

University of Detroit Mercy

Graduate Business Programs



Capstone Thesis Guidelines

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines to graduate business students in planning their thesis work from need for the thesis to topic selection, and thesis preparation to final submission and presentation. The recommended time line leading to the completion of the thesis is also included.

These guidelines are provided to facilitate the thesis process and establish the basis for a meaningful and enjoyable learning experience. This document should be considered as a “living document” and as such it will be updated as and when needed.

Why Do the Graduate Business Programs Provide a Thesis Option?

It fulfills a requirement of the graduate business program

A thesis provides an important educational experience, significantly different from that available to the student in other business courses or from that experience afforded the student in an independent study course.

Considering an academic career

A graduate thesis gives business students an insight into the type of academic research done by business faculty. Students considering a career in academia or in other research-oriented fields may benefit from this experience.

What is a Graduate Business Thesis?

A thesis is a research proposition rigorously defended in a written argument. It represents open-ended independent study on a topic of significance to business management. Graduate business students have considerable latitude in selecting their thesis topics. However, there are some restrictions:

- A graduate thesis is to be completed at or near the end of a student's graduate degree program.
- Completion of the thesis, should allow the advanced business student to demonstrate both business knowledge and capabilities and significant research content.
- The graduate thesis must go beyond a research paper. As such, this study should demonstrate sufficient breadth and depth in the design, collection, analysis, and explanation of data and concepts.

The above broad guidelines, may guide the faculty and student in determining if a given topic is appropriate. However, there may be “grey” areas and in this case the faculty and student should consult with Director of Graduate Business Programs.

Student: Get written approval of your thesis topic before investing too much time on research! See the section on the thesis process for more details.

A Graduate Thesis is ORIGINAL

The thesis comprises an original investigation and significant contribution. The following are alternative means of meeting this originality requirement.

- Graduate business students must conduct a research study using principles, methods and tools learned in the graduate program (or elsewhere). Document this study and show how these principles, methods or tools helped (or hindered) your progress. Recommend modifications to the methods/tools as appropriate. Research through the literature should support the originality of this work.
- Further develop a topic, theory, method or tool that you learned during the graduate business program. This enhanced theory, method, or tool may then be demonstrated through a case study. Literature surveys should enhance this study and support the originality of the work.
- Analyze a study that was previously conducted in terms of the principles, methods and tools learned during graduate business program. The literature, especially that subsequent to the original work, should support the originality of the student's analysis. (Be aware of the risk that a thesis in this category may create some political implications since you may be criticizing others' work).

N.B. Thesis credits cannot be granted for work done previous to registration as a graduate business student at the University of Detroit Mercy or for work initiated without previous approval by the faculty thesis advisor. While a student is encouraged to draw upon personal work experiences to enrich the thesis, a graduate thesis must include substantial research and insights that were completed during the terms of the graduate business program in which the thesis is completed!

A Graduate Thesis is RIGOROUS

The faculty thesis advisor ensures the rigor and overall quality of the graduate thesis. Every faculty thesis advisor will have somewhat different expectations and requirements. For this reason it is not possible to issue a general definition of rigor. You must discuss specific expectations and requirements on your thesis with your faculty thesis advisor.

Key Deliverables of the Thesis Work are PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

As you will note in the research deliverables section, all key deliverables (see below) will be in the public domain and as such they would be available to anyone who wishes to view them. The development of the thesis may involve potentially confidential information, but these problems can typically be avoided by masking data or names in the thesis document. It is the responsibility of the student to clear all public domain content. In some cases, the need for confidentiality could significantly compromise the deliverables, so issues of confidentiality should be discussed and clarified early in the thesis process.

How Should I Select a Thesis Topic?

