

Program and University of Nebraska Policies for the Master’s Thesis

Community and Regional Planning 899

Effective September 2014

(Approved by the Community and Regional Planning Program Graduate Committee, September 2014)

These policies pertain to the Master’s Thesis completion track (UNL Graduate Studies “Option I”) for the Master of Community and Regional Planning (MCRP) degree at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

I. Credit Hours, Registration, and Grading

- A. A maximum of six credit hours for the master’s thesis, CRPL 899, is permitted for inclusion in the 48 credit hours required for the Master of Community and Regional Planning degree. Even though one may register for more than six master’s thesis credit hours, only six are allowed for fulfillment of degree requirements.
- B. Thesis credit hours may be distributed across more than one semester. Students should register for thesis credit hours only in the semesters during which they intend to work on the thesis. Students are entitled to seek thesis advising from faculty advisors only if they register for thesis credit hours. If students are not registered for thesis credit hours, advising takes place entirely at the discretion of the faculty advisors.
- C. Completion of the master’s thesis, including the oral examination, must occur as the final required component of all course work in the student’s program of study for the MCRP degree.
- D. Grading for the six required CRPL 899 credit hours is on pas/no-pass basis only. Prior to completion of all CRPL 899 credit hours in the semester when the oral examination is scheduled, increments of CRPL 899 credit hours registered in previous semesters will be graded Incomplete (“I”) until the semester in which the oral examination is scheduled.

II. Master’s Thesis Faculty Advisory Committee

- A. Each thesis student must have a faculty advisory committee consisting of at least three University of Nebraska faculty members, all of whom constitute the voting members of the committee.
- B. At least two members of each faculty advisory committee, one of whom must serve as chair of the committee, shall be members of the faculty of the Community and Regional Planning Program.
- C. Student requests for individual faculty members to serve as thesis advisory committee chairs or committee members will be considered and accommodated when possible, but equitable distribution of faculty workloads may necessitate assignment of faculty to thesis advisory committees.

III. Thesis Format

- A. All materials submitting for review by the thesis advisory committee chair and committee members must be computer-generated text and graphics.
- B. The recommended style manual for MCRP theses is Kate L. Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, Latest Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).
- C. The thesis document must be prepared in accordance with the latest information posted on the UNL Office of Graduate Studies website, detailed in a clickable box, “Preparing a Thesis or Dissertation,” which shows on the “Master’s Degree Milestones” component of the website.

