

WestConn MFA in Professional Writing Thesis Guide

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I. Responsibilities

Primary Thesis Advisor

The role of the primary thesis advisor is to coach the student through the process of producing a “publishable-quality, book-length manuscript.” The primary thesis advisor should be mindful of the thesis deadlines, should coach the student through whatever revisions are deemed necessary to meet the quality and length requirements, and is required to sign off on the thesis proposal and the completed thesis manuscript when, in the Advisor’s opinion, the quality and length requirements have been met.

Second Thesis Advisor

The role of the second thesis advisor is to give the student an additional perspective on the thesis project, to offer advice on revisions to meet the quality and length requirements, and to sign off on the completed thesis proposal and thesis manuscript when, in the Advisor's opinion, the quality and length requirements have been met.

Student

The student, of course, is ultimately responsible for deciding what and how to revise. The student must be aware of all deadlines and is responsible for collecting signoffs from the Primary and Second Thesis Advisors and for making the proper submissions at all stages of the thesis process.

MFA Coordinator

It is the MFA Coordinator's responsibility to inform the student and advisors of the process and deadlines, to assist the student and Advisors where necessary, to serve on the MFA Committee, to present submitted theses to the MFA Committee, and to represent the MFA Committee to the student and Advisors.

MFA Committee

A committee of WestConn faculty who teach in the MFA program, including the Coordinator, will review each thesis project for appropriate quality and length.

II. Thesis Proposal Process

Thesis Proposal

No later than Sept. 15 in the fall semester or no later than February 15 in the spring semester, the MFA Coordinator must **receive** from the student a thesis proposal. The proposal will follow these requirements:

- Must include a completed Thesis Proposal Form with signatures from all Thesis Advisors on a single sheet (see Appendix: Forms or download from <http://www.wcsu.edu/writing/mfa/>)
- Must include a prospectus and bibliography (see **Prospectus and Bibliography** in Section III)

Completed proposals will be reviewed by the MFA Committee as quickly as possible. If the committee requires changes, the student and the advisors will be notified immediately.

If a proposal fails to include any of the above elements, it will be returned to the student without review, and the student will be ineligible for graduation at the end of the current semester.

III. Thesis Project

Quality and Length

The student will produce a “publishable-quality book-length manuscript.” In genres where the book may not be an appropriate measure (such as screenwriting, PR/Marketing, etc.), substitute “performance-quality and -length manuscript,” “substantial, production-quality project,” or the equivalent measure.

The thesis project will also include a prospectus, an abstract, and a bibliography, all to be approved by the Advisors and the MFA Committee.

Standard for Quality

The publishable quality of the MFA thesis will be evaluated by the thesis advisors and by a committee that includes editors who regularly determine publishable quality of work and will do so here on the basis of whether the work:

- Offers a recognizably new or fresh perception or understanding to its subject
- Demonstrates solid awareness of its genre
- Demonstrates notable stylistic facility

Standard for Length

The committee has the following expectations of thesis length (lengths below refer to pages of actual text). These are guidelines only, not strict requirements. Any shorter project should be approved by the MFA Coordinator in advance.

- *Novel*: 200 pages or more
- *Short fiction (novellas, short stories)*: 150 pages or more; (*flash fiction*): 100 pages or more
- *Poetry*: 60 pages or more
- *Screenwriting*: at least one full-length feature
- *Stage*: One full-length production script or up to three shorter works that combine for at least 120 minutes of stage time.
- *Nonfiction* (including investigative reporting, feature writing, etc.): 150 pages or more
- *Creative nonfiction*: 150 pages or more
- *Non-book project*: consult MFA Coordinator

Prospectus and Bibliography

The student will submit early in the final semester a thesis prospectus and MLA-style research bibliography for approval by the Thesis Advisors and the MFA Committee.

If the thesis project does not require extensive research, the student instead will provide a bibliography of secondary texts that have been useful to the student during thesis production.

The committee has the following expectations for prospectus length:

- *Nonfiction, Investigative Reporting, Feature Writing, other brands of journalism:* 1250-2500 words following conventions of nonfiction book proposals
- *Creative Nonfiction:* 1000-1250 words following conventions of agent solicitation and synopsis
- *Fiction:* 1000-1500 words following conventions of agent solicitation and synopsis
- *Poetry:* 1000-1500 words in an artist's statement
- *Screenplay:* 1000-1250 words of synopsis
- *Stage:* 1000-1500 words in a synopsis/artist's statement
- *PR/Marketing/Advertising/Technical Writing/Business Communications*
 - Book: 1250-2500 words following conventions of nonfiction book proposals
 - Project(s): 1000-1500 words describing the scope, goals, and focus of the project(s)
- Other genres: Consult the MFA Coordinator

Thesis Format

Length

See **Standard for Length** above for expected length of thesis.

