Designing a Thesis

UEP-293-04  Fall 2016  (.5 Credits)  Full semester

Instructor: Sheldon Krimsky
Tues. 4:30-5:45PM  UEP Seminar Room

Designing a Thesis

The course, directed at UEP master's candidates, will guide students through the stages of the thesis process including: selecting a topic; narrowing the focus; turning a topic into a problem; framing researchable questions; choosing a method (qualitative or quantitative) of inquiry; developing a systematic literature review; citation analysis; writing styles; using figures and tables; incorporating cases; embedding the thesis questions into a theoretical framework; developing the policy implications of your findings; preparing the prospectus.

Goals: Complete thesis prospectus, introduction and literature review by the end of the course.

Required Book


Sess. 1 Sept. 7  Introduction

Organization of the course; readings; assignments; deadlines.
The nature of the master’s thesis. UEP’s expectations. Thesis vs Capstone.


Ideas and sources for finding a topic; narrowing the topic; defining research questions; evaluating the time to take for answering the questions; relating the topic to your previous work; manageable in size; within your range of competence; does the thesis have to be original? What is originality? Does it have to produce primary data?


Umberto Eco, “Choosing the Topic, In: How to Write a Thesis Ch. 2, pp. 9-34.

Students bring to class a page with a suggested topic and some research questions. There will be a discussion of the various research questions and whether the questions fit the scope and criteria for a master’s thesis. How to gauge the literature view to the research questions.


Sess. 4. Sept. 28. **Developing a Methodology**

Defining the type of thesis; analytical; theoretical; case study; survey; investigating the literature; gathering data.

**Reading:** Bui, Ch. 7 “How to Write Chapter Three, Methods”, pp. 137-159

Sess. 5. Oct. 5. **Writing a Prospectus**

Elements of a UEP master’s degree prospectus. Introductory section; research questions; methodology; chapter breakdown; preliminary bibliography. Timeline.

Sess. 6. Oct. 12. **Literature Review**

Purpose of the literature review; how to structure a literature review; the use of databases; key word algorithms in Boolean form; choice of databases; peer-reviewed literature; books.

**Readings:**
Bui, Ch. 3 “Using the Literature to Research your Problem, “ pp.45-76; Ch. 6 “How to Write Chapter Two, Review of the Literature,“ pp. 120-159.


Legal and ethical principles involved in researching and writing a thesis; interviewing and surveying; human subject research; IRBs; citing sources; using primary literature; responsible conduct of research; avoiding plagiarism; avoid cherry-picking data to fit a pre-determined hypothesis.

**Readings:**
Bui, Ch. 4. “Conducting Ethical Research,“ pp.77-95.
Garson, 2002, Ch. 16 Research ethics, pp. 221-231. (B)

          A set of prospectuses will be distributed for discussion.

Readings: TBA

Sess. 9. Nov. 2. Use of Figures, Tables, Graphs, Charts
          The best uses of figures, graphs and charts. Summarizing data through tables.

Sess. 10. Nov. 9. Conceptual Frameworks, Models, Theories
          The value of theory or conceptual frameworks in interpreting or guiding your analysis; the use of flow charts for showing linkages in interactive spaces.; drawing insights in your conclusion from your literature review.

Sess. 11. Nov. 16. Data Gathering
          Use of pre-existing data sets; creative ways of generating data; focus groups; surveys; Twitter data; Government data sources.

          Reading:
          Garson, 2002, Ch. 18, Data gathering resources, pp. 251-265; Ch. 5, Reference search resources. (B)

Nov. 23 No Classes

Sess. 12. Nov. 30 Developing a Conclusion and Policy Implications
          The final chapter of your thesis summarizes your findings and should return to the initial questions you raised in the introduction.

Readings:
          Bui, Ch. 8, “How to Write Chapter Four, Results, pp. 160-190, Ch. 9. How to Write Chapter 5, Discussion, pp. 291-307.

          Garson, 2002, Ch. 19, Drawing inferences and making generalizations, pp. 267-277. (B)

Sess. 13 Dec. 7 Final Considerations in Preparing a Thesis
          Role of Advisor; 2nd reader; formatting; citations-author-date system; bibliography; endnotes; responding to comments. Citing from the web; access dates.
**Deliverables for credit.**

1. Topic outline and research questions: due: Sept 21  20 pts
2. Literature Review       due: Nov. 2    30 pts
3. Thesis Prospectus      due: Nov. 30   30 pts
4. Class Participation: attendance and discussion     20 pts
   100 pts

Students who have an accepted thesis prospectus (forms signed by both readers) by Dec. 15 can qualify for an A in the course.