IV. Thesis Oral Examination, Scheduling, and Deadlines

- A. A final oral examination must occur at the conclusion of each student's thesis work.
- B. The student is responsible for scheduling the final oral examination. This is accomplished by submitting a Graduate Studies "Final Examination Report" form, approved by the student's thesis advisory committee chair and the Community and Regional Planning Graduate Committee chair, to the Office of Graduate Studies before the deadline noted on the Graduate studies website. The "Final Examination Report" form specifies the time and place of the final oral examination and will be approved for submission to the Office of Graduate Studies only under the following conditions:
 1. The student and the faculty advisory committee chair and members must agree that they can and will be present at the scheduled oral examination time. (The feasibility of completing the thesis during the summer may depend upon availability of thesis advisory committee members for the oral examination.)
 2. The "Final Examination Report" form must be approved by the student's thesis advisory committee chair and the Community and Regional Planning Graduate Committee chair and submitted to the UNL Office of Graduate Studies no later than four weeks (during the academic year)/three weeks (during the summer sessions) prior to the desired final oral examination date. *The student's thesis advisory committee chair and the Community and Regional Planning Program Graduate Committee chair will approve this form for submission to the UNL Office of Graduate Studies only when a full master's thesis draft (including all chapters with complete text, footnotes, graphics, bibliography, page numbers, appendices, etc.) has been received and approved as an acceptable draft by the thesis advisory committee chair.* The last possible date for scheduling the final oral examination for each semester and for the summer sessions is set by the UNL Office of Graduate Studies.
- C. Copies for the final master's thesis (the document upon which the oral examination will be based) must be distributed to all members of the thesis advisory committee at least two weeks (during the academic year)/one week (during summer sessions) prior to the scheduled oral examination. *Failure to satisfy this deadline for distribution of final master's thesis copies to members of the student's thesis advisory committee will result in cancellation, by the Community and Regional Planning Program Graduate Committee chair, of the scheduled oral examination.* The format (printed or digital) of the copies distributed to advisory committee members is to be determined by each of the committee members. A copy of the thesis and abstract also must be presented to the Office of Graduate Studies for approval of format, type of print, etc., no later than two weeks (one week in summer) prior to the date of the final oral examination.
- D. Successful completion of the master's thesis requires affirmative votes of at least two of the three faculty members on the thesis advisory committee.
- E. Any changes to the master's thesis required by the faculty advisory committee following the oral examination must be completed no later than the deadline established by the UNL Office of Graduate Studies for the submission of finished thesis documents for the term in which the student wishes to graduate. The chair of the faculty advisory committee will hold the "Final Examination Report" form until the student satisfactorily completes all required changes. After changes are made in the thesis document, a PDF copy of the final thesis document also must be sent as an email attachment to the Master's Specialist in the Office of Graduate Studies for final approval of formatting.
- F. After approval of final formatting of the thesis document, the student uploads the entire thesis document to the University Library's Digital Commons.
- G. The signed "Final Examination Report" form is submitted to Graduate Studies, along with one paper copy of the thesis abstract (for Graduate Studies) and one paper copy of the abstract and title page (for the University Library). Also, a printed confirmation of uploading the thesis to the Digital Commons (sent to the student via email) must be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies.

Program Policies for the Professional Project

Community and Regional Planning 898

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(Approved by the Community and Regional Planning Program Graduate Committee, September 2014)

These policies pertain to the Professional Project completion track (UNL Graduate Studies “Option III”) for the Master of Community and Regional Planning (MCRP) degree at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

I. Credit Hours, Registration, and Grading

- A. A maximum of six credit hours for the professional project, CRPL 898, is permitted for inclusion in the 48 credit hours required for the Master of Community and Regional Planning degree. Even though one may register for more than six professional project credit hours, only six are allowed for fulfillment of degree requirements.
- B. Professional project credit hours may be distributed across more than one semester. Students should register for professional project credit hours only in the semesters during which they intend to work on the project. Students are entitled to seek professional project advising from faculty advisors only if they register for professional project credit hours. If students are not registered for professional project credit hours, advising takes place entirely at the discretion of the faculty advisors.
- C. Completion of the professional project, including the final presentation of the project, must occur as the final required component of all course work in the student’s program of study for the MCRP degree.
- D. Grading for the six required CRPL 898 professional project credit hours is on a pass/no-pass basis only. Prior to completion of all CRPL 898 credit hours in the semester when the oral examination is scheduled, increments of CRPL 898 credit hours registered in previous semesters will be graded Incomplete (“I”) until the semester in which the oral examination is scheduled.

II. Professional Project Advisory Committee

- A. Each student pursuing a professional project must have an advisory committee consisting of at least three University of Nebraska faculty members and one nonfaculty practicing professional or a project client representative. Selection of the practicing professional or client representative by the student is subject to approval by the chair of the advisory committee.
- B. The three faculty members of the professional project advisory committee constitute the voting members of the committee. At least two members of each project advisory committee, one of whom must serve as chair of the committee, shall be members of the faculty of the Community and Regional Planning Program.
- C. Student requests for individual faculty members to serve as professional project advisory committee chairs or committee members will be considered and accommodated when possible, but equitable distribution of faculty workloads may necessitate assignment of faculty to project advisory committees.

