

Institute of Political Economy
Thesis and Research Essay Information

Thesis and Research Essay – Main Differences Summarized:

	Thesis	Research Essay
Credits	2.0 credits	1.0 credits
Time to completion	At least three terms, full-time	At least two terms, full-time
Proposal Length	8-10 pages	3-5 pages
Manuscript Length	80-100 pages	40-60 pages
Supervision	Supervisor and committee member, or two co-supervisors	Supervisor and a second reader
Content	Original application of new or existing knowledge to a new problem or setting; may include analysis of primary or secondary research data from archives, interviews, policy documents, etc.	Raises issues and presents arguments based on an engagement with the work of others. Primarily a library-based paper, but could include primary research.
Archived	University library, Institute Office. May be deposited with Library and Archives Canada.	Institute Office
Final Submission	Formal oral defence as regulated by FGPA. Examination board includes supervisor, committee member, external examiner, and chair of defence.	Final paper is submitted to supervisor and is graded by the supervisor and a second reader. An oral defence is customary but optional.
Grade	Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory	Letter grade

Thesis and Research Essay Scope and Claims:

Both a research essay and a thesis aim to be creative and innovative in their offering of political economic insights. Each develops a position or standpoint that represents the voice of the student and demonstrates a rigorous understanding of the field of research. The main differences between the research essay and the thesis are of aims, scope, and evidence.

A **research essay** aims to establish an argument through the assessment and evaluation of existing research and theoretical literature. Its primary material is a critical reflection on the work of others, organized around a clearly specified topic. In some cases, a research essay may include a preliminary exploration of original research material or secondary data. For example, you may wish to interview a few key respondents, or examine available data sources. The research essay can have a wider scope than a thesis because it can be more speculative and agenda-setting. Its role is to provide illustrative evidence, rather than definitive, fully-

documented answers. The end result of a research essay could be a well-grounded set of new research questions, or the initial exegesis and preliminary development of a working argument.

A **thesis** aims to produce original evidence or argumentation based on the candidate's own novel research or theorizing. The overall scope is more focused, and the standards of argumentation and evidence are higher. Don't be frightened by the idea of originality! It doesn't mean you are expected to completely revolutionize our understanding of the world. The expectation is that, as an original contribution, the thesis will identify ways to push ideas forward by providing new evidence and argumentation, and some working answers to the research questions posed.

Thesis Proposal and Research Essay Proposal:

All students will need to prepare a proposal for their thesis or research essay. **Full-time students should have their proposals completed by the end of their second term in the program.** Part-time students should have their proposals completed by the time they finish all of their coursework.

A thesis proposal has a working title and should be a compact document (maximum 10 pages). It identifies and locates the significance of the question framing the research and sets out the investigative procedures to be followed. In order to develop a proposal, you must have a sense of the field, i.e., what is 'known' and 'claimed' about the issue, and a well-specified research question. You need to be explicit and specific about the logic of inquiry and the strategies proposed to support your own claims.

A research essay proposal is a more concise document, normally 5 pages. It too identifies an organizing research question, and outlines your plans to investigate and answer this question.

Thesis Proposal Format:

Formats may vary (check with your supervisor), but should contain the following elements:

1. **Research question:** This is key and should appear on the first page of any proposal. It should be clear and specific. It can be thought of as a puzzle or a problem to be solved.
2. Specify your **working argument**. This is your tentative, speculative answer to the research question. You may want to think of this as the answer that would follow from your expected research findings, based on your analysis of the existing scholarship on the topic. Focus on bringing out the underlying logic. Setting out a working argument will help guide your investigation, and keep you focused on your contribution to the literature.
3. **Location vis-a-vis the existing literature:** Locate your thesis in terms of the relevant theoretical approaches and substantive research in the field. Do not write a lengthy review of the literature. What is more important is to identify how your project is situated in relation to the current issues in and approaches to your topic. You should demonstrate that you are aware of the scope of the field, the significant debates (past and present), and where your work fits within those. Ensure your read of the existing literature is both generous and rigorous.
4. Explain the **key concepts** used in formulating your research question and working argument. This is more than a simple matter of definitions. Your discussion should reflect on debates about these concepts, conceptual ambiguities, and room for development.
5. Identify your research **method** and **sources**. Bring out the way your research question, and the

argumentation in which it is located, establishes the importance of certain kinds of evidence. Identify and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the methodological approach you have chosen. Be reflexive about your position as 'researcher' in the investigative process. Consider issues of access to data sources, and the quality/quantity of information required. Show how these sources, using this methodology, will produce evidence in terms of your research question and working argument.

