The thesis is a work of substance and length – approximately 50 pages/12,500 words excluding the bibliography – requiring research that draws together ideas developed in the course of a student’s interdisciplinary studies. Students should start thinking about a topic and connect with possible faculty supervisors early in the program. With time, further course and research work and guidance from faculty will develop, improve, and likely alter the original thesis idea. Students may exceed 50 pages in their final work with the permission and support of their supervisor.

Students may write the thesis as independent study under Supervised Individual Research (G4999) or as part of the Research Seminar (G4990). Students must be registered in one of these courses (usually for three credits) as part of the requirements for the degree. To be registered for the thesis, students submit a proposal to a faculty member, who must approve the topic and agree to serve as supervisor before the project can begin. Approved proposals are then submitted to the Liberal Studies office for processing.

Proposal
For Supervised Individual Research (SASS G4999) or Research Seminar (SASS G4990), students must first submit a written proposal to a faculty supervisor (or two supervisors—see Thesis Registration and Supervisors below) who, by agreeing to be the supervisor, affirms that the topic is satisfactory, manageable, and of appropriate size. The complete proposal should include:

- A statement of approximately 1000 words describing the topic, the nature of the resources to be used, and plans for the way in which you will approach your analysis of the topic (methodology).
- A brief bibliography indicating that you are aware of current work in the field.

Thesis Registration and Supervisors

There are two academic options for writing the thesis: Supervised Individual Research (G4999) and Research Seminar (G4990). Students may choose their registration option depending on their preference on how to undertake the thesis and the availability of the thesis seminar in a particular semester.

SASS G4999 Supervised Individual Research is the traditional method of writing the thesis as an independent study under the supervision of a faculty member (thesis supervisor). Students must have one supervisor. A second supervisor is optional if the guidance and advice of a second supervisor is wanted or the thesis spans different academic disciplines. Supervised Individual Research is available in the fall, spring, and summer terms.

SASS G4990 Research Seminar provides a class-like structure to the research and writing process of the thesis. Students must have two faculty supervisors. The first supervisor is the instructor of the seminar, and the second supervisor is a faculty member with expertise in the thesis subject. The thesis proposal for registration in the seminar must also be approved by the second supervisor.

Students are responsible for finding their own faculty thesis supervisors. All supervisors must be current Columbia faculty members of a relevant department and must hold a Ph.D. or other comparable degree. If there are two supervisors, both approve the proposal and decide on the grade for the final thesis. Most academic department websites list faculty profiles and research concentrations. Students are encouraged to review faculty information to target possible supervisors and contact faculty early to discuss the thesis.
The South Asia Institute Office registers students for the thesis as requested on the Thesis Registration and Approval Form. The office must have the printed proposal with Registration and Approval Form attached in order to register the thesis. The first supervisor listed on the form will be listed in the registration system as the faculty responsible for the grade. For Supervised Individual Research, students do not register for a separate independent study course in the academic department of the thesis supervisor, and students should never attempt to register for the thesis themselves.

Submission of Proposal to the SAI Office
Prior to the term in which students plan to write the thesis, they must submit the printed proposal with the supervisor’s signature on the Thesis Registration and Approval Form to the MA Coordinator in 214 Knox Hall or the SAI office in 216 Knox Hall.

Deadlines for Thesis Proposal:
May 1st for writing in the Fall 2014 term
November 15th for writing in the Spring 2015 term
April 1st for writing in the Summer 2015 term

The proposal may be altered after submission, with approval of the first supervisor, if research indicates that a different direction would be more productive.

No one may undertake research that involves human subjects, including interviews, surveys, or related methods, without prior review and approval or evidence of exemption from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB guidelines and applications are available at http://www.columbia.edu/cu/irb/.

Deadline for applying to GSAS for graduation:
  September 1 for October 2015 graduation
  November 2 for February 2016 graduation
  December 1 for May 2016 graduation

Completing and Submitting the Final Thesis

The final version of the thesis and thesis evaluation form must be deposited in the South Asia Institute office before the student can be certified for graduation. The student is responsible for submitting the final bound copy of the thesis. The faculty supervisor(s) are responsible for submitting the signed and graded evaluation form. Students cannot submit their own evaluation forms. Evaluation forms submitted by students will not be accepted.

With attention to the final deadlines below, the student and the supervisor(s) must agree on their own schedule for discussions, revision, and grading of the thesis. Be sure to allow enough time for the supervisor(s) to read and grade the thesis and to make any final revisions based on their comments (recommend three to four weeks prior to the final thesis deadline).

Students are responsible for giving the Final Thesis Evaluation Form to the first faculty supervisor, who must complete and submit the form to 214 Knox Hall.
  • If the evaluation form indicates that minor revisions are to be made, students must make these revisions before depositing the final bound copy of the thesis in the SAI office.
  • Students with major revisions required or who do not submit the final thesis by the deadline receive an incomplete grade (IN) and do not graduate. Students have one calendar year to complete an IN thesis.

Electronic copies of the thesis are also required for the South Asia Institute Thesis Database. Electronic copies may be in Word or PDF and may be submitted on a CD or via email to William Carrick at wac2112@Columbia.edu by the final thesis deadline.
Deadlines for Final Thesis and Evaluation Form:

- September 24th for October 2014 graduation (Summer term)
- Jan 15th for February 2015 graduation (Fall term)
- April 15th for May 2015 graduation (Spring term)

The SAI program cannot guarantee that students will be certified to graduate on time if we receive the signed evaluation form and the final copy of the thesis after the listed deadline.

