
Senior Thesis Manual

Plan II Honors Program
The University of Texas at Austin

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Please note: Some details outlined in this manual are subject to change due to the continued pandemic. Contact a Plan II representative with questions.



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Your Topic



FINDING A TOPIC

It is never too early to start thinking about a topic. Indeed, as a “capstone project,” your thesis should grow out of your personal interests and passions as you have pursued them in courses, internships, travel, and experiences during your college years. The thesis can be as interdisciplinary as Plan II is and as individual as you are, but it must also reflect areas that you have training or experience in; a thesis topic in an area in which you have *no* background won’t be approved. We don’t want to curtail your intellectual pursuits, but we know from experience that two semesters aren’t anywhere near long enough to master a whole new field and write a thesis on it. That being said, *do* feel free to spread your wings and be creative—think about ideas that have interested you in the course of your studies, papers that you found exciting, professors who inspired you. A Plan II thesis allows you to combine areas, topics, and fields in unique ways, so this is your chance to put together an intellectual inquiry that reflects something that you find meaningful and compelling. The best advice we can give you is follow your passion and find/create/construct a thesis topic that you can imagine spending a year developing. Remember, a thesis poses a question and proposes an argument to answer it, so as you begin you may know the question but not the answer. By the time you submit your thesis, you will have that answer (though it may well not be what you thought nine months earlier!).

Finding a topic is a process and will more than likely grow out of conversations with friends, professors, advisors, and the Plan II Directors (the folks who will help guide you through the thesis process). So start talking (sooner rather than later) about your ideas

and the connections you see in the constellation of courses you have enjoyed. The Plan II Junior Seminars (T C 358) are meant to prepare you for the thesis project, so make your course selections wisely. Another fine source for inspiration is the collection of Plan II model theses on display in the Plan II common room, which we encourage you to look at as particularly good examples of interdisciplinary scholarship in a wide variety of areas.

Do not forget about the wonderful resources at University libraries such as the **Subject Research Specialists** (<https://guides.lib.utexas.edu/prf.php>), the Ransom Humanities Research Center, the Texas History Center, the LBJ Library, and the Benson Latin American Collection. Also, keep in mind the fine collections of art now available in the Blanton Museum of Art. These materials provide subjects for unique theses, and the librarians and curators are eager to help students make use of them.

BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE IN YOUR TOPIC

You must have some background in your topic. It is impossible to define a topic unless you already know something about it. You do not need to be a specialist in the area, but you will have to show us that you have some general knowledge of the subject before your topic can be approved. One of the Directors will review your thesis proposal and suggest modifications if you need experience in the suggested area of study.

This background ought to involve some coursework in the area that you propose to study, almost certainly beyond a single introductory level class. Taking elective courses in areas that involve possible thesis topics is a wonderful way to initially explore those topics and to insure that you are prepared to tackle your topic. It is *never* too early to start taking these classes. If you are unsure of the best courses to explore your interests, go see a faculty member in the department. As long as you go during their office hours, they will usually be happy to talk with you.

Please be aware that this requirement also applies to creative theses. If you want to write a collection of short stories, you must have coursework in creative writing. If you want to produce a photographic essay, make sure to take classes in photography.

Guidelines & Appropriate Projects

HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH

Students working on a thesis that involves human subjects in any way (and this includes just interviewing peers on campus) must complete and submit documentation and forms for approval from the university Institutional Review Board (IRB). Students must then wait for formal approval from the Office of Research Support and Compliance (RSC) *before* they may begin their research. Interviewing human subjects before you have received IRB approval could result in disciplinary proceedings by the Review Board for non-compliance, so be sure to submit your online application early in the first semester. Please be aware that the time it takes for IRB approval is widely variable. You may be asked to resubmit your proposal, perhaps more than once, and several people in their office may need to review it. While many research projects qualify for an expedited review, yours may not. A Full Board Review, if required, could take several months.

The guidelines below should be kept in mind to avoid a Full Board Review: *

1. Avoid research on “Vulnerable Populations.” Vulnerable populations are:
 - Prisoners or “institutionalized persons”
 - Pregnant Women (when executing clinical studies)
 - Children (not Full Board when observing in public setting or when observing in an educational setting)
 - “Decisionally Impaired” Adults (e.g. Adults with Alzheimer’s)
2. Avoid research on “Sensitive Subjects.” Sensitive Subjects are:
 - Drug Use
 - Sexual Behavior
 - Incriminating Activities
 - Suicide
3. Avoid research using a medical device, testing a drug, or implementing any clinical procedure that would put the subject at a higher level of risk (physical or

4. mental).

CLASSIFICATION OF STUDIES FOR IRB REVIEW

Full Board Review means that your study has more than “minimal risk,” or exposes subjects to more risk than they would normally encounter in everyday life. Thus, if planning a study that will require Full Board Review, plan to submit several months ahead of time and contact the Office of Research Support and Compliance prior to submission to ensure that all steps are fulfilled. *

“**Exempt**” classification means your study still requires IRB submission but can be processed at a quicker rate. Examples of “Exempt” studies include: *

1. Secondary data analysis that is “de-identified” (de-identified means that the researcher cannot readily ascertain the identity of the subject)
2. Low risk interviews on non-sensitive subject matter. Audio-recordings are permitted in this category but real names should not be used (use pseudonyms or codes/numbers for participants both during the interviews and on any labels or file names).
3. Low risk subject-matter using anonymous surveys.

Research that does **NOT** require IRB submission/review includes secondary data analysis that implements a publicly available data set that is de-identified. *

**Please note that these are guidelines based on current interpretations of regulations and are subject to change so be sure to contact the Office of Research Support and Compliance before submitting to make sure. They will also assist you with how to submit your documentation if you are confused.*

For more information, visit the RSC website: <https://research.utexas.edu/ors/>.

