

Guidelines for Plan II Thesis Supervisors and Second Readers

The Plan II Thesis

The Plan II senior thesis is the capstone to the student's undergraduate experience in Plan II. It is typically a two-semester project that results in about 60 pages of original research in a topic approved by the Plan II Associate or Assistant Director. Topics are only approved if the student demonstrates adequate course work or other preparation in the area of interest. The student is free to select two professors from any department who they feel will best guide the research and writing on their topic. Supervisors and second readers may be any level of UT faculty, including adjuncts (provided they have the time needed to supervise the thesis to completion). Frequently, Plan II students propose interdisciplinary theses that bring together several areas of interest and represent topics that might not be possible in a departmental honors program. For these interdisciplinary topics, the student is encouraged to find a second reader whose field of expertise complements that of the supervisor.

During the first semester, the student performs their research, formulating their thesis question and creating a comprehensive bibliography and outline. This outline should be detailed enough to indicate that the student is ready to begin the writing process. It should provide a complete sense of the arguments the thesis will make and the evidence that will be used to support them.

During the second semester, the student writes the thesis and is expected submit a draft of the entire thesis at least one month prior to the final due date. Also in the second semester, all Plan II thesis students must present their work at the Thesis Symposium. Thesis supervisors are strongly encouraged to attend the symposium, both to support their students and to evaluate how well they are able to articulate their research.

Role of Thesis Supervisor

The primary responsibility of the supervisor is to play an active role in guiding the student towards appropriate sources, methods and approaches to the topic. This includes meeting with the student regularly during both semesters; advising him/her on appropriate research directions; and providing timely feedback on written work (bibliography, outlines, chapters, drafts), suggesting revisions that can be incorporated into the final version. The student is expected to submit drafts of their work to the supervisor by the deadlines set by Plan II. For most, however, it is helpful if the supervisor and student set a more detailed schedule of due dates throughout the course of the semester, rather than just the single deadline for a completed draft. It is important to remember that this is not an MA thesis and virtually none of these students have written something of this length or complexity before. While the research may come easily, turning it into a well-organized 60-page thesis is often more of a challenge and can require multiple drafts.

Supervisors are expected to sign the Progress Report form, assign grades, sign the title page of the completed thesis, and participate in the final oral defense (see following sections for additional details).

Role of the Second Reader

Though the second reader may play a substantially smaller role in guiding the thesis, the student is still expected to seek their input and keep them apprised of their research and writing status throughout the project. Monthly meetings are recommended, though these can take place more or less often at the discretion of the second reader. The student is expected to submit drafts of their work to the second reader by the deadlines set by Plan II. The second reader's responsibility is to offer comments and feedback for revisions that may be incorporated into the final version.

Second readers are expected to sign the Progress Report form, consult with the supervisor in the assignment of grades, sign the title page of the completed thesis, and participate in the final oral defense (see following sections for additional details). Under no circumstances is a second reader obligated to sign off on a thesis that they have not been given the opportunity to read and comment on prior to its final version.

Progress Reports

In both the first and second semester, the student will ask the supervisor and second reader to sign a Progress Report about one month prior to the final due date, indicating that the student has submitted a rough draft of their work (bibliography/outline in the first semester; complete draft in the second semester) and has been meeting with the supervisor and second reader on a regular basis.

Grades

At the end of the first semester, the supervisor (with input from the second reader) assigns a letter grade for the thesis course based on the completed research, bibliography and outline (or for creative theses, a rough draft of the work/treatise). The supervisor can submit this grade using the online grade reporting system. The full range of grades, from A to F, is available.

At the end of the second semester, the final grade is based on assessment of the completed thesis and must be agreed upon by both the supervisor and second reader. The signatures of the supervisor and second reader are required on the title page of the final, bound version of the thesis. The title page signatures and final grade assignment should take place during the oral defense (see below).

Oral defense

The culmination of the thesis project is a 30-60 minute oral defense with the student, supervisor, and second reader all in attendance. The time and place of the defense can be scheduled independently, but it must take place after both professors have received the final version of the thesis and before the due date (5 pm on the Wednesday following dead days). The oral defense is meant to give the student an opportunity to present their work and enter into a scholarly dialogue about their thesis. It often takes the form of a discussion of the ideas in the thesis, but, when appropriate, it might also incorporate material from the student's related course work. It is a chance for the student to explain his or her approach to the project and to consider the success of the result.

At the defense, both supervisor and second reader will sign the title page of the thesis, and also decide upon the student's final grade, which will be recorded on a separate grade submission form. The full range of grades, from A to F, is available. The student is responsible for turning in the signed thesis and grade submission form by the deadline. Late theses will not be accepted.

The supervisor and second reader may also decide at this time if the thesis merits "Special Honors," meaning that the student has earned a grade of "A" in both semesters of the thesis course and the final thesis is found to be exceptional within the context of undergraduate honors theses. Hard work does not necessarily merit Special Honors; both supervisor and second reader must agree that the student's research and writing represents truly outstanding work. Special Honors recognition, if merited, can be indicated on the grade submission form.

Student Responsibilities

The students' responsibilities include, but are not limited to, maintaining good communication with their supervisors and second readers (including providing each with the other's contact information); attending the thesis course meetings; submitting drafts to both the supervisor and second reader on or before the agreed upon deadlines, obtaining signatures on the progress report and title page, turning in required forms to the Plan II office on or before posted deadlines, and scheduling the final oral defense with both professors. Students are also responsible for the final binding of the thesis and obtaining signatures of both the supervisor and second reader on their thesis title page prior to the final turn-in deadline. Professors are not expected to give a passing grade to students who do not meet these expectations. Students who do not attend thesis meetings and meet deadlines may have their final grade in the course penalized.

Additional information about the thesis program, including the Plan II Thesis Manual, can be found online at:

<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/progs/plan2/advising/thesis/>

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