

THE CULMINATING EXPERIENCE

The culminating experience for a student's graduate program is carefully spelled out by the California State Education Code, Title 5. Master's and Ed.S. students may choose one culminating experience from the three, as determined by the particular program. Not all programs offer all three options. A doctoral student's culminating experience is determined by the specific program.

Certain advisement tips apply equally to all forms of the culminating experience, and as such, deserve your special attention as graduate coordinator/director:

- Once enrolled in a particular culminating experience and having earned an RP grade, students may not switch to an alternative. For example, a student who has received a semester/term RP grade for units in a thesis may not file a "Program Adjustment Request" (PAR) to change to a project. However, had this same student not yet enrolled for units or withdrawn from the university during the semester/term (thus receiving no RP grade), he or she could file a PAR to change the selection indicated on the approved "Petition of Advancement to Candidacy" form.
- The **total number of units** assigned for the thesis or the project may not exceed 6, or be less than 2.
- Advisers should counsel students that they are expected to be enrolled each semester while working on their project, examination, or thesis (see also Continuous Enrollment, p. G-1).
- Advisers should assure that the culminating experience selected by the student is appropriate to that student's particular program emphasis, career goals, and ability.
- It is imperative that programs and individual committee advisers set **early** dates for completion of the exam, thesis, or project. This will ensure sufficient time for completing the review, grading, and submission of graduate degree clearance paperwork by the graduate coordinator/director to the Graduate Division by the posted deadline. Students are counting on the timely posting of their degrees! If the required, signed clearance forms have not been submitted by the deadlines listed, students' graduation dates may be delayed or postponed to the following semester or term.

Additionally, for both the thesis and project:

- Grades must be submitted on the "Graduate Degree Clearance" form. This is the only acceptable method for submitting these grades. Faculty should not enter thesis or project grades online, as they do for other courses.

- It is important that faculty members meet regularly with the student each term that the student is enrolled to analyze that student's progress toward completion of the thesis/project.
- No academic distinction is made between a thesis and a project. Either one is acceptable as a means of fulfilling the requirements of the graduate degree. Coordinators/directors provide essential guidance and instructions on whether a student should enroll in 298 (project) or 299 (thesis).

THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

Catalog Definition

A comprehensive examination is an assessment of the student's ability to integrate the knowledge of the area, show critical and independent thinking, and demonstrate mastery of the subject matter. The results of the examination evidence independent thinking, appropriate organization, critical analysis, and accuracy of documentation. A record of the examination questions and responses shall be maintained in accordance with the records retention policy of the California State University.

Paperwork

"Graduate Degree Clearance" form, with required signatures and date indicated for completion of the exam.

Eligibility Criteria

An approved "Petition of Advancement to Candidacy" form must be on file with the Division of Graduate Studies prior to taking the comprehensive exam.

Deadlines

The exam must be completed in time for the "Graduate Degree Clearance" form to be issued by the deadline (available at the "Dates & Deadlines" section of the DGS Web site.)

Procedure

- The process varies from program to program, as appropriate to the discipline. Each program should establish its own procedures and policy (including appeals policy) and have it available in writing to all graduate students.
- Copies of examination questions and responses must be kept on file.

Advising Tips

Set and advertise dates early.

THE PROJECT

Catalog Definition

A project is a significant undertaking of a pursuit appropriate to the fine and applied arts or to professional fields. It must evidence originality and independent thinking, appropriate form and organization, and a rationale. It must be described and summarized in a written abstract that includes the project's significance, objectives, methodology, and a conclusion or recommendation. An oral defense of the project may be required.

Content Summary

- A project reflects applied field research or creative effort, often suited to the student's individual and/or professional goals.
- A project allows application of technical skills and knowledge with a practical emphasis.

Paperwork

- Varies with program requirements. Usually, a project committee form, signed by the committee members and the graduate coordinator/director, is required.
- The "Graduate Degree Clearance" form, with required signatures, must be submitted to the Division of Graduate Studies by the posted deadline at the end of the semester/term. The form indicates the grade for the project assigned by the committee for the enrolled project units. (See "Graduation" [section L of this handbook] for complete discussion of required paper work and procedures.)

Eligibility Criteria

An approved "Petition of Advancement to Candidacy" form must be on file with the Division of Graduate Studies one semester prior to signing up for project units in the department.

