

# Thesis Handbook

A Guide for MABS and MDiv Students

INSTITUTE OF  
BUDDHIST  
STUDIES



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## **Overview of the IBS MABS & MDiv Thesis Project**

IBS MABS and MDiv students are required to submit a thesis that represents the equivalent of at least two three-unit courses. The MA thesis is expected to show the competence of the student for independent investigation, scholarly judgement, and creativity. It should demonstrate that the student is able to deal with research materials and to organize a problem in acceptable academic form. A general understanding of the problem is required as well as knowledge of the standard reference works and journals that focus on the subject. An adequate bibliography must be included. A thesis must consist of 75 to 90 pages.

All requirements for the thesis must be completed while the student is registered. The student must be enrolled to consult with professors about the thesis. The student's defense should be done at least two to four weeks before the thesis filing deadline in order to leave time for the student to revise their draft prior to filing it.

### **Complete a Thesis in Ten Easy Steps!**

1. A thesis starts with an idea, the topic you want to study. Once you've got an idea, talk with your advisor to start formulating a research project and identifying who should be on the committee.
2. Once you've formed your committee, write a thesis proposal which will need to be approved by your committee and the Dean.
3. Do the research and write your thesis. During this process, you'll probably be getting feedback from your committee chair and/or other members of the committee on drafts of the thesis.
4. Schedule the oral defense.
5. Once you've finished the final defense draft of the thesis, submit it to the committee.
6. Rest.
7. At the oral defense, you will have an opportunity to discuss your work with the committee, answer questions, and receive more feedback. The committee will give its final evaluation of the thesis and may ask for revisions.
8. Complete any revisions to the thesis and make sure it is formatted correctly.
9. Submit (file) the thesis with the Registrar and complete any necessary paperwork for graduation.
10. Celebrate!

**Helpful tip:** consult the [IBS Academic Calendar](#) and the [GTU Extended Calendar](#) to find the thesis filing deadline for the semester in which you want to graduate. Then work backwards to determine when you should schedule the defense, complete the final draft, research and write the thesis, write a thesis proposal, form a committee, and discuss your thesis timeline with your advisor.

### ***When Should I Begin the Thesis Process?***

The MABS program is designed so that students can complete their studies in two years of full-time (12 units per semester) coursework. The MDiv program is designed so that students can complete their studies in three years of full-time coursework. Generally speaking, a student should start discussing their research topic with their advisor and potential committee members no later than the midpoint of their program.

For MABS students, this means that by the end of the second semester of full-time coursework, you should have a clear idea of what your research topic is and which faculty you want to work with.

For MDiv students, this means that by the end of the third semester of full-time coursework, you should have a clear idea of what your research topic is and which faculty you want to work with.

Students who are enrolled part time or who have matriculated into a degree program from a certificate program should adjust their timelines accordingly. Regardless of whether a student is enrolled full or part time, all students are required to adhere to the dates and deadlines in the [IBS catalog](#) and [Academic Calendar](#).

Students who wish to participate in the IBS Exchange Program with either Ryukoku University or Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts are strongly encouraged to have a solid first draft of their thesis completed prior to their studies abroad.

Students should work closely with their Academic Advisor to ensure that all deadlines are met and that they make satisfactory progress toward graduation.

# **Thesis Process: From Topic to Proposal**

## **Selecting a Thesis Topic**

The thesis topic, which should be in the student's concentration or MABS degree track, is drawn up in consultation with the Thesis Committee, and must be approved by the Committee and Dean. Keep in mind that different areas of specialization may have discipline-specific methods, expectations, or foci. Discuss these with your advisor early and often!

Students may find the following three-part research topic formula from *The Craft of Research* (4th edition) to be helpful in formulating their thesis topic:

1. **Research Interest:** What interests you? What are you inspired to research?
2. **Indirect Question:** What do you want to understand in studying your research interest?
3. **Significance:** Why is your research interest important to you and the communities to which you belong?

This can be expressed with the following single sentence: "I am studying **X** because I want to know more about **Y** in order to help my readers understand **Z**."

MABS and MDiv students are required to take HR-1630: Methods in Buddhist Studies for which the final project is a draft of your thesis proposal.

## **Forming a Thesis Committee**

The [IBS Thesis Proposal Form](#) must be submitted at least 90 days prior to the defense or oral exam (see the [IBS Academic Calendar](#) for thesis filing deadline). If you have any trouble forming your committee, please consult with the IBS Dean for assistance. The Thesis Proposal Form requires signatures from the student, their advisor, and the IBS Dean. The Dean's signature certifies that the student has complied with the rules for forming a committee, that they are comfortable with the student's choice of committee members, and that they are confident that these particular scholars can be helpful to your work. Once you submit the form, it is usually also a good time to schedule the defense with the IBS Registrar and your Committee.

