

## GUIDELINES: THE MASTER'S THESIS

Students wishing to pursue an MA Thesis must identify a Supervisory team, take the research methods class (INAF 5015), and complete their research proposal in their first year of study.

Students undertaking an MA Thesis should normally have a minimum A- GPA at the end of the first two terms of study at NPSIA.

Please also consult the [resource materials](#) available through the office of Graduate Studies.

### **Supervision**

The Master's Thesis is supervised by a Supervisory Team consisting of a Supervisor and an Advisor or Co-supervisors. Please familiarise yourself with NPSIA's Guidelines for Graduate Student Research Supervision (available on the website) and the [Responsibility and Expectations Policy](#) for Thesis Supervisors developed by Graduate Studies.

**Supervisors must be NPSIA faculty members.** Students are responsible for identifying a Supervisor and seeking their approval to supervise.

**Co-supervision requirements:** MA/JD students must have a **co-supervisor** from University of Ottawa Law School; Latin American Studies and African Studies Specialisations require a co-supervisor from these respective programmes.

In consultation and with the approval of their supervisor, students may bring on a non-NPSIA faculty member to be a co-supervisor.

For further information, please consult the [guidelines for nominal co-supervisors](#) and the Graduate Studies' [Supervision Appointments Policy](#).

**Advisors** should be identified in consultation with the Supervisor. Students are strongly encouraged to finalize their choice of Advisor early in the process to maximize the benefits of their input and advice. Advisors are recognized experts in the subject area and can be any of the following:

- Faculty members at NPSIA, other relevant departments at Carleton, or another university;
- NPSIA fellows or senior fellows or adjunct professors;
- Government officials such as analysts, diplomats in any department or agency relevant to the work;
- Experts at non-governmental organizations, including think tanks.
- A retired person or expert outside of the above list who is identified in consultation with the Supervisor.

## **Proposal Approval Process**

**Proposals are due on May 1 using the Research Proposal Form.** Proposals are approved jointly by the Proposed Supervisor and MA Associate Director.

The Proposal format should include the following information:

1. TENTATIVE TITLE
2. PROBLEM AND QUESTION. Describe the problem/puzzle/issue you are investigating, its relevance, and identify the research question or hypothesis you will be analyzing.  
NB: A Master's Thesis must reflect original research.
3. RELATED RESEARCH. Provide a brief overview of the literature that addresses or is directly relevant to the research question. The overview should specifically identify the gaps or shortcomings in the literature that the paper plans to address.
4. BASIC APPROACH. Describe what you plan to do in your research and how you plan to do it, i.e. the methods you will employ to collect and analyze information and evaluate your research question or hypothesis.
5. TENTATIVE CHAPTER TITLES

## **Research and Writing Process**

**Prerequisites:** Students must take INAF 5015 Research Methods (for Data Science students DATA 5000) in their first year of study.

**Thesis Course Credit:** Students must register in INAF 5909 continuously until the Thesis is completed, per Article 8.2 of FGPA regulations.

**Academic Integrity Policy:** Students are subject to and should be familiar with [Carleton's Academic Integrity Policy](#). Students must submit an [Academic Integrity Statement](#) with the submission of their MA Thesis.

**Generative Artificial Intelligence:** Students should agree on the use of GenAI with their supervisor, in accordance with Carleton's [Artificial Intelligence Framework](#).

**Research Ethics:** Research involving human subjects must be reviewed and approved by Carleton's Research Ethics Board (CUREB-A). Applications for ethics approval must be submitted prior to the commencement of the research. Students should familiarise themselves with the processes outlined by the [Office of Research Ethics](#), including the frequency of CUREB-A proposal reviews. Students need to plan sufficient time for the review and revision of their Application for Ethics Clearance.

**Field Research:** Please consult NPSIA's Field Research Guide for suggestions and guidance on undertaking field research.

**Thesis Length:** Unless otherwise agreed to by your supervisory committee, a thesis must be no longer than **30,000 words**, inclusive of all notes, figures, and bibliography.

## Overview of Thesis Structure

The Thesis should include the following components:

- A. Clearly identified, well-motivated, focused, and original **research question** that identifies a puzzle within the field of international affairs and undertakes:
  - a. Theory testing: tests or clarifies existing theories or addresses a current policy debate.
  - b. Explanation: explains a particular policy outcome or event.
  - c. Evaluation: evaluates outcomes of a policy.
- B. An argument that clearly answers the research question. The argument should identify a dependent variable that identifies the outcome they are interested in, and the explanatory variables as the key factors influencing the dependent variable.
- C. A methodology and conceptual framework that identifies the key factors influencing the outcome of interest. For example, empirical analyses may take the form of an in-depth focused case study (justifying the use of a single case), comparative case studies, or large sample statistical analysis.
- D. A structured, focused, comprehensive, and coherent literature review that describes the important literature associated with their research problem and identifies the gap or debate in the literature that is addressed in the paper.
- E. The body of the argument and the analysis. Please note that a thesis requires scholarship that builds on a critical review of previous work to explore **a new question or specific problem or issue in a new setting**. A thesis should demonstrate “**originality in the application of knowledge.**”
- F. Conclusions. Students are strongly encouraged to draw out the policy implications and relevance of their research.

**Formatting:** Thesis formatting requirements are specified by the Office of Graduate Studies. Information can be found here: <https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/resources-page/thesis-requirements/formatting-guidelines/>

Other information relevant to the writing of the thesis can be found here: <https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/resources-page/thesis-requirements/thesis-forms-templates-policies/>

## **Submission and Evaluation**

When a Thesis is completed to the satisfaction of the Supervisor and Advisory, it can be submitted for examination. A student may also insist on submitting a thesis that the Supervisory Team has deemed not ready for evaluation.

Three submission deadlines exist:

- April 1 for Spring Graduation;
- August 1 for Fall Graduation;
- December 1 for Winter Graduation.

A Master's Thesis is subject to an [external examination process](#), including an oral defence of the thesis. The Thesis is examined by a board consisting of at least four members, including the thesis supervisor, the advisor, the Director of NPSIA, and an examiner external to NPSIA. NPSIA's Director will announce the constitution of the examination board. Please familiarise yourself with the thesis examination process, available at this website:

<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/resources-page/thesis-requirements/thesis-forms-templates-policies/>

Students are expected to notify their supervisor and the chair of the department at least two weeks in advance of the date on which they intend to submit the completed thesis. The examinable thesis must be submitted to the department at least three weeks in advance of the intended date of examination. The thesis examination and defense will then be scheduled, and the date will be announced at least two weeks in advance.

The thesis will be evaluated using a [standard form](#). The four categories for a thesis defence include:

- Accepted;
- Acceptable after minor revisions;
- Acceptable after major revisions;
- Rejected.

The Oral Defense is graded as Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory.

For minor revisions, the Supervisor certifies that all revisions/corrections have been completed satisfactorily. Major revisions may be subject to the approval of the examining board.

**Grade:** The final grade is submitted prior to Carleton's grading deadlines to ensure graduation in a given term.