

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE
Graduate Studies in Theatre & Performance

MA Thesis Guidelines

I. Thesis Goals and Guidelines

Overview

This document (**MA Thesis Guidelines**) describes the MA Thesis and Thesis Project. The MA thesis serves as the culminating work from a student's course of graduate study in Theatre & Performance and demonstrates their independent research, writing, and/or creative activity. The written portion of the thesis should articulate comprehensive knowledge in the core areas of study—research methods; literature, theory, and criticism; performance practice; and history—based on original research and argument in the student's area of specialization.

After completion of course work, students register for 6 credits of MA Thesis Guidance (TH 600). This may be completed during the summer following coursework (6 credits), during the following fall semester (6 credits), or extended over the summer and fall terms (3 credits each).

The MA Thesis should demonstrate the following:

- Formulation of an original research question
- Reading and documentation of the existing literature
- Convincing argumentation, with appropriate examples
- Use of clear, well-constructed prose

The MA Thesis Project should demonstrate the following:

- Knowledge of the skills, techniques, and processes required for professional theatre or performance production
- Ability to design, execute, and manage a theatre or performance project
- Evidence of professional expertise, including the presentation of thesis materials
- Ability to articulate in writing the context and significance of the work in relation to contemporary theatre and performance practices

Criteria for Successful Thesis Completion

To complete the MA, students either complete a **scholarly thesis** or a **thesis project**. In both instances, the student will submit a final work to be read (and/or viewed) and approved by a committee of graduate faculty including the major advisor (or thesis director, if different), and a thesis committee comprised of two other faculty members, one of whom may come from outside the department.

Scholarly Thesis

The thesis paper is recommended for students intending to pursue the PhD or other doctoral programs (either at UB or elsewhere). This is a paper of modest length (approximately 30-50

pages) that demonstrates comprehensive knowledge in the student's area of specialization and presents an original argument on that subject as related to theatre and performance studies.

Thesis Project

The MA Thesis Project is an original creative work in the student's area of specialization (e.g., directing, acting, design, playwriting, intermedia performance, dance theatre, among others). The thesis project should be substantial (e.g., original script; direction of a full-length play, evening of solo performance) and is accompanied by a critical text (approximately 20-30 pages) that provides the critical and methodological context for the work. Because every project is different, the specific requirements for the project will be determined in consultation with the major advisor and other members of the graduate faculty.

Academic Integrity

Absolute integrity is expected of every member of the UB community in all academic matters. When a student submits any work for academic credit, he/she makes an implicit claim that the work is wholly his/her own, done without the assistance of any person or source not explicitly noted, and that the work has not previously been submitted for academic credit in any area.

Plagiarism in any form is unacceptable. Students must understand that they may under no circumstances knowingly represent as their own any idea or expression of an idea or work of another in any academic examination or term test, or in connection with any other form of academic work. Any work submitted by a student for the thesis should be original work. Outside source material must be acknowledged. Penalties for committing plagiarism may include warning, probation, or dismissal. Individuals have the right to defend themselves and appeal any penalties.

II. Committee Formation

By the end of the fall term, each student should select a **major advisor** and begin forming a thesis committee. This is usually done in consultation with graduate faculty and approved by the Director of Graduate Studies to ensure that each student is optimally mentored. Students should consult with their initial advisors (appointed upon acceptance to the program) and the DGS in this process.

After the major advisor is chosen, the student will form a thesis committee of 2-4 additional faculty (3-5 faculty total). One member of this committee may come from outside the department if deemed appropriate to the project and approved by the other departmental members of the committee and the DGS prior to invitation. All committee members, regardless of department, must be members of the Graduate Faculty at UB and hold a terminal degree (MFA, DFA, PhD, etc.).

III. Thesis Process

1. Proposal

In consultation with the major advisor, each student should develop a preliminary thesis abstract (approximately 150 words) by the conclusion of the spring term. A final abstract of the thesis will be included with the final submission of the manuscript to the Graduate School. This proposal abstract must be approved by the major advisor and the DGS before the student enrolls in TH 600 (Masters Thesis Guidance). The proposal applies to both the MA Thesis and MA Thesis Project.

2. Application to Candidacy (ATC)

The ATC form requires that students specify courses and as well as the finalized concept of the thesis paper or project (i.e., thesis abstract). Later adjustments or changes require approval by the graduate school—by petition. The ATC is submitted to the graduate secretary by the end of the spring term. To be eligible for a September conferral date, the ATC must be submitted by **June 1**. The ATC must include the following attachments:

- Copy of the unofficial UB transcript.
- Course syllabi for every course whose title does not clearly indicate the course's relationship to the Theatre & Performance requirements, or which is from another department.
- Copies of any approved graduate petitions for undergraduate courses taken for graduate credit.
- Copies of syllabi and forms for any independent and directed studies courses without an official course description.

Expected Conferral Date	February 1	June 1	September 1
Date to submit to Department:	September 1	February 1	June 1
Completed ATC with all required signatures and attachments due to Graduate School	October 1	March 1	July 1

Formatting

MA Thesis should follow conventions and formats consistent with the discipline and agreed to by the student and the major advisor. Generally, MLA or Chicago Manual of Style endnote citations are preferred. Specific guidelines from the UB Graduate School are outlined in the [Guidelines for Thesis and Dissertation Preparation and Submission](#).

Oral Defense

A public oral defense of the thesis is required for all students who complete a master's thesis or project. The oral defense is attended by the candidate's major advisor, thesis committee, and members of departmental faculty (as agreed to by the candidate and major advisor). The candidate has the prerogative to open the thesis defense to a larger audience if that is desired, but this is not required.

M-Form

The M-Form, which must be signed by the thesis committee members, certifies completion of all degree requirements. It serves as the master control document ensuring a student's compliance with THD and the UB Graduate School requirements. Students should meet with their thesis committee prior to the M-form submission date. Also, students should meet with the Graduate Secretary well ahead of time to insure that courses, thesis/project, and all paperwork are in order by the deadline.

IV. Graduation Checklist

For candidates completing a Masters Thesis: An oral defense of the thesis must be authorized and held (see above). To graduate, the following must be on file in the Graduate School by the prescribed deadlines:

- Approved Application to Candidacy (with all necessary attachments, including original transcripts)
- M-Form (post oral defense)
- Electronic submission of the master's thesis

For candidates completing a Masters Project, the following must be on file in the Graduate School by prescribed deadlines prior to degree conferral:

- Approved Application to Candidacy (with all necessary attachments, including original transcripts)
- M-Form
- Brief written summary of project completed (normally no more than 150 words)

In both instances, the Graduate School will verify satisfactory completion of all courses to be applied toward the degree.