

# *Thesis Program Options and Requirements*

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*This handout describes the Thesis Options and Requirements that all MArch I candidates must fulfill in order to receive the degree of Master of Architecture. These requirements were put into effect in the Fall of 1992, replacing previous ones.*

## **OBJECTIVES**

The options and requirements of the MArch I Thesis Program approved by the Department of Architecture in 1992 are intended to broaden the field of opportunities for independent work in the Graduate School of Design as fulfillment for the Thesis Requirements established in 1981. While the basic premise of requiring from the students a demonstration of their ability to successfully undertake independent work as a condition for graduation is reaffirmed by the Faculty in this policy, the experience gathered in the operation of the Thesis Program has pointed to the need to establish different modalities of independent work, which acknowledge and profit from the wide range of interests, abilities, and resources that the students, the Faculty and the Graduate School offer and pursue. In recognizing this fact, the Faculty also has qualified such requirements for independent work with a specific, yet broad characteristic common to two different modes of endeavor but not explicit in the previous system: that of *research in architecture*.

Understood as a kind of research the heretofore single mode of an independent architectural design thesis now becomes one of two from which students can choose in order to fulfill their requirements, albeit expected that this studio-oriented endeavor will still constitute the majority of cases. The other mode is akin to types of research work already in place in our curriculum, research programs, and Advanced Independent Study Programs. It requires as a (final product) a more conventional, usually written academic thesis: independent thesis project specifically tied to an architectural topic but not requiring a building design (see "Modalities," for detailed descriptions and examples). *In both cases the pertinence and relevance of the research to the field of architecture must be demonstrated in all stages of the process.*

These alternative outcomes of an architectural thesis recognize not only that *research* in architecture can be and is carried out with different techniques and in different forms, but also, and as important, that the architectural *design project* is one of them. The new set of requirements, reaffirms the Faculty's belief that the production of knowledge is as well served by the design project as it is by other conventional academic research activities.

Another major consequence of conceptualizing the Thesis as not just an exercise of the students' abilities to design independently but also to conduct research is that the Thesis Program requires a different rapport between students and advisors. At the beginning of a student's fifth semester the Thesis Program is introduced by the Thesis Program Director and a course of studies supporting the Thesis effort will be mapped out with the counsel of the student's Academic Advisor. By the end of the fifth semester the student obtains the agreement of a Faculty member to become his or her Thesis Advisor. This Thesis Advisor works with the student for two semesters or until the final presentation of the Thesis (for specific details see the discussion of the fifth, sixth and seventh semester Thesis curriculum and organization).

The following outline explains the elements, characters and roles, schedule, and general organization of the Thesis Program.

## **FACULTY**

### **The Thesis Program Director**

The Thesis Program Director oversees the general operation and coordination of the Thesis Program. The Thesis Program Director consults periodically with the Chairman's Advisory Committee or any other body designated by the Chairman of the Department of Architecture for that purpose. The Thesis Program Director maintains active files of students' progress, students' and advisors' reports, etc., and when necessary organizes activities supportive of Thesis development.

### **The Academic Advisor**

The Academic Advisor, assigned to specific students upon their entry into the GSD to counsel and oversee each of them on all matters affecting their academic progress at the GSD, acquires by reason of such charge a key role in the Thesis Program. At the beginning of the student's fifth semester, the Academic Advisor counsels the student on the selection of issues, topics, or areas of interest that will orient the student's work toward the research objectives of the Thesis. During the fifth semester the Academic Advisor, in agreement with the student, establishes the course of studies for the next three Thesis semesters and counsels the student on the progress of his or her proposal. The Academic Advisor also helps the student to identify Faculty members who could appropriately act as his or her Thesis Advisor during the sixth and seventh semesters.

### **The Thesis Advisor**

The Thesis Advisor supervises the student's research work during the sixth and seventh semesters. The relationship between the student and the Thesis Advisor is established during the student's fifth semester by a *common agreement* between the parties after they have discussed the intended research topic and mode of completion and the Faculty member has accepted to act as the student's advisor. In the case that an overload on a single faculty member should prevent him or her from accepting all the students that could appropriately work in his or her area of competence, the relationship between the student and the Thesis Advisor is established after the student submits a rank-ordered list of three names of Faculty members who, upon reviewing the student's proposal, have agreed to serve as Thesis Advisor. A lottery will be used, if necessary, to determine assignments of Thesis Advisors to students.