In selecting your graduate business thesis topic you should take into account many factors:

- **Graduate business program requirements:** Remember you have to go beyond a basic research paper. See “What is a Graduate Business Thesis?” for details.
- **Individual Interest:** You are going to spend a large portion of time on your thesis. Why not enjoy that time? Pick a topic that makes you excited to study and pursue it.
- **Company Interest:** Most graduate business students are closely tied to a sponsoring company. If possible, select a research topic that puts your thesis on the critical path of the company or at least has good support from upper management. If you plan to use company data to test your hypotheses, you don’t want your data collection efforts on the bottom of the company’s priority list. Remember that the final document will be a public document.
- **Faculty Interest:** Your faculty thesis advisor is potentially a great asset to your thesis effort. If you find a research topic that engages the interest of your advisor, your thesis is likely to be of better quality. Consult the various faculty members to learn about faculty areas of interest.
- **Proper Scope:** Some graduate business students begin with a thesis topic that would require a lifetime of effort to satisfactorily address. It is better to choose a topic of modest scope and firmly establish your key points than to attempt an epic research proposal and fail to firmly establish anything.

Membership of the Thesis Committee

The thesis committee consists of the faculty thesis advisor, and either a thesis reader or an industry advisor.

Who can be Thesis Advisors?

Faculty Thesis Advisor:

Graduate students **must** choose as their principal thesis advisor a **full-time faculty member** in the University of Detroit Mercy College of Business Administration. Graduate students should seek a faculty thesis advisor that is interested in and knowledgeable about their proposed topic. You may wish to start by speaking with the Director of Graduate Business Programs.

Thesis Reader

The thesis reader helps to ensure the quality of the research. The thesis reader may be selected from full-time or adjunct faculty and determined with the faculty thesis advisor. The role of the thesis reader is to assure the inclusion and the rigor of the content. The thesis reader will sign off at three stages of the thesis: proposal, first draft, and final document and will consult with the thesis advisor as to the student's thesis grade.

Industry Advisor

An industry advisor can provide many valuable functions for the student working on a thesis. The industry advisor ensures relevance and originality of your research, and provides detailed technical and operational advice.

The Graduate Thesis Proposal

The graduate business thesis proposal is a required element of the thesis process. A thesis proposal includes:

- Thesis Statement
- Motivation (Rationale for selection of the topic)
- Research Approach, including preliminary literature search (list primary sources for related articles)
- Related Work
- Thesis Advisor
- Preliminary Timeline

The thesis proposal should be limited to no more than ten pages typed, double-spaced in 12-point font.

Once the proposal is accepted it should be expanded further with content outline of the thesis, research plans, and the timeline.

Research Deliverables

- A formal progress report due at the time determined with the Faculty Thesis Advisor
- Thesis Document
- A paper(s) ready for submission for publication
- An abstract of the thesis posted on the College of Business Administration's website
- A public presentation/defense to the Thesis Committee and other interested parties
- All issues raised by faculty (whether on the Thesis Committee or not) must be addressed in the final thesis document

Thesis Process and Recommended Timeline

Step	Activity
A.	Information meeting to review thesis requirements, process and establish a tentative time table for the process. This may be between the student and a potential faculty thesis advisor, or the student and the Director of Graduate Business Programs.
B.	The student identifies a potential topic(s).
C.	The potential faculty thesis advisor, Director of Graduate Business Programs or other interested faculty may review the proposed topic(s) and provide feedback its suitability as a thesis research topic.
D.	A faculty thesis advisor and a thesis reader or industry advisor are identified. The thesis topic must be approved by the thesis committee before proceeding further.
E.	The student will then be approved to register for the appropriate thesis course and credits. The thesis will consist of 6 credits, which may either be taken as two consecutive 3-credit courses, or one 6-credit course. This should be determined based on the student's other academic responsibilities and other considerations (work, personal obligations).
F.	The student should meet regularly with the thesis advisor to discuss progress.