III. Professional Project Scope and Format

- A. The professional project involves emulation of professional planning work, wherein the student pursues a project having the following characteristics, the precise nature of which are subject to approval by the project advisory committee:
 - 1. An explicit project subject and scope of work;
 - 2. A project schedule with explicit established deadlines;
 - 3. At least one component of significant documented research (e.g., exploration and evaluation of various methodologies that could be utilized in the project, comparative analysis of other similar projects elsewhere, etc.) which may or may not be presented as an integral part of project final product(s), but which must be presented to the project advisory committee;
 - 4. Recommendations pertaining to the project, derived from the application of appropriate methodologies;
 - 5. One or more products that convey project results and recommendations, including a report document that must include or summarize all of the essential components of the project; and
 - 6. At least one formal presentation of the project results, in person, to the project advisory committee and other interested persons.
- B. A student's professional project must be pursued and completed individually, with advice from his or her project advisory committee.
- C. All written materials submitted for review by the professional project advisory committee chair and committee members must be in computer-generated format.
- D. All research for the project utilizing other source materials shall be documented and presented in conformance with a standard citation system, such as Kate L. Turabain's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, Latest Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).

IV. Professional Project Presentation/Critique, Scheduling, and Deadlines

- A. A final formal presentation/critique (oral examination), with all members of the project advisory committee present, must occur at the conclusion of the student's professional project.
- B. The student is responsible for scheduling the final formal presentation/critique (oral examination). This is accomplished by submitting a Graduate Studies "Final Examination Report" form, approved by the student's advisory committee chair and the Community and Regional Planning Graduate Committee chair, to the Office of Graduate Studies before the deadline noted on the Graduate Studies website. The "Final Examination Report" form specifies the time and place of the final oral examination and will be approved for submission to the Office of Graduate Studies only under the following conditions:
 - 1. The student and the faculty advisory committee chair and all members must agree that they can and will be present at the scheduled presentation/critique time. (The feasibility of completing the professional project during the summer may depend upon availability of project advisory committee members for the formal presentation (oral examination)).
 - 2. The notice of the final formal presentation/critique (oral examination) must be approved by the student's project advisory committee chair and the Community and Regional Planning Graduate

Committee chair no later than four weeks (during the academic year)/three weeks (during the summer sessions) prior to the desired presentation date. *The student's project advisory committee chair and the Community and Regional Planning Graduate Committee chair will approve the scheduled time for the presentation/critique only if they judge that the student will be fully prepared for the presentation. Normally, this means that a full draft of the student's professional project document (including all components of the text; figures and tables, appendices, table of contents, lists of figures and tables, etc.) must be presented when the presentation date is set, in the timeframe described in this section (IV.B.2.).*

- C. Copies of any project final products (materials upon which the final presentation will be based) must be distributed or made available to all members of the project advisory committee at least two weeks (during the academic year)/one week (during summer sessions) prior to the scheduled presentation/critique. *Failure to satisfy this deadline for distribution of final professional project copies to members of the student's advisory committee will result in cancellation, by the Community and Regional Planning Program Graduate Committee chair, of the scheduled oral examination.* The format (printed or digital) of the copies distributed to advisory committee members is to be determined by each of the committee members.
- D. Successful completion of the professional project requires affirmative votes of at least two of the three faculty members on the project advisory committee.
- E. Any changes to the final project products required by the project advisory committee following the final presentation/critique (oral examination) must be completed no later than the deadline published by the Office of Graduate Studies for submission of final master's theses for the term in which the student wishes to graduate. The chair of the project advisory committee will hold the "Final Examination Report" form until the student satisfactorily completes all required changes.
- F. The signed "Final Examination Report" form is submitted to Graduate Studies.
- G. The student uploads the professional project to the University Library's Digital Commons. Instructions are included in the Office of Graduate Studies booklet, "Guidelines for the Preparation and Submission of an Electronic Thesis," even though the document to be uploaded in this case is not a master's degree thesis.

