

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
College of Nursing
THESIS GUIDELINES

Revised September 14, 1998

INTRODUCTION

The traditional academic finale to graduate work is the presentation of a dissertation or thesis that serves as evidence that the student has performed significant and acceptable research in the field. The thesis is a public and permanent communication of that research for the use of anyone interested in the field. It may stand on its own or it may serve as the starting point for additional research. The preparation of a thesis should, therefore, be a source of pride not only for you, the student, but also for the College of Nursing and the Graduate School as well. The purpose of these guidelines is to assist you in the preparation of a thesis that is consistent with the high standards of appearance and communication that represent scholarly excellence.

PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION OF A THESIS

A thesis is an empirical investigation of a problem, which relates to a theoretical or conceptual framework. The individual research or scholarship should demonstrate the capacity of the student for sustained investigation and intellectual curiosity. The thesis is expected to address a problem of relevance for nursing and to be based upon a conceptual framework. It should demonstrate that the writer has the capacity for research, facility in the use of language, and the ability to review appropriate background material, organize investigative information, and draw logical conclusions.

Theses are conducted as independent research under the direction of graduate faculty thesis advisers (the Thesis Committee). The committee members assume major responsibility for guiding the students through the investigation. It is the responsibility of these advisers (the student's chairperson and committee) to ensure that the thesis content, conduct, and form are acceptable to the Graduate School. For formatting questions, please refer to the Student Handbook and the Graduate School Regulations for Master's Theses.

Topics for graduate theses should be directed research toward meaningful clinical problems to improve nursing practice. Suitable topics for investigation include: a) exploration of patterns of behavior surrounding particular nursing phenomena, b) analyzing nursing situations or processes, c) examination of new relationships between and among variables d) measurement of variables in new circumstances, e) testing of predictive outcomes through manipulating variables, and f) discovering conditions that achieve a projected goal or desired situation. Replication studies may be appropriate for theses at the Master's level.

Currently, there are a variety of quantitative methods and qualitative methods that are used in nursing research. Examples of qualitative methodologies, which are used in nursing research, include: grounded theory methods, phenomenology, ethnographic studies, and historical research. Experimental design, surveys, secondary data analysis, replication studies, and development and testing of an instrument are examples of quantitative methodologies. In all cases, the students should seek thesis committee members with expertise in the research methodology, which is most appropriate to the research question. Additionally, when a graduate student uses another investigator's data as a basis for the graduate student's thesis, there must be an understanding that the student's work must be original in that new questions must be examined in the data.

COMPOSITION OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE

Graduate students should realize that the selection of an appropriate thesis committee is critical to the development of the thesis. The student should carefully select a chairperson who should have expertise in the programmatic and functional focus of the thesis. The chairperson bears primary responsibility for decision-making in the event of committee disagreement. Initial exploration of a thesis topic and selection of a second and, optionally, a third committee member should be conducted in collaboration with the chairperson.

The thesis committee shall consist of a chairperson and one other member, both of whom have doctoral preparation and graduate teaching experience. The chairperson must be a tenure-track academic faculty member of the College of Nursing, and is selected by the student in consultation with the student's academic advisor. A third member of the committee may be selected to meet content or methodological needs. The chairperson shall have primary responsibility for the guidance of the research. The other members of the thesis committee shall serve as consultants during the development of the research and writing of the final document. It is the responsibility of the thesis committee to approve the proposal, examine the student, and approve the final thesis product.

PREREQUISITES TO THE THESIS

The student may not begin work on the thesis until they have completed NURS 700, 790, statistics, and at least one clinical course in the major. Students who have prior coursework in nursing research at another University will need to submit syllabi and any other evidence to the Office of Academic Programs and Student Services to seek transfer credit.

APPROVAL OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE

The Department Chair and Graduate Director of the College of Nursing shall approve the membership of the committee. After the thesis committee has been selected, and there is acceptance of the topic, the student must complete the Approval of Thesis Committee form (See Appendix A) that is to be signed by the committee members, Departmental Chair, Graduate Director of the College of Nursing and the student's advisor.

