

Guidelines and Procedures for a *MPPA Thesis* PADM 5909

A. Overview

A *M.P.P.A. Thesis* is a substantial and scholarly research project that enables students in the M.P.P.A. to develop and demonstrate not only their understanding of a body of academic literature, but also their ability to draw upon that literature in order to conduct an original, sustained analysis in support of an argument concerning an aspect of public policy. It constitutes 2.0 credits, replacing the elective courses of the M.P.P.A. program. Students may undertake a thesis only after they have completed the first-year core courses of the M.P.P.A. program, and achieved at least an A- average (a GPA of 10 or higher) in them.

The project is overseen by a committee comprising a supervisor and two other faculty members. The supervisor must be a full-time faculty member at Carleton University, typically at the School of Public Policy and Administration. The guidelines set out here accompany but do not replace the requirements as outlined in the Graduate Calendar:

<https://calendar.carleton.ca/grad/>

or as described at:

<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/thesis-requirements/>

B. Procedures prior to registration

The planning and preparation for a *M.P.P.A. Thesis* are considerable and should be undertaken well before the term in which the student hopes first to register. Whereas for a *Research Essay* the proposal is completed and approved prior to registration (see *Guidelines and Procedures for a Research Essay* PADM 5908), for a *M.P.P.A. Thesis* the proposal, being more comprehensive, is prepared and defended after registration.

1. Determine a topic A *M.P.P.A. Thesis* must be feasible – ideally to be completed within two consecutive terms of full-time study. Toward that end, students should avoid topics that are too broad, general or vague, topics that are speculative (say, dealing with events that have not yet occurred), or topics for which the availability of data or information is uncertain. A *M.P.P.A. Thesis* must also be analytical, not merely descriptive. It is important, therefore, that the topic lends itself to analysis. Toward that end, there should be a related body of literature that provides background understanding, an issue or dilemma or sequence of events that can generate a research question, and a theoretical framework that allows the student to form and support an argument that answers the research question. Finally, a *M.P.P.A. Thesis* must involve original work that goes beyond assembling and syncretizing the ideas and conclusions of others. Accordingly, the topic must involve gaps in either theory, measurement, or application that students can address and fill.

In order to determine a topic that meets these requirements, students may find it helpful both to draw upon their reading and study from previous courses, and to consult several faculty

members. Before speaking with potential supervisors (see below), students are advised to have prepared a two-page description of the project that summarizes the type of information that will eventually contribute to the proposal (see below).

2. Identify supervisor and committee The second step is to find the people to oversee the research – persons whose expertise would allow them to guide and evaluate the work. Supervisors take the lead in providing direction for all aspects of the thesis. Typically, they assist in identify the other committee members, in consultation with the student. These may be more or less involved in the project, their role and contributions depending on how their particular expertise (theoretical, methodological, policy, country) complements that of the supervisor and other members.
3. Complete and submit Approval Form The third step is for the student, supervisor and other committee members to complete and sign the attached *M.P.P.A. Thesis Approval Form*. This form is to be given to the Graduate Administrator who in turn submits it to the Graduate Supervisor, M.P.P.A. for approval. Once approval has been granted, a space for the student is reserved under the course number PADM 5909. Only then is the student able to register in the course, via Carleton Central.

C. Research process

Before writing the thesis itself, the student prepares, writes and defends a proposal. This preliminary stage normally takes at least a month of full-time study. The purpose of the proposal is to ensure that the student has a well-thought-out research plan that not only is manageable, but also has the potential for generating analytical and original work. The purpose of its preparation and defence is to solicit constructive criticism from the committee at an early stage, and to provide all parties with a common understanding of the project.

To fulfill this purpose, the proposal will normally be 10 pages in length, and include the following headings and content.

- Research Question and Thesis (Describe the aspect of public policy that is to be the object of study and explain why such study is important. Outline the main themes to be examined; the main problems or questions to be answered. Clearly state the proposition or argument – the “thesis statement” – for which the thesis will attempt to make a convincing case.)
- Basic Approach (Describe what you plan to do in the research, and how you plan to do it, including: the theoretical framework or set of assumptions you will adopt in order to support your argument; the sources of information or data you will draw upon; and the methods you will use to make inferences from that information.)
- Tentative Structure (List the titles of the chapters or sections that will make up the final thesis.)
- Related Research (Specify the principal works related to the research question, summarize their arguments and approach, and explain how these will be amended, adopted or rejected in order to support the “thesis statement”. List other works that will contribute to the final bibliography.)
- Work Schedule (Outline the timing of tasks, and the target dates for submitting draft and final versions of chapters.)