## **SYNOPSIS OF THESIS REQUIREMENTS**

Note; the specific dates for all deadlines (such as “end of the semester” or “midterm”) will be established each term by the Department.

### **Fifth Semester**

*The major goal of the Thesis Program in the fifth semester is to produce individual student proposals for research, identify and secure the commitment of a Thesis Advisor, and select the mode of completion of the Thesis.*

The Thesis Program Director meets with the fifth-semester class to introduce them to the Thesis Program.

Each student meets individually, preferably during orientation week, with his or her Academic Advisor and establishes a tentative course of studies for the coming three semesters; in particular, the program of studies for the fifth semester is to be established at this meeting. The student establishes with the Academic Advisor a definite schedule of meetings during the semester to report on progress, both in defining a Proposal for Thesis Research, and in identifying Faculty members that could be of help in that area of research. A short *progress report* on each student’s work is submitted by the Academic Advisor to the Thesis Director at mid-term. Each student identifies and meets with potential Thesis Advisors to discuss his or her proposal for Thesis Research.

### **End of Fifth Semester: Requirements**

Each student submits to his or her Academic Advisor a *Proposal for Thesis Research*, of a maximum of ten pages, that outlines objectives, subject matter, proposed course of study and intended mode of research, together with a proposed Faculty member to act as the student’s Thesis Advisor (see “The Thesis Advisor” for cases of overload). Each student obtains the signature of the Thesis Advisor (in the proper form provided at the end of this booklet) who agrees to act as such for the student’s coming sixth and seventh semester; the signature form must be filed with the Thesis Program Director. Students receive no units of credit for Thesis requirements at this time.

### **Sixth Semester**

*The major goal of the Thesis Program in the sixth semester is to begin and complete the introductory, general, and foundational Independent Research work on the selected Thesis topic under the guidance of the Thesis Advisor.*

Students enroll in a 4-credit *Preparation of Design Thesis Proposal for MArch* (GSD 9203) course with their respective Thesis Advisors. Each student meets regularly throughout the semester with his or her Thesis Advisor on a pre-established schedule. The Thesis Advisor determines specific partial assignments of work in progress. A *mid-term report* on each student’s progress is filed by the Thesis Advisor with the Thesis Program Director. In this report, the likely mode of completion (A or B) must be decided. For any exceptions regarding mode of completion, a petition must be included with this mid-term report (see “Exceptions,”). The Thesis Program Director may act on the petition alone or with the advice of the Chairman’s Advisory Committee, depending on the nature of the petition. While the subject matter, methodological approach or theoretical perspective of one student may coincide or overlap with others, *no joint research projects will be accepted.*

For Mode A, all preliminary work, such as building a site model or drawing basic site documents, should be completed in the sixth semester. A few schematic design alternatives should be tested during the sixth semester in order to identify pertinent issues to be addressed in the final semester. For Mode B, all preliminary research of the topic and bibliographic analyses of material pertinent to the thesis should be completed in the sixth semester (see “Modalities”).

## **End of Sixth Semester: Requirements**

A final Independent Research document is submitted to the Thesis Advisor for evaluation (see “*Independent Research Document*,”). The mode for completion is confirmed or re-defined. Research is graded and credit received.

## **Seventh Semester**

*The major goal of the Thesis Program in the seventh semester is the successful completion of the final Thesis in one of the two modes.*

Students enroll in GSD9301 (*Independent Design Thesis in Satisfaction of the Degree Master in Architecture*) according to the selected mode: (A or B: see “Modalities”)

Each student begins to work on a final Thesis. While the subject matter, methodological approach or theoretical perspective of one student may coincide or overlap with others, no joint Thesis project in either mode will be accepted.

The role of the Thesis Advisor is the same as sixth semester. The Thesis Advisor establishes a schedule of regular meetings throughout the semester. Two of those meetings should be formal reviews to which at least one guest critic is invited. Invitations and organization of such formal reviews must be carried out by the Thesis Advisor. Guest critics are determined by the Thesis Advisor who may ask the student or other faculty members for suggestions. The inclusion of Visiting Faculty on these reviews is encouraged. A *mid-term report* on each student’s progress is submitted to the student with advice on how to continue work; a copy is filed with the Thesis Program Director.

