

THESIS INSTRUCTIONS

When you have completed your coursework—MLA 6000 (Research and Writing), MLA 6010 (Themes in Culture and Society I), and MLA 6020 (Themes in Culture and Society II)—core courses which you can take in any order or at the same time—as well as a minimum of six graduate electives (with at least one elective in at least two different areas—such as 5 ENGL and 1 HIST), you should begin your thesis preparation. However, you cannot write your thesis if your GPA is under 3.0 because you need a 3.0 minimum GPA in order to graduate. I don't want you writing an entire thesis and still not graduating because your GPA is under 3.0.

You begin by thinking of a thesis topic, one that interests you and that will continue to intrigue you for the months during which you work on your project. You then go see and talk to the faculty member you wish to direct your thesis.

You may include work and papers from previous classes, such as MLA 6000, in your thesis. For some students, the thesis topic derives from a paper they wrote in a graduate course or a theme from a graduate course. However, some students enjoy trying something new for their thesis and exploring a topic that has always intrigued them greatly but never was addressed in a class, such as an autobiography or a popular culture or creative writing topic. In the past, several students with an English concentration have employed the skills they learned to write a thesis that combines English with History, Visual Art with History, Education with Theatre, or other fields; these students have taken to heart the interdisciplinary nature and intellectual curiosity that this flexible degree program affords. You have five years to complete all of the requirements for your MLA degree, but extensions, which are obtainable but not guaranteed, can give you a sixth and even a seventh year—but no more than seven. Even if you can get an extension, that doesn't mean you should use all or some of it.

If you don't complete the thesis (MLA 6992) in the semester in which you register for it, you get an incomplete (IP); **you never register for it again, only once.** If you need two hours of credit, you can register for MLA 6952, Thesis Prospectus, which gives you credit and a grade for writing your thesis; this course is optional and is needed only to boost your GPA (you cannot graduate unless your GPA is at least 3.0) or for financial aid purposes (to make you a half-time student). Please don't drag out the process of writing your thesis; dragging it out leads to anxiety. And you want to complete your thesis so that you will increase your opportunity on the job market or get a raise at work, which are two benefits of earning a graduate degree. One frequent and major reason for the delay in completing the thesis is that students

begin with a very broad topic, which leads to confusion. It is important to narrow the focus of your topic. You should not write about women in the Middle Ages, but rather the importance of the female characters as seducers in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Scholars have written 500 page books on the former topic Do some work on your thesis every day.

After meeting with your thesis director and choosing your topic, you and the director choose a second reader together. You must have two readers. You must complete a thesis prospectus: the prospectus is an introduction to, or overview of, your thesis—and MLA 6992 (thesis). Write your prospectus so that it can later be included as part of your thesis. Sample prospectuses are available on the website, with the names removed and with the students' permission. Please work hard on your thesis. If you feel frustrated or are stuck, please talk to your director or me. Feel free to come to thesis defenses to see the light at the end of the tunnel and keep in close touch with others who are writing their theses. Write at least a paragraph every day, and don't let your head hit the pillow at night until you have done something on your thesis that day. Remember that you no longer have professors giving you deadlines and are no longer in a classroom community, so you have to be responsible, dedicated, and self-motivated. Keep in frequent contact with your thesis committee. Talk to, and meet with, other students who are writing their thesis. Be part of or create a thesis writing community, such as a thesis support group. The MLA program has a thesis support group on Facebook. You can create your own thesis support group. Unfortunately, there are many fine MLA students with very high GPAs who don't complete their thesis and never graduate. It is a shame when students complete their course work and perform very well in the program but then let their hard work, time, and money go to waste by not completing their thesis or earning their graduate degree. Don't let this happen to you!

Don't consider the written thesis as a large project but rather as a set of short, manageable chapters, a set of building blocks. Most students have never written a large paper (over fifty pages) and thus find the task psychologically intimidating. But when you complete your degree, you will have a great feeling of satisfaction and will be more marketable on the job market or possibly can get a raise at work.

CHOOSING A THESIS DIRECTOR:

You need to select a thesis director and a second reader, faculty members who will guide you during the thesis process. The thesis is not a class that meets but rather a process in which students work independently, with the guidance of their thesis committee members. Students choose their own topic and select their own director.

