

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS POLICY

Faculty of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies

June 6, 1997, Revised Dec 2000

INTRODUCTION

The Undergraduate Thesis provides an opportunity for students to independently gain experience by undertaking research in their area of interest. It allows students to integrate the abilities, skills, and knowledge acquired during undergraduate studies. It is open to students with 90 credit hours who are declared majors in a Program within the Faculty of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies (NRES). Individual Programs may create more specific academic requirements for students wishing to undertake a thesis (e.g. a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.67 or 3.00, or subject to supervisor availability). Working under the guidance of a faculty member, students design, execute and analyze research on an issue, problem or concept within their discipline. This course is primarily intended for students contemplating graduate studies or pursuing a career in research.

As undergraduate theses are highly individual, the time commitment to the undergraduate thesis can not be precisely defined. Students bring different levels of experience, knowledge and abilities to problems that can vary widely in technical or philosophical difficulty. However, depending on the phase of the project, students should expect to spend up to 12-15 hours per week on this course. Similarly, the amount of time Thesis Supervisors need spend with each student will also fluctuate based on the individual student, thesis topic, and the phase of the thesis, with between 2-4 hours per week often necessary to provide the student with direction, deadlines, supervision, constructive criticism and praise.

Some undergraduate theses may be of such high quality that the student may wish to submit a paper for publication. Other theses may run into problems caused by such factors as equipment failure or climatic conditions. In this situation, students may still earn an A+ grade for their design and analysis for suggesting and testing alternative methodological approaches to the problem, and for the depth and breadth of understanding of the topic in question. A high grade does not necessarily depend upon the successful completion of the thesis proposal, but comes from a thorough intellectual and physical involvement in the thesis.

The undergraduate thesis in NRES will be worth six credit hours.

TOPIC SELECTION

Students are responsible for contacting one or more potential supervisors to act as a Thesis Supervisor. It is anticipated that students should contact potential Thesis Supervisors before the end of the Winter term at the end of their third year. Contact with potential supervisors **must** be made by the add/drop date of the academic term (normally the Fall term). After discussions with various faculty members, an arrangement with one faculty member to serve as a Thesis Supervisor should be made. The student, Thesis Supervisor, and the Chair of the Program must sign a form which names the student, proposed thesis topic, and Thesis Supervisor. It may be feasible, or even desirable for some topics, for students to begin preliminary reading and planning through the summer months if the thesis topic can be adequately defined by this time.

THESIS SUPERVISION

The Thesis Supervisor is responsible for the direction and instruction of the student, and will ensure that adequate time is spent with the student to allow for the successful completion of the thesis. However, as in all other courses, the student is ultimately responsible for their completion of course requirements. The Thesis Supervisor is responsible for evaluating the: a) thesis proposal and implementation of the research program; b) thesis; and c) student presentation.

A Second Reader will be required for all undergraduate theses as an external reader. The student and the Thesis Supervisor will share joint responsibility for selecting the Second Reader. The Second Reader will normally be a UNBC faculty member, and will probably come from the same Faculty, if not the same Program as the Thesis Supervisor - occasionally it may be best to have a member of the community as a Second Reader (e.g., a planner employed by the public sector or a member employed by the private sector). If the Second Reader is not a member of the UNBC faculty, then they are required to have a minimum of a Master's degree in the same or a closely related field as the thesis.

The Second Reader will be primarily responsible for reading and grading the final draft of the thesis. *Half of the final grade for the thesis and half of the grade for the thesis presentation will be provided by the Second Reader.* The Second Reader may also aid in the grading of the thesis proposal, but this is not required.

If any problems arise between the student, Thesis supervisor or Second Reader, the Chair of the program (or the Associate Dean of NRES if the Thesis Supervisor is a Chair) will act as a mediator, ensuring that any differences are settled to allow the student to complete the thesis requirements.

GRADING CRITERIA

As noted above, the Thesis Supervisor is responsible for evaluating the thesis proposal and implementation of the research, thesis, and student presentation. However, the Second Reader will provide thirty-five percent of the final grade.

The grading criterion will be the following:

- a) 30% of the total grade will derive from the thesis proposal and the implementation of the research (Thesis Supervisor);
- b) 60% of the total grade will derive from the thesis (50% of which is evaluated by the Thesis Supervisor, and 50% by the Second Reader)
- c) 10% of the total grade will derive from the students' presentation of their thesis (50% from the Thesis Supervisor and 50% from the Second Reader).

