

## Media Communications Department Undergraduate (BA) Thesis Guidelines

### INTRODUCTION

This document is a departmental supplement to the Thesis Guidelines for Students at Webster Vienna Private University (WVPU), adopted by the Executive Board and approved by the University Council on October 7, 2016. This document is available on the Media Communications Department website.

Writing an undergraduate thesis can be a rewarding academic experience, but it can also be stressful and challenging, especially since it is likely the longest piece of academic work that you've written. This document will guide you through the process, explaining formal procedures and providing you with helpful hints. It is of utmost importance that you read this document thoroughly and well ahead of when you formally register for the thesis.

Before beginning your thesis project, we suggest that you also review WVPU's [Academic Policies](#).

### REQUIREMENTS

1. **All core major requirements** must be completed prior to registering for the thesis.
2. The Non-Credited **Portfolio Review** must be passed.
3. The **Undergraduate Thesis Proposal & Proposal Form** must be submitted and approved by the end of the term prior to the term you wish to be registered as a thesis-writing student.
4. Attendance at **Research Seminars**, guest lectures, and other academically oriented events during your studies is strongly encouraged. Research Seminars and related events are announced on the WVPU website under Events.

### RESEARCH TOOLS & UNIVERSITY SUPPORT

#### THE LIBRARY

As you begin to research and plan your thesis, it is important that you are familiar with the full array of research tools available to you. Subsequently, we recommended that students schedule a research consultation session with the librarian, who will acquaint you with available resources on your subject, including both electronic and hardcopy sources. The library also offers useful materials on research methodology and academic writing.

#### THE LANGUAGE CENTER

Schedule an appointment at The Language Center before and during your thesis writing process to get tips & techniques for abstract writing, to brainstorm research ideas and or to have a sample of your writing reviewed. The Language Center also runs various helpful and useful workshops, which are periodically announced in the Bulletin and promoted on campus.

## THE PROCESS

### FIND A SUPERVISOR

You will need to find a thesis supervisor, as the department will not assign one for you. Please review our *Supervisor Thesis Areas* document for faculty's research areas and methods on the [Thesis - Media Communications](#) landing page. Please note that not all teaching faculty are eligible to supervise your thesis, even though you are welcome to discuss your ideas with any faculty member. A supervisor must hold a PhD or equivalent in the field and be a permanent member of our faculty. In addition to the supervisor you need to find another faculty member to be the second reader. Depending on your topic, this can also be a faculty member from a different department (e.g. Center for Liberal Arts, Business & Management) or a completely different institution in the US or European Higher Education Area.

Approximately **two or three terms before you intend to register** for thesis credit hours, you need to start approaching eligible faculty members with your ideas about a thesis topic. From as early in your studies as possible, you should listen closely to suggestions about possible research topics in your courses. Instructors may mention that certain issues are worth researching in more depth, some areas have not been researched sufficiently, or particular studies could be replicated for a new region, different circumstances, etc. A well-tuned ear should take note of these research avenues.

### UNDERGRADUATE (BA) THESIS PROPOSAL FORM

As soon as you have found a faculty member willing to supervise your thesis, you should start working on your proposal. The combined length of the proposal is determined by your supervisor. It is your responsibility to submit the proposal early enough so as not to jeopardize the registration process. The components of the proposal are described as follows:

1. Summary of the research proposal (250 words)
2. Background of the research (What problem is involved? Why is it interesting to do research on that problem? What controversies are involved?)
3. Objectives of the research (academic, practical)
4. Central question the research addresses, followed by sub-questions
5. Any proposed use of human subjects, and if so, an approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB)
6. Any potential use of university equipment
7. Review of some of the central literature that will be used (with a list of references at the end of the proposal)
8. Discussion of the main methodological choices (How will the research be conducted, and why? What data will be used: Sample Size, Sampling Method, Study Design, Units of Analysis, Independent and Dependent Variables, etc.). Be sure to specify whether the study follows the positivist or interpretivist paradigms, and whether a quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, or critical approach will be used in the study.
9. Preliminary contents of the thesis (chapters, paragraphs)
10. Detailed time planning of research activities, milestones and deliverables. It is recommended to use a Gantt chart or similar planning schema.
11. Include a brief analysis of the limits and uncertainties involved in the research.

