

**East Carolina University  
Department of Occupational Therapy**

**Overview of the Thesis Process**

**Thesis Director:**

The student has the responsibility of selecting the thesis director. As the student is determining whether to complete a thesis or master's project, he or she should be discussing topics and possibilities with faculty members who potentially could be thesis directors. It should be noted that only doctoral level faculty members are able to fulfill the role of thesis directors. The faculty member must agree to be the thesis director and also has the right to withdraw from this role. 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. It is recommended that the faculty member suggest other faculty and/or projects. Similarly, the student is free to change to another thesis director if desired and another faculty member agrees to work with the student. The faculty member must approach the Chair of the Department for appointment to the position of thesis director. The student's Thesis Director becomes the student's advisor at this point.

**Thesis Committee:**

The thesis committee is composed of a faculty member from the student's department who serves as the thesis director, two other faculty members from the school or department who serve as members/readers, and one other member of the committee. This member may be a faculty member from another department or school at East Carolina University, from an institution other than East Carolina University, or an expert from the professional community. These four 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. With the Departmental Chair approval, the

student and thesis director discuss the committee appointment and roles of the committee with the selected faculty members. The student should complete the *Request for Thesis Committee* form with appropriate signatures and deliver copies to the Chair of the Department, Thesis Director, Thesis committee members, student file, and student's advisor.

**Process for Completing a Thesis:** (See Flow Chart for Thesis Sequence)

**Step 1-4:** Selection of thesis topic. The student typically determines his thesis topic in the spring semester prior to completing OCCT 6600 Concepts and Practice of Research in Occupational Therapy. The outcome of OCCT 6600 should be an initial proposal. However, there may be changes to the topic as determined by the student and thesis director after the course is completed.

**Step 5:** Thesis Director. The student establishes a thesis director prior to, during or immediately after OCCT 6600.

**Step 6:** Thesis committee. Thesis committee is determined and *Request for Thesis Committee* form completed and file with the appropriate individuals listed on the form.

**Step 7:** Thesis proposal. The student prepares the thesis proposal that will be defended prior to implementing the study. 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.

**Step 8:** Analysis course. The student must take either a statistics or qualitative analysis course in preparation for the thesis. Typically this course is done the fall semester after OCCT 6600. Based on the advise of the thesis director and the student's individual plan for completion, the student may begin to work on the thesis proposal without enrolling in OCCT 7000 or may enroll concurrently in OCCT 7000 with the analysis course.

**Step 9:** Thesis enrollment. The student enrolls in OCCT 7000 thesis credit under the section of the Thesis Director. Outcome of this first course is the proposal defense, Institutional Review Board (IRB) application adhering to the procedures outlined in the *University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB)*, and authorship order for any subsequent professional publication or presentation. The Thesis Director submits a grade of completion if these goals have been met as well as satisfactory progression on the thesis.

**Step 10:** Thesis proposal preparation. Once the student has completed the thesis proposal, he or she should seek feedback from the Thesis Director as to the readiness for the defense. If the Thesis Directors concurs with the proposal readiness, each member of the thesis committee should get a copy. Members should get at least 10 working days for review of the proposal. The student is responsible for arranging a convenient time for all members and place for the thesis proposal defense.

**Step 11:** Thesis Proposal Defense. Student presents his/her thesis proposal, as structured by the Thesis Director. Typically, this would include a brief presentation of the literature, description of the methods, and explanation of his or her timeline. Members will discuss all components of the proposal, questioning the student about all aspects of the proposal. The Thesis Director or Members may recommend changes in the study

proposal. If changes in the written proposal are needed, the Thesis Director records the requested changes and provides the student a written summary using the *Approval of Thesis Proposal* form.

The proposal will be 1) accepted with minor changes to be done and approved by the Thesis Director, 2) accepted with significant changes, or 3) not approved. In the last two cases, the thesis committee can decide to hold a second Thesis Proposal Defense meeting, ask to review particular portions of the proposal, or choose to have the Thesis director review and approve the changes on behalf of the committee. The student may be asked to leave the room while the Thesis Committee discusses the evaluation of the proposal. The Thesis Director completes all forms regarding the evaluation and records the changes requested by the Thesis Committee. The student then returns to receive the written and verbal evaluation.

