

Guidelines for Digitally Submitted Master's Theses and Projects



Office of Graduate Studies

Stevenson 1041

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Introduction

The Master's thesis or project is a serious demonstration of a graduate student's ability to explore, develop, and organize materials relating to a certain topic or problem in a field of study. The goal of the master's thesis or project is not only to pursue research and investigation, but also to write an extended scholarly statement clearly, effectively and directly. The thesis or project becomes a visible and permanent record of the quality of the work that a graduate student has accomplished at Sonoma State University. Library records show heavy borrowing of theses, both on campus and through inter-library loan. It is very important to insure that every manuscript represents the highest professional standards. Before a thesis is officially approved by the Graduate Studies office, it must meet the requirements specified below:

- Critical, independent thinking. Mere description, cataloguing, compilations and other superficial procedures are not adequate.
- A clear statement of the details of the study or task, the methods or criteria used, and the supporting data. An effort should be made to make the work accessible to as broad an audience of educated people as possible.

In conducting research and in writing, students should observe the practices and standards of their particular discipline. Students' work should be their own and, if not, there should be careful and accurate acknowledgement of the work of others. All quoted or paraphrased material should be referenced according to the footnote, note, or parenthetical referencing practice of a student's department and/or discipline. Extracts and quotations may be used to a limited extent for purposes of illustration and criticism. The language of the copyright law is vague as to what constitutes fair use, so if students are concerned about exceeding the "fair use" doctrine, they should seek permission or consult with the Graduate Studies Office. The CSU Office of General Council has prepared a document called *Fundamentals of Copyright and Fair Use*, available on the web at <http://calstate.edu/gc/Docs/CopyrightManual.pdf>.

Plagiarism is the use of another's ideas without giving proper credit, or the use of another phraseology without: (1) enclosing it in quotation marks, or (2) blocking it by indenting and single spacing. Plagiarism also includes simple mechanical modification of another's writing; for example, replacing a word or dropping or interpolating words here and there, but retaining the essence of the other person's work without acknowledgment.

Because the manuscript will be the student's own scholarly study, it is best not to rely too heavily upon quotations from others. Students should consult a style manual regarding justification for quoting. The penalty for plagiarism could be dismissal from the University.

Definition of Thesis vs. Project

Thesis:

The California State University Education Code (Title V, Section 40510, p. 473) defines a thesis as

...the written product of a systematic study of a significant problem. It identifies the problem, states the major assumptions, explains the significance of the undertaking, sets forth the sources for and methods of gathering information, analyzes the data, and offers a conclusion or recommendation. The finished project (product) evidences originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate organization and format, and thorough documentation.

A thesis is an original contribution to knowledge resulting from the systematic study of a significant problem or issue. The following is an outline of the various sections of a traditional, quantitative thesis. There is a difference between the elements found in a *quantitative* thesis and those in a *qualitative* thesis; thus, some sections of the following may not apply. The format is presented only as a guide. For more in depth information, consult your committee chair, department, or the Graduate Studies Office.

Thesis Content:

Introduction to the study:

Background

- statement of the problem
- purpose of the study
- theoretical bases and organization
- limitations of the study
- definition of terms

Review of the literature

Methodology

- design of the investigation
- population and/or sample
- treatment
- data analysis procedures

Results and discussion

- presentation of the findings
- discussion of the findings

Summary, conclusions, and recommendations

References

Collaborative theses, (theses authored by more than one student), must include a clear statement in the introduction and abstract as to the responsibility of each individual. Collaborative theses are never to be filed separately, in halves. Collaborative theses involving more than one department must include:

1. the signature of committee chairs, one from each department, on the title page; and
2. a letter from both committee chairs to the Graduate Studies office specifying that the thesis is a true collaboration entitling both students to the degree.

Project:

In many departments, students have the option of producing a project instead of a traditional research thesis. A project is defined by the California State University Education Code (Title V, Section 40510, p. 473) as:

...a significant undertaking appropriate to the fine and applied arts or to professional fields. It evidences originality and independent thinking, appropriate form and organization, and a rationale. It is described and summarized in a written abstract that includes the project's significance, objectives, methodology, and a conclusion or recommendation.

