By its nature, directing graduate research is a demanding task that requires both faculty members and students to devote time to bringing the work to fruition. Traditionally, senior faculty members have greater experience and skills set to guide graduate research. However, those same senior faculty members may also be mentoring junior faculty members under equally demanding time constraints. Thus, given regular faculty commitments, it is critical to match graduate student assignment with faculty member mentors carefully. It may be a disservice to a student or the department, for any single faculty member to bear responsibility for directing an excessive number of graduate student project/thesis simultaneously.

Graduate programs are complex entities with student involvement serving multiple purposes. First and foremost must be the academic needs of the student, and faculty members must be ever conscientious of their ethical obligations in that regard. However, it is also recognized that student involvement represents a potential benefit to faculty members in advancing research agendas. Students are expected to be conscientious of the time invested by a faculty member in making thesis/project work possible.

The completion of a thesis or master’s research project by each student is a uniform expectation of the program. Departmental faculty members are expected to participate in this part of student training as part of the annual faculty effort allocations, unless the Department Chair grants a specific exemption.

The process for thesis research will be outlined in the following document: (1) Clinical Research Scholar thesis students and (2) self-selected thesis students. The process for Master’s Research Project students is outlined in the Master’s Research Project Process and Procedures document.

**Clinical Research Scholars**
Clinical Research Scholars are students completing a thesis through a College award of graduate assistantship monies. Accepted applicants to the occupational therapy program apply for the clinical research scholar award after being notified of admission, but prior to arrival for their first fall semester. Through the Clinical Research Scholar award selection process, each scholar is assigned a graduate faculty mentor and topic identified upon entry to the program. Clinical Research Scholars must complete the thesis process as outlined below. The exception is the identification of a Thesis Director since it is already determined, although there is a process for the Clinical Research Scholar to change Thesis Director if warranted.

The Clinical Research Scholar is receiving a financial award to complete a thesis. In working towards that goal, the student is responsible to work approximately 10 hours per week as a graduate assistant for the Thesis Director while receiving the award. He or she may also be asked to assist with Departmental functions (e.g., Departmental programs, open houses, conferences). If at any time, the scholar fails to complete these responsibilities adequately, he or she may be at risk for losing the scholarship. Failure to make sufficient progress on the thesis may also result in immediate loss of the financial award and/or result in requirement of the student to refund reward money to the university.

**Thesis Students**
All occupational therapy graduate students have the option to complete a thesis. However, there is a limit on how many thesis students the Department can support at one time given graduate assistant resources and areas of expertise. The Departmental faculty members are not required to accept a thesis student outside their area of expert knowledge. There is no guarantee of graduate assistant funds for thesis students outside the Clinical Research Scholar awards as described below, although individual faculty
members or the Department may have grant monies that can be used to pay graduate assistantships for assistance to work under a faculty member’s research agenda.

Below is an outline of the process for students completing a thesis. Those who are recipients of a Clinical Research Scholar Award may skip numbers (1b. 1c.) as they do not apply:

1) Fall Semester - First Year

a. All incoming first-year students interested in completing a thesis must enroll in the Fall section of OCCT 6600 Concepts and Practice of Research in Occupational Therapy (3 cr). The intended outcome of this course is an initial draft of the thesis proposal. Upon completion of the OCCT 6600 course and the continued intention of pursuing a thesis, students are required to take a statistics course in the spring semester of their first year.

b. In conjunction with the OCCT 6600 course, the student must identify and meet with possible faculty mentors to discuss their lines of research and possible thesis topics. Students are encouraged to speak with at least 3 faculty members.

c. Once the student identified a thesis topic in conjunction with a faculty member who agrees to serve as his or her thesis chair, the student must develop an agreement to commit to the Thesis Director and thesis student relationship. This faculty member will become both the Thesis Director and advisor for this student until the student graduates.

i. Thesis Director: In order to be eligible to serve as a Thesis Director, the faculty member must be an occupational therapy faculty member with a doctoral degree as well as have the designation as either Associate Graduate Faculty or Graduate Faculty through the Graduate School.

ii. Although the student has the responsibility of selecting the Thesis Director, the faculty member must agree and also has the right to not accept being Thesis Director. It will be the responsibility of the faculty member to inform the student if he or she determines that he or she cannot be the student’s thesis advisor. Faculty members are encouraged to suggest other faculty members and/or projects.

iii. The student reserves the option to change to another Thesis Director, if desired, and another faculty member agrees to work with the student. The student must follow the Change of Thesis Director process outlined in 2d. If this change occurs, the student’s new Thesis Director becomes the student’s advisor.

