

GRADUATE STUDENT SURVIVAL SKILLS

Strategies for Success

Mr. Charles Darwin is making highly unsatisfactory progress on his research. He was supposed to be preparing a dissertation on the marine fauna, to which he has excellent access during his voyage. There is no reason why he should not have prepared a satisfactory thesis by cataloging these organisms.

Dr. Richard Pohl, 1972

I. Thesis option vs. non-thesis option

- A. Career goals
 - 1. Private practice
 - 2. Public practice
 - 3. Academic practice
- B. Job requirements
- C. Stereotypes of rigor
- D. Topic: Research or research
- E. Thesis format requirements
- F. Thesis-journal format
- G. Time available and deadlines
- H. Al's expectations
- I. Mark's expectations

II. Advisor and major professor

- A. Types of LA graduate programs
 - 1. First professional degree
 - 2. Advanced study
- B. Employer satisfaction
- C. Our LA grad program
 - 1. Advanced study
 - 2. Based on faculty member's expertise
 - 3. Tutorial basis
 - 4. Graduate faculty members
 - 5. Seek variety (overload basis)
- D. Application package
 - 1. ISU application form
 - 2. Transcript
 - 3. Letters of recommendation
 - 4. Portfolio
 - 5. Letter of intent
- E. Your letter of intent is the basis of advisor assignment
- F. Shop around for major professor during your first semester

III. POS committee

- A. Select members and form committee during second semester
- B. At least 3 graduate faculty members
 - 1. Major professor
 - 2. At least one outside LA department
 - 3. Others as needed (including non-grad faculty, P&S, non-ISU)
- C. Get ideas from classes, major professor, other grad students
- D. Call or Email for appointment, bring along a copy of research proposal

IV. Program of study

- A. List of courses you have taken, you are taking, you will take
- B. Contract between you and your committee members
- C. Start with MLA requirements worksheet (pink sheet from LA office)
- D. Get suggestions from your major professor
- E. Unlike undergraduate program, some course requirements are negotiable
 - 1. Must be justified based on your special needs
 - 2. Must be agreed to by your committee members
 - 3. Must have at least 36 graduate credits
- F. Fill out POS worksheet (from LA office also)
- G. May be “amended by mutual agreement of the parties involved”
 - 1. In case of course cancellation or substitutions
 - 2. With committee approval and signatures
 - 3. Major professor completes a Graduate College form
- H. Don’t include courses beyond the minimum required by your committee
- I. Finalize during second semester (usually immediately following first committee meeting)
- J. No degree audit sheet (as in undergraduate program)

V. Committee meetings

- A. First meeting
 - 1. Sign committee appointment form
 - 2. Discuss POS
 - 3. Discuss research topic
- B. Second meeting (and perhaps a third or fourth meeting)
 - 1. Bring draft of chapter(s) to committee members before meeting
 - 2. Review draft and progress
 - 3. Plan remaining work
- C. Usually have individual appointments with committee members instead of 3rd or 4th meeting
- D. Orals
 - 1. Bring refined draft to committee members at least two weeks before orals
 - 2. Three parts -- see below

VI. Oral examination

- A. Audience is optional
 - 1. Discuss with your major professor
 - 2. Guests may attend only with permission from your major professor
- B. Three parts
 - 1. Presentation
 - a) 5 to 50 minutes
 - b) Length depends primarily on whether there is an audience in addition to committee members
 - 2. Questions and discussion
 - a) Committee members take turns asking questions
 - b) Questions may be about your research or about your course work
 - c) If guests are present, they may ask questions only if called on by major professor
 - 3. Committee discussion and decision
 - a) You and guests are invited to leave the room
 - b) Discussion and voting by committee members
- C. Committee decision options
 - 1. Unconditional pass -- no omissions, only minor editing changes or concerns
 - 2. Conditional pass -- minor omissions, significant editing changes or concerns
 - 3. Not pass -- major omissions, concerns, or problems with research
- D. Report form to Graduate College
 - 1. Indicates which one of above three options committee members selected
 - 2. Signed by all committee members
 - 3. Optional -- minority report

- E. Traditions (change occasionally -- discuss with your major professor)
 1. Normally schedule a 2 hour time period in room 411
 2. Audience of fellow grad students, faculty members, and off-campus guests
 3. Personally invite department chair
 4. Questions only about research
 5. Dressier clothing than you usually wear to class
 6. Coffee or other refreshments
 7. Final copies for each committee member, department office, and (if thesis) Thesis Office

VII. Typical thesis outline (journal thesis format is different than this)

- A. Chapter 1 -- Introduction
- B. Chapter 2 -- Literature review
- C. Chapter 3 -- Method
- D. Chapter 4 -- Data, observations, survey, results
- E. Chapter 5 -- Analysis, discussion
- F. Chapter 6 -- Conclusions and recommendations