While a thesis is a scholarly research study (either quantitative or qualitative), a project is more creative in nature. While requirements for various projects will vary, there will be certain elements common to each project. All projects should be grounded in a discipline, should demonstrate mastery of an identifiable body of literature, and should include a bibliography.

The following are the most common types of projects approved at Sonoma State University:

- A *creative project* is an original contribution to the verbal, visual, or performing arts. Examples include: a musical recital, a musical composition, a completed novel or play, a collection of short stories or poems, direction of a theatrical production, a gallery showing of works of art.
- A *curriculum project* contributes to a field of teaching by enhancing communication of a subject matter. Examples include: a course of study, a teacher's guide, an instructional manual, a design for a new teaching method, or the development of new teaching methods.
- An *investigative or research project* contributes to the disciplines or the professions by adding to technical/professional knowledge or by providing an original application of technical/professional knowledge in the professional field. Examples include: building a device, designing an experiment, a field study, a

case study, a documentary report, a substantial annotated bibliography, or a professional article of publishable quality.

The following is an outline for a *project*. However, because of the uniqueness of projects, this outline is only a recommendation and should be adapted as necessary. For more in depth information, consult your committee chair, department, or Graduate Studies Office.

Project Content:

Introduction to the project

- purpose of the project
- scope (description) of the project
- significance of the project
- limitations of the project
- definition of terms

Review of related literature

Methodology

Results

Recommendations

- summary
- conclusions

References

Appendices

The Use of Human Subjects in Research

If a project or thesis, either directly or indirectly, involves humans in research, the student must seek approval from the Committee on the Rights of Human Subjects prior to initiating any activity with the subjects. There is human subject involvement when human beings are asked to participate:

- physically in an activity or to donate their tissue, organs, fluids, and other bodily material;
- when information is sought from them directly (as through interview, questionnaire) or indirectly (as through observation);
- when information concerning specific, individually identifiable human beings is asked for from third parties – whether through access to files, data banks, or other means – or through direct inquiry of third parties concerning the individuals in question.

Research proposals for which the question of human subject involvement is itself uncertain or ambiguous *must be submitted for review*. The Human Subjects application and detailed information on the review process can be downloaded from http://www.sonoma.edu/orsp/human_subjects.html. Your application must be reviewed *before you begin your research*, and evidence of approval should be included as an Appendix of the thesis/project. The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs is located in Schulz 1105, 664-2448.

Faculty/Student Responsibilities and SSU Procedures

Composition of Student's Graduate Committee

The student's graduate committee consists of three faculty members. The members will ordinarily be from the department in which the student is a candidate. However, cross-disciplinary theses/projects must have a faculty member from an appropriate outside department as second or third reader. Also, in some cases, an off-campus expert may be appropriate as third reader. In these cases a vita demonstrating the appropriateness of the person's expertise must be on file in the department. The chair of the committee must be a tenured/tenure track member of the student's department.

Responsibilities of the Chair and Members of the Committee

Thesis Chair: It is the responsibility of the thesis chair to:

1. Assist the student in the selection of the other committee members;
2. Determine the appropriateness of the thesis/project topic selected by the student;
3. Determine the adequacy of the thesis/project design before the student begins work;
4. Review and approve the Advancement to Candidacy Form (GSO 1) which describes the final thesis/project;
5. Ensure that the student has obtained the required clearances from the Committee on the Rights of Human Subjects for research involving human subjects before research gathering begins;
6. Review the scholarly execution of the study;
7. Assure that all of the committee members have reviewed the thesis/project before it is typed in final form and that all the necessary changes have been incorporated;
8. See that a high standard of writing quality is maintained throughout the thesis/project;
9. Make certain that the thesis/project, when word processed in final form, conforms to the style manual of the department;
10. Call all necessary meetings and work effectively with the student to set realistic timelines for completion of the thesis/project;
11. Chair the public defense of the thesis/project, which is a systemwide and campus requirement.