Draft versions of the proposal are distributed to the committee members for comments that can assist in its revision. The supervisor will determine the point at which the proposal is of a sufficiently finished form that it can be defended before the committee. The defence is a formal, chaired event, normally lasting an hour. It culminates in the proposal being either accepted or rejected by the committee. A proposal may be accepted, even if parts are amended, in light of the comments and concerns raised by the committee during the defence.

Once accepted, the proposal acts more like a road map than a contract. It is often the case that aspects of the research that had been anticipated and outlined in the proposal will need to be revised, in light of the reading, data collection and analysis that follow the successful defence. Such revisions are made in the context of the ongoing consultations with the members of the committee.

Writing a thesis is a more solitary pursuit than course work, and, for most students, a more sustained undertaking than preparing and writing previously essays or papers. It is important, therefore, that students remain disciplined in structuring their time and in maintaining contact with the committee. Part of that contact will involve agreeing with the supervisor both on the time frame for submitting draft chapters, and on the state of those drafts. The purpose of these submissions is to obtain timely, constructive and substantive criticism. This purpose can be undercut by students submitting either drafts that may be more finished but arrive late, or drafts that may arrive early but are too rough.

D. Form and Content

As noted, a *M.P.P.A. Thesis* is a substantial and scholarly research project. Its length must be between 120 and 160 pages (inclusive of appendices and bibliography), double-spaced (except for footnotes and bibliography), with one-inch margins, and a size 12 font. Detailed information about format is available at:

<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/thesis-requirements/formatting-guidelines/>

There are several style guides for citations and bibliography. Among these is Kate L. Turabian, *A manual for writers of term papers, theses, and dissertations*, 6th edition, rev. by John Grossman and Alice Bennett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Whatever guide is used, the student and supervisor should, at an early stage, agree upon the presentation style to

The thesis, regardless of how its chapters are sequenced and structured, must have the following components.

- A well-motivated research question This normally deals with an aspect of public policy that is either explanatory (accounting for a particular policy decision) or evaluative (assessing the outcomes of policy decisions).
- A clearly-stated proposition or argument that answers the research question This involves a dependent variable that identifies or measures the phenomenon or outcome the student is interested in, and explanatory variables that are considered the key factors influencing the dependent variable.
- A theoretical framework This involves a set of assumptions – perhaps used elsewhere in the literature, but adopted or adapted for the thesis – that enables the student to justify the link between the explanatory and dependent variables.
- A structured and coherent literature review This both introduces the important literature associated with the research question and identifies the gap or debate in the literature that is being addressed by the thesis.
- A body of analysis supporting the argument

- Conclusions These might include the general implications of the thesis' argument for either policy-makers or researchers.

Whether theoretical or empirical – or both – the thesis is to include original research. If theoretical, this could involve interpretations, applications, or criticisms of a theorist or theory. If empirical, this could involve primary research based on the collection and analysis of government documents, other texts, interview data, or quantitative data.

E. Finishing and evaluation

The procedures for the final defence and evaluation of the *M.A. Thesis* are outlined at:
<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/thesis-requirements/defence-the-process/>

Carleton University
School of Public Policy and Administration

M.P.P.A. Thesis PADM 5909 Approval Form

This is not a registration form. Students can register in PADM 5909 after this form has been completed by the student, supervisor and committee members, and approved by the M.A. Supervisor.

Student: _____ **ID:** _____
(last name) (given name)

Email: _____

Academic Year: _____ **Academic Term:** _____

Supervisor: _____ **Dept:** _____
(last name) (given name)

Academic Position: _____ **Email:** _____

Proposed title of Thesis: _____

Target date for proposal defence: _____

Target date for thesis defence: _____

Approved by: _____ **Date:** _____
(Student's signature)

_____ **Date:** _____
(Supervisor's signature)

_____ **Date:** _____
(Committee member's signature)

_____ **Date:** _____
(Committee member's signature)

_____ **Date:** _____
(Graduate Supervisor, MPPA's signature)