Deadlines

The project must be completed in time for the "Graduate Degree Clearance" form to be issued by the deadline (available at the "Dates & Deadlines" section of the DGS Web site.)

Procedure

- Project committees are formed according to departmental specifications and guidelines. Frequently, project committees consist of two committee members rather than three, as required for the thesis.
- Rules governing format and content are determined by the program. Most programs follow the general layout required for theses (*Guidelines for Thesis Preparation*). The project guidelines should be published and applied across the program.
- Final project format and quality approval rests with the department. Signatures on the project approval page attest to the approval of committee members regarding form and content of the project, as meeting Title 5 regulations (see Catalog Definition, above).

Advising Tips

Be sure to set early dates for completion and submission of projects in order to ensure full time for committee review, grading, and submission of clearance paperwork to the Graduate Division by the posted deadline.

Library-Bound Projects

On March 15, 2005, the University Graduate Committee approved a policy for “library bound projects,” which you can find in full on the DGS Web site. This policy and the procedures for review apply only to projects that the student and faculty advisor wish to have placed in the Madden Library.

The purpose of the policy is to bring greater visibility to the research done by our university’s project (298) students and provide them with an opportunity to have their projects formally reviewed at the university level for placement in the Henry Madden Library. In addition, Division staff will post library-bound project abstracts to the DGS Web site in a compendium similar to the Thesis Review, which profiles the work of thesis students.

Faculty and students who wish to have a project eligible for binding must complete and sign a form (available from the “Thesis” section of the DGS Web site) attesting that the project meets required standards of scholarship, format, and style of the university and the student’s program. This form will also require the signed endorsement of the program’s graduate coordinator.

Students may submit an endorsed project anytime during their semester or term of graduation, but no later than six weeks into the semester or term following their graduation date. This deadline is meant to address time constraint concerns from programs designed such that students don’t begin writing the project until the beginning of their final semester.

Library-Bound Projects (continued)

The university's thesis consultant in the Division of Graduate Studies will review the recommended projects. Library-bound projects must meet the manuscript requirements of the thesis (299) detailed in the university's *Guidelines for Thesis Preparation*.

THE THESIS

Catalog Definition

A thesis is the written product of the systematic study of a significant problem. It clearly 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 product must evidence originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate organization and format, clarity of purpose, and accurate and thorough documentation. Normally, an oral defense of the thesis will be required.

Critical and independent thinking should characterize every thesis. Mere description, cataloging, compilation, and other superficial procedures are not adequate.

Content Summary

- The thesis is a highly structured document resulting from original student research.
- The thesis investigates specific, well-defined questions or issues, frequently forming hypotheses to be tested.
- The thesis relates to an existing body of theoretical or empirical knowledge in the field.

Eligibility Criteria

An approved "Petition of Advancement to Candidacy" form must be on file with the Division of Graduate Studies one semester prior to signing up for thesis units in the department.

Paperwork

- "Thesis (299) / Dissertation Committee Assignment" form (available at the DGS office and online via the "Forms" link on the DGS Web site). This form should be filed with the Division of Graduate Studies before or at the time of the student's first registration for thesis units in the department.

Paperwork (continued)

Signatures of all committee members, the graduate coordinator or department chair, and the college dean (if indicated) are required. See the “Thesis Committee Policy and Procedures” in the “Thesis” section of the DGS Web site.

- For a third, off-campus committee member, a curriculum vita or resume must be submitted with the TCA form to the Division of Graduate Studies.
- For changes in committee chair, second, or third committee members, or in the thesis topic, a “Change in Thesis (299) /Dissertation Committee and/or Topic” form (available at the DGS office and online via the “Forms” link on the DGS Web site) must be on file in the Division of Graduate Studies.
- “Human/Animal Subjects Clearance” form, as applicable. To be submitted to the student’s departmental Human/Animal Subjects Clearance committee.
- Research involving human subjects should not begin until written approval has been received from the departmental human subjects committee and, where review demands, the university Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS). Guidelines and forms for protocols can be obtained from the departmental office or online at <www.csufresno.edu/humansubjects/>.
- Research involving live animals on campus must receive approval from the Animal Care and Use Committee. Forms may be obtained from the departmental or college dean’s office.
- “Graduate Degree Clearance” form, with required signatures, must be submitted to the Division of Graduate Studies by the posted deadline. The grade for thesis units is recorded on this form by the thesis chair, on behalf of the committee, and given to the graduate coordinator/director for final processing (see “Graduation” [Section L of this handbook] for complete discussion).