It is essential that the Thesis Committee be appointed during the planning stages of the thesis so they have a chance to express concerns about any substantial issues before the thesis is fully in progress.

MABS & MDiv students are required to have two members on the Thesis committee, both of whom should be regular members of the IBS faculty ([Core Faculty or Research Fellows](#)), not an adjunct or visiting scholar. Generally speaking, your Academic Advisor will serve as the Committee Chair. However, if your topic would be better supported by another member of the faculty, and in consultation with your advisor, you may choose a different person to serve as Chair. Usually, the Chair then becomes your Academic Advisor.

A third reader is not required; however, you and your committee may determine that the project would be best supported by an additional member with appropriate scholarly expertise. The third reader may be: any member of the IBS faculty, including adjunct faculty; a faculty member from the GTU or one of its member schools; or an outside reader from UC Berkeley or another university. An outside reader's curriculum vitae (CV) must be submitted with the Thesis Proposal Form for the Dean's consideration. Outside readers are expected to have a publishing/teaching record, and, preferably, an academic appointment. Students can consult with the Registrar to see if their potential outside reader has already been approved to serve on thesis committees.

### ***Writing a Thesis Proposal***

The thesis proposal is composed of six elements (scope & nature, thesis statement, methodology, significance, outline, and short bibliography); save for the short bibliography, the proposal should be no more than five pages double spaced, composed in Times New Roman 12 point font. A breakdown of the six elements follows:

- **Scope & Nature:** Define what the project is about, the field in which it is located, background of the topic, and what is not to be included in the study.
- **Thesis Statement:** One or two sentences that state what the work will attempt to demonstrate or accomplish.

- **Methodology:** Explain the theoretical frameworks and specific methods that will be used for research and analysis.
- **Significance:** Discuss the significance of the work, that is, its contribution to Buddhist studies or to a religious community.
- **Outline:** Clearly indicate the topics and sequence of their development. This may take the form of a proposed chapter outline.
- **Short Bibliography:** Most significant works that will be used in the study. This list of 20 to 40 items should be compiled in consultation with all the members of a student's thesis committee.

### ***Best Practices for Proposal Writing***

**Read the Descriptions Carefully:** Each description of the six elements above gives clear instructions of what to include for each one. Use the descriptors as signposts to help your committee identify what methods and theories you will utilize, what contribution you seek to make, what will and will not be included in your research, what topics and sequences of development will be involved in your research, and so on.

**Avoid Wordiness:** Students only have five pages to elaborate on their thesis project through the various elements of the proposal. Being concise here is essential. Consider whether or not a statement or sentence could be rephrased more simply or economically; whether or not certain details are necessary to the overall objective of each of the elements.

**Consult with Your Advisor & Committee Regularly:** Your Advisor and committee members will be the ones to approve your proposal, so getting their feedback at every step of the process, draft after draft, will ensure that your research is not only feasible but grounded firmly in the field of Buddhist studies.

# Writing the Thesis

## Accessing Research Materials

Recall that the thesis is expected to show the competence of the student for independent investigation, scholarly judgement, and creativity. It should demonstrate that the student is able to deal with research materials and to organize a problem in acceptable academic form. In order to be better prepared for writing the thesis, students should familiarize themselves with the resources available through the GTU and UC Berkeley.

All IBS students have access to the library resources of the GTU and UC Berkeley. For distance students, the GTU library has a large collection of materials that can be accessed remotely as well as inter-library borrowing agreements with libraries across the country. Familiarize yourself with the resources available on the [GTU library home page](#). For local students, UC Berkeley's libraries are an invaluable resource, with general and specialized libraries that store books in the millions. IBS students can retrieve their borrowing card from the [Privileges Desk](#) in Doe Library upon showing proof of course registration or a GTU library card.

According to the UC Berkeley Library [website](#), the borrowing card allows for entry into most of UC Berkeley's thirty-six libraries as well as:

- A maximum of 20 books charged out at any one time.
- Reference assistance.
- Databases, library catalogues and other education resources via public computers in the libraries.
- Many library events
- Library exhibits
- Printing/scanning in the libraries.

Not only will the Gardner Main Stacks and the East Asian Library be vital resources for IBS students, as these contain a wealth of materials germane to the field of Buddhist studies, the online databases of journals, periodicals, and other digital resources will be indispensable. Students are encouraged to acquaint themselves with these resources as they build their bibliography and draft their thesis proposal.



In addition to the resources available through UC Berkeley, the GTU provides students with crucial resources for their research. Key electronic resources available to IBS students through the GTU are:

- ATLA Religion Plus Database
- ArtSTOR
- Brill Books & Journals
- Cambridge University Press Journals
- EBSCO E-Book Collection
- JSTOR
- Oxford Reference Online
- Project Muse
- ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global
- SAGE Journals

Materials not found either through the GTU or UC Berkeley libraries can be accessed through the Interlibrary Loan system. Students can find out more about this program at the GTU Library and make requests for an interlibrary loan [here](#).