You can also contact them by calling or e-mailing:

Peter T. Flawn Academic Center (FAC); Suite 426
2400 Inner Campus Drive
Office Number: (512) 471-8871
Email: orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu

CREATIVE THESES

Creative projects are especially demanding, so we try to make sure in advance that you know what you are doing. The Directors will only approve a creative thesis in a field you have done course work. If you want to write a collection of poems or short stories for your thesis, be sure to take a creative writing course in that area—and preferably two—before the end of your junior year.

Given the challenges of creation and revision, anyone considering a creative project must plan on doing a two-semester thesis. If you are considering writing a novel, we strongly recommend short stories instead. That way, advisors can give helpful criticism on the first story early in the year without interfering in the creative process.

We also require you to write a treatise and introduction or afterword (approximately 15-20 pages) to your creative project to explain the nature of your work and the influences on it. In the case of a performance, your writing should analyze the texts, contexts, and interpretive choices involved in the works you are presenting. The theoretical or analytical section of a creative thesis should be of the same intellectual caliber as any other Plan II thesis. A description of your own creative process in completing your work is not sufficient to meet this portion of the requirement. This section involves background research and analysis. While it does not have to be as long as a traditional two-semester project, it should demonstrate substantial engagement with a set of critical questions or problems addressed in the creative work. The analytical section should count for no less than 40% of the final grade for the creative thesis.

Students working on creative theses should focus on the creative part of the process during the first semester, with the goal of producing a complete rough draft of their work by the end of the first semester. In the second semester, students should revise and refine their creative pieces while also researching and writing the academic treatise accompaniment.

SCIENTIFIC & TECHNICAL THESES

Technical theses are those based on laboratory research. Topics primarily based on laboratory research may not be appropriate for a Plan II thesis and *must* have permission from either the Plan II Director or Associate Director. An alternative for students who want to pursue a lab-based thesis is to do so through a departmental honors thesis course ([see page 12](#)). If a student is not eligible for departmental honors, the Plan II directors may recommend a thesis based on library research related to the scientific field of interest.

If approved, scientific and technical theses must be supervised by faculty in the appropriate field and

conform to the standards of that field. Because scientific theses are typically shorter than analytical theses, they must be accompanied by a treatise of approximately 15-20 pages that address the larger questions raised by the research and explains the results to a non-technical audience. You should describe in lay terms the experiment and the process of inquiry for your particular project. In all cases, you should write the introduction, conclusion, and abstract as if you were addressing the interdisciplinary board of a grant-giving agency and had to explain the significance of your project to a group of intelligent people who know very little about your field.

BUSINESS THESES

Business theses should be grounded in a particular field of business research. As with other types of theses, they should pose an original research question or problem and test a hypothesis in answer to that question. Fields such as marketing, finance, and management vary in their research practices and methods, and students working on a thesis in one of these fields are expected to adhere to the research standards of that field. Business and CBHP students are strongly encouraged to select a thesis supervisor who is actively engaged in research in their respective field.

Business proposals, plans, and case studies (except in select cases) do not qualify as scholarly research, and cannot be submitted in place of a Plan II Honors thesis.

TOPICS TO AVOID

Deadly Secrets: In general, your thesis (or any information in it) cannot be kept confidential. These are kept in the Plan II office and are available for other students or visitors to read. Only in very specific and unusual situations will the director give approval for keeping a thesis confidential.

Autobiography/Hagiography: The story of your life so far is not a good idea for a thesis – no matter how fascinating you’ve found it, your readers probably won’t and there are far more interesting topics than self-reflection. And as much as you love your mother/father/grandparents, etc., it is best to steer away from the stories of their lives as well. Finding the right degree of distance to write about family would take more time than you’ve got, so look for something a little less close to home.

Opinions: Left-wing or right, your opinions will not count as a thesis, no matter how eloquently they are expressed. If you wish to tackle a social issue, you will be expected to do research with an open mind. If you are not prepared to be surprised by the results you find, or if you are unwilling from the start to change your mind on the issue, pick another topic.

Raw Material: Plan II does not accept raw data or transcripts. If you plan a thesis in oral history, consult a Director for guidelines.

CHANGES IN TOPIC

Most students continue to pursue their original topic (with a perfectly normal amount of evolution that takes place as a result of the research process). However, there are situations in which a student wishes to change their selected topic. If the change involves only the focus or direction within the general area of the approved topic, then this is a matter can be determined between the student and the supervisor/second reader. Any change in focus or direction must be discussed with, and approved by, both the

supervisor and second reader before the student undertakes it. If the change involves an entirely new topic, then the student must also discuss the new proposed topic with a Plan II Director and have it approved prior to undertaking work on the new topic. If the change happens very late in the semester and/or necessitates a change in supervisor/second reader, then the student may be advised to drop the thesis class and start over the next semester, in order to provide the amount of time necessary to produce an acceptable thesis. If a final thesis is submitted on a new topic without following these procedures, it will not be accepted.

Supervisors and Second Readers

FINDING A SUPERVISOR

Your supervisor *must* be a UT faculty member with expertise in the area of your thesis work, and *must* be available and on campus for the entire time you plan to work on your thesis. A supervisor is typically a professor that has taught you before, but this is not a requirement. If one of your former professors works in your area, that is wonderful. However, as much as you may have loved one of your old professors, that person cannot advise your thesis if they do not have expertise in the area. This is important because your supervisor will be the person who suggests sources to you, discusses your ideas with you, and then evaluates your work. Someone outside the area may be unaware of very relevant material for your work or of critical questions that you need to consider.

Feel free to meet with several professors and run your ideas past them. Even if they cannot advise you, they may point you in a helpful direction. Don't dread this process. Finding a good advisor is like finding the perfect pair of shoes: it will be a comfortable fit, and the outcome will be attractive.

If you are having trouble finding a supervisor, consult the Directors or an Academic Advisor. They know the faculty and can give good advice. You may also want to look at past areas of research and advising professors using the online thesis database, which is accessible via the Plan II thesis website.