d. By December 1st of the first fall semester, the student should complete the Pre-Thesis or Dissertation Pre-Approval Form (http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/gradschool/ETD.cfm) identifying the working title of the project, the director of the thesis, and the committee, if appropriate at that time. This form must be signed by the Thesis Director and then submitted by the student to the Graduate Program Director. Once the Thesis Committee is identified, the Graduate Program Director will sign the form for the student to submit to the Graduate School. A copy will go into the student’s file.

i. Thesis Committee: The Thesis Committee must consist of at least three members: the Thesis Director and two other faculty members from the Department or College. A fourth member may be a faculty member from
another department, school or college at East Carolina University, from an institution other than East Carolina University, or an expert from the professional community. The Thesis Committee members serve as a team whose job is to advise the student throughout the thesis-writing process. It is the responsibility of the Thesis Director to guide the student in terms of choices for the Thesis Committee. The student and Thesis Director discuss the committee appointment and roles of the committee with the selected faculty members.

e. Students are encouraged to share a copy of their proposal from OCCT6600 with the Thesis Director.

2) **Spring Semester - First Year:**

a. In order to adequately complete the thesis process, an additional research course will be taken that is not required of master’s project students.

   i. Those students completing quantitative research will take BIOS 7021 *Biostatistics for Health Professionals I* (3 cr).

   ii. Those students completing qualitative research will take OCCT/HLTH 7100 *Qualitative Research: Analysis and Interpretation* (3 cr)

b. The thesis student will work with the Thesis Director to continue developing the proposal in preparation for defense of the thesis proposal. The thesis proposal should contain: 1) a statement of the purpose, including the significance of the question, 2) a full literature review, as appropriate for the study, 3) a plan of research to study the question (methods section), and 4) an exhaustive list of references pertaining to the topic. The Thesis Director should delineate clear guidelines and criteria for the proposal to the student and other committee members.

c. **Authorship and Data Agreement** is completed and signed by thesis student, Thesis Director, and Graduate Program Director by the conclusion of the first year spring semester. Copies of this agreement will be kept in the student’s file

d. **If a change in thesis director or a change to a master’s research project are desired, see “Exceptions” at the end of this document.**

e. Toward the end of this semester you will be required to attend the Occupational Therapy Department Research Symposium where the second year students will be presenting their research. You will be informed of the date, times, and location of this event.

3) **Summer Session after First Year**

a. Typically, the outcome of this semester to finalize thesis proposal and prepare for the Thesis Proposal Defense. For some students, this occurs in the first year spring semester or second year fall semester.

b. The Thesis Proposal Defense is the student’s presentation of the research idea, methods, and discussion of research outcomes before the Thesis Director, Thesis committee, and possible other audience members. The outcome is a approval of moving forward with the research study.
c. **Process of the Thesis Proposal Defense.**

i. Students should submit a written draft of the thesis proposal to the Thesis Director for feedback and in preparation for the defense. After the Thesis Director concurs with the proposal readiness, each member of the Thesis Committee receives a copy at least 10 working days for review of the proposal.

ii. The student is responsible for arranging a two-hour block of time in which all members of the thesis committee can attend. The student reserves a location for the thesis proposal defense through the departmental office assistants and informs the members of the time and location. Any conflicts of time should be discussed with the Thesis Director for guidance.

iii. Typically, the student prepares a brief powerpoint presentation emphasizing the research question, methods and analysis.

iv. Thesis Committee members must be prepared to discuss all components and question the student about all aspects of the proposal.

v. The Thesis Director or committee members may recommend changes in any component of the study proposal. All changes should be discussed and agreed upon by all members.

vi. The final outcome of the Thesis Proposal Defense is: 1) accepted with minor changes to be done and approved by the Thesis Director, 2) accepted with significant changes, or 3) not approved. The student is asked to leave the meeting for the discussion by all members of the committee. In addition to the outcome, the members decide who (i.e., Chair or all members) needs to review if changes are requested or a second defense is necessary.

vii. In accepting the proposal, the Thesis Committee is agreeing the thesis topic is relevant, the method to study the problem is appropriate, ethical considerations have been documented; all needed approvals are likely to be obtained, the study is manageable and can be completed, and the student has access to needed resources.

viii. Upon approval of the defense, the student may start the IRB process.

4) **Fall Semester - Second Year**

a. Student enrolls in *OCCT 6650 Conducting Research in Occupational Therapy (3cr)*. Specifics of the course expectations are outlined in the coordinating syllabus, issued by the Thesis Director to the student. Specific expectations relevant to that particular student during this semester of the course will be identified in a meeting between Thesis Director and thesis student early in the fall semester or after the thesis defense, which ever comes first.

b. **Thesis Proposal Defense** occurs if it did not take place during the summer.

c. One of the outcomes of this semester is approval of the **Institutional Review Board** for the thesis proposal. The student is responsible for completing the appropriate applications ([http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/rgs/irb/ePirate.cfm](http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/rgs/irb/ePirate.cfm)) through ePirate.

d. As thesis director, the director has an oversight role in the IRB process and must review the IRB application.

e. Upon approval of the IRB and Thesis Director, the student may begin collecting data.
f. Student should plan to attend an Electronic Thesis and Dissertation workshop sponsored by the Graduate School (http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/gradschool/ETD-WorkshopsFallSpring.cfm).

