

**Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences**  
**MA Program in South Asia Studies**  
**South Asia Institute**  
**Thesis Guidelines**

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 (GR5999) or as part of the Research Seminar (GR5990). 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 South Asia Institute office for processing.

### **Proposal**

For Supervised Individual Research (SASS GR5999) or Research Seminar (SASS GR5990), 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 (GR5999) and Research Seminar (GR5990). 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 GR5999 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 GR5990 Research Seminar** provides a class-like structure to the research and writing process of the thesis. The MA Director is the instructor of the seminar. Students may have one or two faculty supervisors. The thesis proposal for registration in the seminar must be approved by the thesis supervisor (both if there are two supervisors) and submitted to the MA Director.

**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 Director in 214 Knox Hall or the SAI offices in 213 Knox Hall.

### **Deadlines for Thesis Proposal:**

May 1<sup>st</sup> for writing in the Fall term

November 15<sup>th</sup> for writing in the Spring term

April 1<sup>st</sup> for writing in the Summer 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 graduation

November 1 for February graduation

December 1 for May graduation

March 1 for June 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 or 213 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 via email to William Carrick at [wac2112@columbia.edu](mailto:wac2112@columbia.edu) by the final thesis deadline.

**Deadlines for Final Thesis and Evaluation Form:**

- September 15 for October graduation (end of Summer term)
- Jan 15th for February graduation (end of Fall term)
- May 1 for May graduation (end of Spring term)
- June 15 for June graduation (during the Summer 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 South Asia Studies Master's program at Columbia University. Please submit an electronic copy (word or pdf) as well as a physical copy of your thesis to SAI. As public testimony of your scholarship, a copy of the final paper is deposited in the South Asia Institute 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. in South Asia Studies  
Thesis Registration and Approval Form**

I request registration in    ☐ SASS GR5990 Research Seminar (Spring)  
   ☐ SASS GR5999 Supervised Individual Research (Fall, Spring and Summer)

Term: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Credits: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's name printed \_\_\_\_\_

LSMA program: South Asia Studies                      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 \_\_\_\_\_

[Sample **FINAL PAPER** title page]

Columbia University  
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences  
South Asia Institute  
Master of Arts

TITLE

a final paper  
by  
NAME OF STUDENT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts

month and year of degree conferred

Columbia University in the City of New York  
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences  
South Asia Institute Master of Arts – 215 Knox Hall, MC 9634  
**Final Thesis Evaluation**

**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 be given to both supervisors. The first supervisor must arrange for the coordination of grading.

South Asia Studies Program

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisors: (fill in both names if you have two supervisors)

1. name \_\_\_\_\_ email address \_\_\_\_\_ phone \_\_\_\_\_

2. name \_\_\_\_\_ email address \_\_\_\_\_ phone \_\_\_\_\_

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUPERVISORS: SEE NEXT PAGE**

**EVALUATION OF THE FINAL PAPER**

SUPERVISOR #1			SUPERVISOR #2 (if applicable)		
<u>Revisions</u>	<u>Recommended</u> Y/N	<u>Completed</u> Y/N	<u>Revisions</u>	<u>Recommended</u> Y/N	<u>Completed</u> Y/N
Minor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Minor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Major	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Major	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments			Comments		
<b><u>GRADE</u></b> _____			<b><u>GRADE</u></b> _____		

=====

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 right-hand column, and email it to the first supervisor. The **first supervisor** should fill in the appropriate blanks in the left-hand column and fill in the blank for the consensus grade.

As the supervisors have entered their revision recommendations, comments and grade individually, they should communicate with each other and come to a consensus. The agreed-upon grade should be recorded in the space provided on the first supervisor’s form.

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 Director: Syantani Chatterjee, at 214 Knox Hall, or by email to [sc3079@columbia.edu](mailto:sc3079@columbia.edu). *Please 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 thesis 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, as well as email a copy to the MA Director, Syantani Chatterjee at [sc3079@columbia.edu](mailto:sc3079@columbia.edu) and the Assistant Director of SAI, William Carrick at [wac2112@columbia.edu](mailto:wac2112@columbia.edu).

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.