(<http://liberalarts.utexas.edu/plan2/advising/thesis/index.php>)

If You Feel You are Wandering...

We will be happy to help you define your topic or assist in finding a supervisor, especially if you do not put it off until the last minute. The Directors and Academic Advisors are available to aid you in your quest, and the Plan II library will also have copies of well-known guides to research and writing.

Another useful resource is the Eureka database: <https://www.utexas.edu/research/eureka/>

Enter a topic of interest and Eureka returns a list of all the professors whose research relates to that topic, telling you the areas in which they work.

THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR

The supervisor is a professor who is your first reader, guides your research, provides constructive criticism of your writing, and assigns your grades for the thesis course, in consultation with the second reader. If your supervisor judges your work to be an acceptable honors thesis, they will sign your title page at the final oral exam.

You should meet with your thesis supervisor regularly, at least once every two weeks, to discuss your progress. Regular meetings and communication with your supervisor are essential for successful completion of your thesis. *Thus, your primary supervisor MUST be someone who will be working on campus for the length of your project.* Make sure that you and your supervisor understand what you expect from each other; we recommend that you put your expectations in writing at the start. Early in the process, your supervisor will offer suggestions, directions and advice to help you refine your topic to something you can cover well.

Make sure you hand in your drafts and meet all deadlines, which are announced in the course syllabus at the first Thesis Seminar meeting and posted on the Plan II website.

THE SECOND READER

Second readers must be regular UT faculty members. Like your supervisor, the second reader *must* be available for the entire year you plan to work on your thesis. The second reader is a professor who helps guide your research, reads your drafts, and provides helpful feedback.

It is your responsibility to talk to your second reader and work out what you expect from each other. Be clear about dates: when drafts are due, how often you need to meet, etc. If your topic crosses fields, then the second reader's expertise may complement that of your supervisor, and they might meet with you regularly throughout the semester(s). Moreover, if you are writing an interdisciplinary thesis, be sure that your work takes into account the scholarly practices of different fields. Scholars from different fields read theses with different expectations.

Your second reader must receive the thesis by the deadline announced in the Thesis Seminar course syllabus. Often, however, the second reader will want to see a rough draft earlier so that you can incorporate their comments into your final copy. If your second reader judges your work to be an acceptable honors thesis, they will sign your title page at the final oral exam and provide input on the Supervisor's decision for the final grade.

Finding a second reader is like finding a supervisor, only easier. Usually your supervisor will help

you in your search. If not, follow the steps for finding a supervisor or ask us for advice.

CHANGES IN SUPERVISORS/SECOND READERS

Occasionally circumstances arise where a student may need to find a new supervisor or second reader. This can be an extremely stressful situation for the student and should only happen when no other alternative for successful completion of the thesis project exists. If such a situation should arise or seems like it might be imminent, **DO NOT DELAY** in making an appointment with either the Plan II Director or Associate Director to discuss your situation.

Departmental Thesis Option

WRITING A THESIS IN ANOTHER DEPARTMENT

If you have an additional major, you may be eligible to graduate with special honors in that discipline and substitute a departmental honors thesis for your Plan II thesis requirement. You must apply and be admitted to the honors program in your other major department, usually in the junior year (although some programs may require an earlier application; check with your advisor). This option is strongly recommended for students interested in pursuing a graduate degree in a particular discipline. You may not complete both a departmental honors thesis course and the Plan II thesis course using the same thesis project. [*NOTE:* Not all departmental thesis courses carry an upper division Writing Flag designation like the second half of the Plan II Thesis Course (TC 66oHB) does. Discuss whether you will meet this degree requirement with your academic advisor if taking the departmental thesis option.]

Please make sure you fill out the Departmental Thesis form (available in the Plan II office and online) to request this substitution. You must also submit a typed, well-informed and well-written abstract describing your topic. The form is due in the Plan II Office on the 4th class day of the first semester you register for a thesis course. You are responsible for all other deadlines set by the department that oversees your thesis course.

Plan II places two conditions on the substitution of an honors thesis from another department:

1. Submit bound (when appropriate) and electronic copy of your thesis to Plan II, following the guidelines outlined in [Appendix 3](#).
2. Present at Plan II Thesis Symposium and receive a passing grade ([see pages 24-27](#)).

DEPARTMENTAL SPECIAL HONORS

If, for example, you complete a history major and write your thesis through History Honors, you will graduate with special honors in history instead of Plan II. The same is true if you are completing two separate degrees. You are still eligible for University honors (honors, high honors, or highest honors), which is determined by your grade point average.

Registration

HOW TO REGISTER FOR THE THESIS CLASS

With few exceptions, all Plan II students are expected to have completed both their required Junior Seminar courses before starting the thesis course. During the semester prior to when you plan to start your thesis, complete Part One of the Thesis Registration Form (available at the Plan II office and online) and arrange to meet with either the Plan II Director or Associate Director. On this form, you must present a general idea for your thesis topic and potential faculty supervisors. Once the first part of the form is approved, you may register for the thesis course.

Part One of the Thesis Registration Form is due by the **Friday BEFORE registration begins** (in April for Fall registration; October for Spring registration). **NO LATE PROPOSALS WILL BE ACCEPTED.** Missing the deadline could mean delaying your thesis and graduation by a semester.

Part Two of the Thesis Registration Form is due on the **Friday BEFORE finals** during the semester prior to when you plan to begin your thesis. On this part, your supervisor and second reader must sign the form and you must attach a typed, well-informed and well-written abstract describing your topic. The abstract should be a full paragraph to one page in length. You may be asked to rewrite it if it is unclear, vague or too brief. Students commonly make the mistake of waiting until finals have begun to arrange meetings with their proposed supervisor and second reader. Since this is an incredibly hectic time of the semester, faculty may not always be available to meet with you before the deadline. **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE!** You will be dropped from the course if Part Two is not submitted and approved by the deadline.