**DEADLINES FOR PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

To be registered for writing thesis in	Proposal Due to Supervisor
Fall Semester	Week 6 of previous Summer Term
Spring Semester	Week 6 of previous Fall 2 Term

**Please note that deadlines for proposal submission are subject to change.  
If they change, communication will be sent to students accordingly.**

Your proposal and the *Undergraduate (BA) Thesis Proposal Form* must be submitted to your supervisor, who will review and forward them to the department coordinator. The department head will grant final approval. Absent a proposal approval, you cannot continue the process, i.e. your thesis credits will not be registered. The department coordinator will register you. Please ensure that you and your supervisor identify a second reader for your project. While there is no defense presentation for undergraduate thesis projects, a second reader will review your final paper (in addition to your supervisor).

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

If your research requires work with human subjects (surveys, interviews, experiments), you need to have clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before submitting your proposal. Anyone wanting to submit an application (student and their faculty sponsor, faculty, staff) to the IRB is required to complete an online training program provided by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). Approval from the IRB in St Louis must be submitted with the proposal and proposal form. As the application and approval are a lengthy process please plan ahead accordingly. Make sure to view the necessary steps of the *IRB Approval Process* document on the [Thesis - Media Communications](#) landing page.

**TIMELINE**

After you’ve been registered, you should work out a timeline with your supervisor for regular meetings and submission of your drafts and in-progress work. Choosing a “first draft” deadline, for example, is a good idea, but these types of informal deadlines are up to you and your supervisor. The earlier you submit meaningful drafts to your supervisor, the more time your supervisor will have to provide feedback and the more time you will have to incorporate that feedback into your thesis.

**SUBMISSION OF FINAL DRAFT**

The deadline for submission of the final version of your bachelor thesis will be determined by your thesis supervisor but will be no later than the last day of classes in the semester for which you are registered (e.g. the Friday of Week 16).

After submitting your thesis to your supervisor, it will read/reviewed by the second reader and graded by your supervisor. The grade will be submitted by that semester’s grading deadline.

## THESIS FORMAT

A *Thesis Formatting Template*, which incorporates the formatting guidelines, is available on the [Thesis - Media Communications](#) landing page. You can download it, “Save As”, and begin writing your thesis directly into the document. Your thesis should follow APA conventions. An APA style guide is available on the Citation Styles page of the Webster University Library website.

The length of the thesis is not a measure of quality; however, the Media Communications Department expects the average thesis to have approximately 10,000 words (ultimately, the length will be determined by your supervisor and your topic), excluding appendices, notes and references. The length requirement may be modified only upon consultation with your supervisor.

## UNEXPECTED DIFFICULTIES

As mentioned before, thesis writing can be a challenging undertaking. This is true for students as well as professional academics. A researcher cannot predict the twists and turns of the research journey, as data may not be available or be incomplete, results may not support a hypothesis, further research could reveal that somebody else has already had the same idea, or you simply get stuck. These setbacks may seem like bad luck, but they are a normal part of academic research. For that reason, you will need to establish a good rapport with your supervisor. That means that you regularly inform him or her about your progress (or lack thereof). It is important to be open and transparent with your supervisor about the trajectory of your research and writing.

Please adhere to mutually agreed-upon deadlines for submissions of drafts. If your supervisor does not hear from you, or if you do not meet a deadline for a draft as agreed upon, please note that there may be consequences.

On behalf of the entire department, we wish you all the best in your research efforts. We are committed to your academic success!

If you would like to discuss this document or any related issue, please contact your faculty advisor, thesis supervisor, or the department coordinator.

Approved by Bradley E. Wiggins, Ph. D.; November, 2019  
Media Communications Department

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