



Completing a Thesis

A Step-by-Step Guide

Master of Science in Organizational Leadership
Faculty of Leadership and Integrative Studies
Arizona State University

CONTENTS

Your Thesis: A Snapshot

- Difference Between a Thesis and a Capstone Project
- Thesis Requirements

Choosing a Thesis Topic

Academic Integrity and Assurance

- Protection for Human Subjects (IRB)
- Committee Formation

Gaining Approval for your Thesis: The Proposal

OGL 599: Thesis

- Roles and Expectations
- Planning Your Timeline
- The Defense
- Course Grades and GPA
- Incomplete Grades

Archiving Your Thesis

YOUR THESIS: A SNAPSHOT

As a Master of Science in Organizational Leadership student you have two options for your culminating experience: a capstone project or a thesis. The option you choose determines your plan of study through the program. Your coursework—particularly OGL 530, 540, and 550—incorporate elements intended to assist you in developing your ideas early on and give you a head start in drafting a capstone prospectus.

What is the difference between a capstone project and thesis?

A *thesis* is an academic paper that contributes to the field of organizational leadership. It is the result of working with a committee of faculty members that produces original research that furthers the field. The thesis is an excellent option for students who might wish to pursue a doctoral degree after the MS in OGL.

A *capstone project* builds a connection between the academic components of the program and applies that knowledge to a real-world context. It is an *independently produced deliverable* (e.g. technical manual, website, needs assessment study, diversity training, seminar curriculum, etc.) that has a function within an organization and can either target an actual workplace need or serve as an exercise in gaining experience.

Capstone Project Requirements

OGL 599: Thesis is the 3-credit hour course you take during your *last* term in the program. While you may take other courses concurrently, you must have already completed OGL 520, OGL 530, OGL 540, OGL 574, and OGL 575 *prior* to registering for OGL 599 and be in good academic standing.

Other requirements include:

- ❑ **Committee Formation**—You must assemble a committee of three faculty members, two of which, including the chair, must be full-time FLIS faculty who hold a terminal degree. The third may also be from FLIS, or anywhere else at ASU, or external to ASU, pursuant to the approval of the chair. The form for committee members to fill out is below and will be uploaded to iPOS.
- ❑ **Thesis Proposal**—a plan of action or proposal for your thesis that includes the topic, theoretical background, methodological approach, and estimated schedule. The prospectus must also address any approvals that must be obtained for the thesis, such as human subjects (IRB), organizational permissions, or confidentiality disclaimers. *This must be approved prior to the first day of OGL 599 and confirmed in your iPOS.*
- ❑ **Thesis**—a deliverable in the form of a research paper, usually between 60-80 pages and at least 3 chapters.

- ❑ **Thesis Defense**—this is the final step in the evaluation of your capstone project. You will schedule an empaneled committee for 1 hour and will answer questions about your thesis from them. If these questions are answered to the satisfaction of the committee, then all the degree requirements will have been met.

A copy of each thesis will be archived by the Faculty of Leadership and Integrative Studies.

CHOOSING A TOPIC FOR YOUR THESIS

Choose a topic as soon as possible. As you progress through your core courses, you will be given the opportunity to develop ideas about what to focus on for a thesis. It is highly recommended that you take advantage of that opportunity and solicit the guidance of your professors along the way.

When selecting a project, here are a few things to consider:

- ❑ Find gaps in the literature. This doesn't mean reinventing the wheel, but is there an area of some existing research you've seen that you can shed light on? Different contexts for a certain theory? A critical engagement with an established theory that problematizes it and points toward better theorizing?
- ❑ Use the opportunity to further explore topics, approaches, or theories you enjoyed in your Organizational Leadership classes.
- ❑ Consider your career goals and use the thesis to help you get there. For many master's students, their thesis is effectively the writing sample for doctoral program applications.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND ASSURANCE

The Faculty of Leadership and Integrative Studies has a zero-tolerance policy toward academic dishonesty that is enforced within every course and educational activity offered or sanctioned by the school. Student theses will be run through standard anti-plagiarism software.

Any allegation of academic dishonesty will be referred to the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts Standards Committee for review and recommendation to the dean of the school. If any student is found to have engaged in academic dishonesty in any form – including but not limited to cheating, plagiarizing and fabricating – that student shall receive a grade of XE for the class and will be dismissed from the school. There will be no exceptions.