Students starting the second semester of the two-semester thesis can register themselves for TC 66oHB online. Students who receive an incomplete in the first semester will be dropped from TC 66oHB if they do not have a final grade submitted by the tenth class day. There will be no late thesis registrations after the twelfth class day. This is a firm deadline.

NOTE ABOUT SUMMER REGISTRATION: Registration in TC 66oHA or TC 66oHB in the summer semester is rarely, if ever, approved. Plan II students should never plan on starting or finishing their Plan II thesis over the summer. Faculty are far less available to guide you over the summer, and the majority of students who attempt summer thesis work end up with incompletes, thus delaying their graduation plans. In order to register for the thesis course during the summer, you must receive permission from either the Plan II Director or Associate Director. In addition, to register in TC 66oHB in the summer, you must obtain your thesis supervisor's and second reader's signatures on a Summer Thesis Contract form, to ensure that everyone is committed to finishing the thesis, including the final oral exam, in the timeframe summer requires. If a Plan II Director tentatively approves registration in TC 66oHB during the summer, you will be provided with the contract form and not allowed to register in the course until it is signed and turned in to the Plan II office.

NOTE ABOUT STUDY ABROAD: Many students plan study abroad semesters during their Junior year when these registration steps typically take place. This is completely acceptable; however, if you study abroad the semester prior to starting your thesis, you must **PLAN AHEAD** and meet with a Plan II Director about your plans well in advance. You should also complete the thesis registration paperwork before leaving Austin. This is for your benefit, as trying to arrange your topic approval and supervisor/second reader relationships over email can be problematic and frustrating.

ONE-SEMESTER THESES

Approval to register in the one-semester thesis course, TC 359T, is extremely rare. The one-semester thesis option is approved on an individual basis and by petition with a Plan II Director.

Students should never put off their thesis until their final semester under the assumption that they will be approved to start a one-semester project. Circumstances that merit consideration for registration in TC 359T must be presented to a Plan II Director **ONE SEMESTER IN ADVANCE. NO LATE PROPOSALS WILL BE ACCEPTED.** Students pursuing the Plan II major only and those doing creative theses are not eligible for the one-semester thesis option. Students who complete the one-semester thesis course are not eligible for special honors in Plan II ([see page 22](#)).

DEPARTMENTAL THESES

Registration in a departmental honors thesis courses is controlled by the department, thus you must meet their requirements for adding the course. To notify Plan II you intend to take the departmental thesis option, **you must submit the Departmental Thesis form to the Plan II office or send to Dr. Sarah**

Mason via email (sarah.mason@austin.utexas.edu) by the 4th class day.

The Plan II Thesis Class

CLASS STRUCTURE

The thesis class is a two-semester experience that can be taken fall-spring or spring-fall, depending on your graduation timeline and when you are academically prepared to begin your thesis. The course comprises two three-hour semesters (T C 66oHA and 66oHB).

The course itself consists primarily of independent work that the student is responsible for managing, punctuated by periodic required class meetings with Plan II faculty and fellow thesis students. The class meetings aim to give students a sense of community, to provide a forum for discussing thesis progress with a small group of students working on similar topics, and to present students with the information and guidance necessary for timely and successful completion of their senior thesis projects. Students enrolled in the Plan II thesis course may have their final grades penalized for multiple absences and/or missed assignments required by the course.

The time spent working independently on your thesis each semester should be at least equivalent to the time devoted to any other three-hour class. That is, following the generally recognized formula of weekly class time plus 2-3 times that number for outside study time, you should be scheduling 9-12 hours into your week dedicated to thesis research, writing, and meeting with your professors. Successful thesis students carve out regular weekly time(s) to work on their thesis, ideally at a library or other productive space away from distractions - it is all too easy to let other courses and commitments get in the way of a project like this if you don't have a plan for when and where you will work from the very start.

COMMUNICATION

Similarly, successful thesis students maintain excellent communication with their thesis supervisors and second readers throughout both semesters. Students are responsible for all communication with professors, and should always demonstrate a professional respect

for the time your professors have volunteered for guiding you through the thesis experience.

Each Plan II thesis and student/professor relationship is different, and the structure of the thesis course allows for flexibility in the type and amount of communication and meetings you will need to schedule. Plan II strongly recommends, however, that you meet *in person* with your primary supervisor AT LEAST every two weeks and the second reader AT LEAST monthly. Approximately one month prior to the final day of classes, you will be required to turn in a Progress Report signed by both professors confirming you have been in regular contact with them and are making good progress.

EXPECTATIONS

Although each thesis project will vary by discipline, methodology, and scope, by the end of the first semester class (T C 660HA) every student should have completed the bulk of the thesis research, developed a well-defined thesis question, and written a 2-page prospectus, a 2-page outline, a 4-page annotated bibliography, and 10 draft pages from a chapter (18 pages minimum). A student producing a creative thesis should have completed a first draft of the creative work, as well as a (minimum) 1-page outline for the accompanying academic treatise. By the end of the second semester class (T C 660HB) every student will turn in a completed 60-page thesis, bound and bearing both professors' signed approval ([see pages 28-34](#)).

NOTE FOR DEPARTMENTAL THESIS STUDENTS: Students completing their thesis requirement through another department's thesis courses ([see page 12](#)) ARE NOT required to attend the Plan II thesis class meetings or meet other course assignments (including the Progress Report requirement). Plan II defers to the other department in all areas, including class meetings, deadlines, and length of thesis. However, departmental thesis students are always welcome to attend the Plan II class meetings (especially the meeting prior to Thesis Symposium) and/or follow the deadlines set out by Plan II if your departmental thesis program doesn't offer structure that you think may be helpful for staying on track.