APPROVAL OF PROSPECTUS OF THESIS

When the Committee is in agreement that the proposal for the thesis research is complete, the Thesis Committee signs the "Approval of Prospectus for Thesis" form. This form is filed in the student record in the Office of Academic Programs and Student Services.

SELECTION OF THE THESIS TOPIC AND METHOD

The topic of the thesis is expected to relate to the student's nursing major and/or area of role emphasis and to the nursing research interests and expertise of the faculty guiding the research. Normally, the chairperson, in particular, should possess an expert knowledge related to the topic of the thesis; however, there may be exceptions to this policy. Students may find that some faculty are unwilling to work with theses which are not within their particular areas of research interest. A list of faculty research interests is maintained in the Office of Research in the College of Nursing, is updated annually, and should be used by students when they are trying to find a chairperson. Students should also understand that faculty have the prerogative of refusing to guide theses which are not within their area of expertise.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection may not proceed until the student has an Approval of Prospectus on file; clearance of the Thesis Committee; Ethics Committee approval; and approval of human subjects' committee of any appropriate agency.

GRADING FOR THESIS PREPARATION

Hours earned in NURS 799 Thesis Preparation are counted in hours attempted and hours earned; however, they are not computed in the grade point average. Satisfactory work toward the thesis is denoted with the grade of "T". Unsatisfactory work receives a "U". The grade of "I" for incomplete work may not be assigned for NURS 799.

CREDIT FOR THESIS PREPARATION

Thesis and Special Projects in Nursing Research credits are not transferable/interchangeable in the Master's program. Students who begin the research path and subsequently elect to transfer to the other must take NURS 792, Special Projects in Nursing Research, in addition to any credits already accumulated toward the thesis.

Six credits of NURS 799 (Thesis Preparation) are required for graduation from the Master of Science program. Students may not enroll for NURS 799 credit until they have completed NURS 790 and have an approved Thesis Committee. Students may enroll for 1-6 credits of Nursing 799 in a semester and may repeat the course as often as necessary in order to complete the thesis. Decisions about the number of hours for which the student should enroll are negotiated with the Chairperson and the advisor and may be

influenced by practical considerations, such as maintaining a full-time academic load. The amount of work to be accomplished in any given semester is a matter for negotiation between the chairperson and the student. Students should enroll in NURS 799 for as long as it takes to complete the thesis and should not expect faculty to work with them on thesis preparation unless enrolled for thesis credit. University policy requires enrollment for thesis credit in order to use University facilities and to consult with faculty about the progress of the thesis.

Despite the relative latitude in credit allocation for the thesis, students are advised that it is unwise to defer completion of the thesis.

Six years is regarded as the maximum time allowed for graduate credits for Master's candidates. In case more time than six years is spent on the program, special arrangements may be made with the Graduate School for the revalidation of over-age credits in courses given by the University, if the college or department concerned approves the revalidation. Any student who fails to complete a program in a period allowed becomes subject to changes in degree requirements adopted, to a date six years prior to the student's graduation (See USC Graduate Bulletin).

A risk of loss of Committee members and the need to renegotiate with a new Committee increases as students delay progress with the thesis. Students are also advised to confer with faculty as to their availability during summers and other holiday periods. Although faculty may elect to be available, they are not required to do so. Students should anticipate the absence of faculty during at least some portions of the summer.

COMMITTEE CHANGES AND/OR CHANGES IN THE THESIS PLAN

On occasion, students may find themselves in need of a new committee member because of faculty illness or because faculty have left their position at the University. In most cases, faculty who leaves the University will not be able to continue on the committee. When the new committee member is the chairperson, there may be particular difficulties for the students since the new chairperson may have different expectations of the thesis. If committee replacements become necessary, the student will be required to file a new Approval of Committee for Thesis form (See Appendix A) signed by the new committee members and submitted for all the required college signatures.

In addition, if any substantive changes are made in the thesis topic, sample, or data collection methods utilized, the students will also have to file a new Approval of Prospectus for Thesis form.

CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE STUDENT AND THE COMMITTEE

Students and faculty are normally expected to resolve conflicts within the Committee. In the event of serious differences within the Committee, grievance channels are always open to students; however, a joint conference of the student and the committee may

resolve differences of opinion. It is possible and/or necessary, in some cases, for the student to name a new committee and begin again on the thesis.

WRITING THE THESIS

The USC College of Nursing requires students to comply with the regulations for completing Master's Theses Developed by the University of South Carolina Graduate School. In addition, the College of Nursing requires the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, (4th Ed.) (1994), as the style manual.

In regular semesters the first draft of the master's thesis must be in the hands of the major professor at least 60 days before the end of the semester. Final copies of the thesis are to be submitted to major professors at least 30 days prior to the end of the semester. Copies signed by the professors are to be filed with the Graduate School at least 20 days prior to the end of the semester (See the USC Graduate Bulletin).

All students are required to make two appointments for "format checks" with a Graduate School staff member before the submission deadline and before copies of the thesis are made and distributed. The purpose of the meetings is to assure that the thesis meets Graduate School guidelines.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

A suggested organization of the thesis is found below (see your committee for possible variations to this format which may be appropriate to your study). All pages should be numbered consecutively with Arabic numbers beginning with Chapter I The Introduction. The APA Style Manual (4th ed.) (1994) should be consulted for greater specificity. The sequence of content is:

Title Page
Abstract
Copyright Page
Table of Contents
List of Figures
List of Tables

Chapter I Introduction
Introduce the Problem
Develop the Background
Present the Theoretical Framework
State the Purpose and Rationale

Chapter II Review of the Literature

Chapter III Method
Subjects, Sampling, Setting
Apparatus/Materials
Procedures - Ethics, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

Procedures

Chapter IV Results
Tables and Figures
Statistical Presentation

Chapter V Discussion
Interpretation of Findings
Implications for Nursing
Implications for Further Research

References

APPENDICES

The following are requirements of the USC Graduate School: Candidates for the MSN degree are required to submit the original copy of the thesis and two copies. The original is kept on file in the Caroliniana Library. One copy is kept on file in the Cooper Library for use of inter-library loans and one copy is returned to the College of Nursing to be kept on file in the Information Resource Center. The original plus the two copies, signed by all thesis committee members, are to be deposited with the Graduate School not less than twenty (20) days before the date of graduation. (See Graduate School Bulletin).

REFERENCES ON STYLE, ORGANIZATION, AND WRITING

Students are expected to use the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (4th ed.) (1994) as a guide for preparing the thesis. It is expected that grammars, spelling, sentence and paragraph structure, punctuation, and format of the paper will be correct when the final report is submitted.

STYLE MANUAL

Publications manual of the American Psychological Association (4th ed.) (1994). Washington: The American Psychological Association.

STATISTICS

Hatcher, L. (1994). A step-by-step approach to using the SAS system for factor analysis and structural equation modeling. Cary, NC: SAS Institute.

Hatcher, L., & Stephanski, E.J. (1994). A step-by-step approach to using the SAS system for univariate and multivariate statistics. Cary, NC: SAS Institute.

**University of South Carolina
College of Nursing
APPROVAL OF THESIS COMMITTEE**

Name of Principal Investigator Telephone _____

Address

Graduate Major

Proposed dates for data collection: to

Thesis Topic

Student's Signature Date

Thesis Chairperson's Signature Date

Approval:

Department Chair Date

Committee Member Date

Graduate Director Date

Committee Member Date
(if 3rd member applicable)

Student Advisor Date

Submit form to the Office of Student Services for student file.

**University of South Carolina
College of Nursing**

APPROVAL OF PROSPECTUS FOR THESIS

The prospectus of (Student's name)

entitled

has been approved by:

1. Thesis Chairperson

Signature

Date

2. Second Committee

Signature

Date

3. Third Committee (if applicable)

Signature

Date

File this completed form with the Office of Student Services before proceeding with the study.