Style

In the text, the student must follow the appropriate style for his/her genre (generally, MLA style for literary works, AP style for journalistic projects, PR/Marketing/Advertising, etc.). Follow MLA guidelines where there is no other genre-specific standard. **Note that we do not use the medium tag at the end of bibliographical entries in the MFA program.**

Layout

Students must use the Thesis Template available on the MFA website (<http://www.wcsu.edu/writing/mfa>). The template provides the proper order of sections and pagination elements. For layout, page design, tables and figures, etc. follow the guidelines in *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, Seventh Edition, by Kate Turabian. If there are any contradictions between Turabian and the template, the template takes precedence.

Paper

Each page of the abstract, prospectus, and thesis must be provided on 20# paper of at least 25% rag content.

Thesis Submission

No later than two weeks before the end of the semester (and advisably earlier), two complete copies of the thesis submission must be **received** by the MFA Coordinator in separate thesis binders (the black cardboard spring-spine variety, also known as manuscript binders, are available through the campus bookstore or can be purchased online via a link at the MFA web page).

Each copy of the thesis submission must include the following parts **in this order**:

1. The “Fulfillment of the requirements for a MASTER’S THESIS” form (see Appendix or download from <http://www.wcsu.edu/graduate/forms/thesis.pdf>) with the top section completed (faxed signatures are acceptable, but all signatures must be on the same sheet)
2. The other elements of the Thesis as indicated in the Thesis Template.

In addition to the two copies of the thesis as described above, the submission must include six additional copies of the abstract.

Thesis Review and Approval

Soon after receiving the complete thesis submission, the MFA Committee will review and either approve or immediately return the thesis to the student with an explanation of required changes.

If the committee approves the thesis, the student will be informed immediately and the thesis will be passed to the Office of the Dean of Arts & Sciences.

IV. Summary of the Process for Thesis Advisors

1. Coach the student on the completion of a high-quality thesis project. Ensure that the thesis project meets the guidelines for length and quality described in **Section II**.
2. Review the student's thesis prospectus and bibliography.
3. Sign off on the student's Thesis Proposal form so that it can be submitted to the MFA Coordinator with signatures from both Thesis Advisors no later than September (Fall)/February (Spring) 15. **Proposals received after this date will not be considered for end-of-semester graduation.**
4. Sign off on the student's Thesis Completion form early enough that the MFA Coordinator may **receive** no later than two weeks before the end of the semester (exact date TBD) the student's thesis submission. **Submissions received after this date will not be considered for end-of-semester graduation.**

V. Summary of the Process for Students

1. Focus on the integrity of your book/project.
2. Compose a prospectus and a bibliography under the guidance of your Thesis Advisors.
3. Collect signatures from your Thesis Advisors on the Thesis Proposal Form and submit your proposal to the MFA Coordinator. It must be **received** in the MFA office no later than September (Fall)/February (Spring) 15. **Proposals received after this date will not be considered for end-of-semester graduation.** *Note: the WestConn mail room is unreliable. You are strongly advised to use FedEx well in advance of the deadline.*
4. Complete your book/project under the guidance of your Thesis Advisors.
5. Collect signatures from your Thesis Advisors on the "Fulfillment of the requirements for a MASTER'S THESIS" form and submit your completed thesis project to the MFA Coordinator. It must be **received** in the MFA office no later than two weeks before the end of the semester (exact date TBD). **Proposals received after this date will not be considered for end-of-semester graduation.** *Note: the WestConn mail room is unreliable. You are strongly advised to use FedEx well in advance of the deadline.*

VI. Deadlines

Thesis Proposal

Fall: September 15

Spring: February 15

Thesis Submission

Two weeks before the end of the semester (exact date TBD by MFA Coordinator)

VII. Additional Time

In the event that a student is unable to complete a thesis project to the satisfaction of the Thesis Advisors and the MFA Committee within the allotted time, the student may take a maximum of two additional years to satisfactorily complete and file the necessary copies of the thesis submission. The student may be required to register for “Continuous Registration” hours through the Graduate Studies office.

Appendix: Forms

- A. See following pages.
- B. Terms
- C. Addendum: Spring 2015 Thesis Process

**MFA in Professional Writing
Thesis Proposal Form**

This form must be completed and submitted with the thesis proposal to the MFA Coordinator no later than Sept. 15 for fourth-semester students in the fall or no later than Feb. 15 for fourth-semester students in the spring.

