

# GUIDE FOR PREPARING THE MA THESIS

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

### **IS 899 MA Thesis    4 credits**

IS 899 is intended to be taken in the student's final semester of study. The Master's Thesis is a scholarly work that demonstrates the ability to do graduate-level research, to analyze primary texts, to use and evaluate scholarly literature on those texts, and to present the results of that research in a written thesis and a public oral defense. (Prerequisite: Approval of thesis topic by theology faculty; MA candidates only)

## STYLE

The thesis is to be 50 to 60 pages in length, not including the title page, table of contents, and bibliography. It is to follow the norms of style for written work contained in the latest edition of the Turabian manual and the Sacred Heart Major Seminary Writer's Checklist. The paper used in the originals submitted for the Szoka Library must be plain white twenty pound bond with at least 25% rag content; these copies must have the original signatures of the director and reader. Ink corrections of any kind are not acceptable. The typeface must be consistent throughout the thesis. The left margin must be 1.5 inches. Footnotes are to be at the bottom of the page.

## DEFENSE

1. The thesis must be approved by the director and reader before the defense may be scheduled.
2. The director chooses a defense date agreeable to the student, the reader, and a representative of the dean's office (see Thesis Scheduling below).
3. Thesis defenses are open to all faculty, staff, students and guests invited by the student or faculty. For exceptional cases, upon request by the student or director, the dean may close a thesis defense (thus permitting attendance only by the director, the reader, a representative of the dean's office).
4. The total time for the defense is no more than one hour. The student is given 20 minutes to present the thesis. The director and reader then ask questions for up to 15 minutes each. For the remaining time the audience is permitted to ask questions, during which the director and reader remain in the room. At the conclusion of the defense, the director and reader leave the room to confer and determine a final grade for the thesis.

5. The student's grade or whether the student has passed or not is not announced publicly without the written permission of the student.
6. If the director or reader suggests revisions to the thesis during the defense, the student submits those revisions to the thesis director as soon as possible. The revised thesis must receive final approval by the director before being submitted to the library.
7. If the student fails the defense, the director informs the student of the reason for the failure. Upon approval of the dean, a second (and last) defense may be scheduled within a six-month period.
8. The student submits a minimum of two copies of the thesis with the signed title page to the SHMS Library for binding.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Responsibilities of the student**

#### *Thesis Preparation*

1. Discuss possible thesis topics with your academic advisor as early as practicable, but no later than the halfway point of your MA course of study (20 credits). These discussions help determine which courses to take in your research concentration. Also discuss a feasible thesis completion timeline.
2. At the beginning of the penultimate semester of studies, arrange for a thesis director with the help of the academic advisor. The academic advisor may serve as the thesis director.
3. With the director's guidance, formulate a thesis topic in an area of theology germane to your coursework. Prepare a one-paragraph description of the thesis topic, an initial outline and a bibliography. The topic must be adequately researched and discussed with the director prior to its submission to the theology faculty.
4. Obtain the IS 899 MA Thesis Approval form from the academic advisor or office of the Dean of Studies, and obtain signatures from the advisor and the director. Submit the form to the Dean of Studies office.
5. Once the topic is approved by faculty, complete and submit an initial draft of the thesis with the guidance of the director. The director may ask you to submit one or two chapters of the thesis first. The draft is 50 to 60 pages in length, not including the title page, table of contents, and bibliography.

#### *Thesis Defense*

1. Register for IS 899 MA Thesis during the final semester of studies. Regular tuition is charged for these four credit hours.
2. Revise the thesis as recommended by the director and reader.
3. Defend the thesis on the scheduled date. The thesis must be defended within six years from the time of matriculation.
4. Submit two copies of the thesis with the signed title page to the SHMS Library for binding.
5. If the thesis is not defended during the first semester of registration for IS 899, the student must register each subsequent semester for Continuing MA Thesis Guidance (IS

8991) until the defense is completed. A student is charged one credit hour of tuition for each subsequent semester of registration.

### **Responsibilities of the Academic Advisor**

1. Provide the MA Thesis Guidelines to the student upon acceptance into the MA program.
2. Facilitate the student's choice of a general area of research for the thesis and the courses to be taken as research concentration electives.
3. Assist the student in choosing a thesis director. The academic advisor may serve as the thesis director.
4. If the thesis director is not present for the faculty meeting at which the thesis topic is to be presented, the advisor may present the thesis topic for approval.

### **Responsibilities of the Thesis Director**

#### *Thesis Preparation*

1. During the student's penultimate semester of studies, assist the student in formulating a thesis topic and creating an initial outline and bibliography.
2. Contact the dean's office to place thesis topic approval on the agenda of the next theology faculty meeting.
3. Make a request to the dean of studies to appoint a reader.
4. Within three weeks of submission of the first draft, review it and provide feedback and recommendations for revision. Review and approve further drafts as needed.
5. Submit the draft to the reader for recommendations and approval. If the reader finds major problems with the thesis, he or she will inform the director within two weeks.

#### *Thesis Defense*

1. Schedule the defense on a date agreeable to the student and the board (comprised of the director, the reader and a representative from the dean's office).
2. Assemble the board just prior to the defense to determine its conduct and protocol.
3. Conduct the defense for no more than one hour.
4. Confer with the reader immediately after the defense to give a pass (P), pass with distinction (PD), pass with high distinction (PHD), or fail (F) grade to the thesis.
5. Submit the MA Thesis Assessment Rubric and MA Thesis Grade form with the signatures of the director and reader to the Registrar.
6. After all necessary post-defense revisions have been completed, sign the title sheets of both copies of the thesis with the reader and return them to the student.

