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SSEM THESIS HANDBOOK

Eastern Kentucky University

Created by: Brandon Hays, SSEM Graduate Assistant
Tate Preston, SSEM Graduate Assistant
Dear Graduate Student:

We are pleased that you have chosen to pursue the thesis option as part of the SSEM MS degree requirements. This handbook contains important information you will need while working on your thesis project. General thesis guidelines from the EKU Graduate School are available at http://gradschool.eku.edu/thesis-guidelines. In the event of a conflict between information in this handbook and guidelines from the Graduate School, the latter will take precedence.

The SSEM graduate faculty truly believe the growth you will experience from the pursuit of higher levels of academic attainment is transformational, and further exploration in your area of interest will be incredibly rewarding.

We wish you the best throughout your studies. If you have any questions or comments about the information in this handbook or the thesis option, please contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Sarah M. Adkins
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Thesis Coordinator
School of Safety, Security & Emergency Management
Eastern Kentucky University
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Richmond, Ky 40475
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Why Should I Write a Thesis?

Many individuals when starting this program ask the question “Why should I write a thesis when I can just take the comprehensive exam?” The following are a few benefits to writing a thesis.

- You get to work at your own pace. The comprehensive exam is a one time test, whereas working on a thesis research project can take 1-2 years. You and your committee create a timeline in which you set your own schedule.

- You get to learn more about topics in which you are truly interested. Developing a thesis allows you, as a student, to do insightful research into real world issues. A thesis allows you to become engaged in an issue that you are truly interested in.

- You can help provide a solution to a problem. While writing a thesis you will be doing meaningful research and perhaps contributing to literature about real world issues. The research that you conduct can help lead to the solution of a problem.

- The opportunity to be published. Writing a thesis allows you the opportunity to publish your research in a particular topic, if you choose to do so.

- Furthering your education. Writing a masters thesis will allow you to gain critical experience that will help you if you choose to complete a doctoral program. When writing a doctoral dissertation you can use your thesis as a foundation, putting you ahead of the game.

- You will be able to take SSE 880 and SSE 898. SSE 880 is a 3 credit hour class which provides an opportunity to learn more about the research process. SSE 898 is a 3 credit hour class with no set meeting times that provides you time to work on your thesis without enrolling in an additional elective. Both courses count directly toward your 36 hour degree requirement. By writing a thesis, you eliminate having to take 2 extra electives. (To register for this class the Thesis Coordinator must give an override.)
Where to Get Started

So you’ve decided to write a thesis? Are you crazy, do you know how hard it is? Just kidding, it isn’t as bad as you think. The first step in the thesis process in the SSEM Graduate Program is to contact Sarah Adkins. Sarah is the Thesis Coordinator for the SSEM Graduate Program. When you initially contact Sarah you should have a specific research topic in mind. Now, you may want to call her and say “I want to do research on fire”, for example. That will not cut it! What part of fire would you like to research? Be detailed!
How to Choose a Thesis Topic

What are you interested in? Picking a topic that truly interests you can be a great help in keeping you on track and focused in a research project of this magnitude. You may want to look at fields that you are somewhat knowledgeable in or a topic you really enjoy learning about.

Look at personal experiences you have had in the SSEM field, whether it be occupational safety, homeland security, emergency medical care, or fire-related. Doing this will bring a personal connection to your thesis topic. This will keep you more engaged and motivated through the research process. Remember this is a topic that you will be working with for at least a year.

Look at other research that has already been conducted in your area of interest. This can also help when selecting a topic. Most theses end with thoughts for future research that can spark inspiration. By doing this, you not only become more knowledgeable about your topic of interest but you also help your mind focus on a narrowed topic. This also will give you a head start on articles for your literature review.

Do not expect it to just come to you! This is a common mistake. Stay up to date on current issues/problems in your field. The bottom line is you have to do the leg work.

Communication is also helpful in this stage. Professors are often working on a project, or have data on a previous project that can save you a lot of time if you just ask.

Essays in other classes are also important. If you already have your idea, you can do essays in your classes that pertain to part of your thesis topic. This will help you when it comes time to really get going on your thesis.

Always balance your ideas with feasibility of time, your own abilities, data availability, and the type of analysis you are going to do.

When thinking about a potential idea, ask yourself four questions: What? Who Cares? Why does it matter? Essentially, you will need to answer these questions.
Selecting Your Thesis Committee

A thesis committee is made up of three members of the graduate faculty, with one serving as the committee chair. The chair will become your main point of contact while working on your thesis project, and the other committee members will serve as experts in your area of interest. Your committee members will help guide you through your research, preparing you for thesis defense when you have completed your thesis project.

Your thesis committee can be made up only of EKU faculty with graduate faculty status. You can find a list of these faculty members on the next page. Included with that list the is the faculty members’ areas of expertise, as well as if they are willing to sit on thesis committees and/or chair committees. Just because their name is on the list does not mean they will sit on your committee, only that they are willing to discuss being on your committee.

When choosing a committee you should choose individuals that you can easily work with and talk to. These faculty members will challenge you in order to help you produce the best work possible. Choose wisely and be open to their constructive criticism.