Standards

REVISION, REVIEW, AND GRADING

Your Supervisor and Second Reader should be receiving regular submissions of your work throughout the thesis process. The timing and frequency of your work submissions should be arranged with each professor according to their preferences. You should give your supervisor and second reader a full draft of the thesis about a month prior to the final deadline. Students should be prepared to revise as the supervisor and second reader suggest. In the thesis, you need to demonstrate that you faced, identified, and surmounted a problem in research or the creative process.

Either your supervising professor or second reader may call for further revision to your work, even if doing so will delay your graduation. Be sure you know in advance what standards your professors expect you to follow. If your supervisor expects too much, let us help you resolve this before it is too late.

The Plan II office requires that you submit your thesis in a specified format. A Plan II Director will review your thesis before your grade is submitted, taking into consideration your participation in the thesis seminar course and compliance with course requirements. If they determine that a thesis is below standards, they will hold back the grade for that thesis, pending a conference with the supervisor. The supervisor and second reader, however have the final say on both standards and grading. Like all work at UT, the full range of grades may be applied to senior theses.

VARIED SET OF STANDARDS

We cannot enforce a single set of standards on every thesis, as standards for both research and format vary from field to field. What follows is a set of guidelines that you should read before starting. If the thesis you plan to write does not conform to one of these standards, or if you have special reasons for seeking an exception, ask a Director or Associate Director for approval, in writing.

SUBJECT

Although you may not know exactly what you are doing at the start, a finished thesis should have a well defined problem or purpose clearly stated in the introduction. A research thesis should use primary material when it is available. A technical thesis may be written in the language of its field, but the abstract and the conclusion must be written for the intelligent lay-person.

METHODOLOGY

Your thesis should follow the rules of the discipline of your topic. For example, a psychology thesis should use one of the methods acceptable in psychology, while history and English theses should follow convention in use in those fields. There is more flexibility, however, for Plan II theses that are interdisciplinary. If you are writing a thesis that crosses disciplines, you, your supervisor, and your second reader should determine what methods you will use. It is your responsibility to make sure you communicate frequently with both your supervisor and second reader and understand their expectations.

CONCLUSION

Your thesis should have a conclusion. Creative theses accompanied by a treatise or introduction are an exception to this. No thesis will be accepted that is plainly unfinished. A thesis that breaks off after sixty pages without a conclusion is not acceptable.

LENGTH

Our guideline is approximately 15,000 words (around 60 pages) for a two-semester thesis. This expectation is not arbitrary; it indicates the scope of a thesis project. A thesis that is 40 pages, no matter how concisely written, is almost certainly not dealing with a sufficiently substantial topic or is not dealing with such a topic in enough depth. However, this may vary with the nature of the thesis; creative writing projects tend to be longer, while performance-related treatises are usually shorter. All are held up to the same intellectual standard, regardless of length.

CITATIONS

You must use notes that cite the sources of your information and give credit for ideas and

phrases that are not your own. Footnotes, endnotes, and parenthetical notes are all acceptable, but you might consider the beauty of footnotes for longer citations. However, talk with your supervisors about their preferred method of citation. Whichever method you decide upon, form a lasting relationship. Consistency might be the hobgoblin of small minds, but it is the key to acceptable citations.

REFERENCES

In addition to your many citations, your thesis needs a list of works cited in a standard bibliographic form. If you think your thesis is an exception, please discuss with a Director.

FORMAT

A thesis or treatise should meet the following requirements:

1. Neatly printed - double-sided printing is preferred to conserve paper unless recommended against by a copy center for binding purposes.
2. Numbered pages
3. One-inch margins
4. Follow a manual of style that is in use in its field (consult your supervisor).
5. Proofread - a thesis with more than a few errors in spelling, grammar, or punctuation will not be accepted.

ORAL EXAM

All students enrolled in the Plan II thesis courses are required to complete an oral exam before turning in the completed thesis. Typically, the oral examination is a 30 to 60 minute oral defense. The purpose of the oral exam is to provide a meaningful completion to the capstone of the Plan II education, where you can discuss the results of your thesis endeavor and possible future directions for your research and writing. Though informal, this is a special occasion marking the completion of your project. Your readers will ask you questions, and you may have questions for them. If your answers make it clear that you could not have written the thesis, or if your responses put your thesis in such a new light that your readers now think it should be re-written, you could fail the oral exam; however, this rarely happens. At the end of the oral exam, your Supervisor and Second Reader will sign your thesis title page and turn-in form, indicating their approval of the thesis and whether or not they feel it merits Special Honors. *It is the student's responsibility to provide a copy of the finished thesis in ample time for it to be read thoroughly before the exam. Regular meetings and good communication with your two*

professors throughout your thesis project will play a critical role in the successful completion of this requirement.

Grades

RANGE

A full range of grades, from an A to an F (and including +/-), may be given for a senior thesis. You are not guaranteed an A. An A thesis should be much better than an A term paper, but is not expected to be at the graduate level. The thesis is worth a passing grade (D or better) when both the supervisor and second reader agree. Only those that meet the highest standards for honors work should receive an A. If you turn in a thesis that is below average, you may prefer to accept a very low grade rather than take an incomplete and delay graduation while you rewrite it.

If the thesis is found unacceptable or unfinished, the supervisor may assign an incomplete and allow the student to finish by a date convenient to the supervisor and second reader. Otherwise, it will be assigned an F. Students are entitled to an opportunity to fail.

The grade assigned by your supervisor and second reader accounts for 75% of your final grade in the thesis course. The other 25% is based on meeting required deadlines, participation in the Thesis Seminar meetings and Thesis Symposium. Grading for this portion of the course is explained in the course syllabus as distributed in the first Thesis Seminar meeting each semester.

Because of the diversity of Plan II thesis topics and formats, no one set of grading standards can be applied universally. Supervisors and Second Readers assess thesis quality based on the standards for their fields, which varies across disciplines. What follows below are the most general guidelines regarding expectations in each semester of the thesis course.

