Most Common Mistakes in Submitting Theses and Dissertations

by Debra Conlin

Welcome to the Graduate School at Michigan State University. If you are planning to write a masters thesis or doctoral dissertation, you will need to visit our office in the near future, so let me introduce myself.

My name is Debbie Conlin. I am the person who will receive your thesis or dissertation and check it for proper formatting. Our office is responsible for the acceptance or rejection of your completed manuscript. Our staff understands the amount of work that goes into the research and writing of a thesis or dissertation. We know the sacrifices you have made to complete this goal, so let me speak for the entire staff and say our office is here to serve you. We want to help you succeed and to make this experience as painless as possible. If you have any questions, call our office or stop in to see us at our new location (18 Linton Hall). Perhaps our assistance will prevent some of the most common mistakes graduate students incur while submitting their completed manuscripts.

Before sharing with you some of the common mistakes graduate students make while completing their theses or dissertations, I would like to suggest a few valuable sources of information.

One source of information graduate students should refer to is the Academic Programs book. In the Graduate Education section for Master's Programs, a wealth of information is included under the subheading, "Research and Thesis Plan A." For Doctoral Programs, information is listed under the subheading "Dissertation and Abstract" and "Microfilming and Publication of Dissertation." This information will describe requirements set by the university governing theses and dissertations. The Academic Programs book also refers to a handbook called "The Graduate School Guide to the Preparation of Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations." This handbook can be obtained from the Graduate School, 18 Linton Hall. You should obtain this booklet when you are ready to begin writing your thesis or dissertation. The booklet is updated each year and it is imperative graduate students get current information.

Another source of information is the MSU Schedule of Courses. This booklet will inform students of deadline dates leading to the submission of the thesis or dissertation. The Academic Programs book and the MSU Schedule of Courses can be obtained from the Office of the Registrar, 150 Administration Building.

are taken prior to the actual writing of the thesis or dissertation. However, some mistakes occur repeatedly, every semester, and may become a source of unnecessary frustration and discouragement if they are not avoided. We therefore offer the following tips to make submission of your thesis or dissertation run more smoothly:

1. Obtain approval for human or animal research before work is started.

2. Complete the packet of forms obtained from the Graduate School: namely, bookplate, thesis/dissertation agreement form, surveys, human or animal subjects approval form, typist evaluation, etc.

3. Pay the thesis or dissertation fee with a check or money order. Cash and/or credit cards are NOT acceptable. The check for the current fee must be submitted with the thesis or dissertation. Each year the correct amount can be found in the "The Graduate School Guide to the Preparation of Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations" and also in the current semester packet of forms obtained from the Graduate School office.

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4. Understand and abide by all paper specifications. The paper must be 20 lb. weight and the cotton or rag content MUST be 25% or higher. The watermark seal on each page should indicate the percentage of cotton content.

5. Number your pages correctly. Refer to page 13-14 and 32 of the guidebook for instructions.

6. Meet all margin specifications. ALL left margins must be 1 1/2". The top, bottom and right margins must be 1".

7. Copy quality MUST be flawless. Black smudges, xerox lines, etc. are not acceptable.

8. Major professor’s name must be included on the EXTRA title page two spaces below the year.

9. The guidebook asks for one blank page at the beginning of theses and dissertations. This page is NOT to be counted or numbered.

10. The degree is not conferred the semester of the defense or oral exam. The degree is conferred the semester the course work is complete and the thesis or dissertation is submitted and accepted by the Graduate School.

11. The spring, summer, and fall deadline for submitting thesis and dissertation is NOT negotiable. Extensions or exceptions cannot be made.

12. When the thesis or dissertation is complete, the bookplate found in the packet must be signed by the major professor. Communicate with the major professor in advance (several weeks or months) to assure they will be available for a signature.

The Graduate School extends its services to all graduate students who have questions. If you would like to have your thesis or dissertation reviewed before the final copy is submitted, please drop by our new offices at 118 Linton Hall. No appointment is necessary. Our hours are from 8:00 - 12:00 and 1:00 - 5:00. Good luck!