It is important that students have the right and the opportunity to choose the topic and the people they want to work with during this process. Selecting the right faculty member to direct a thesis is important because a good working relationship with a director is essential to the completion of the project. It is recommended that you choose a director who has expertise in, or at least competent knowledge of, the field and who is someone who has taught you in a college course. Choose someone you feel comfortable with and someone who will regularly remind you to keep working on your thesis. Choose someone who tends to return work quickly to students. It would be wise to choose someone who enjoys and is impressed by your work, who wants to work with you, who is interested in your topic, and who is willing to keep in touch with you frequently and hold you to deadlines. Feel free to consult other graduate students about their thesis experiences with directors. After you meet with your thesis director and discuss your topic, tell the director you want to discuss a choice for a second reader. The student and the thesis director then work together to select the second reader.

THESIS PROSPECTUS

Next begin work on your thesis prospectus, which is an overview or introduction to your thesis. It should be approximately 6-10 pages (including a working bibliography—a list of sources that you intend to use). Please look at the MLA website for samples. Please note that for performance theses, such as art or theatre, the prospectus is up to the discretion of the thesis director. If you compose your prospectus to serve as your introduction, you will have already written the first 6-10 pages of their thesis. You may use any style of documentation (MLA, APA, Turabian--Chicago) as long as your thesis committee approves. After the thesis committee (director and second reader) approve the prospectus, send me an electronic copy as an attachment. I will then forward the prospectus to the MLA committee, which consists of one faculty member in every Liberal Arts department. I give the committee ten business days to approve or reject the prospectuses and to provide comments if they wish. Once the thesis prospectus is approved, you and the committee will be notified. Please keep working on your thesis while you await a decision; don't stop to wait for a response because that would be a waste of time.

THESIS

There is no page length requirement for the thesis. A definitive guideline or requirement is impossible because the MLA program consists of several markedly different disciplines, with students writing theses or doing creative theses, such as sculptures or paintings or even theatre performances. Here is a link to a style guide:

http://www.grad.auburn.edu/etd_guide.html. Please double space and print on only one side of the paper. All pages must have 1 inch margins on 3 sides but a 1 1/2 inch left margin. The Associate Provost would like to see a Table of Contents page in the thesis, but an Acknowledgments and Dedication page are optional. If the two-member thesis committee and the Associate Provost support the thesis and sign the signature page, then the thesis is approved and the student graduates. As for traditional, written theses, I'm not sure if the Associate Provost would approve any thesis under 50 pages, but if he does and your committee finds it acceptable, that will be sufficient. In the past, most theses, have been between 50-100 pages, double spaced with 1 ½ inch left margins and including the bibliography. But again, the MLA thesis does not have a page limit; it's up to the committee and the Associate Provost. The signature pages must first be signed by your two committee members, indicating that they approve your thesis. If your committee hasn't signed the signature pages, that suggests that they haven't yet approved your thesis, so the Associate Provost won't read it. There are 3 lines for signatures—for your two committee members (thesis director and second reader) and the Associate Provost. You are welcome to have a third reader; if you do, include a line for that person's signature. The Associate Provost needs a copy of the thesis (on regular paper) with the signature page(s) a month before the end of the semester in which you plan to graduate. If you do not wish to purchase any copies of your thesis (\$15 each) for yourself or the AUM Library (a copy for the stacks), you never need to purchase thesis paper, so the signature page should be on regular paper. If you want to purchase copies, the signature pages you give the Associate Provost should be printed on the expensive, thesis-quality paper and given to him for his signature—1 signature page for every copy you will purchase. Give the Associate Provost the signature pages on the thesis paper when you submit your thesis copy to him so that you don't have to find him later to get the signatures. Thesis-quality paper, 100% cotton, at least 20 lbs. but it usually comes in 24 lbs., 8 ½ X11, white paper—is available at [amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com/Southworth-Cotton-Business-Pounds-14C/dp/B000093IP3/ref=sr_1_5?s=office-products&ie=UTF8&qid=1452837542&sr=1-5&keywords=thesis+paper) (http://www.amazon.com/Southworth-Cotton-Business-Pounds-14C/dp/B000093IP3/ref=sr_1_5?s=office-products&ie=UTF8&qid=1452837542&sr=1-5&keywords=thesis+paper). It is thesis paper, not résumé paper. If you do a creative show, rather than a written thesis, the AUM Library requires digital photos of your work instead.