Students can also request the GTU Library acquire certain materials if they are not already available through the channels above. Acquisition requests can be made [here](#).

### ***Working with Your Committee***

As per the requirements mentioned above, the members of your committee must be regular members of the IBS faculty. This means that your committee members have courses to teach and other students to advise as well as administrative duties that comprise full-time work. Often, regular members of the faculty also serve as leaders in their sanghas. This is to say, your committee members are busy people with busy lives; they will need your patience as you work with them on your thesis.

Figuring out how to effectively communicate with your committee members as they work amid their other responsibilities will be key to the writing process. Students are advised to do the following as they prepare to write their thesis:

- Work with committee members to develop a timeline for delivering drafts.
- Establish expectations with committee members for effective communication and delivery of feedback.
- Work diligently to proofread and edit complete or partial thesis drafts before sending them to committee members.

Students who are facing issues with any committee member should consult with the Dean to address their concerns and make any necessary changes.

### ***Best Practices for Writing and Research***

**Don't forget your research question:** As you are in the process of writing your thesis, the research question which inspired your inquiry will act as your North Star; it will serve as the guide for your research. It is easy to stray into extraneous topics and get distracted from the initial purpose of your research. Keeping your research question in mind will help to avoid “going down the rabbit hole” as it were. If you feel as though you have gotten off-topic in your research, ask yourself: does looking into this subject help answer my research question? If not, then you can set it aside and reorient yourself to answering your research question.

**Keep a routine:** Half the battle of writing a thesis is making the time to write between the various responsibilities we all have. Commit yourself to a writing routine; make time where you can block out distractions and focus on the research. Of course, this is easier said than done, so it is advisable to consider the other commitments present in your life as you enter the writing process. Be sure not to overwhelm yourself with too many responsibilities.

**Take time for yourself:** It is just as easy to burn out as it is to lose your way as you are writing and conducting research. Part of developing the routine just mentioned can be setting clear boundaries for when you are and are not focused on your research and writing. Stepping away from your research to spend time with loved ones, rest, or even just go outside can help relieve stress and allow you to clear your mind.

**Don't lose sight of your passion:** Related to keeping your research question at the forefront, remaining passionate about your research is crucial. Remaining passionate can help to avoid burnout and keep you on your routine. Every student comes to the IBS with a question or

concern they are trying to solve, one which develops from their lived experience. Keeping that question in mind and the experiences which inspired it can help to remind you why you are researching and writing about a given topic. Losing sight of that purpose can be discouraging, and can lead to apathy and withdrawal from the research and writing process.

**Peer Support:** Forming a group with other students who meet regularly to read and comment on one another's work is invaluable. The group does not have to be limited to people in your specific area of study, but should be made up of people with whom you can work effectively and trust and who are at a similar stage in their program (writing a thesis). Alternately, you may want to consider pairing up with one other student with whom you have regular face-to-face or phone/zoom meetings. These meetings can take many forms — from discussing your process, problems or obstacles you are working through, celebrating successes, to actually writing with another person in the same room. The important thing is that they should help move your work forward and provide you with support from other students working through their own research and writing processes.

## ***The Defense***

Early in the research and writing process—as early as when you submit the thesis proposal form—you should coordinate with the committee to schedule the defense. Remember to give yourself two to four weeks between the defense and the filing deadline.

### ***The Defense Draft***

Students should expect to send their committee the “defense draft” of the thesis two to four weeks before the defense. The defense draft is the more-or-less final version of your thesis. It should be formatted correctly. It should include all citations and a bibliography. It should include front matter such as the table of contents and title page. (A sample title page is included at the end of this handbook.) Submitting a defense draft is important so that at the defense the student and their committee are all referring to the same version of the thesis.

Once you’ve submitted your defense draft to the committee, this is a good opportunity to rest and reflect on your work. Do not continue to send edits to your committee.

### ***Format of the Oral Defense***

On the day of your defense, you will be invited into the exam room (or a Zoom meeting room), and the Chair will provide you with an overview of how the defense will proceed. The Chair will ask you to leave the room while the Committee discusses your work and decides on the order of questions.

The Committee will then invite you back into the room. At this point, you will generally be asked to provide a short summary of your work, your thesis’ main argument and findings, and/or to reflect on the work and the process of completing the thesis. You should prepare these remarks before the day of the defense. And remember to be concise and brief. The Committee may only give you a few minutes to speak.

At this point, you and the Committee will engage in a conversation about your work. Generally, committee members will take turns asking questions about the thesis. These questions

may be more abstract, asking you to reflect or clarify some of your main points. Questions may also take the form of helpful suggestions for further research or corrections needing to be made to the thesis. This discussion may be open-ended, and the length will depend on your work and your committee.