VIII. Writing your thesis in every class

- A. 1 -- Introduction -- LA 541 proposal, LA 580 tutorial, LA 582 colloquium, other courses
- B. 2 -- Literature review -- LA 580 tutorial, LA 541 annotated bibliography, other courses
- C. 3 -- Method -- LA 580 tutorial, LA 541 proposal, other courses
- D. 4 -- Data, observations, survey -- LA 599/699
- E. 5 -- Analysis, results -- LA 599/699
- F. 6 -- Conclusions and recommendations -- LA 599/699

IX. Handbooks and manuals

- A. First two are available on-line and in Beardshear Hall
- B. Graduate College Handbook for faculty and students
 1. Master's degree checklist/process (inside front cover)
 2. Admission, registration, fees, assistantships
 3. Degree programs, programs of study, course work
 4. University offices, services, funding opportunities
 5. Human Subjects Review Committee
 6. Graduation procedures
- C. Graduate College Thesis Manual
 1. Title page, section and chapter headings, copyright
 2. Page format, paper, illustrations, citation format
 3. Deposit requirements and schedule (see checklist on back cover)
- D. Style manual (select in consultation with your committee members)
 1. Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*
 2. Council of Biology Editors' *Scientific Style and Format*
 3. Others: Chicago Style Manual, IEEE, APA, ACS, Landscape Journal

X. Schedule, forms, and deadlines

- A. Typical schedule
 1. 1st semester -- select major professor, LA 541 proposal, begin POS
 2. 2nd semester -- LA 580 tutorial, form committee, finish POS
 3. 3rd semester -- begin research, finish coursework
 4. 4th semester -- finish research, graduate
- B. Exceptions to typical schedule
 1. Demanding work schedule (TA, RA, off campus job)
 2. Family or business commitments
 3. Health and motivation
 4. Weather-related delays (field work)
 5. Delays in obtaining data from other people

- C. Strategies for finishing in 3 semesters
 1. Before first semester -- select major professor, select thesis topic, take graduate course(s)
 2. 1st semester -- LA 541 proposal, LA 580 tutorial, form committee, finish POS
 3. 2nd semester -- begin research, finish coursework
 4. 3rd semester -- finish research, submit thesis, pass orals, move somewhere, get a great job
 5. After 3rd semester -- enroll in GR ST 600 or 601, officially graduate
- D. Forms
 1. Committee appointment
 2. Program of study (POS)
 3. Graduation application (diploma slip) (beginning of semester of graduation)
 4. Request for final oral examination (at least 3 weeks before orals)
 5. Human Subjects (Institutional Review Board—IRB)
- E. Deadlines
 1. Committee deadlines are flexible (usually depends more on you than on committee members)
 2. Graduate College deadlines are inflexible (especially Thesis Office and Human Subjects)

XI. High risk factors

- A. Selecting more than the minimum number of committee members
- B. Selecting committee members who are off campus when you need them
- C. Waiting until your last two semesters to complete the Committee Appointment form and POS form
- D. Meeting with your POS committee members after you've finalized your 599/699 topic
- E. Completing LA 599/699 credits before you complete the Committee Appointment form and POS form
- F. Omitting LA required courses from your POS form
- G. Including courses on your POS beyond the minimum required by your POS committee
- H. Failing to keep your committee members up to date on your 599/699 project
- I. Failing to meet Graduate College deadlines
- J. Distributing your complete thesis draft or creative component report draft to your POS committee members less than two weeks before your orals
- K. Failing to follow IRB requirements (for research that involves Human Subjects)
- L. Others

XII. Ethics

- A. Ethical standards
 1. Academic honesty, plagiarism, ghost writers (“Confessed science cheat was thought to be a research star”) (<http://policy.iastate.edu/policy/academics/>)
 2. ISU Code of Computer Ethics (<http://policy.iastate.edu/policy/it/ethics/>)
 3. Misrepresentation (“How to lie with statistics” and “graphical distortion”)
 4. Accountability, responsibility, integrity, reputation, quality assessment
 5. Human subjects protection, informed consent (<http://policy.iastate.edu/policy/research/>)
- B. Norms of good practice
 1. Copyright, ownership of intellectual property, conflict of interest (*Grad Handbook*, p. 47)
 2. Land stewardship, environmental ethics, landscape ecology principles
 3. ASLA Declaration on Environment and Development (http://www.asla.org/nonmembers/declarn_env_dev.html)
 4. ASLA Code of Environmental Ethics (<http://www.asla.org/about/codeenv.htm>)
 5. ASLA Code of Professional Ethics (<http://www.asla.org/about/codepro.htm>)
 6. Professional expertise, limitations, collaboration, clients
 7. Professional licensing (<http://www.state.ia.us/government/com/prof/landscape/home.html>)

XIII. Optimism and pessimism

- A. First committee meeting
 1. You say, “I’d like to do it all. I can’t wait to get started.”
 2. Committee members say, “Be careful not to take on too much.”
- B. Second committee meeting
 1. You say, “I don’t know how I’ll get it all done.”
 2. Committee members say, “You’ve made great progress. It will all be over soon.”