Guide for Thesis Directors

Directing a thesis can be deeply rewarding, especially when all concerned parties remain organized and enthusiastic. The WCU Graduate School encourages you as a director to use your own best judgment and recognize that all expectations and experiences are unique. Above all, we urge you to consult and rely heavily upon the WCU Thesis Guide and the Thesis/Disquisition Information and Resources web page to facilitate your directing process and to assure student success. The checklist below summarizes the major duties and deadlines for directors.

A Director’s Duties

1. Verify Eligibility
   Ensure that your student is eligible to write a thesis. Requirements vary by department (comprehensive exams, credit hours, etc., may determine whether and when a student can begin research). Check with the student’s advisor and/or your department’s Graduate Program Director.

2. Form the Committee
   - Directors usually determine the members of a student’s thesis committee, but it is very helpful to have a thoughtful conversation with your student to assure he/she has a positive relationship with all members.
   - The thesis committee director must have full graduate faculty status.
   - All committee members, including the director, must be officially listed as graduate faculty.
   - To verify graduate faculty status, check the Graduate Faculty List found on the Graduate Faculty and Staff web page or contact the Graduate School.
• Approval for members not listed on the current Graduate Faculty List can be requested by completing the following procedure:

a. For committee members currently employed by Western Carolina University and hired as graduate faculty (check their AA21), contact the Graduate School to update the Graduate Faculty List.

b. For external members and/or members not currently employed as graduate faculty by Western Carolina University, a Graduate Faculty Nomination Form must be completed and submitted to the Graduate School for review and approval by the Graduate Council. *Please be aware that this process may take several weeks.* Contact the Graduate School to obtain the form. **NOTE:** A Graduate Faculty Nomination Form can only be completed and submitted by a Department Head. The department head will be notified when the nomination is approved by the Graduate Council.

3. **The Abstract**

Coach the student through the process of writing the thesis abstract. Again, this varies by department and discipline. You should, where applicable:

- Ensure that IRB forms have been approved for any study with human subjects. *(Protocols must be approved BEFORE research can go forth.)* For more information, see the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board web page.

- Help the student develop a research question, methodology, and other important content.

- Ensure that the student understands style and citation formats in your discipline.

- Guide and approve the student’s list of resources/bibliography.

- Help with revisions and editing, where needed.

- Make sure the student meets the appropriate deadlines.
NOTE: Abstracts are due at least one semester prior to the semester in which the student will graduate. The Graduate School may not be process Abstracts during the summer term. If the student plans to graduate in the fall term (December graduation), he/she must submit his/her Abstract during the preceding spring term. See the Thesis/Disquisition Information and Resources web page or the Academic Calendar (follow the link in the Related Information section of the Graduate School Admissions page) for exact deadlines.

Attain signatures: Confirm that all committee members, department Graduate Program Directors, and Department Heads have signed their approval before the Abstract Approval Form is submitted to the Graduate School.

4. Institutional Review Board (IRB) Forms

If your student is conducting research involving humans or any other live vertebrates, he/she must submit protocol(s) and IRB forms to the Graduate School and Research office before the proposal summary can be approved and prior to beginning research.

IRB instructions and forms can be found on the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board page. You will be the student’s best guide when filling out these forms. The IRB protocol must include a faculty advisor as part of the investigative team. Initial Review of IRB forms may take up to two weeks. For further information, contact the Research Compliance Officer.

5. The Thesis

• Student must be registered for thesis credit.

• Your duties will vary, depending on department and personal preference, but The Graduate School recommends that all directors do the following:
Set deadlines and work schedules to keep your student motivated and on track. Discuss and monitor his/her progress.

Regularly assess the quality of your student’s references. Directors must check that students cite and use their sources properly. The Graduate School will only “spot check” references on the submitted paper. It is the director’s responsibility to do a thorough check of the final reference list.

Hold your student to rigorous standards of academic honesty.

Confer and advise your student on central ideas, content, use/citation of sources, and writing style. A list of WCU thesis resources is available on the Thesis and Disquisition Information and Resources webpage.

A student must remain registered for thesis credit during any semester he/she is working on thesis. This may require multiple semesters.

Determine when chapters/sections of the thesis are ready to be reviewed by committee members.

A grade of “IP” (In Progress) must appear in the student’s transcript for any registered thesis credit.

6. **The Defense Timing**

- When you, the committee members, and your student feel the thesis is complete and ready, schedule and administer the defense.

- Requirements and methods of defending theses vary by department.

- Consult your department’s Graduate Program Director for more details.

- After a successful defense, you and your committee members must sign the Defense Approval Form in ink for submission to the Dean of Graduate School and Research.
• The Graduate School will not begin the formatting review until we receive the Defense Approval Form.

7. **The Defense Approval Form**

• The [Defense Approval Form](#) must be submitted to the Graduate School approximately four weeks prior to the end of the semester in which the student will graduate. See the [Thesis/Disquisition Information and Resources](#) web page or the [Academic Calendar of the Graduate Catalog](#) (follow the link in the Related Information section of the [Graduate School](#) homepage) for the exact deadline.

• Committee members, department Graduate Program Director, and Department Head must all sign their approval.

• The Dean of Graduate School and Research will sign the Defense Approval Form only after all revision requests have been approved through Pro Quest.

8. **Submission of Thesis**

• The defended thesis must be submitted electronically to the Graduate School (via [PROQUEST/UMI](#)) approximately four weeks prior to the end of the semester in which the student will graduate. Go to the [Thesis/Disquisition Information and Resources](#) web page for the exact deadline or see the [Academic Calendar of the Graduate Catalog](#) (follow the link in the Related Information section of the [Graduate School](#) homepage).

• This file will be reviewed carefully to ensure it follows WCU thesis format rules. While this process is the student’s responsibility, you should assist if necessary.

• The Graduate School recommends that directors:
o Ensure the student has access to and uses the WCU Thesis Guide to format the final thesis. (It is useful to follow this format throughout the entire writing process to avoid delays, complications, and errors at the final formatting stage.)

o Remind the student about the deadline, and strongly encourage him/her to defend and submit the thesis as early as possible.

o Follow up with the student to make sure the approval and submission processes are going smoothly and in a timely fashion. At this stage, students often need detailed advice about copyright and other issues.

9. **Final Copy of Thesis**

   • **Please note:** Once a student submits a final thesis to the Graduate School for approval, neither you nor the student may make or recommend any content changes. The only changes permitted at this point are the Graduate School Administrator’s required format changes during the review process.

   • WCU now publishes theses online only. Neither you nor your department will receive a bound copy from the student—*unless you specifically require one*. A bound copy purchased through Pro Quest will be housed in Hunter Library. If your department requires an additional copy, or if you wish to have a copy for yourself, inform the student. (Bear in mind that all theses are available online whenever you need them.)

10. **Remove IP Grades**

    Prior to graduation, change any “IP” grades on the student’s transcript to a letter grade.

    The director has complete discretion over the final grading of a student’s thesis work. The Graduate School staff will mark the thesis requirement complete in Banner’s Non-Course
Requirements section when the final revised version is accepted by the Graduate School in Pro Quest.