Once the conversation has drawn to a close, the Committee will once again ask you to leave the room while they deliberate on the defense result. The Committee has the following options:

- Approved with Honors
- Approved as it Stands
- Approved with Minor Revisions
- Approved with Major Revisions
- Fail with request for second oral
- Terminal fail

## ***Filing the Thesis and Graduation***

Please consult with the IBS Registrar for thesis filing procedures. Generally, students should expect to submit a printed copy of the thesis on acid-free paper, formatted correctly for binding (see below), to the Registrar along with a copy of the [Degree Program Checklist](#) and be prepared to pay any necessary filing and/or graduation fees. Attention to the details of this process are crucial in order for you to graduate on time. The filing deadline is generally October 1 for fall graduation and April 1 for spring graduation.

If a student defends their thesis before the end of registration (generally the second Friday of the semester), they do not need to register and pay tuition for that semester. The filing deadline remains the same. As always, consult the [Academic Calendar](#) for specific deadlines and discuss your plans with your academic advisor early and often.

### ***Formatting and Citations***

Proper formatting and citations are essential to the filing draft of the thesis. Improper formatting or incorrect citations can hold up the filing process, as it requires the draft to be examined by the IBS Registrar for these qualities. Drafts with improper formatting or incorrect citations will be turned away for revisions! To avoid missing the deadline for filing, it is advisable to submit your thesis for filing early. **Do not wait until the last minute!**

### ***Formatting the Thesis***

The filing draft must conform with the following formatting standards:

- **12-point Times New Roman font.** Footnotes as well as wording for charts and graphs should be less than 12-point yet still legible (10-point is recommended).
- **The left hand margin should be set at 1.5 inch.** The top, right and bottom margins should be set at 1 inch.
- **Page lines should be double spaced,** save for where Turabian guidelines stipulate otherwise (e.g., footnotes and blockquotes).
- Content pages (the introduction, chapters, conclusion, and bibliography) should be numbered with Arabic numerals, with page numbers in the right hand side of the footer

(no closer to the edge than the right margin of the page).

- The title page of the thesis, however, is **unnumbered**. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the features of your word processor to ensure that you can format this properly!
- The title page should include the following information in this order (a sample is included at the end of this handbook):
  - Title of the thesis
  - Degree for which the thesis is being submitted (“a Master’s thesis submitted to the faculty of the IBS in partial fulfillment for the degree of MABS/MDiv”)
  - Student’s name
  - Date and year of the submission
  - Names of the committee members (lower right hand corner)
  - Signature and date lines for each committee member (lower right hand corner)
- The front matter should be numbered with lower-case Roman numerals, with page numbers in the center of the footer.
- **All citations should be made as footnotes** (*not* endnotes or in-text citations), following the notes-bibliography style of Turabian (see below for more information).
- **All footnotes should be indented a half-inch from the left margin**, with one space between each footnote.
- Block quotations should be single-spaced and indented a half inch from the left **and** right margins.

Students are strongly encouraged to review the GTU’s [guidelines for theses and dissertations](#). For formatting concerns not covered here please consult the most recent [edition](#) of the *Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations* by Kate L. Turabian.

### **Citations in the Thesis**

Following the standards set by the GTU, the IBS uses Turabian style for citations and bibliographic references. Within this style, the IBS requires the use of notes-bibliography style of Turabian for all citations and bibliographic references. Notes-bibliography style should not be confused with “author-date” style. An exposition of both the basic features and applications of notes-bibliography style can be found in sections 16 and 17 of the 9th edition of *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (2018). *The Chicago Manual of Style* offers a free Turabian [quick-guide](#) with basics on how to use notes-bibliography style.

The GTU encourages students to use [Zotero](#), a free, open-source tool for reference management. The GTU also provides [instructional videos](#) on how to get started with the software. Zotero can be used in conjunction with Microsoft Word and Google Docs.

While the Zotero software is recommended for use by IBS students, online citation machines should be avoided. These applications typically are not properly updated for the most recent edition of Turabian and thereby can provide incorrect citations. Another issue typical with these applications is they may include only one style of Turabian, either author-date or notes-bibliography, but not both. If students wish to use online citation machines, they are highly encouraged to check the citations produced against the stipulations found either in the Turabian quick-guide or *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*.



THESIS TITLE: A SUB-TITLE EXPLAINING A BIT MORE ABOUT THE SUBJECT  
OF THIS THESIS

A thesis by

Jane R. Student

presented to

the Faculty of the

Institute of Buddhist Studies

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Buddhist Studies

Berkeley, California

April, 2022

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Dr. First A. Faculty, Coordinator

Date

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Rev. Dr. Second Faculty, Member

Date