Note: International students interested in applying for OPT after graduation should contact ISSO concerning the completion of their degree requirements and graduation. The date of your degree completion (including the thesis) may affect your OPT application. ISSO can provide further information.

Physical Structure of the Paper

The final thesis marks the end of a student’s degree work in the Liberal Studies Master’s program at Columbia University. As public testimony of your scholarship, a copy of the final paper is deposited in the Liberal Studies office, where it is available to other students and scholars. Therefore its physical appearance is a matter of some importance to you and to the program.

- The final version submitted to the SAI office should be approximately 50 pages/12,500 words long excluding bibliography. Students may exceed 50 pages in their final work with permission of their supervisor(s).
- Use good-quality 20 lb. bond paper (acid-free if possible) with text printed on only one side of each page.
- Use one standard style and size of font (ex. 12 pt. Times New Roman) throughout and double-space the text (long quotations, footnotes and bibliography may be single-spaced).
- Choice of style manual (e.g. MLA, Chicago) is up to the student and faculty supervisor, but students should follow one method of reference and bibliographic notation throughout.
- The title page should not be numbered, but all other pages should be sequentially numbered.
- Margins should be 1½ inches at the top and left sides and 1 inch at the bottom and right sides.
- Binding and cover: the top cover must be transparent so the title page is visible; the back cover should be opaque. Binding should be strong, permanent and durable. Velobind, which uses a plastic strip and “rivets,” is the best type of binding that is easily available at most copy shops.
South Asia Institute M.A.  
Thesis Registration and Approval Form

I request registration in  
☐ SASS G4990 Research Seminar (Spring)  
☐ SASS G4999 Supervised Individual Research (Fall, Spring and Summer)

Term: __________________________ Year: __________________________ Total Credits: ________

Student’s signature: ____________________________________________ Date: ________________

Student’s name printed _____________________

LSMA program __________________________ CUID # C00 ________________
Listed on SSOL

Tentative title of paper _________________________________________

________________________________________________________________

Attach thesis proposal to form

________________________________________________________________

First supervisor:  
Signature indicating faculty’s approval of proposal __________________________ Date ________________

Name of first supervisor (please print) __________________________________________

Department or program: _______________________________________________________

Second supervisor: (if applicable)  
Signature indicating faculty’s approval of proposal __________________________ Date ________________

Name of second supervisor (please print) __________________________________________

Department or program: _______________________________________________________

Date received in South Asia Institute office __________________________
INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENT: Complete the top portion of this form and give it to your supervisor with the copy of the final paper to be evaluated and Instructions for Supervisors. If you have two supervisors, the form should go to the first supervisor who arranges the coordination of grading.

__________________________ Studies Program
American, East Asian, Human Rights, Islamic, Jewish, Medieval, Modern European or South Asian

Student ___________________________ Phone number ____________ Date ____________

Title ____________________________

Supervisors: (fill in both names if you have two supervisors)
1. name ____________________________ campus address __________________________ phone ________
2. name ____________________________ campus address __________________________ phone ________

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUPERVISORS: SEE REVERSE

EVALUATION OF THE FINAL PAPER

SUPERVISOR #1
GRADE _________

________ Minor revisions needed

________ Major revisions needed

Comments

SUPERVISOR #2 (if applicable)
GRADE _________

________ Minor revisions needed

________ Major revisions needed

Comments

CONSENSUS of Faculty: GRADE __________________________ (Letter grade or Incomplete)

SIGNATURE ____________________________ SIGNATURE ____________________________

Date ________________ Date ________________

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUPERVISORS: SEE FOLLOWING
Instructions for Supervisors

Procedures for Grading:

Where two faculty have been designated for a paper, one will already have been designated as the primary (first) supervisor. This faculty member is listed as the “instructor” of the student’s thesis with the Registrar.

The second supervisor (if there is a second supervisor) should fill in the appropriate blanks in the righthand column. The first supervisor should fill in the appropriate blanks in the lefthand column and fill in the blank for the consensus grade.

If the supervisors do not agree on the grade as they have entered it individually, they should communicate with each other and come to a consensus, and the agreed-upon grade should be recorded in the space provided.

If a student has more than one supervisor, the primary (first) supervisor is responsible for providing the final grade.

The first supervisor should forward this completed form directly to the South Asia Institute MA Coordinator: Professor Katherine Ewing, 214 Knox Hall, MC9634, ke2131@columbia.edu. Do not give the form to the student to submit.

Grading system:

Students must receive at least a C to pass the thesis and to be recommended for the degree. + and – qualifiers may be used for letter grades.

Readers may recommend and specify minor revisions to be made in papers that earn a grade between A and C. These minor revisions must be completed by the student and the final paper deposited in the South Asia Institute Office before graduation.

If the paper requires major revisions, the student should be given the grade of Incomplete. Students have one year to complete the work in order to receive a letter grade. The student must submit the revised paper within a calendar year to the first supervisor, who then determines the grade, completes the evaluation form, and submits all paperwork to the SAI office. The student must bring a copy of the final paper to the SAI office before graduation.

Grades of D and F are failing grades. A student who receives a D or F will not be recommended for the degree, although he or she may submit for consideration a new proposal for a final paper.