The Associate Provost reads the thesis carefully, so please proofread carefully. If there are many problems and he doesn't sign the signature pages, you won't graduate. You can make any changes he requests after he returns the thesis to you. You can also make minor revisions to your thesis after you submit the thesis to him,

such as after your defense or as you continue to rethink things while he is holding your thesis. Because you might make changes to your thesis after you submit it to him, you obviously shouldn't submit your copy to him on the expensive, thesis-quality paper, but you still need to give him a clean copy in good shape. Again, the only pages that you give the Associate Provost on the thesis-quality paper should be the copies of the signature page (if you purchase bound copies) because these signature pages will be signed and bound with your thesis and won't be revised. You can defend while you are waiting for him to approve your thesis or even before you submit it to him, provided that your thesis committee is willing to let you defend. At the end of the semester or definitely by the beginning of finals week, you need to retrieve your thesis from the Associate Provost—the sooner the better because you need time to make changes and print out the copies of your thesis on the thesis-quality paper (if you buy copies). If you don't buy copies, you simply send me and the AUM Library your thesis (including the signature page) as an attachment. I also need time to enter your final grade and have it processed, particularly if you have an IP (In Progress) grade on your thesis.

THESIS DEFENSE You provide a twenty minute overview of your thesis in which you present your work, tell how you became interested in the topic, discuss major themes and points, tell what you learned, and then answer questions. You can invite anyone you want. You can bring notes, an outline, and your entire thesis. Please tell me in advance if you need access to technology; most students simply discuss their thesis without using any technology. However, please don't simply read a document for twenty minutes; this is not a conference paper. Please contact me and your committee for a defense date. The thesis defense should take place at least a week before finals, but several weeks before that would be preferable. You also need to send me a title, a short synopsis of your thesis, and a short bio (about 3 sentences each for the synopsis and bio) a week before your defense so that I can announce it.

FINAL THESIS PAPERWORK AND LOGISTICS

I will give you an exit questionnaire. Please fill it out soon and send it to Tara Woods at twoods11@aum.edu or give it to her personally in Liberal Arts 336. You can write your name on it or fill it out anonymously. It is a few questions about your opinion of the MLA program.

Please remember that:

1) you have to be registered for something in the semester in which you graduate. If you want to graduate in the Fall semester, you must be registered for something in

the Fall semester. If you are not registered for MLA 6992 (Thesis) because you registered for it previously and have an IP (In Progress), then you must register for REGL (Registration Only) 1110 for 0 hours, which allows you to be a student in good standing for that semester and allows you to use the library. You have to be registered for a course or for REGL 1110 in the semester in which you graduate. Again, you cannot register for MLA 6992 more than once.

2) You must also register online for graduation by the end of the first week of the semester in which you graduate. However, you can register a few weeks before the semester begins if you wish. **If you don't graduate that semester, you then have to register online for graduation again the following semester (but the fee will be waived for the second time).**

These two requirements are very important, so please don't forget them.

THESIS APPROVAL

After the Associate Provost approves your thesis and you defend your project, if you want to purchase copies, you need to show your thesis to the Dean of the AUM Library, whose office is on the second floor of the Library. The dean will measure your margins; every page, including the signature page, must have a left margin of at least 1 ½ inches. It would be helpful to show the dean some sample pages before you print out your thesis on the thesis-quality paper to make sure that everything is correct. For each copy you buy, you give the Dean of the Library one copy of the thesis on thesis paper (including the signature page). You need to pay the library dean for the binding of each copy of your thesis.

The final step is for you to send Samantha McNeilly an copy of your thesis (for AUM Library records). You send it to her (**and copy it to me**) by email attachment. Her email address is smcneill@aum.edu.

Then you graduate.