Program Guidelines for Master's Thesis and Professional Project Proposals

Introduction

The preparation of a formal thesis or professional project proposal is a very important step in the process of completing the thesis or professional project in the Master of Community and Regional Planning (MCRP) degree program.

Preparation of a thesis/project proposal by the student and approval of the proposal by the student's faculty advisory committee must occur before the student can assume that his or her thesis/project topic and methodology are acceptable for fulfillment of the thesis/project requirement in the MCRP program. The student must obtain approval of the thesis/project proposal before pursuing substantial in-depth focused work on the topic and before writing significant portions of the thesis/project document.

Proposal Elements

The proposal is comprised of the following elements:

1. Cover page

The following items should appear on the proposal cover page, in the order indicated:

<p style="text-align: center;">Thesis [or Professional Project] Proposal</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>[proposed thesis/project title]</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>[author's name]</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">For the degree: Master of Community and Regional Planning Community and Regional Planning Program University of Nebraska–Lincoln</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>[name of committee chair], Chair</i> <i>[name of second committee member]</i> <i>[name of third committee member]</i> <i>[name of client – for professional project]</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>[date of submission of proposal]</i></p>

2. **Introduction**

The overall context and setting of the thesis research problem or professional project is succinctly presented and discussed in the introduction. The scope of the research or project, especially in terms of its significance, importance, and utility in the field of planning, must be presented in this section. Definitions of key terms must be included.

The relevance of the thesis/project subject to one's current or past work experiences, classroom experiences, area of concentration in the MCRP program and/or career goals, may be addressed in the introduction.

3. **Statement of thesis research questions, hypotheses, or project intent**

Relationships among key concepts, variables, phenomena, events, etc., are identified in this section, and one or more research questions or project intentions to be investigated in the thesis research or project are stated in the form of interrogative sentences.

Definitions of key terms contained within the research questions must be included in this section.

4. **Description of methodology**

This section should describe the organizational framework for pursuing the topic/project and should precisely explain the methods that will be employed in addressing the research questions or hypotheses, or project intentions. All of the methods envisioned for information gathering and analyses for the thesis or project should be described.

5. **Proposed table of contents**

An initial table of contents of the thesis/project should be included in the proposal. The suggested table of contents should encompass all dimensions of the research problems or project.

6. **Timetable for completing the thesis/project**

A tentative schedule for each stage of completing the thesis/project, from the early stages of research, to completion of chapters and drafts, to the final oral examination and graduation, is outlined in this section. Specific dates should be targeted for the key stages of the process. This will aid members of the thesis/project advisory committee in gauging their availability for advising and reading related to the thesis/project.

7. **Initial bibliography**

All of the relevant sources, that the author has consulted in preparing the proposal, as well as any additional sources that the author envisions pursuing as part of the thesis research, should be listed in proper (see Kate L. Turabian's *Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, Latest Edition) bibliographic format.

For the benefit of the thesis/project advisory committee reading the proposal, some or all of the sources may be annotated (i.e., the content of each source and the usefulness of the source for the proposed research may be briefly described after the source citation).

The initial bibliography gives the thesis/project advisory committee an indication of the scope and quality of the sources that have been pursued and enables the committee to suggest other useful references that may have been overlooked.

Program Policies for the Comprehensive Examination

Effective September 2014

(Approved by the Community and Regional Planning Graduate Committee, September 2014)

These policies pertain to the Comprehensive Examination completion track (UNL Graduate Studies “Option III”) for the Master of Community and Regional Planning (MCRP) degree at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln.

I. Purpose of the Comprehensive Examination

The purpose of the Comprehensive Examination is to test the student’s knowledge and understanding of specified core courses and to assess whether the student is academically prepared to pursue a career as a professional planner. The Comprehensive Examination requires the student to demonstrate the ability to synthesize knowledge gained from courses in the MCRP degree program and to apply it to planning problems.