6. Outline the **research process** (how you intend to proceed) and **the data analysis strategy**. How do you intend to work with the primary or secondary data relevant to your research? How does the data analysis strategy you propose speak to the research question and fit with the overall theoretical orientation of your research? Discuss any considerations, including any special circumstances, required for ethics approval.
7. Discuss the intended **contribution** of your proposed thesis: the significance of your research and the claims to originality. Understand where and how you are making a contribution to the field. Although this could be due to a gap in the literature (see point #3, above), claims that 'no one has ever written about this' are usually wrong. Original claims are more often made by examining an object of analysis in a new way or in a particularly illuminating or revealing context.
8. Provide a **timeline** for your work.
9. Provide a **rough outline** of thesis chapters.
10. Include a **sample bibliography** of relevant writing in the area on which you intend to draw.

Research Essay Proposal Format:

Formats may vary (check with your supervisor), but should contain the following elements:

1. **Topic and research question of the essay:** What is the general topic of the essay and what do you propose as the specific research question? This question will guide your interrogation of the literature.
2. Specify your **working argument**. This is your tentative, speculative answer to the research question. Focus on bringing out the underlying logic. Setting out a working argument will help guide your research, and keep you focused on your contribution to the literature.
3. **Location re: the existing literature:** Locate your proposed essay in terms of the relevant theoretical approaches and substantive research in the field. Do not write a lengthy review of the literature. What is more important is to identify how your research essay is situated in relation to the current issues in and approaches to your topic. You should demonstrate that you are aware of the scope of the field, the significant debates (past and present), and where your work fits within those.
4. Identify your **research sources**. Identify the range and types of material that you intend to read and interrogate. If you plan to do some limited form of primary research, outline why you intend to do this and how you plan to carry it out. Make sure to note if you will need ethics clearance.
5. Briefly state the **contribution** you hope to make with the work of your research essay.

6. Provide a *timeline* for your work.
7. Include a *sample bibliography* of relevant writing in the area on which you intend to draw.

Defence Procedures:

A *research essay* requires a supervisor with whom the candidate works. A second reader is also required, and is someone who may be more or less involved in the production of the essay. The second reader is always involved in the examination of the essay and may be identified for this purpose only. A committee member may be added if the supervisor and student identify someone of importance to the topic. This committee member can also be the second reader for the completion of the research essay, or someone who is solicited for only this reason. An optional oral defence is permitted with the Research Essay. The oral defence of a research essay is about an hour in duration, and attended by the candidate, the second reader, and the supervisor (who will chair the proceedings). The defence begins with a short statement by the candidate (no longer than 5 minutes) outlining the contribution of the essay, followed by a round of questions from the two examiners. The supervisor and the second reader will agree on a letter grade for the essay. *N.B.: the oral defence has no bearing on the final grade, which is (per FGPA guidelines) determined strictly on the basis of the written work.*

A *thesis* requires a supervisor and committee member (in some instances, co-supervisors). When the thesis is ready, a formal defence is organized based on the regulations by the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs. Once the supervisor and committee member indicate that the thesis is ready to defend, the student's supervisor must contact the Institute Administrator to open the e-thesis system for the student to upload their thesis. It is also the supervisor's responsibility at this point to locate an external examiner (i.e., external to the committee but internal to Carleton) for the thesis, subject to the approval of the Director. The external examiner must have been uninvolved in the research and writing of the thesis at any stage, and cannot hold a 50% or greater appointment in the same home department as the supervisor. Once the external examiner has agreed to review the thesis, they should be allowed 3 weeks to read it and determine whether it is indeed ready for defence. Only at this point should the defence be scheduled.

The oral defence of an MA thesis lasts between 90 minutes and two hours, and is normally chaired by the Director of the Institute (or his/her designate). The defence begins with a statement by the candidate (no longer than 10 minutes) locating the thesis in the candidate's intellectual biography and outlining its contribution. There are two rounds of questioning: the first, a series of one-on-one questions between each examiner and the candidate in turn (beginning with the external and ending with the supervisor), lasts for roughly one hour. The second round is typically more informal, and can look like more of a conversation or seminar, in which all the examiners may chime in. The examination board will evaluate a successful thesis as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. If 'satisfactory', the board will determine whether it is to be accepted as-is, with minor revisions, or with major revisions. *Note that external examiners are required to give notice before the defence date if they judge the thesis not ready for defence, or if they anticipate major revisions. The external examiner must agree with the final evaluation of the thesis.*

Registration:

Once your proposal is approved, you will normally register in the MRE or Thesis course. Once you register, you must maintain continuous registration until the MRE or thesis is completed, per Article 8.2 of FGPA regulations.