FIRST SEMESTER

The grade for the first semester of the two-semester thesis course should be based on the amount of research completed and the quality of the prospectus, outline, annotated bibliography, and 10 pages of draft text, which is due at the end of the first semester. For a creative thesis, the grade should be based on your complete first draft. Talk with your advisor early in the first semester about how much work they expects from you and when

it is expected.

This grade reflects not only the quality of the thesis work but also the progress of the thesis research (or first draft for a creative thesis). A grade of A would typically be given to a student who has been working consistently throughout the semester, meeting with their supervisor and second reader regularly, and has reached a point where the student consulted an appropriate amount of resources, has crafted a detailed outline of the thesis, including a well defined thesis question, and has begun the writing process with 10 draft pages (any chapter of the thesis is acceptable for these 10 pages). A grade of B is usually given to a student who has been working diligently but may require more research or outlining before being ready to write at the start of the next semester. A grade of C tends to be given to the student who has gotten something but not a great deal done, usually because the student did little work until close to the end of the semester and then made a gargantuan last minute effort.

FINAL SEMESTER

A grade of A (*exemplary*) on the final thesis should demonstrate thorough research through a familiarity with authoritative sources and methods of the discipline, a well-reasoned analysis of the research methods and sources used, direct application of the research to the argument being made, a cogent conclusion based on the research, and superior written presentation of the thesis argument. A grade of B (*better than required*) should demonstrate all of the above, but may use fewer or less appropriate research sources and methods, and sufficient (rather than superior) written presentation. A grade of C (*as required but no better*) will indicate a basic grasp of the data and appropriate sources, limited application of the research towards the argument being made, and merely acceptable written style. A grade of D (*barely passable*) indicates minimally acceptable research findings in addition to poor analysis and writing standards. A grade of F is appropriate where the thesis represents a crudely thrown-together last minute effort or even evidence of unoriginal work.

ORAL EXAM

Towards the end of the final thesis course, when the thesis has been written, revised, and is ready to be turned in, the student, supervisor, and second reader should agree on a time and place for the approximately 30-60 minute oral exam (before the final turn-in

deadline). The oral exam can take the format of a conversation about your thesis research and results, or be a more formal question and answer session, depending on your supervisor's and second reader's preferences. At the conclusion of the oral exam, both professors will sign the oral exam/final thesis turn-in form, which will indicate their acceptance of the final thesis and if they feel the thesis merits designation for "Special Honors in Plan II" or nomination as a Model Thesis.

SYMPOSIUM GRADE

All students must participate in the Plan II Thesis Symposium and will be graded on their presentations. Presentations are graded on the high pass/pass/redo basis, and those who earn a redo will be given the opportunity to give a make-up presentation. A passing grade for the thesis symposium presentation is required to pass the thesis course, and students who have not passed will be assigned a grade of "X," or incomplete.

SPECIAL HONORS IN PLAN II

Special Honors in Plan II (also called Department Honors) are conferred upon students whose work on the senior thesis is considered truly outstanding by both the supervisor and second reader. Hard work does not necessarily merit Special Honors, nor does the student's own evaluation of the exceptional nature of their thesis; the decision to schedule a Special Honors oral exam must come from the thesis supervisor, in consultation with Plan II.

To be eligible for Special Honors, the student must complete TC 660H with a grade of "A" in both semesters, and must pass the oral exam. One-semester theses are not eligible. (Note: if the student's final semester grades could conceivably raise the cumulative average to or above 3.5, "Special Honors" would then be contingent upon the final grade point average.) If you would like to be considered for Special Honors, speak with your supervisor and second reader about this when scheduling the final oral exam. The professors' decisions are final.

MODEL THESES

Especially distinguished theses will be considered for special designation as model theses when nominated by the professor. Nominations should be sent to a Plan II Director. Model thesis selections are made every spring semester. Those selected by the

Directors will be recognized at the Plan II commencement ceremony and on the Plan II website.

LATE AND UNFINISHED THESES

Students who submit the final bound copy after the deadlines assume the risk that their grades may not be posted in time for final grades or graduation. In addition, theses submitted to supervisors and second readers late will most likely incur a grade penalty.

Plan II strongly discourages incompletes, but we understand that sometimes students encounter unforeseen difficulties. If you do not finish, or your thesis is judged unacceptable, you cannot graduate from Plan II until the thesis is completed and approved.

If you do take an incomplete, you must agree on a new schedule with your supervisor. Tell the Academic Advisor what this schedule will be and when you plan to graduate. It is your responsibility to keep up with the deadlines set by the student division of Liberal Arts for students with incompletes and to keep in touch with your degree evaluator.

Be especially conscientious if you want to finish and graduate during the summer, since faculty members are often not on campus. Make sure that your supervisor and second reader have the time to work with you in completing the thesis and that there will be someone in the Plan II office to read and check your completed thesis in time for you to be certified for graduation. Check your email for deadlines.

Thesis Symposium

OVERVIEW

Every student in Plan II must receive a passing grade on a Thesis Symposium oral presentation. Since the presentation is only eight minutes long (followed by six minutes for Q&A), the challenge is to craft a presentation that will effectively convey your ideas and engage your audience. The better you engage your audience, the more willingly they will enter the discussion. And the more eager they are, the better feedback they will give you. In addition to feedback, the symposium is useful because preparing a short speech will help you select the points that you most want to make prominent in your written thesis. You may hear questions that are new to you and that you want to answer in your writing. You may also come away with useful suggestions. So don't dread the symposium!

CONTENT

Emphasize the main question that leads your research. After that, your main points concern either your method for exploring the question or your preliminary answer. Because it is difficult to make a number of points effectively even in a long lecture, try to limit yourself to the highlights of your thesis.

For creative theses, your approach will be different, although you may still have points to make in order to interest your audience in the kind of work you are doing. You may decide to read from a story or set of poems, to show art slides, or even to introduce a short performance of a script. Those approaches are all acceptable.

PREPARATION

We recommend preparing an outline for your speech. Then, form a study group as you would for physics, and practice on each other or for chance comers. It's best not to practice alone, because you cannot get used to eyes staring at you.