Committee Members: It is the responsibility of the committee members to:

1. Review and approve the Advancement to Candidacy Form (GSO 1) which describes the final thesis/project;
2. Check the adequacy of the thesis/project design before the study is begun;
3. Review the scholarly execution of the study;
4. See that a high standard of scholarship and writing quality are maintained throughout the thesis/project;
5. Review the thesis/project before it is typed in final form;
6. Support and participate in the public defense of the thesis/project, which is a systemwide and campus requirement.

Responsibilities of the Student: It is the responsibility of the student to:

1. Constitute a committee of three people willing to act as supervising faculty on the final thesis/project;
2. Decide, in consultation with his/her graduate advisor or committee chair, an appropriate and worthy focal topic for research;
3. Draft a description of the project and receive committee approval prior to enrollment in the thesis/project units;
4. Determine, in consultation with the committee, roles of the committee members, needs of the committee in working through the approval process, and the timelines and deadlines for submitting written work for approval;
5. Understand that re-writes will probably be necessary and that the guidance of the committee is to be taken seriously if the project is to be satisfactorily completed. The student needs to understand that no faculty member can be expected to act as simply a “rubber stamp” for his or her ideas and writing;
6. Obtain editorial help if necessary to meet the standards of the University and the program for quality and presentation of the information in the thesis;
7. Adhere to the appropriate style manual determined by the student's department and to the thesis guidelines outlined herein;
8. Defend the thesis in an open forum prior to final approval;
9. Submit the thesis or project to the Graduate Studies office for final review by the published deadlines,
10. Understand that final acceptance of the thesis/project is determined by the student’s faculty committee, the Graduate Studies Office, and the Associate Vice President of Academic Programs and Graduate Studies. Posting of the final degree is dependent on clearance by all of the above parties.

Preliminary Draft and Final Copy of Thesis/Project

The student should submit a preliminary draft of the thesis/project to the chair for suggestions and corrections; the draft should also be submitted to the other members of the committee for their suggestions, comments, corrections, and approval. The student is responsible for preparation of a manuscript that meets the standards of the committee. Committee members should not be expected to make extensive corrections or revisions, and the committee may recommend that the student use the services of an editor or typist. The selection of a competent editor/typist is up to the student although the Graduate Studies Office does maintain a file of editors/typists but cannot guarantee the quality of their work.

After the thesis/project is prepared in its final form and prior to submission to the Graduate Studies Office, obtain signatures of all committee members on the [Thesis Signature Page](#). The signatures of the committee members indicate their approval, the approval of the department, and certify that the thesis/project conforms to the department's style and reference format, methodology, spelling, punctuation, typing, grammar, and standards of content. A public defense of the thesis/project must then be scheduled and held.

Final Approval of the Thesis/Project

After the thesis has been defended and cleared by your committee, submit the following to the Graduate Studies Office, Stevenson 1041, on or before the appropriate deadline date (posted in the Schedule of Classes and on the Graduate Studies website.)

- The final PDF file as an accessible document emailed to graduate.studies@sonoma.edu .
- The [Thesis Signature Page](#) (in hard copy or as a scanned email attachment);
- The [Master's Thesis Submission Agreement](#) form (in hard copy or as a scanned email attachment);
- The [Completion of Requirements form \(GSO 2\)](#) (hard copy only).

Theses/projects will not be accepted after the deadline or without all signatures on the title page and the signatures of the committee chair and graduate coordinator on the GSO2 form.

The thesis/project will then be reviewed by the University Thesis Reviewer. Students should allow two to three weeks for the review process to be completed. In order to ensure the quality and uniformity of theses/projects, the following will be checked before clearance:

- all preliminary pages
- pagination
- margins
- word processing (accuracy, consistency, neatness, clarity, etc.)
- tables, figures and illustrative materials
- text (format, heading levels, writing quality)
- notes, references, bibliography (conforming to the approved departmental style manual) (See Appendix B)
- appendices

The thesis/project will be returned to the student for final changes (if needed), which will be outlined on the Thesis Review Form (see Appendix C). Once the changes have been made, the student will re-submit the corrected final version to the Graduate Studies Office on or before the final clearance date noted on the Thesis Review Form:

Final approval of all theses/projects rests with the Associate Vice President of Academic Programs and Graduate Studies. If problems arise, the thesis/project will be returned to the chair of the student's committee. The Graduate Studies Office will forward the final thesis to the Library for electronic publication in [SSU ScholarWorks](#).