No later than the tenth week of the semester students whose work does not seem to have advanced sufficiently to meet the end of the semester deadline must be advised by their respective Thesis Advisor to defer or extend their work, subject to the rules already established by the School of Design regarding Thesis extensions, as stated in the Official Register itself (Incomplete or Unsatisfactory Thesis: “*A student whose thesis is not accepted must extend work by registering for additional terms. A maximum of one additional term will be granted for completion of master’s thesis. A student who has to repeat the thesis because of failure may also be required to repeat the thesis preparation, in which case it would be necessary to register for two additional terms...*”)

Students **cannot** change the mode of Thesis completion during this final semester.

## **End of Seventh Semester: Requirements**

The final Thesis projects are presented and defended at a final, open review consisting of a panel chaired by the Thesis Advisor and composed of members of the Faculty and outside guests. The schedule of such reviews is established by the Department of Architecture. The composition of the review panels is established by the Thesis Program Director, who solicits suggestions for individual Thesis Advisors, students, and other faculty members. Mode B will require that the Final Thesis documents be submitted to panel members sufficiently in advance of the reviews to be read by members sitting in those panels. A final documentation following established uniform formats should be filed with the Department of Architecture after final review (see “Documentation,”)

## **MODALITIES**

### **Mode A**

It is expected that the majority of students will satisfy the Thesis requirements by completing the design of an architectural project with the criticism and advise of a Thesis Advisor who is selected according to the mutual interests of the student and the faculty member.

Examples of an architectural design thesis include (a) the design of three buildings of similar programs on three significantly different sites; (b) a project that investigates the body as a metaphor and phenomenological standard for the design of a building; (c) the development of a new type for an airport, which considers the multiple modes of transportation involved in the experience of an airport and their architectural implications; or any architectural project where a specific issue in architecture is researched through design.

In this mode the student should establish the foundational topic and issues of the design Thesis and analyze relevant bibliographic material, a site, program, and appropriate precedents with the GSD 9203 (*Preparation of Design Thesis Proposal for MArch*) course of the sixth semester. A few schematic design alternatives should be tested during the sixth semester in order to identify pertinent issues to be addressed in the final semester.

The progress of the design and the manner in which it is presented is self-directed by the student with counsel from the Thesis Advisor. Thesis reviews of an hour's length occur once a month with the Thesis Advisor and appropriate Faculty to be selected by the Thesis Advisor and the Thesis Program Director. The ultimate goal of Mode A is a complete, significant, and carefully considered design project.

### **Mode B**

Student whose interest and inclinations are more toward scholarship and experimentation may wish to satisfy the Thesis requirements with a body of research plus an independent thesis project other than a building design conducted in a standard studio format.

Such an independent thesis project may involve, for example, (a) the theoretical and technical design of an advanced structural or building system including the projection of specific material and constructional processes; (b) and original theoretical interpretation and graphic documentation of a historical architectural project in its social, cultural, and material-formal contexts; (c) a measured survey, and graphic documentation and interpretation of a significant historical building or urban area; (d) the production of an original technical or theoretical paper on a current research topic in computer aided design, the development of an original piece of computer software to support some design task, or the application of computer modeling techniques to carry out a project of architectural investigation or reconstruction.

In general, specific topics for any Thesis project must (1) demonstrate the relevance of the research for the discipline of architecture in all stages of the process, (2) reflect the teaching and research areas of the Faculty of the Department, (3) include the agreement of a Thesis Advisor whose area of expertise is consistent with the thesis topic, and (4) meet academic standards for scholarly and professional work at the master's level. The objective of this mode is to allow the student to test out a significant proposition that might begin to constitute an original contribution to the discipline and the profession.

In this mode, the student should establish the foundational context and topic of the Thesis and complete all preliminary research and bibliographic analyses in the GSD 9203 (*Preparation of Design Thesis Proposal*)

*for MArch*) course of the sixth semester. During the seventh semester, research is developed and the independent thesis project completed.