Deadlines

- Final thesis draft: Approximately seven weeks before last day of classes. (Consult the *Class Schedule, University Catalog*, or the “Dates & Deadlines” section of the DGS Web site for exact dates.)
- Publication copy: Date assigned by thesis consultant, after review of final draft.

Procedure

- Thesis format must follow the university *Guidelines for Thesis Preparation* (available from the Kennel Bookstore, lower level, or electronically from the “Thesis” section of the DGS Web site).
- Theses are submitted to the Graduate Division in two stages: initial review by the thesis consultant (final draft) and clearance review of the corrected final copy for binding (publication copy). By signing the approval page in both submissions, the committee signifies that the form and content of the thesis meet Title 5 regulations (see Catalog definition, above) as well as program standards.
- Thesis committees are formed according to guidelines established by the Graduate Committee of the Academic Senate. The committee consists of three members; the chair and at least one other committee member must be appointed members of the department’s Graduate Faculty Group of the student’s degree program. With requisite expertise, an individual who is not a member of the department faculty in the student’s program may serve as a member, with approval of the department chair. (See the “Thesis” section of the DGS Web site for “Thesis Committee Policy and Procedures.”)
- When approved for quality, format, and style, the graduate dean signs off on the Publication Copy approval page.
- In order for the thesis consultant to grant final thesis clearance, students are required to have submitted the following:
 - The filled out, signed ProQuest (formerly University Microfilms [UMI]) form (part of Thesis Office paperwork given to students at time of final draft submission);
 - Thesis fees form with the imprint from the University Cashier showing payment of fees for thesis microfilming, binding, and UMI (ProQuest) processing; and the optional copyrighting and mailing.
 - Three copies of the laser-printed thesis: one for the department, one for the library, and one for microfilming. *Note:* The Kennel Print and Copy Center and the Thesis Office will handle copying and processing, after fee payment.
- “Permission to Publish Copyrighted Material” form(s), as applicable (available from the “Thesis” section of the DGS Web site).
- In order for the graduate evaluator to register final thesis clearance or the degree, the final grade for the thesis must have been recorded on the “Graduate Degree Clearance” form.

Advising Tips

- Set early internal program deadlines for committee review and approval of theses to ensure that students meet university timelines for graduation.
- Faculty and staff should advise students to attend a thesis workshop as soon as possible after registering for thesis units in the department (workshop schedules are announced at the start of each semester).
- Students should be directed to the Thesis Office Web site, which has a number of indispensable resources designed to assist students through the thesis process <www.csufresno.edu/gradstudies/thesis>.
- Thesis support is available from the Thesis Office in the Division of Graduate Studies. A thesis typist/formatter list is offered upon request and a thesis template and video tutorials on using the template are available from the “Thesis” section of the DGS Web site. Class and group lectures may be arranged by calling the thesis consultant (ext. 2418).
- Students should inform the thesis consultant about their plans for the semester/term of their thesis submission and expect to be present for the review of both the final draft and the publication copy. Out-of-town students should contact the thesis consultant before leaving campus for advice on the best way to handle these processes from a distance.

THE DISSERTATION

Eligibility Criteria

Students writing a dissertation for the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership must have an approved “Advancement to Candidacy” form on file with the Division of Graduate Studies one semester prior to signing up for dissertation units in the department.

Paperwork

Dissertation students should be advised to follow the same paperwork procedure as that recommended for thesis students (see pp. K-5 – K-6).

Deadlines

- Final dissertation: See the DPELFS Web site for submission dates.
- Publication copy: Date assigned by thesis/dissertation consultant after review of final draft.

THE DISSERTATION (continued)

Procedure

- Dissertation format must follow the program's Format and Evaluation Guidelines for Dissertation Preparation, available from the DGS Web site: <<http://csufresno.edu/gradstudies/dissertation/>>.
- The remaining procedures for dissertation submission and review will follow those for thesis students listed on p. K-7 of this handbook.

Advising Tips

- See "Advising Tips" for thesis (p. K-8).