General Format Instructions

All master's theses/projects must follow certain basic style and format guidelines and also adhere to basic standards of clear, correct English and careful presentation. Students are encouraged to hire a professional editor to assist in the preparation of the final draft.

Students are warned not to follow the style and format of a thesis completed earlier at Sonoma State University or elsewhere. It may not have been properly prepared, or what was previously acceptable may not meet present requirements. Students should be sure that they are using the current *SSU Guidelines for Digitally Submitted Master's Theses and Projects*, available on the Graduate Studies website--
<http://www.sonoma.edu/aa/gs/thesis-review.html>.

Basic Appearance

Computer: Students are expected to use computer word processing software to prepare the thesis/project. Convert the file to PDF format for electronic submission. The following requirements and restrictions should be noted:

Type Face: The type size should be either 10 or 12 point (12 point is preferred). A common font such as Times, Geneva, Helvetica, etc. should be used. Bold type should be used sparingly. Outline, shadow, or similar “trick” forms are not allowed anywhere in the thesis/project. Type used for charts, graphs, drawings, tables, etc., may differ according to format and space requirements but should always remain consistent. Italics may be used for appropriate purposes, i.e., for foreign words or phrases, for book and journal titles, etc. Students may also choose to use underlining in place of italics, although italics are preferred. In either case, consistency of form is required.

Alignment/Justification: Text should be left-justified with a “ragged” right margin. Fully justified text is not acceptable because word processing software accomplishes this by adding spaces between words, thus negatively impacting legibility.

Pagination: Each page must have a number designation, though numbers may be left off the title page and pages of chapter headings if the student prefers. All pages must be numbered consecutively as follows:

- Lower-case Roman numerals (i.e., i, ii, iii, iv, v, vi, etc.) are used for preliminary pages. The numerals appear centered at the bottom of the page, approximately 1/2" above the bottom.
- Arabic numerals (i.e., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, etc.) are used for the body of the thesis/project. The numerals appear in the upper right of the page, approximately 1/2" down from the top and 1/2" in from the right margin.
- Material inserted after final typing should be numbered as in this example: 21, 21a, 21b, etc. *This expedient should be used sparingly.*
- Appendices and the bibliography or reference list should be numbered consecutively with the rest of the thesis

Preliminary Pages of the Thesis/Project (in order of appearance):

i - Title Page: This page includes the approved title for the thesis and must list all members of the committee and be dated. (see Appendix A) It should be counted as p. i.

ii - Copyright Page: Under the 1976 Copyright Law, unpublished theses are protected by statutory law against unauthorized copying, publication, or use. When a thesis has been uploaded into SSU ScholarWorks, it has been published. The student should include a copyright notice on the page following the title page in order to protect his/her rights. (See Appendix A) Although the law does not make registration a condition of the copyright protection, a student may wish to register his/her thesis promptly with the Copyright Office. Registration is a prerequisite to an infringement suit and certain rights and remedies for infringement depend on registration. The forms and additional information are available on the web at <http://www.copyright.gov/> .

iii - Authorization Form: This form enables a student to decide whether or not to allow reproduction of all or part of the thesis and accompanying material. Students should remember that if the work is a project, it should read “project” (not “thesis”) on this page. (See Appendix A)

iv - Abstract: The Abstract typically consists of a brief statement of the nature of the study, the method and design used, and the findings or conclusions. It may not exceed two pages and must be single-spaced. The title of the thesis/project and author's name must match exactly with the title and author's name as it appears on the title page. (See Appendix A)

Note: The sample format in Appendix A is appropriate for most theses and many projects. However, some projects, especially creative projects, may not lend themselves to this form of abstract. In those cases, a statement of intent, scope, and approach or methodology will be sufficient.

v - Preface or Acknowledgement: This page is optional and usually acknowledges and/or thanks individuals for their assistance.