AGREEMENT FORM

All final arrangements should be mutually agreed upon by the student, Thesis Supervisor and Second Reader. This agreement should be signed by the student, Thesis Supervisor, Second Reader, and Chair. This form must be signed as soon as possible, but at least by the end of the first term that the student started the thesis (normally the Fall term of the fourth year). A basic time line for the completion of the Thesis should also be included in this agreement (see Appendix I for a proposed copy of this form).

FORMAT AND TIMELINES FOR THESIS

The specific formatting of undergraduate thesis, which includes citation style (e.g., APA, MLA), font style and size, margins, title page, table and figures style, etc., is a Programmatic decision. It is suggested that each Program that has a thesis requirement or option create their own formatting guide for students. This will ensure that both students and faculty are clear about the standards and styles required of the final thesis.

The Undergraduate Thesis will normally begin in the Fall term of the fourth year, and be completed by the end of the Winter term, at the end of the student's fourth year of studies. In some disciplines it may be necessary to initiate the thesis in the student's third year of studies in order to make data collection during the summer possible. Additional arrangements as to starting and completion dates may be possible with the support of the Chair (or Associate Dean if the Thesis Supervisor is the Chair).

THESIS SEMINARS

Several Programs in NRES have considered establishing seminars designed to provide students with assistance in choosing a thesis topic, beginning the literature review, preparing a basic thesis proposal and familiarization with basic requirements including citing, formatting and thesis style. These seminars, it is believed, will provide students with valuable information that will improve their ability to successfully complete an Undergraduate Thesis.

If the Programs choose this route, these seminars should be provided in the Fall term. It will be important to link thesis seminars between Programs in order to increase interdisciplinarity. The seminars should, therefore, stress:

- a) presentation of a wide range of thesis topics, methodologies, disciplinary approaches, terminology and concepts.
- b) the realization that issues and problems span disciplinary boundaries.

THESIS PRESENTATIONS

Students will also be responsible for presenting a brief overview of their thesis topic, research findings, and implications of their research. The audience will include faculty and students (both Thesis students and other undergraduate and graduate students). Thesis Presentations will normally be scheduled near the end of the winter term. Thesis Presentations will likely be scheduled by the Thesis Supervisor, however Programs or the broader NRES Faculty may choose to have all Thesis Students defend on a given day. The Presentation will comprise 10% of the students' total mark.

Thesis Presentations should follow the format of talks at Scientific Conferences. The presentation should be approximately 20 minutes outlining the background, methodology, results and implications of their Thesis work, to be followed by questioning by the Thesis Supervisor, Second Reader, and public. Programs should decide and discuss what role questioning from the general audience will play in the Thesis Presentation.

FACULTY WORKLOAD

As per the Collective Agreement, faculty will receive teaching workload credit for the thesis course, which will be determined through consultation with the Program Chair. Supervising undergraduate theses often requires more contact with students than a 'normal' course, and the contact is usually on a one-to-

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one basis. As noted earlier, the time spent on each student's thesis will vary: some students require a minimum of supervision, while others need constant direction and feedback; the former may require one hour, the latter eight hours per week. Also, by design, the material provided in a thesis is more detailed and complex than in other academic courses. This creates more work for the supervisor, but it also increases the reward to both the supervisor and student. Similarly, the presence of one-on-one supervision - rarely if ever encountered in a traditional undergraduate course - is extremely important both to the student and to the supervisor.

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS AGREEMENT FORM
FACULTY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

THIS AGREEMENT MUST BE COMPLETED AND APPROVED BY ALL SIGNATORIES.

STUDENT

Name: _____ UNBC ID #: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Major: _____

Program: _____ Email: _____

THESIS SUPERVISOR

Name: _____ Phone #: _____

Program: _____ Fax#: _____

E-mail: _____ Room #: _____

SECOND READER

Name: _____ Phone #: _____

Program: _____ Fax#: _____

E-mail: _____ Room #: _____

CHAIR

Name: _____ Phone #: _____

Program: _____ Fax#: _____

E-mail: _____ Room #: _____

THESIS TITLE AND TOPIC

Proposed Title: _____

Proposed Topic: _____

DUE DATES

Due Date of Thesis/Report Proposal : _____

Due Date of Final Thesis/Report: _____

Date of Thesis Presentation: _____

SIGNATURES

As parties to this agreement, we accept the information and conditions stated on this form:

Student Name: _____

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thesis Supervisor: _____

Supervisor Signature: _____ Date: _____

Second Reader: _____

Reader's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Chair Name: _____

Chair Signature: _____ Date: _____

IF THERE ARE ANY MAJOR CHANGES TO THE THESIS TOPIC OR DUE DATES, A NEW AGREEMENT FORM MUST BE COMPLETED