In most cases, your presentation will be better if you do not read. Good speakers give the impression of spontaneity. They don't read, because reading rarely engages an audience. But having a written text or an outline can give you confidence, and you can refer to it if you feel lost. There is an exception for creative writers. Poets and fiction writers are expected to give readings.

Your presentation will probably be better if not memorized. You need to be prepared to make changes as you go, to adapt to earlier speakers, and to adjust to the audience. And you need to be able to go on if your memory (or media) fails. However, this is not to say you should not run through your presentation a number of times.

ELEMENTS OF YOUR PRESENTATION

Content: Appeal to interests the audience already has. Tailor your content to their knowledge level. Be sure to clearly state your thesis question and how you are crafting your answer to this question.

Structure: Narrative is engaging. When in doubt, tell a story to convey your message.

Style: Look them in the eye, be real, and speak clearly. Slow down. End each sentence with a strong and confident inflection (avoid the rising tone that indicates a question).

Pay attention to whether or not they are following you. If they you see eyes glazing over, go back and catch them. If they are slow to follow you, say less than you had planned. That's why you need to have framed your essential points, so you can jump to them.

Don't look at the floor or the ceiling or out the window. Don't speak too fast or at too low a volume.

Don't overload your audience with information.

Don't read from a prepared text or from slides on the screen. Chances are, they can read the slides without your help.

Don't worry about stage fright. This is not about you. You are not performing. Focus on your audience and connecting them to your message. Keep their needs in mind. What do they need in order to understand you well enough to give you feedback?

Make eye contact with one member of the audience and make believe you are talking to that one person. After a while, move on to someone in another part of the room. Remember to breathe. Stand in a confident posture. Try not to shift too much.

Have a friend in the audience prepared to ask a question for the Q&A portion. They may not need to chime in, but it will help take away any fears you may have about no one asking any questions once your presentation has concluded (which is highly unlikely!).

VISUALS

PowerPoint, Prezi, or other media presentation tools are great if used for its purpose, which is the visual representation of information. It destroys the purpose of your presentation if it is misused. PowerPoint is an especially effective tool for presenting data, charts, and graphs. Your purpose is to engage the audience, so you need to be making contact with them. They should be looking at you, and not at the screen.

You should be looking at them, and not at the computer screen.

For an eight-minute talk, we recommend a keeping the number of slides to the bare minimum (4-5). It takes about two minutes to connect an audience to the content of each slide. For a lecture on art, however, you may need more slides, so there are exceptions to this advice. But do remember not to overload your audience or distract them from your spoken presentation.

Bulleted outlines can be helpful if very brief when used on slides. If you are analyzing a short text, put it on a slide. If you are presenting a logical or mathematical argument, put that on a slide.

Do not write your entire presentation on the slides. Never turn your back to the audience in order to read your slides. At most, give the screen a quick glance to be sure it is the right one. Remember, dealing with power point can slow your down.

Problems with media set-up can completely derail an otherwise fine Symposium presentation. If you plan to use media, arrive at the Symposium location early to access your room, inspect the facilities, and work out any potential snafus ahead of time. You should also practice giving your presentation without any media availability, as a worst

case scenario.

FRAMING YOUR PRESENTATION

Framing helps you stay on target, even if you are interrupted or lose your way. To frame your speech, work out what are your key points, so you can share them with your audience.

You have about 30 seconds to capture their interest before they tune out, daydream, think about sex, etc. Before that happens you need to have brought out your main point.

Frames help set up a context and meaning for the audience. Frames establish focus and help manage the exchanged/dialogue with the audience.

The structure outlined below was developed by Margaret Keys and Steven Tomlinson for Executive Briefings. However, it is also useful for making your symposium presentation.

Executive Briefing Frame/The First Two Minutes

Context: Present a clear picture of what's going on.

Diagnosis of Key Issue: What question are you trying to answer? Why is it important?

Specific Proposed Solution/Approach: What specific steps must be taken to find the answer to your question?

Definition of Success/Deliverable: How will you know when you have completed your project?

The Ask/Purpose: The purpose of your talk and your project. What do you need to move forward?

8 minutes total:

2 minutes to frame

5 minutes for Information, Dialogue and Questions

1 minute to close

Submitting the Thesis

PRESENTATION

Your thesis will represent many hours of hard work. It should be neatly printed on good quality paper and well bound. Use chapter headings if you can and provide a table of contents with page numbers for the start of each chapter or section.

BINDING

Your thesis should be bound. Please look at the copies on display in the office. All theses are required to have your name, thesis title, and the current year on the spine, so the spine should be “closed.” There is no one way to put titles on the spine; just make them neat and long-lasting.

Make at least four copies of the final thesis. One copy is for the supervisor, one for you to keep, and one is reviewed by a Plan II Director and eventually placed on display in the Plan II office.

Many students also give the second reader a copy. Keep in mind that commercial copy shops are very busy at the end of a semester.

THESIS APPROVAL AND ARCHIVING

Your thesis will be reviewed by a Plan II Director before it is accepted. It will then be on public display in the Plan II office and the Joynes Reading Room.

An electronic (.pdf) copy of your final thesis should be submitted via the thesis class group on Canvas. This will allow for permanent and public online storage of your thesis for others to easily search and access via [Texas ScholarWorks](#), an openly available repository.

A thesis is considered a public document and will not be kept confidential unless advance arrangements have been made with the Director.

Appendix 1:

Summary of Requirements

If you do not think that you should be held to any of these requirements, appeal in writing to either Director for an exception before you register for the thesis course.

Thesis length: Thesis length may vary with the nature of the thesis, but the basic guideline is approximately 15,000 words (about 60 pages). To measure the length of your thesis, simply run a word count on your computer. **Chapter/section** headings should be used to organize the thesis.