vi - Table of Contents: Titles and subtitles are to correspond exactly with those in the text. Make sure that the page numbers listed are accurate (See Appendix A)

vii - List of Tables: This is separate from the Table of Contents. The tables/figures are numbered in the order in which they appear. Titles are to correspond exactly with those in the text. Follow your disciplinary style guide for formatting.

viii - List of Figures: This is also a separate page. Graphs, charts, photographs, and illustrations are all examples of figures. Figures are numbered in the order in which they appear in the entire thesis/project, not within each chapter or appendix. Again, titles must correspond exactly with those in the text.

Body of Thesis/Project

Margins: For binding purposes observe the following:

- Left: ONE AND ONE HALF inches (1 1/2")
- Top, right, and bottom: ONE inch (1")

Particular care must be made to see that all tables, figures, and appendix materials meet the margin requirements as well.

Line Spacing: Double space is required, except in those places where conventional usage calls for single spacing, (e.g., abstracts, footnotes, block quotations, or tables.)

Indentations: The first line of every paragraph should be indented. Block quotations (more than four typed lines) must be indented from the left margin and single-spaced. NOTE: This may contradict a department's style guide or manual; students must follow the *SSU Guidelines for Digitally Submitted Master's Theses and Projects* in this matter.

Page Breaks: In the body of the thesis, the concluding words of a paragraph less than half a line long should not be carried over to the next page. If it is perceived that a page will end with a few words of the paragraph left over (half a line or less), the page may be broken off a little short and a line and a half carried over. Or, the page may be made a little longer in order to put the extra half line at the bottom. The prescribed margins are given as guidance; an occasional extension for a very short distance into top or bottom margins is permitted.

Illustrative Material: The student's departmental style manual should be consulted for proper format and placement of tables, figures, graphs, drawings, photographs, etc. Graphs, photos, and other images must be clear. Color images are acceptable.

Footnotes/Endnotes: An approved style manual should be used for format (see Appendix B for a list of approved departmental style manuals). Footnotes/endnotes are used to document sources, to amplify or qualify a statement, or to make acknowledgments.

Appendix: The title page bears only the centered word APPENDIX (or APPENDICES). Page numbers are continuous with the text. The Appendix contains material which may be of interest to the reader but not an integral part of the thesis. If items protected by copyright are to be included, written permission from the author or publisher must be obtained and so noted.

Bibliography: Both theses and projects should include a bibliography or list of literature cited, consisting of references to original literature relevant to the area of inquiry. A bibliography must include, but is not limited to, all works cited in the text. Students should follow the approved departmental style manual for the format of the Bibliography, Works Cited or Reference List (see Appendix B for a list of approved departmental style manuals). Page numbers are continuous with the text. Each entry in the bibliography is single spaced with a double space between entries. Note: This may contradict a department's style guide or manual; students must follow the *SSU Guidelines for Digitally Submitted Master's Theses and Projects* in this matter.

Appendix A
Sample Preliminary Pages

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

**A Systematic and Ecological Study of *Delphinium luteum*
(Yellow Larkspur)**

by

Edward O. Guerrant, Jr.

A thesis* submitted to
Sonoma State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE**

in

Biology

Committee Members: (Type names; no signatures needed)

Dr. Charles F. Quibell, Chair*

Dr. Robert Sherman

Dr. Joseph Powell

Date

* OR "investigative project," "curriculum project," "creative project"

** OR "Master of Arts," "Master of Public Administration," etc.

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

Copyright 2016

By Prudence P. Jones

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

Authorization for Reproduction of Master's Thesis (or Project)

(Type only ONE option from those offered below)

I grant permission for the print or digital reproduction of this thesis [project] in its entirety, without further authorization from me, on the condition that the person or agency requesting reproduction absorb the cost and provide proper acknowledgment of authorship.

I grant permission for the print or digital reproduction of parts of this thesis [project] without further authorization from me, on the condition that the person or agency requesting reproduction absorb the cost and provide proper acknowledgment of authorship.

Permission to reproduce this thesis [project] in its entirety must be obtained from me.