G.	<p>A progress report of work to-date must be submitted and reviewed with the Thesis Committee. This must be prepared one month prior to completion of the thesis in the term the thesis is to be completed, or before the end of the term in which a thesis is ongoing.</p> <p>This should, to the extent possible, be expandable into the final thesis document. At a minimum, this progress report should define the problem statement/goals, present an extensive literature review, discuss assumptions, discuss planned methodologies/approach/tools/techniques etc. which will be applied in the final research, and summarize expected final deliverables of the research. This progress must include discussion of alternative methodologies/approaches/tools/techniques judging their relative value and applicability to the problem at hand and providing the rationale for the choices that have been made. The principal advisor and thesis reader must sign off on the work to date and agree on open items to be completed in the final document.</p>
H.	<p>A grade will be submitted for the first 3 credit hours of thesis if the thesis is completed over two terms. In the event that the thesis committee cannot agree upon a grade, the grade will be computed as follows: a single overall grade will be computed with 75% based on the faculty thesis advisor's grade and 25% based on the thesis reader's/industry advisor's grade.</p>

Thesis Evaluation and Grading

The research work will be evaluated on the basis of the quality and depth of the research and all the deliverables shown under the section "Research Deliverables." A letter grade for the first 3 credit hours will be given at the end of one term and the grade for the final 3 credits will be given at the end of the next term or upon completion of the work.

The grading scale will be as follows:

%	Grade
93+	A
90+	A-
87+	B+
83+	B
80+	B-
73+	C+
70+	C
60+	D
< 60	F

Concluding Comments

Successfully completing a graduate business thesis is a long and arduous endeavor, and it is only intended for a small minority of graduate business students who may benefit for the experience. Those who may wish to pursue a thesis option may be considering a research career. This document provides a roadmap along with the associated opportunities and challenges leading to meeting the requirements for the graduate business degree and setting a foundation for a rewarding career as a researcher.

The guidelines are provided to make the thesis process a productive and enjoyable learning experience. Students are encouraged to interact with the thesis advisory team, the Director of Graduate Business Programs, and others as needed throughout the thesis process.

Appendix A

Thesis Reporting Format and Conventions

Paper

White, 8-1/2 x 11” standard typewriter paper, twenty-pound bond

Typing

Clean, free of smudges and smears

Title Page

Must include the University of Detroit Mercy logo, thesis title, name of the team members (name of author), and the date of submission

Numbering

- (1) Lower-case – Roman numerals for preliminary matter
- (2) Arabic numerals without punctuation numbered consecutively throughout the thesis. The page number should be centered just above the bottom margin.

Spacing

Double line space everything except preliminary matter, footnotes, bibliographical entries, and blocked-in quotations

Indentation

Standard indentation is five spaces. Block-in long quotations (more than three typed lines) by indenting five spaces on both left and right sides

Quoting

Use quotation marks for direct quotations of less than three typed lines. Block-in longer quotations

Margins

- (1) Left-hand margin always 1-1/2 inches
- (2) Right-hand margin always 1 inch
- (3) Bottom margin always 1 inch
- (4) Page numbering – on “first page” and on pages beginning parts of the thesis (eg. The outline, first pages of new chapters, the bibliography) the top margin is 1-1/2 inches; on all other pages the top margin is one inch

Submission

Copies must be submitted electronically to the Faculty Thesis Advisor and the Director of Graduate Business Programs.

The original copy must be neatly typed. The second copy may be Xerox or similar kind of reproduction. Do not bind, staple or punch holes in the original copy that is submitted to the Graduate Business Programs Office.

Appendix B

Business Thesis Courses

MBA 5990 Master's Thesis	Credit Hours	Recitation/Lecture Hours	Studio Hours	Clinical Hours	Lab Hours
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(Open to students with approval of instructor and the director of Graduate Business Programs.) Requires the submission of a thesis under the direction of a supervising faculty member. Students should consult the Graduate Business Programs Office for format requirements.

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BTM 5990 Master's Thesis	Credit Hours	Recitation/Lecture Hours	Studio Hours	Clinical Hours	Lab Hours
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In-depth research, study and defense of a topic related to Business Turnaround Management, chosen with the assistance of the Student's Thesis Advisor. The student is required to enroll in BTM 599 for three hours of credit in each of two successive semesters.

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