Protection for Human Subjects (IRB)

For theses that require research involving human subjects conducted under the auspices of Arizona State University are reviewed by the University Human Subjects Institutional

Review Board (IRB) in compliance with federal regulations. Documents containing any data collection from human subjects require that applications be submitted to the University Human Subjects IRB for approval before data collection or recruitment of subjects is initiated.

The IRB process requires completing online training modules, so be sure to plan accordingly.

For more information on IRB protocols, please visit <https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/protocol-submission>

GAINING PROGRAM APPROVAL FOR YOUR THESIS: THE PROPOSAL

A proposal is a document that serves as the basis and justification to conduct your thesis research and must be approved *prior* to beginning work on the thesis. While you will be working on elements of the proposal within your core classes, you will also be able to develop it in OGL 574 and OGL 575. Your proposal should be completed and approved by your chair before beginning OGL 599.

Components of the capstone prospectus include:

- ☐ Problem under investigation
- ☐ A review of related academic literature
- ☐ Theoretical basis for investigation
- ☐ Methods and protocols to gather data
- ☐ Approvals needed (IRB approval must be obtained *prior* to the start of OGL 599)
- ☐ Project schedule from start to finish, which leaves time for revisions and defense

OGL 599: THESIS

The OGL 599: Applied Project course adheres to the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) standards for a 3-credit hour course, which expects *an investment of 135 hours*. While this is indeed a full course that culminates your defense, you will have been working on your thesis on your own prior to this final course. In this class you can expect:

- ☐ Dedicated meetings (in person or virtual) with your committee
- ☐ Revise and finalize thesis
- ☐ Defense

Roles and Expectations

Your Role as a MSOGL Candidate

You are responsible for every aspect of your thesis. This includes making sure that you fulfill all requirements, adhere to deadlines, and seek assistance when you need it. Keeping yourself on track is vital to your thesis success.

Your MSOGL Committee

Your committee chair is the person whom you have worked with throughout your program as you have worked on your thesis. The chair will be your primary point for revisions and permission to schedule a full defense. Your other committee members will provide feedback and attend your defense, but almost all program issues should be addressed with your chair.

Planning Your Timeline

The purpose of a thesis is to demonstrate that that you can produce original research that contributes to the field of Organizational Leadership. The timeline should be included in your proposal and should cover the period from the point to the completion of your thesis. The dates in-between should be appropriately broken up to reflect significant and attainable milestones throughout the course of your project's duration. The end date should be the "deliverable" date.

Your committee will review your thesis during the course of OGL 599 and will:

1. Approve it as is, declaring it ready for the defense
2. Request minor revisions that need to be addressed prior to the defense
3. Request major revisions accompanied by a contract on what changes need to be made before the thesis will be approved and the defense scheduled. In this situation, the candidate will likely receive an "Incomplete" grade and be held up from graduating until the thesis is brought up to standard and the defense completed.

The Defense

The defense is the final step in the evaluation of your capstone project. The tradition of "defending" your thesis serves as a rite of passage from master's student to a graduate and professional. It serves as an opportunity to share your project, the process you took to complete it, lessons learned, impact it had (or will have), and future directions. Your defense will likely be via online conference.

The thesis must conform to ASU's thesis formatting [manual](#).

Course Grades and GPA

Faculty of Leadership and Integrative Studies students must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) overall and in courses included on their plans of study. Courses taken as an undergraduate at ASU and reserved for use in a graduate degree program are included in the GPA (i.e. a "4+1" program).

If a student's GPA falls below 3.0, the student will be notified in writing and placed on probation. If the student's GPA is not raised to at least a 3.0 by the end of the next semester, a recommendation will be made to Graduate Education to remove the student from the program.

To receive their degrees, students also are required to earn at least a B (3.0) in their culminating experience of a thesis or applied capstone.

Incomplete Grades

Students who are unable to successfully defend their thesis on time must purchase one credit hour in continuing enrollment to assemble their committee for a defense.

ARCHIVING YOUR PROJECT

All MSOGL Theses will be archived in a repository upon successful defense.