### **Responsibilities of the Reader**

1. Read and approve the thesis, or recommend revisions, within two weeks of receiving it.
2. Participate in the oral defense, and in collaboration with the director, grade the thesis.
3. After all necessary revisions have been completed, sign the title sheets of the thesis.

## THESIS SCHEDULING

### Thesis Topic Approval

- Thesis topic must be approved by the theology faculty no later than the November faculty meeting in order to apply for a winter Graduation (end of Term II).
- Thesis topics must be approved by the theology faculty no later than the May faculty meeting in order to apply for a fall graduation (end of Term I).
- Thesis topics must be approved by the theology faculty no later than the February faculty meeting in order to apply for a spring graduation (end of Term III).

### Thesis Defense

- Winter Graduation – thesis defended no later than April 1.
- Fall Graduation – thesis defended no later than December 1.
- Spring Graduation – thesis defended no later than June 1.

**Note:** If the thesis is not defended before the deadline, the student will register in the following semester for IS 8991 Continuing MA Thesis Guidance.

## SAMPLE THESIS TIMELINE

September	Student arranges for a director with help of academic advisor
October	Student formulates topic and prepares initial outline and bibliography
November	Director submits topic to theology faculty for approval
December	Student registers for IS 899 for winter semester
Dec. 20	Student submits complete initial draft
Jan. 12	Director returns draft with recommendations for revision
Jan. 26	Student submits revised draft
Feb. 2	Director returns draft with further recommendations
Feb. 9	Student submits second revised draft
Feb. 16	Director approves revised draft and sends it to reader
March 2	Reader offers recommendations (or approves thesis for defense)
March 9	Student submits final revised version
March 14	Director approves final version and schedules defense
March 21	Defense is held and director submits grade to dean's office
March 31	Student submits signed copy to library



SACRED HEART  
MAJOR SEMINARY

**SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
IS 899 MASTER OF ARTS THESIS  
APPROVAL FORM**

**PART ONE: THESIS TOPIC**

The student shall choose a thesis director who will be willing to work with the student for the duration of the thesis. The student shall seek the help of the advisor in choosing a director. This director shall provide guidance in the choice of topic, in the research, and in the writing of the thesis.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please Print Student Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**PART TWO: TOPIC APPROVAL**

The student is to choose a topic in the area of the M.A. Concentration. The director must approve this topic. The thesis topic is then presented to the full faculty of the School of Theology by the director for its acceptance. The signature of the dean means that the faculty has accepted the topic. If the faculty does not accept it their decision will be communicated to the student who must either rework the topic or develop a new one depending on the comments of the faculty. The director should be prepared to discuss the student's choice of topic with the faculty. Below please describe the topic of the thesis in thirty words or less.

*Thesis Topic*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Dean

\_\_\_\_\_  
Approved Date



# MA Thesis Assessment Rubric

Student's name \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluated by: \_\_\_\_\_

Thesis title: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check level for each criterion.

Criteria	Level of Achievement			
	High Distinction	Distinction	Pass	Fail
Thesis guidelines	Thesis fully adheres to Turabian and SHMS thesis guidelines (length, appropriate citation methods, correct font and layout).	Thesis generally adheres to Turabian guidelines and SHMS thesis guidelines.	Thesis partly adheres to Turabian and SHMS thesis guidelines.	Thesis fails to adhere to Turabian and SHMS thesis guidelines.
Quality of writing	Thesis communicates very accurately and persuasively, with good use of language and correct grammar, syntax and punctuation.	Thesis communicates accurately and persuasively, with only minor lapses in grammar, syntax and punctuation.	Writing is somewhat unfocused or vague; several errors in grammar, syntax and punctuation.	Style is poor or tone inappropriate; major errors in grammar, syntax and punctuation.
Organization	Thesis is very well organized, with clear progression of argument.	Thesis is generally well organized.	Some peculiarities in ordering.	Thesis is disorganized.
Knowledge of the subject	Thesis demonstrates thorough knowledge of the subject.	Thesis demonstrates good knowledge of the subject.	Thesis partly misunderstands subject or presents it in a superficial or confused manner.	Thesis largely misunderstands subject or is missing important content.
Knowledge of Catholic faith and tradition	Thesis demonstrates thorough knowledge of Catholic faith and tradition.	Thesis demonstrates good knowledge of Catholic faith and tradition.	Thesis demonstrates some gaps in knowledge of Catholic faith and tradition.	Thesis demonstrates inadequate knowledge of Catholic faith and tradition.
Pastoral insight and reflection	Thesis demonstrates excellent pastoral insight and reflection on the topic's importance for Christian life.	Thesis demonstrates good pastoral insight and reflection on the topic's importance for Christian life.	Thesis demonstrates limited pastoral insight or reflection on the importance of the topic for Christian life.	Thesis demonstrates little or no pastoral insight or reflection on the importance of the topic for Christian life.
Oral defense	Oral defense consistently demonstrates clarity and cogency in presenting the topic.	Oral defense generally demonstrates clarity and cogency in presenting the topic.	Oral defense demonstrates limited clarity and cogency in presenting the topic.	Oral defense demonstrates little or no clarity or cogency in presenting the topic.

## NOTE:

Please return this form to the registrar's office immediately following the thesis defense presentation.

**TITLE PAGE FORMAT**

TITLE OF THE THESIS

by

STUDENT'S NAME

THESIS

Submitted to the School of Theology  
of Sacred Heart Major Seminary  
Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS (IN THEOLOGY)

Year

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR: \_\_\_\_\_

SECOND READER: \_\_\_\_\_