In keeping with the intentions of the Thesis Requirement, the student's work in Mode B is independent and self-directed. Thesis reviews, organized by the Thesis Advisor in consultation with the student, occur once a month, for about one hour, with the appropriate Faculty to be selected by the Thesis Advisor and Program Director. The final presentation may be in the form of an oral discussion and defense before a panel, or may be a project review modeled on similar presentations in studios.

## **INDEPENDENT RESEARCH DOCUMENT**

There are as many different approaches to Independent Research as there are Thesis topics, and the Thesis Program provides the flexibility to pursue those independent interests freely and rigorously. Independent Research could begin with general issues of current architectural theory and practice and then proceed to specific questions of program, site and technology as vehicles to challenge and develop those issues. Independent Research could begin with an interest in a specific building type, program, or technology and arrive at a set of theoretical issues and interests that constitute a relevant theme. Any area and method of investigation should draw on the resources of a student's educational development; it could derive from successful research methods and projects completed in previous semesters.

Since Independent Research in Mode A is intended to lead to a proposal for a design project, it should ultimately address issues of site, program, technology, and precedent. If, within a reasonable period of time, a student decides that Mode B would be more appropriate for his or her particular research, the student should consult with the Thesis Advisor to determine the conditions for a revised proposal. Since Independent Research in Mode B is intended to lead to a proposal for scholarly research of a specific architectural theme, it should comprise a thorough analysis of existing literature on that theme and specify its methods of research, such as types of graphic analysis, calculations, textual analysis, field work, etc. Regular meetings must be arranged with the Thesis Advisor during the sixth semester. A candidate whose work does not progress satisfactorily during the sixth semesters and receives a non-passing grade may be asked to repeat GSD 9203 with a new Thesis Advisor.

The following are guidelines for Independent Research document in satisfaction of GSD 9203 (*Preparation of Design Thesis Proposal for MArch*). The development of each category may not follow a strictly linear path; some categories may take on more importance than others; categories may, of course, be added. Students who wish to depart from these guidelines must provide their Thesis Advisor with an alternative outline of their proposed work. In all cases, the relevance of the research to the completion of an architectural design thesis must be demonstrated.

### **Mode A: Suggested Format for Independent Research Document**

Title Page

Table of Contents

Synopsis of Thesis proposal (one page), including brief descriptions of the program and site.

1. **Proposed Thesis.** A developed statement of at least 2500 words describing the topic and nature of the study and the intellectual content of the design Thesis. Should delimit the specific themes to be researched and addressed by the design project.
2. **Program.** A narrative description of the building program, including major spatial and functional requirement. A tabulation of space requirements, indicating not only floor areas but also relevant characteristics, adjacency requirements, special equipment, etc. A categorization of uses (public, private, circulation, service, etc.)
3. **Site.** A narrative description of the site from general location to specific characteristics. A history of the site's transformations and developments. Appropriate maps, drawings, and photographs. Analysis of micro climate, orientation, topography, vegetation, soil, utilities, traffic, access, zoning, and building regulations, as needed.
4. **Precedent.** Graphic and written analysis and interpretation of the precedents relevant to the design intentions.
5. **Bibliography.**

6. **Schedule** of work to be completed during the seventh semester.
7. **Preliminary Design Proposals** – design “tests” in sketch form

### **Mode B: Suggested Format for Independent Research Document**

Title page

Table of Contents

Synopsis of Thesis Proposal (one page).

1. **Proposed Thesis.** A developed statement of at least 4000 words describing the topic and nature of the study and the intellectual content of the independent Thesis project. Should delimit the specific themes to be researched and addressed by the Thesis.
2. **Significance of Study.** A narrative description of approximately 1000 words stating the reasons and ways in which this study will contribute to the body of knowledge regarding architectural design.
3. **Source of Primary Material.** A narrative description of the primary resources such as archives and libraries from which research material will be taken, or building sites and laboratories where research will be conducted.
4. **Bibliographical Analysis.** Extensive analysis and interpretation of the bibliography relevant for the research topic. Should delimit the specific intellectual context of the Thesis and describe precedents for methods of analysis and research.
5. **Outline of the Thesis.** A developed outline of tentative chapters and headings. Alternatively, a near-final draft of a particular, exemplary case.
6. **Schedule** of work to be completed during the seventh semester.