Candidate Name _____

Preferred Email Address _____

Telephone # _____

Thesis Title _____

Thesis Genre _____

Signatures of the following thesis advisors and MFA Coordinator indicate their approval of the thesis proposal.

Primary Thesis Advisor _____

Name

Signature*

Date

Second Thesis Advisor

Name

Signature*

Date

Third Thesis Advisor

(where appropriate)

Name

Signature*

Date

MFA Coordinator

(on behalf of the MFA
Committee)

Name

Signature

Date

Appendix B

Important Thesis Terms

Abstract—a short, objective description of the book for the use of archivists and researchers so that they can tell at a glance how to classify the thesis and/or whether or not it is useful to them in their research. The abstract is not a part of the proposal, but it will be required as part of the final thesis submission.

Bibliography—a list of works consulted in the process of completing the thesis. The bibliography must be submitted along with the prospectus and final thesis submission, and adhere to MLA format (unless the thesis requires another format, such as with Journalism). The bibliography need not be annotated, but must show proof of a significant amount of reading and research. See Works Cited below, which lists works that are directly referenced, quoted, or paraphrased.

Introduction—has two different meanings in the thesis process. First, it refers to the first section of the thesis *proposal*: whatever comes before the synopsis (if included). It can be longer than a couple paragraphs, and, ideally, it should be something more than just a summary for creative genres, but for non-fiction theses can be simply a summary. For thesis projects in poetry, drama, and short fiction, the introduction should tell the thesis committee a bit more about the project—maybe its genesis, its inspirations and influences, its goals, etc. It should give the thesis committee a frame within which to read the thesis (as in an artist’s statement). Secondly, when the final thesis project is submitted, the thesis prospectus (or a revision of it, including the synopsis, if provided) becomes the “Introduction” to the *whole thesis project*.

Prospectus—term used to describe the thesis proposal, containing an Introduction, a Synopsis (where appropriate), and a bibliography. Upon submission of final thesis project, the prospectus will serve as the “introduction” to the thesis. The prospectus (or a revision of it) will appear in its entirety at the beginning of the final submission; the bibliography should be placed at the end of the final thesis submission rather than at the end of the introduction.

Summary—usually a few paragraphs that describe the work as a whole and appear in the prospectus. Typically, agents for fiction and nonfiction books expect to see summaries in the proposal, so strong summaries are expected in thesis proposals in those genres.

Synopsis—appears in the prospectus of projects that require scene by scene, chapter by chapter, story by story, and/or section by section descriptions. Students should consult **Prospectus and Bibliography** below to determine whether or not the synopsis is appropriate for their projects.

Works Cited—appears before the bibliography if the prospectus or final thesis project refers to other works.

Appendix C: Spring 2015 Thesis Process

In Spring 2015, the MFA program will be piloting a new system with the library to digitize the thesis submission, review, approval, and archiving system. This system will have advantages to the student, the program, and the university. The advantage to the student is that it will reduce your cost on paper and binders. The advantage to the program is that it will streamline the thesis review process. The advantage to the university is that it will streamline the thesis archiving process and reduce space required for archiving. However, the program may still require that the student provide a binder (type TBD) for archiving a hard copy in the MFA office. A decision is yet to be made on this point.

At some point in the spring, probably in February, the MFA Coordinator will provide all Thesis students and advisors with detailed instructions on using the digital system. ***Thesis students and advisors will need their WCSU computer account logins to use the system.*** So it will be to the advantage of all Thesis students and advisors to see that their accounts are active well in advance of the April 24 due date.

This semester, you will not need to submit any hard copy by the due date; submission of your thesis into the digital system only will satisfy the due date requirement. Once you have submitted the thesis digitally, the Thesis Committee will review it and get back to you with any change requirements. You will then be able to post your revised/edited thesis to the system. The Committee will review again, will approve online when appropriate, the MFA Coordinator will sign off online, the Dean will sign off online, and the Graduate Studies office will sign off online. Once the signoffs are completed and all other program requirements are met, your degree will be conferred.

You also will have the option, when you submit your thesis, to choose whether you want your thesis to be publicly available. Those of you producing theses in fiction, nonfiction, screen, and poetry should select NOT to have your thesis publicly available; public availability would threaten the publishability or producibility of your manuscript. If you are producing a PR portfolio, tech writing portfolio, or other project that you would not intend to publish or produce after graduation, then you are encouraged to opt for public availability of your thesis.