

Duke GLS Master's Project

A. Overview

The master's project is the last academic task that students must complete in order to earn a master's degree. In order to undertake the Project, students register in LS850, *The Master's Project Colloquium*, a three-credit pass/fail course that has two components:

- **An independent study** supervised by a graduate faculty member with some expertise in the issues or methods involved; and
- **A classroom component**, the Master's Project Proseminar, held twice a semester at GLS House, which provides advice and support for work in progress.

Prior to the Project semester, the student must fulfill all Project *prerequisites* (see D below) and submit a *proposal* for approval. Once the proposal is approved by the GLS Advisory Committee, students and supervisors are free to begin work on the Project, and students will be given a permission number that allows them to register for LS850.

The Project is considered a one-semester effort; as such, it should require the time and expense typically associated with a demanding three-credit graduate course. Together, the student and supervisor arrange a schedule of regular meetings and deadlines for meeting goals and expectations. The supervisor then advises the student on progress toward those goals.

Once the supervisor considers the Project to be complete, it is evaluated by a 3-person *master's examination* committee of Duke graduate faculty that includes the supervisor. The student must submit the penultimate version of the project to the GLS office **at least 10 days** before the scheduled master's examination. To be considered by the examining committee, the project must meet all appropriate academic standards and require no more than minor edits. Last-minute efforts by any students who have failed to work steadily with their supervisors will not be considered.

The examining committee may recommend corrections to the final version (due ten days after the master's examination) before it can be considered for publication as a GLS master's project on DukeSpace. Upon receiving a passing grade by this committee (and assuming all other degree requirements have been fulfilled), the student is awarded the master's degree, and graduates that semester.

B. Requirements

1) The project should represent an effort equivalent to a 50-60 page research paper.

Most projects take the form of an extended essay, much like a standard Master's thesis, that interprets an issue in light of scholarly sources. The project can also integrate materials, methods, and perspectives from a number of disciplines, and may be innovative in approach, so long as it represents an effort equivalent to a Master's thesis of 50-60 pages.

2) The project should be interdisciplinary.

The Master's project should avoid narrow disciplinary concerns more appropriate to a specific academic specialty unless it analyzes those concerns from some broader perspective. For example, while it is fine for the student to explore issues pertinent to his or her career experience, the project must analyze them with appropriate critical distance from a broader disciplinary perspectives. Projects can explore issues that do not fall neatly into any particular field, or apply the methods or perspectives of more than one field. For example, projects can involve:

- **Primary research** (e.g., social science interviews or historical archival research);
- **Applied research** (e.g., developing a curriculum, video, website, program, policy or some other practical endeavor of academic significance); or
- **Creative work** (such as fiction, memoir, personal essay, visual art or other arts).

Note: A project involving creative work or applied research requires previous demonstration of ability in the medium or field and an understanding of its methods and issues. Creative written work should engage a wide readership meaningfully and meet sophisticated literary expectations.

3) The project should involve written analysis.

The project should demonstrate the student's ability to conduct sustained critical analysis on a particular question or issue. Even a creative project should be thought of as an attempt to engage through creative methods with some particular question, issue or problem of academic significance. Projects centered on applied research or creative work should include an analytical essay analyzing the issues and/or processes involved in that work. No matter what methods the project employs, writing should be clear, concise, coherent and easily readable. The final version of the project should represent a quality of written work appropriate for a published Duke University Master's thesis.

4) The project should meet high academic standards.

While the Master's project is not required to make a publishable original contribution to the academic discussion, it should:

- **Engage in an open, honest and objective process of critical inquiry** about an issue that is, in academic terms, worth addressing. The Master's project is at heart a work of critical analysis that seeks to answer the open-ended central research question posed in the project proposal.
- **Demonstrate an awareness of the scholarly literature.** While the project does not require a formal literature review, it must be informed by an awareness of the state of the scholarly conversation and current research. For example:
 - A project that brings to light new archival data should interpret that data within the context of the ongoing scholarly discussion among historians and others.
 - A project that involves curriculum design should include a discussion of appropriate scholarly research and an analysis of how scholarly theories (whether pedagogical or content-oriented) influence that curriculum.
 - A project that features 50 pages of creative writing should include an essay of 15 pages on the relationship of the fiction or memoir to some larger context (e.g., cultural, philosophical, historical, psychological) or to the creative process that produced it.
- **Conform to appropriate standards of responsible academic conduct**, including:
 - **Human Subjects.** All research involving human subjects must be conducted according to appropriate ethical and scientific standards; it must be reviewed by the Human Subjects Committee of Duke's Institutional Review Board before any research is conducted.
 - **Academic Integrity.** All sources must be properly documented, and all use of sources must be conducted according to strict standards of academic integrity. All aspects of the project must conform to the Duke University guidelines for research and appropriate use of intellectual property.

C. Role of the Faculty Supervisor

Prior to the project semester, the student is responsible for finding a faculty supervisor to work with, and confirming that the supervisor is available during the project semester. This supervisor must:

- 1) be a member of the Duke Graduate Faculty;
- 2) have appropriate expertise for guiding and evaluating the proposed project; and
- 3) be approved in advance by the GLS director.

The responsibilities of the faculty supervisor include:

- 1) Before the project semester: Advising the student in developing a workable concept and proposal, and attending the Proposal Meeting (see D below).
- 2) During the project semester: Setting a schedule of goals and deadlines, meeting with the student regularly (ideally every other week), and guiding the student through the work required to complete the proposed project.
- 3) At the end of the project semester: Determining when the student has successfully completed the project, and serving as first reader on the master's examination committee.

Because a student's relationship with the supervisor is crucial to a successful project, students are encouraged to select a project supervisor from among faculty with whom they have studied, preferably one who has taught in the GLS program. While working on their interdisciplinary projects, students are of course free to consult with faculty other than their supervisors, but only one faculty member can be appointed supervisor (and thus first reader on the master's examination committee).

D. Student Prerequisites

- **Master's Project Planning Session.** Each student is responsible for attending this session (offered each January, June and September) before his or her seventh course (ideally during courses five or six). At this session, students will learn details about the process leading to the Project, and can ask questions about the proposal and other prerequisites.
- **Research Librarian Bibliographic Consultation.** Before the proposal is submitted, the student must consult with a Duke research librarian in any field pertinent to the proposed Project to discuss the current state of scholarly research and discussion, as well as strategies for further research.
- **Human Subjects Approval** (if appropriate). Before any research involving humans as subjects can be conducted, or the proposal is submitted, the student must receive a waiver or approval from the Human Subjects Committee of the Institutional Review Board. Documentation of either waiver or approval should be submitted with the proposal.
- **Proposal Meeting.** At least two weeks before the proposal deadline, the student, the supervisor and a representative of the GLS program (either the director or assistant director) will meet to share ideas and work out the final details of the proposal.
- **Master's Project Proposal.** Approval of a master's project proposal by the GLS Advisory Committee is required *prior to* the master's project semester. Students should submit a proposal (see below for format) by the deadline at least one semester before the master's project semester. Students should strive to craft a proposal that is centered on a focused, analytical central question. An optional Proposal Workshop is available for support in crafting the proposal.