

Thesis and Project Instructions

OVERVIEW

The thesis for Master of Arts (MA) students is a written work and is a requirement of the degree. Master of Divinity (MDiv) students may choose to do a final project, which is different from a traditional academic essay and can include a presentation, but does include a written component. **MA students are strongly encouraged to register for the Thesis Seminar courses, UT 150 (Fall) and UT 151 (Spring).**

A thesis (MA) or written component of a final project (MDiv) must show academic rigor, good research, plus the development and understanding of the material covered, and relevant technical competency. The thesis/final project should represent your original work and, except for direct quotations, it must be in your own words. Plan, research, and write your thesis/final project in regular consultation with your faculty readers/supervisors, particularly the primary faculty.

MA Thesis: The exact length of the work is not specified; fifty pages of content (approximately 12,000 words) is normally satisfactory. The length should be determined by achieving an adequate treatment of the subject. If the topic cannot be covered adequately in about fifty pages, sharpen the issue or the question that is to be treated in your work, in consultation with your readers.

MDiv Project: The presentation or project must be supported by a documentation of your purpose, sources, and methodology. In some instances, an evaluation of the project might be requested from the project supervisor after completion of the project. You may also write an essay, of approximately the same length as a thesis (fifty pages), espousing and developing a theological position and documenting its sources. The final project may focus on one or integrate two or more fields of study. In all cases, the project must include a written academic paper of approximately twelve to twenty pages.

DEADLINES/MILESTONES

The below is outlined for the normal sequence of a thesis/project. View the **Academic Calendar** accessible from Registrar webpage [here](#) for exact dates.

Early September:

1. Begin thinking about your thesis/project especially **readers/supervisors**. Approach faculty you are interested in having serve as your thesis readers/project supervisors and discuss your topic area. **Written confirmation directly from faculty readers/supervisors must be obtained**, email acceptable.
2. Determine the culminating work – thesis (required for MA), project or electives (MDiv) – and register accordingly.

Mid-October:

1. Finalize topic with readers/supervisors.
2. Complete this [Thesis Overview](#) (MA) or [Project Overview](#) (MDiv) which is submitted to the Assistant Dean who then confirms with the readers/supervisors.

Early December:

1. Complete and submit this [Proposal Template](#) (Word doc.) to your readers/supervisors.
2. Once the **Proposal** is approved, save to your ePortfolio.
3. Email approved **Proposal** to readers and academics@utsnyc.edu.



Mid-January:

Formal (MA) **thesis only** – send extended outline and preliminary *annotated* bibliography of 10-15 sources to all of the following:

1. readers/supervisors
2. academics@utsnyc.edu
3. upload to ePortfolio

Early April:

1. Submit final work to both readers in whichever preferred format they request (printed or emailed PDF/Word doc.). **No extension permissible for expected graduates.**
2. Email PDF of final work to academics@utsnyc.edu.
3. Upload final work to ePortfolio.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

The paper should be written in a standard, double-spaced, twelve-point font with one-inch margins; footnotes should be formatted in ten-point font. Indicate **short quotations** (no more than two sentences) by quotation marks; indicate **long quotations** (three or more sentences) with 0.5-inch indentation on right and left margins, single-spacing, and eleven-point font. Provide the source of every quotation, item of evidence, or citation of opinion according to standard reference forms. Obtaining permission to use specific material, when necessary, is your responsibility. Documentation and attribution of all sources are standard academic requirements.

Observe the highest standard with correct spelling, punctuation and grammar. Follow consistent format and typography found in a generally recognized style manual. Footnotes and references should appear at the bottom of the appropriate pages, or at the end of each chapter, or just before the bibliography.

Whichever style/format you choose, follow it consistently. Recommended manuals include Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* and the *Chicago Manual of Style*. There are many editions of these and other suitable manuals. Strunk and White's popular *The Elements of Style* is useful, but is not a style book. Many of these manuals are available in the Burke Library and local bookstores.

A **table of contents** must be included providing an outline of the treatment and also a list of charts, graphs, or illustrations if applicable. The **bibliography** at the end must list all books and articles used throughout the thesis (a 50-page thesis usually has a minimum of 25 sources). The bibliography may be arranged alphabetically, chronologically, or topically. In each entry, include author's name, exact title of work, and place and date of publication. In the case of articles in periodicals, or single chapters in books, etc., give the volume number, relevant pages of the portion used, and periodical date.

The **title page** should contain the title of the thesis, author's name, date, and degree. Example:

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of [your degree]
at Union Theological Seminary [date]**

Double-sided printing is acceptable if your readers require a physical copy. Do not use spring-back binders, clamp notebooks, ring notebook binder, or any binder that does not hold the manuscript securely. A local copy store should be able to bind physical copies, if readers prefer printed version.



LIBRARY SUBMISSION/ONLINE DEPOSIT

Below is information shared by the Burke Library regarding student deposit of the final theses and projects.

DOES THE BURKE LIBRARY COLLECT STUDENT THESES?

The online repository [Academic Commons](#) is where students, faculty, and staff can upload any of their original created work. This is how the Libraries preserve and maintain access to student theses. Academic Commons is used by both Columbia University and affiliate schools (including Union), especially for MDiv, MA, and DMin thesis, capstones, and final projects.

SHOULD STUDENTS DEPOSIT THEIR THESIS IN ACADEMIC COMMONS?

It is up to each student to decide for themselves. Librarians and faculty recommend it. Here are some of the benefits of depositing in Academic Commons:

- Link/URL/DOI for the work, which can be perma-linked in an online CV or website
- Ensured long-term access, preservation, and discoverability
- Many choices for file types including documents, videos, audio files, and more
- Copyright and Open Access options with Creative Commons licenses
- Monthly download reports sent via email, showing monthly and total reach
- Researchers can [search Academic Commons to browse all works](#) by the Union community

IS IT DIFFICULT, ARE THERE ANY DOWNSIDES?

It is fairly easy. The only catch is, it isn't automatic – students **have to upload their own work** to Academic Commons, if they choose to. The library does not upload on students' behalf. See more information on the [Academic Commons website](#). If a student wants to remove their work from Academic Commons in the future (because they change their mind, or because of copyright shifts) that is very simple too.

MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT THESES / PUBLISHING / ACADEMIC COMMONS?

Email burke@library.columbia.edu.