## **EXCEPTIONS**

Exceptions to the Thesis Program regarding mode will be considered only upon written petition to the Thesis Program Director. With the counsel of their Thesis Advisor, students must give specific reasons for the request and a specific proposal for an alternative program for the seventh semester. Any other special request involving exceptions to these Thesis Requirements will only be considered if they follow these same procedures. The petition must be accompanied by a report and recommendation by the Thesis Advisor. *All petitions must be received with the mid-term progress reports of the sixth semester.* The Thesis Program Director may act on the petition alone or with the advice of the Chairman's Advisory Committee, depending on the nature of the request.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Independent Research (GSD 9203 – Preparation of Design Thesis Proposal for MArch)**

The Thesis Advisor is responsible for grading the Independent Research document. As with all other courses in the GSD a grade of Incomplete will be given only under extraordinary circumstances such as illness verified by a physician (see Policies and Procedures in the Official Register). In the event that a student's Independent Research document is deemed unacceptable (Low Pass or Fail), the following procedure will be followed:

A student who receives a Low Pass may utilize the remaining time before the beginning of the seventh semester to rework and complete the Independent Research document. The revised document must be submitted to the Thesis Advisor two weeks prior to registration and will be subject to review by the Thesis Program Director, who will determine whether the student will be permitted to enroll for Thesis and will so notify the Registrar. Such revisions will result in a change of grade only if the Thesis Advisor and the Thesis Program Director deem the work of sufficient quality to merit such a change. If the report is still unacceptable the student must postpone his or her seventh semester and instead repeat the Independent Research course (GSD 9203).

If a student receives a Fail, the student must repeat and satisfactorily complete the Independent Research course (GSD 9203) prior to enrollment for Thesis.

Any student retaking the course may choose to remain a full-time student or may elect a partial tuition status.

### **Thesis**

The Thesis Advisor is responsible for the judgment of completion and adequacy of work submitted at the time of the final Thesis Review and, in consultation with the Faculty of the Department of Architecture, for grading the Thesis. To fulfill the requirements of the Thesis Program, the student's Thesis must satisfactorily meet the established standards of the Department in terms of overall worth, significance, and completeness that recommends it to the highest standards of academic critical scrutiny.

Permission to receive a grade of Incomplete for thesis will be granted only in extraordinary circumstances such as illness verified by a physician. In such cases the student will have until the last day of the same term of the next academic year to remove the incomplete grade from his or her record. Normally, however, the student submits his or her work for review either one month after the scheduled final review or at the final review at the end of the next semester.

With the counsel of the Thesis Advisor and the recommendation of the Thesis Program Director a student may elect to extend the time of the Thesis. In this event the student must register for Thesis in the immediately following semester; a maximum of one additional semester will be granted for the completion of the work. The final review will take place either at a time agreed upon by the student and the Thesis Advisor or at the scheduled final reviews of the term in which the work is completed.

Any student whose Thesis receives a grade of Fail may be required by the Thesis Advisor and the Thesis Program Director to repeat the Thesis term.

## **DOCUMENTATION**

In order to receive the Masters of Architecture diploma, each student must submit a full Documentation of his or her Thesis, due at least one week before Commencement. If a student wishes to graduate without submitting the required Documentation, he or she may still participate fully in Graduation exercises but will not receive a diploma until such time as the student submits the required Documentation.

The Documentation will be in an 8 ½" x 11" format consisting of two parts, the Independent Research Document of the sixth semester and the Thesis of the seventh semester. For Mode A, the second part will be represented by reproductions of all drawings, photographs of models and other material supporting the Thesis as presented at the final review. Two copies of the Documentation must be submitted. The student is responsible for providing one bound copy; a second trimmed and un-bound set of the full documentation must be submitted at the same time. The Frances Loeb Library will undertake the cost of binding the second copy. The bound copy must be submitted in the standard black, hard cover format, with the title of the Thesis, the student's name, and date stamped on the spine in gold lettering. A title page and introductory table of contents should be included to unify the products of the sixth and seventh semester. The Thesis Advisor's name must appear on the title page of the thesis document. Both copies of the Thesis will become part of the permanent Thesis Archives of the Frances Loeb Library.

Independent of the above submission, the Department of Architecture reserves the right to the original work, in accordance with the terms of the Official Register