Students typically register in the Summer following approval of their proposal. However, if you are working full-time over the summer, you may delay your first registration to Fall, but only with the approval of your Supervisor.

When planning your registration, keep in mind that a Research Essay will typically take at least two terms to complete and a Thesis will take at least three terms to complete. In most cases they take longer.

Supervision:

It is your responsibility to seek out and secure a supervisor, normally before the end of your second term. Your supervisor must be a full-time faculty member cross-appointed to the Institute of Political Economy. (Adjunct Research Professors at the Institute of Political Economy may also supervise, but only if a full-time faculty member is a co-supervisor.) When securing a supervisor you should consider both areas of expertise and supervisory style. Remember that this is someone you may have to rely on for some time after graduation: they will be writing your key reference letters for scholarships, further studies, or employment. To really assess whether someone is the right fit for you and your project, you should plan to meet them in person to discuss this possibility with them. Let them know what sort of supervision you need and want, and find out from them what sort of supervisory style they have to offer. If you are meeting someone you have not taken a course with, bring along some material (or send it in advance) that will help to introduce you to them: a short information sheet with your courses and grades, a seminar paper that you're proud of, and of course a statement of your research interests and proposed project. The fit has to work both ways (and the potential supervisor must have room amid their existing supervisory load); arranging a meeting to discuss supervision does not commit you or the faculty member to anything.

Once you have a supervisor, you and your supervisor should together discuss a second reader. The second reader on your committee may be any faculty member (or properly qualified professional, with the approval of FGPA) whose work is relevant to your topic and agrees to join your committee. For an MRE the second reader often joins only as a reader of the final essay; for a thesis, however, they are present throughout the process and may be more or less involved in various stages of research and writing. Students must maintain contact with their supervisory committee throughout the research and writing process, so that they stay on track to completion.

Deadlines:

There are three deadlines each year:

Submission Date	March 1	August 1	December 1
	If submitted by this date, student may be eligible for Summer Graduation	If submitted by this date, student may be eligible for Fall Graduation	If submitted by this date, student may be eligible for Winter Graduation

If a student has a preferred term of graduation, the above deadlines are important to keep track of. If your research essay or thesis is handed in by the deadline, there will be enough time to complete the process, barring any unforeseen circumstances in time for graduation or end of term deadlines. If you submit after this date, there is no guarantee that the process will be complete and you may miss the graduation deadline. If this happens, you will need to register for the next term, as continual registration is needed. If the process is completed by the financial withdrawal date of the term, the student will be eligible for withdrawal and a tuition refund. If this deadline passes, the student will not be eligible for a tuition refund.

Formatting and Research:

Formatting requirements should be discussed with your supervisor. In general, the formatting of research essays is less strict than for theses, but the thesis guidelines are nevertheless useful. Standard requirements can be found here: <https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/thesis-requirements/formatting-guidelines/>

The MacOdrum Library offers many services to both graduate and undergraduate students. They are there to help you with not only your courses, but research assistance as well. They have subject specialists that can help you find valuable information and assist you with expediting your research. Be sure to review the services offered here: <https://library.carleton.ca/services/research-help>.

Responsibilities of the Student:

It is up to the student to maintain contact with their supervisor and committee (if a thesis), submit draft chapters, schedule meetings, and stay on track. The supervisory committee is there to guide the student and answer questions, but it is the responsibility of the student to make sure they are registered in the appropriate courses, meet deadlines, and submit their final paper.

If at any time during the process you choose to move from Research Essay to Thesis or Thesis to Research Essay, you should contact the IPE Administrator to discuss. Depending on where you are in the process, official changes to your student record may need to be completed. If at any point you have a concern or questions that your Supervisory Team cannot answer, do not hesitate to contact the IPE Administrator or the IPE Director for assistance.

For more information on student and supervisor responsibilities, please visit:

<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/thesis-requirements/graduate-supervision-responsibilities-expectations-policy/>