5) **Spring Semester - Second Year**

   a. Thesis student will enroll in *OCCT 7000 Thesis (3cr)*. Course syllabus will be issued to student by Thesis Director during first week or two of class outlining expectations for this course, specific to the student and his/her research. Typically, data collection is concluded with analysis being the significant outcome.

   b. Ideally, the student completes all thesis analysis during this semester.

   c. The thesis student is encouraged to use the Thesis Director and committee members as appropriate resources.

   d. The thesis student will present a formal presentation of the thesis study at the ECU Occupational Therapy Research Symposium (typically held in late April or early May). This presentation serves as the capstone project for the student.

6) **Final two semesters**

   a. The thesis student repeats OCCT 7000 Thesis as needed (maximum of two times). The student needs to continually enroll in classes while working on a thesis. During the summer semesters, OCCT 7000 can be taken for credit. During the semester of the defense, it should be 3 credits. The Thesis Director is responsible for helping the thesis student determine correct enrollment.

   b. Student should prepare the final thesis draft, conferring with the Thesis Director for revisions and structure of writing. The thesis student is directed to the Graduate School website for specific format questions http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/gradschool/ETD.cfm. (See “Preparation and Submission of Digital Manuscript”).

   c. Revisions of the thesis chapters are typically significant. It is usual for students to revise individual sections or chapters of the thesis three to four times with the thesis director before being ready for the formal thesis defense.

   d. **Process of Formal Thesis Defense.**

      i. The purpose of the defense is for the student to demonstrate a complete understanding of his or her study.

      ii. After approval by the Thesis Director, the student offers electronic and/or a paper copy of the thesis to each committee member for review at least 15 working days prior to the formal thesis defense.

      iii. The student is responsible for arranging a two-hour block of time in which all members of the thesis committee can attend. The student reserves a location for the thesis defense through the departmental office assistants and informs the members of the time and location. Any conflicts of time should be discussed with the Thesis Director for guidance.
iv. The student is responsible for preparing a one page announcement for the thesis defense to be submitted for distribution to the College of Allied Health Sciences through announce and on the lobby bulletin board. This announcement is to be submitted two weeks prior to the defense and must include the title of the defense, the student’s name, the Thesis Director’s name, the time/date/and location of the defense. Additional committee members’ names may also be included.

v. For the defense, the student presents an overview of the study using appropriate media for about 30 minutes and should be prepared for questions by the committee, thesis chair, and audience on any aspect of the research question and study.

1. Questions from the Thesis Committee may include, but not limited to: 1) the relationship of the study to literature, 2) justification of approaches and techniques chosen for the study, 3) discussion of issues of reliability, validity, and/or trustworthiness, 4) explanation of data analysis including statistics or qualitative measures, 5) applicability of study finding to occupational therapy practice, 6) discussion of limitations, 6) discussion of the most significant results and implications, and 7) recommendations for further study.

vi. The student should be prepared for verbal feedback and/or marked copies of the thesis from each Committee member. Members of the audience may ask questions, but their comments do not warrant being addressed unless confirmed by a committee member.

vii. After questions and discussion, the Thesis Committee evaluates the thesis and thesis defense in a closed meeting of only thesis committee members. The outcomes include 1) approval of thesis and defense, 2) approval with minor revisions, 3) approval with major revisions, or 4) not approved. The committee decides who should review the revisions (i.e., only the thesis director or other committee members) and if there needs to be a second formal thesis proposal following the same process.

viii. At the conclusion of the committee’s deliberation, the student is informed of the decision privately. It is the Thesis Director’s responsibility to ensure the student understands all aspects of the feedback, the recommendation ramifications, and what the student needs to do next.

e. Once all corrections are made to the approval of the Thesis Director, the student must obtain signatures of all committee members on the signature page of the thesis and submit the original page by mail to the Graduate School by the thesis submission deadline.

f. Submission of thesis to Graduate School.

i. All corrections to the final thesis must be made and approved by the Thesis Director with consultation with the Thesis Committee prior to uploading it for submission for review to the Graduate School.

ii. The thesis should be submitted online by the date identified by the Graduate School during the student’s final semester. This is at least ten days prior to the last day of classes of the student's final semester. Date indicated on the web (http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/gradschool/ETD.cfm).