All of our graduate faculty are here to help you, the student. This is something to be mindful of through the entire thesis and graduate program process. Make sure to take the time to discuss your thesis plans and ideas with your committee. The members of faculty who have agreed to sit on your committee have done so for no extra pay, so make sure to be nice and respectful to all of them!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEPARTMENT</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>ARE WILLING TO SIT ON THESIS COMMITTEE</th>
<th>ARE WILLING TO CHAIR THESIS COMMITTEE</th>
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<tr>
<td>FSE</td>
<td>Larry Collins</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSE</td>
<td>Jim Pharr</td>
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<td>FSE</td>
<td>Greg Gorbett</td>
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<td>FSE</td>
<td>Andrew Tinsley</td>
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<td>FSE</td>
<td>Bill Hicks</td>
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<td>Paul Grant</td>
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<td>Tony Cole</td>
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<td>OSH</td>
<td>Ron Dotson</td>
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<td>Scotty Dunlap</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>EMC</td>
<td>Nancye Davis</td>
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<td>Danny Miller</td>
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<td>TRS</td>
<td>Terry Kline</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (TRS Only)</td>
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<td>Mike Collier</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Norm Spain</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research design, Analysis, etc.</td>
<td>Sarah Adkins</td>
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Institutional Review Board

After you have established a thesis committee, narrowed down a topic, and formulated your research question(s), it’s time to start your research, right? I am sorry to say, if you are working with human subjects, not yet. You must first complete your Institutional Review Board (IRB) application.

What is an Institutional Review Board? An Institutional Review Board is a group of individuals who will determine whether your research will be conducted in a manner that is ethical and will not be harmful to others. This is required by all individuals on campus, including faculty and staff, who are doing research with human subjects through Eastern Kentucky University.

How Do I apply for review by the Institutional Review Board?

Step 1: Do the required CITI training. The link can be found on the EKU Sponsored Programs home page or by following this link: http://www.sponsoredprograms.eku.edu/irb-training

Step 2: Classify your research for review. The three categories are exempt, expedited, or full review.

Step 3: Complete application forms. You can find these forms on the EKU Sponsored programs home page or by using this link: http://www.sponsoredprograms.eku.edu/irb-submission-procedures-and-application-forms

Step 4: Submit all forms and other required attachments (including your CITI completion report) to the Sponsored Programs office in the Jones Building room 414 or Coates CPO 20

Step 5: Check your EKU EMAIL for a response from the Institutional Review Board.
Thesis Proposal

The next step in your research adventure is to present your proposed research to your thesis committee members. Now you may ask yourself, “What does a thesis proposal consist of?” That is a good question. A thesis proposal includes the three following areas:

1. INTRODUCTION: This will include what you are researching, why you are conducting research in this area, what you wish to accomplish by doing this research, and how your research project will provide a significant contribution to your topic area. The end of your introduction should explicitly state your specific research topic or questions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: A literature review is a comprehensive summary of the existing literature related to your research project. This section will not only provide you with knowledge in the subject area, but will also provide a background for the reader.

3. METHODS: In the research proposal, you should include how you will obtain the information for your research. For example, if you are doing a survey to find out the amount of safety professionals with formal/college education, you should include the survey and discuss how you will select study participants, how you will distribute your survey, the amount of time it will take, and how you will analyze the data you collect.

After your thesis proposal has been reviewed by your committee chair, you will forward it on to the other committee members. After all members have reviewed your proposal, you are ready to formally present it to your committee.
Present Your Proposal

The next step in the thesis process is to present your research proposal to your thesis committee. Typically the presentation will consist of 10-15 PowerPoint slides that summarize your written proposal.

This presentation will include what you want to research, why you want to research your topic, your literature review, and the methods that you will use to collect and analyze data.

When your committee approves your proposal and you receive IRB approval, you are ready to move forward with your thesis project.

Photo By: Salem Peters, Class of 2014.
Do the Research and Write Your Thesis

This is what you have been working on and waiting for. In this part of the thesis process you will be working hand in hand with your thesis committee chair. They will give you advice on how to conduct your research and guidance on questions you may have through the research and writing portion of your thesis. Remember that your thesis must be written in APA format.

The Graduate School provides detailed thesis guidelines on their webpage. You can find those guidelines and other useful information here: http://gradschool.eku.edu/thesis-guidelines

When it is time to conduct the analysis of your data you need to contact Sarah Adkins with any questions. Sarah will help guide you through the data analysis portion of your research. She will also advise you on any tables, graphs, and charts that need to be produced for your thesis.
Defend Your Thesis

After you have completed your thesis research project, it should be reviewed by your committee chair. After review by your chair, your thesis should be reviewed by your other committee members. When all comments and questions from review have been addressed, it is time to formally defend your thesis.

Your thesis defense presentation is an extension of your proposal presentation. In addition to the items from your proposal, the defense presentation should be 20-30 PowerPoint slides containing the following:

- Summary of your research findings
- Conclusion of your thesis project
A Few More Things...

During the semester you intend to defend your thesis, you must enroll in GRD 898D. This is a FREE zero credit hour pass/fail course that requires an override from the Thesis Coordinator for registration. Upon successful defense of your thesis project you will receive a passing grade, indicating to the Graduate School that you have completed all requirements for the thesis option.

Also, don’t forget to include the cover page provided by the graduate school! Below is an example of a signed cover page from a completed thesis.

EXAMINING THE VALUE OF FIRE PREVENTION INSPECTIONS IN COMMERCIAL OCCUPANCIES

By
Philip Steven Gainson

Thesis Approved:

[Signatures]
Chair, Advisory Committee
Member, Advisory Committee
Member, Advisory Committee
Dean, Graduate School
Justice and Safety Library

Eastern Kentucky University Libraries

http://libguides.eku.edu/

Save Time! Ask Us!

Nicole Masica Montgomery
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