**Step 12:** Final proposal accepted. The Thesis Director holds the student accountable for the changes requested. The proposal is considered complete when all recommended corrections have been made, it is accepted by the Thesis Committee, and the members and student have signed the *Approval of Thesis Proposal* form.

In accepting the proposal, the Thesis Committee is agreeing that 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 that the students have access to needed resources.

**Step 13:** Institutional Review Board application. Once the prospectus is accepted, then IRB approval can be sought and secured. The Thesis Director and the student are responsible for reviewing and completing the appropriate applications. A student has the

option of seeking IRB approval ten working days prior to the Proposal Defense if all members of the Thesis Committee agree that the IRB can go forward prior to the Proposal Defense Meeting. The IRB application needs the signature of the Chair of the Department. The Chair must be giving at least three working days to review the application.

**Step 14:** Approval of human subjects. Upon approval of the IRB and notification of students by the Thesis Director, the student may begin data collection.

**Step 15:** Enrollment in second three credit course of OCCT 7000. The student is expected to complete 1) data collection, 2) data analysis and interpretation, and 3) copy-ready thesis suitable for evaluation by the Thesis Committee, based on the guidelines of the Graduate School's *Manual of Basic Requirements for Theses and Dissertations*, and 4) final authorship order for any subsequent professional presentation or publication emanating from the study.

**Step 16:** Completion of the thesis research. The student completes their independent research study using their Thesis Director and committee members, as appropriate, for resources.

**Step 17:** Draft of complete thesis. Upon completion of the thesis draft, the student confers with the Thesis Director for revisions and structure of the writing.

**Step 18:** Formal Thesis Defense. With the Thesis Director's approval, the student gives copies of the thesis and schedules the formal thesis defense with the thesis committee. Members must get at least 15 working days for review of the thesis. The student is responsible for arranging a convenient time for all members and place for the thesis proposal defense with a timeframe of at least 2 hours.

The purpose of the defense is for the student to demonstrate a complete understanding of his or her study. The student presents an overview of the study using appropriate media for about 30 minutes. Questions from the Thesis Committee 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. During the defense, the student will receive verbal feedback regarding the thesis and the marked copies of the thesis from each Committee member. The student is asked to leave the room while the Thesis Committee evaluates the thesis and thesis defense. At the conclusion of the committee's deliberation, the student is called in to receive verbal feedback from the committee.

**Step 19:** Outcome of Thesis Defense. The student will be notified in writing about the outcome of the defense within three working days. The outcomes include 1) approval of thesis and defense, 2) approval with minor revisions to be monitored by the Thesis Director, or 3) approval with major revisions. If the thesis is approved with major revisions, a second and final thesis defense is scheduled. The outcome of this meeting will be 1) approval of thesis and defense, 2) approval with minor revisions to be monitored by the Thesis Director, or 3) approval denied.

**Step 20:** Grade for OCCT 7000. Once approved, the Thesis Director submits a grade of pass to the Registrar. If the approval is denied after the second formal defense, the student will receive a failure (F) for the course. If the student is not ready for a formal

defense of the thesis at the end of enrollment in OCCT 7000, he or she must enroll again. However, a maximum of 6 credits from OCCT 7000 are counted toward the degree.

**Step 21:** Submission of Thesis to the Graduate School. All corrections to the final thesis must be made and approved by the Thesis Director with consultation with the Thesis Committee prior to copying for submission for review to the Graduate College. The original copy of the thesis or dissertation, prepared and printed on the required paper with the required format, properly signed by the director of the thesis or dissertation committee and the dean of the school or chair of the major department, must be submitted to the dean of the Graduate School **at least ten days** prior to the last day of classes of the student's final semester. The thesis or dissertation must be left in the Graduate School for five full days for complete review.

**Step 22:** Copies of Thesis. Three copies (including the original) of the thesis must be prepared and submitted to Joyner Library after approval by the Graduate School. Additional copies for the thesis director and/or student may be bound if the student chooses.

**Step 23:** With successful completion of the thesis courses, the student graduates.