more about working with a writing consultant.
- Library--Subject specialist librarians are available to meet with students to identify scholarly resources, to organize research articles using citation tools, and open a Delivery account to request article delivery. This will save students time in the long run. The library also created research guides for classes and subject areas that will allow students to help themselves. <http://libraries.unl.edu/subject-course-resources>
- IRB/Human Subjects research—The University of Nebraska requires all research personnel, including investigators, students and other project staff, who conduct research with human participants, tissue samples, or data to complete and maintain training before and during any research conducted with human subjects. Students should talk with their advisors about training and submitting proposals to IRB.
- IACUC/Animal Subject Research—The University of Nebraska requires review and approval by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) of all research and educational activities involving vertebrate animals (including wild mammals and birds) before projects are initiated, to assure compliance with all laws, regulations and rules governing the care and use of animals. Faculty should lead this process for undergraduates.