iii. The student is required to complete and submit the ECU Non-Exclusive Distribution Agreement (http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/gradschool/ETD.cfm) to the Graduate School with the Thesis student and Thesis Director’s signature.
Scholarly Presentation Expectations:

Thesis students are encouraged and expected to submit their work for presentation at state and/or national conferences and the Graduate Creative Research Week if applicable. If a student desires to submit his/her research work for presentation at the national AOTA conference to present while still a student, thus being able to utilize funds from supporting ECU organizations as appropriate (i.e. SOTA, GPSS, and/or Pi Theta Epsilon), the student must submit proposal during first summer session (typically before June 15th deadline) after the first year thus acceptance would result in presentation at conference spring semester of the second year.

Exceptions:

1) **Change of Thesis Director:** It is recommended that the student finalize the thesis proposal and Thesis Director prior to the end of the first year spring semester. Students must acknowledge a change in Thesis Director or proposal may delay the completion of the thesis, and therefore, graduation.

   a. A change in the thesis director is discouraged, although there may be times when it is necessary such as: 1) the original thesis idea is not possible, 2) the thesis director becomes unavailable due to outside circumstances, or 3) there is a conflict between student and faculty member. The student should discuss their intention with the Graduate Program Director first in order to understand the process and all possible ramifications.

   b. If the student intends to move forward after this initial meeting, the student submits a written request to the Graduate Program Director, with a copy to the Department Chair, previous thesis director and proposed thesis director.

   c. The Departmental Chair, previous and proposed thesis chairs have 15 days to respond to the Graduate Program Director in writing about the change. If all agree, the change will be confirmed without further action. If any disagree, the Graduate Program Director will organize a meeting to resolve any issues with faculty members. Only under extenuating circumstances if agreement is not made, assignment will by the Departmental Chair.

   d. Upon agreement, a new Pre-Thesis or Dissertation Pre-Approval Form (http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/gradschool/ETD.cfm) is completed, submitted to the Graduate Program Director and submitted to the Graduate School. A copy will be made for the student’s file.

2) **Change from Thesis to a Master’s Project**

   a. **Clinical Research Scholar:** Changing from a thesis to a research project is only approved under extraordinary circumstances. If a situation emerges in which a student wants to consider this change in status, the student must discuss it first with the Thesis Director to determine if any other action is possible. The student and Thesis Director should be in agreement for the student to submit a formal written petition to the Graduate Program Director and Department Chair for consideration.

   b. **Thesis student:** Thesis students who are not receiving a research stipend may request a change from a thesis to master’s project at any point during the research process. It is critical that the student understand the ramifications of such a request and discuss it
thoroughly with the Thesis Director and/or the Graduate Program Director. The Graduate Program Director needs the final request in writing.

i. Any credits received from OCCT 7000 will NOT count toward the degree, which may result in additional course credits being required.

ii. The student is responsible for ensuring he or she has the appropriate credits for graduation through the registration process.

iii. A statement will appear on the student’s transcript noting transfer from a thesis to non-thesis track with the effective month, day and year.

iv. Completed Thesis - Non Thesis Change Form (See Appendix) must be completed and signed by Graduate Program Director, Thesis Director, and student and submitted to the Graduate School.
Appendix

The Graduate School
East Carolina University
THESIS - NON THESIS CHANGE FORM

TO: The Graduate School
FROM: __________________________________________________________

Department/School/College

SUBJECT: ____________________________________

Student’s Name: ________________________________________________

BANNER ID: ____________________________________________________

A change from the thesis to the non-thesis option is approved for the above named student. The student is aware of the academic consequences of making this change.

_______________________________________________________________
Signature: Graduate Program Director
Date

_______________________________________________________________
Signature: Thesis Director
Date

I understand that all previously earned credits and grades for 7000/7001 thesis courses will remain on my record but will not count toward the degree. I may be required to enroll in additional course credits to meet the requirements for the non-thesis degree. Any grades of “Q” assigned under the former grading system will be changed to “S” or “U” as appropriate by the professor of record through submission of a grade change form to the Registrar’s Office. If enrolled in a thesis course for the current term, I may drop the course prior to the last day to drop a graduate course according to the published academic calendar. A statement will appear on my transcript noting the transfer from the thesis to non-thesis track with the effective month, day and year.

_______________________________________________________________
Signature: Student
Date

For Graduate School / Registrar Use

TO: Graduate Registrar
RE: Transcript comment

Please add the following comment to the above named student’s transcript:

“Transferred from thesis to non-thesis option effective _____________
Month  Day  Year”

_______________________________________________________________
Signature: Dean of the Graduate School or Designee
Date

C: Dept/school Registrar