Format: Your thesis should be neatly printed, double-spaced with one-inch margins, double-sided to conserve paper, and with numbered pages.

Binding: Your thesis should be bound so that the spine is closed. Spiral bound theses will not be accepted. Copy shops provide what is called “fast back” binding. Your name, the title of the thesis and the current year should be on the spine of the bound thesis. Check the thesis library in the Plan II office for different methods of doing this. Whatever method you use, make sure it is neat and durable. Binding may be soft or hard cover - soft cover is more affordable and is perfectly acceptable. The color of the binding does not matter, although clear covers are discouraged.

Title Page: This should be the very first page of your thesis, following the format found in the Appendix. Original signatures on the title page are required in the final, bound thesis submitted to the Plan II office - these should be obtained at the final oral exam. In unusual situations, an electronic signature may be submitted (a digital image of the signature placed within the title page document, before the thesis has been printed and bound). Electronic signatures must be accompanied with an email from the professor giving permission to use their electronic signature. The email should be printed and loosely (not bound) placed in the final thesis.

Abstract: A brief summary (no more than one page) of the thesis should follow the title page; see the example in the appendix. The abstract should be bound in the thesis after the title page and before the table of contents.

Acknowledgements: This is your opportunity to reflect on the project and thank those who helped you along the way. If included, this should come after your abstract.

A **Table of Contents** is strongly recommended. This should come after your abstract or acknowledgements.

Citations should follow a consistent style. The style you choose will depend on the subject of your thesis. The most common are the MLA style, used for English and the humanities; the APA style, used in the social sciences; and endnotes or footnotes, often used in history and whenever your citations are so long as to distract from your text. This will be the case if they contain substantive material along with references to sources. If you are unsure which style to use, speak with your Supervisor or a Plan II Director.

Direct **quotations** should be indicated as such and their authors properly cited. When quoting a passage of more than three lines, present the quotation without quotation marks, indented, single-spaced, and in block form.

A **conclusion** or afterward is a good idea for most theses.

A list of **Works Cited** or **Bibliography** is required at the end of most theses. As with citations, formats for bibliographies may vary depending on your topic and discipline. Consistency is the fundamental requirement.

Biography: The final page of your thesis should be a brief biography about yourself, your academic interests, history, future plans, and any thing else you'd like to include (keep it professional). See the Appendix for an example.

Thesis Symposium: You may not submit a thesis for Plan II until you have received a passing grade on a thesis symposium presentation.

Oral Exam/Thesis Turn-in Form: The thesis may not be turned in without completion of the oral exam requirement. Bring your final, bound thesis and the Thesis Turn-in Form (available on the Plan II website, the Plan II office, and Canvas) to your oral exam. Obtain signatures on this form to confirm completion of the oral exam and to give your Supervisor and Second Reader the opportunity to assign your final grade and any special honors considerations. Once signed, the turn-in form should be placed loosely inside the final, signed and bound thesis, and then turned into the Plan II office.

PDF copy: Submit a pdf file of your final thesis using the Canvas assignment submission. The pdf file will be electronically archived in Texas ScholarWorks, a public repository for scholarly research hosted by UT Austin.

Appendix 2: Frequently Referenced Style Manuals

The following are some standard style manuals. Please consult with your supervisor and second reader for appropriate style manual:

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009.

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010.

Turabian, Kate. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 9th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Hacker, Diana, and Nancy Sommers. *A Pocket Style Manual*. 8th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2017.

CSE Style Manual Committee. *Scientific Style and Format : The CSE Manual for Authors, Editors, and Publishers*. 8th ed. Chicago: Council of Science Editors in cooperation with the University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Columbia Law Review. *The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation*. 20th ed. Cambridge, Mass.: The Harvard Law Review Association, 2015.

The University of Chicago Press Staff. *The Chicago Manual of Style*. 17th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Appendix 3: Sample Pages

This is a sample title page. The title page should come before the abstract. Original signatures should be on the lines above the faculty names and submitted in the bound copy for the Plan II office.

SCHOOL FINANCE REFORM IN TEXAS

Gail F. Levine

TC 660H
Plan II Honors Program
The University of Texas at Austin

May 10, 2017



Dean Mark G. Yudof, LL.B.
School of Law

Supervising Professor



Diane L. Schallert, Ph.D.
Department of Educational Psychology

Second Reader

This is a sample abstract. The abstract should appear in the thesis in the following format after the title page and before the table of contents.

ABSTRACT

Author: Gail F. Levine

Title: School Finance Reform in Texas

Supervising Professor: Dean Mark G. Yudof, LL.B.

The Texas Supreme Court's unanimous decision in October 1989 to hold the current system of public elementary and secondary education funding unconstitutional has thrust the issue of school finance to the top of the state's agenda in its emergency legislative sessions this spring. Equality, however, is not the only issue under discussion. Twin goals are driving the Texas education reform movement—the desires for equality and for quality. The Court demands substantial equality, the Legislature desires a decent level of quality and the tension between the two will shape Texas's new school finance act. How can the twin goals be best reconciled in a single legislative act? This is the question this paper seeks to answer.

The first task is to understand which principle of educational equality the Court demands—"outcome" equality or one of three types of "input" equality: minimum revenue equality, total revenue equality, or access equality. The second task is to discover how to improve educational quality. Third, I will examine how closely each of the Legislature's bills from the first 1990 special session meets the twin goals of equality and quality. Finally, I will propose my own ideal bill.

This is a sample biography. This should be the last page of the thesis.

Gail F. Levine was born in New Jersey on July 1, 1968, and moved with her family to Dallas, Texas in 1979. She enrolled in the Plan II Honors program at the University of Texas at Austin in 1986 and studied history in her junior year at University College, London. In college, she edited the University's political journal, POLIS magazine, and wrote editorials for the *Daily Texan*. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1990 and plans to attend Harvard Law School in the fall. Ms. Levine will intern at the White House's Office of National Service in Washington, D.C., this summer.