Permission to reproduce parts of this thesis [project] must be obtained from me.

I do not approve the reproduction of this thesis [project], either in part or in its entirety.

DATE: _____

Name

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

**A Systematic and Ecological Study of *Delphinium luteum*
(Yellow Larkspur)**

Thesis [or Project] by
Edward O. Guerrant, Jr.

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: *Delphinium luteum*, the yellow-flowered larkspur, is a narrowly restricted endemic consisting of two small populations near Bodega Bay, Sonoma County. Early workers suggested that this taxon is most closely related to the widespread, red-flowered *D. nudicaule*. Munz and others report that the blue-flowered *D. decorum* occasionally hybridizes in nature with *D. nudicaule*, giving rise to individuals with flowers ranging from purple to yellow. The purpose of this study is to determine evolutionary position of *D. luteum* within the tuberiform series of the genus *Delphinium*.

Procedure: To determine the evolutionary affinities of *D. luteum*, this study has used a combination of ecological, chemical (nectar constituents, floral and foliar pigments), and morphological information. In addition, chromosomes were counted, hybridization and pollinator enclosure experiments were conducted, and pollen vector activity was monitored.

Findings: *Delphinium luteum* was found to be intermediate between *D. nudicaule* and *D. decorum* in almost every morphological character measured in both absolute values and in the ratios between characters. The three taxa have many nectar constituents, and floral and foliar pigments in common, with *D. luteum* occupying an intermediate condition. It also occupies a habitat intermediate in many ways between those of *D. nudicaule* and *D. decorum*.

Conclusions: The two most likely hypotheses to account for the origin of *D. luteum* are that it was derived solely from *D. nudicaule*, or that it was derived from hybridization between *D. decorum* and *D. nudicaule*. The data do not support the first hypothesis, and offer strong circumstantial evidence that *D. luteum* had its origin in a series of hybridizations between *D. nudicaule* and *D. decorum*.

MS [MA, MS, or MPA] Program: Biology
Sonoma State University

Date: _____

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

Preface or Acknowledgement

(OPTIONAL)

Text furnished by student.

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

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(Formatting Tip: Set a tab near the right margin for page numbers so that they will align in a column. The leader dots are optional, but recommended, and can be added via the “Format/Tab” command in Microsoft Word.)

Appendix B

Acceptable Style Manuals

BIOLOGY:

Style Manual Committee, Council of Biology Editors. 2006. *Scientific Style and Format: The CBE Manual for Authors, Editors and Publishers*. 6th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[Your chair may want you to format your thesis according to the style used for a particular journal. If so, please let the Graduate Studies office know the title of the journal.]

CULTURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT:

Society for American Archaeology. *Editorial Policy, Information for Authors, and Style Guide*. Available online at

<http://www.saa.org/AbouttheSociety/Publications/StyleGuide/tabid/984/Default.aspx> .

EDUCATION

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th edition. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2009).

See <http://www.apastyle.org/manual/index.aspx> .

ENGLISH

The MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing

See <https://www.mla.org/Publications/Bookstore/Nonseries/MLA-Style-Manual-and-Guide-to-Scholarly-Publishing-Third-Edition> .

HISTORY:

Turabian, Kate L. 2013. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*. 8th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).

See http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html .

KINESIOLOGY:

Biomechanics/Kinesiology: *International Journal of Sports Biomechanics*.

Motor Learning, Psychology of Sport: APA, listed below.

Physiology of Exercise: APA, listed below

Appendix C

Thesis/Project Review

NAME:

TITLE PAGE:

AUTHORIZATION:

ABSTRACT:

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

LIST OF REFERENCES:

MARGINS / PAGINATION:

OTHER:

Please note that all minor errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, formatting, etc., are marked by an “X” in the right margins.

FINAL COPY:

X Please email the final PDF as an accessible document to graduate.studies@sonoma.edu by the due date below.

PLEASE SUBMIT FINAL COPY NO LATER THAN _____

REVIEWED BY: _____

DATE:

David Hartranft, Administrative Coordinator for Graduate Studies (664-2237)