II. Components of the Comprehensive Examination

The Comprehensive Examination consists of two components: (A) a proctored written component; and (B) a take-home capstone exam question, which includes both written and oral presentations of the response. These two components are further explained as follows:

- A. The proctored written component of the Comprehensive Examination consists of separate questions pertaining to the following core courses:
 - CRPL 800 Introduction to Planning
 - CRPL 802 Planning Theory
 - CRPL 804 Legal Aspects of Planning
 - CRPL 810 Qualitative Techniques for Planners
 - CRPL 900 Professional Planning Practice

- B. For the take-home capstone question, the student must demonstrate and communicate knowledge, skills, and abilities to independently analyze a planning problem, develop a justifiable response, and effectively present the findings and recommendations in a written document and in an oral presentation to the examining committee. It is expected that the response to the capstone question will incorporate knowledge, skills, and abilities obtained from courses in the MCRP curriculum, and particularly from the following core courses:

- CRPL 830 Planning With GIS
- CRPL 840 Planning Methods and Analysis
- CRPL 990 Planning Studio

III. Examination Procedures

A. Registration for the Comprehensive Examination

The student must submit the “Registration for the Comprehensive Examination” form (available each semester from the Community and Regional Planning Program) no later than the deadline specified on the registration form. Submission of the signed “Registration for the Comprehensive Examination” form is considered a formal commitment and the first step in completing the Comprehensive Examination to be offered on the dates specified on the form.

B. Submission of “Final Examination Report for Masters Degree”

The Office of Graduate Studies requires that the “Final Examination Report for the Master’s Degree” (this form is available on the UNL Office of Graduate Studies website) be submitted no later than four weeks before the oral examination; however, for the Comprehensive Examination in the MCRP program, the “Final Examination Report for the Master’s Degree” must be submitted to the MCRP program office no later than the deadline for submitting the Community and Regional Planning program’s “Registration for the Comprehensive Examination” form (see item III.A above).

C. Schedule of Examination Components

1. Proctored Written Component

The written examination will be conducted in Architecture Hall on the first Fridays of November and April each year.

2. Capstone Component

a. Written Part

On a day specified by the MCRP program—after the registration deadline, but no later than 4 weeks prior to the proctored written component of the Comprehensive Examination—the capstone question will be given to students who have applied to take the exam.

Three complete copies of the student's written response to the capstone question shall be submitted to the proctor at the beginning of the proctored written component of the Comprehensive Examination.

b. Oral Part

The oral part of the capstone question, which includes a verbal presentation by the student of the capstone question response, will be scheduled and conducted subsequent to the proctored examination. The oral part of the capstone question will include questions from the examining committee regarding the student's capstone question response and may include questions related to the proctored written component of the Comprehensive Examination and other aspects of the student's program of study.

D. Proctored Written Examination Protocol

Students are allowed to answer only the assigned question of the proctored written examination during the assigned time period for that question and must deliver their answer to the proctor at the end of the assigned time period.

E. Comprehensive Examination Grading

The faculty Comprehensive Examination committee grades the student responses to the written exam questions and the written and oral parts of the capstone question. The student is required to achieve a grade of "pass" on all questions in the written and oral parts of the comprehensive examination. Failure to achieve a "pass" on the proctored written question(s) pertaining to any one or more of the core courses or area of concentration, or the written or oral parts of the capstone question, will count as a "fail" in the respective question(s) or part(s) of the examination.

F. Opportunity to Retake Examination Components

Students have only two opportunities to successfully "pass" all written and oral parts of the Comprehensive Examination. In their first time taking the examination, students must take all written and oral parts in their entirety. Filing of the application form by the student is considered a commitment to take the exam and counts as one opportunity. Students must retake only the question(s) or part(s) of the examination for which they did not receive a grade of "pass." The earliest that a student may retake failed questions or parts of the examination is in the subsequent semester on the days scheduled for the proctored exam and capstone question.