

# *Thesis Program Requirements*

September 2009

Department of Architecture  
Graduate School of Design

*This handout describes the Thesis 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 2009, replacing previous ones.*

## OBJECTIVES

The requirements of the MArch I Thesis Program approved by the Department of Architecture in 2009 reaffirm the basic premise of the Thesis Requirements established in 1981: that of requiring from the students a demonstration of their ability to successfully undertake independent work as a condition for graduation. Also reaffirmed is the premise established in 1992 that the Thesis Program constitutes “research in architecture.”

As with prior revisions to the requirements of the Thesis Program, these revisions are intended to maintain a proximity between the potentials of thesis work and contemporary concerns of the discipline of architecture. In particular, they aim to encourage students to gain advantage from the very wide range of resources, activities, and interests of the Graduate School of Design and its Faculty, and through these, to make thoughtful contributions to the discipline.

The following outline explains the general organization of the Thesis Program.

## DEFINITIONS AND ROLES

### **Thesis Program:**

The Thesis Program is that portion of the curriculum (for credit and not-for-credit) that is devoted to independent thesis work, from the conception of a research topic through to its realization as a project.

### **Thesis Topic:**

The Thesis Topic is the initial statement of an area of research inquiry defined by the student in the semester prior to enrollment in GSD 9301.

### **Thesis Proposal:**

The Thesis Proposal is the developed proposition submitted by the student at the conclusion of the semester prior to 9301, and consists of a document that incorporates the research material, analysis, and argumentation that will provide the basis of the Thesis Project. (A preliminary outline of the Thesis Proposal is submitted with the Thesis Advisor Agreement Form.)

### **Thesis Project:**

The Thesis Project is the final work submitted by the student at the conclusion of GSD 9301 as the culmination of his or her curricular work at the Graduate School of Design and in satisfaction of the Thesis Requirements.

### **Thesis Director:**

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

### **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 remaining 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.

### **Thesis Advisor:**

The Thesis Advisor is a member of the Faculty who supervises the student's research work during the Thesis Program. The relationship between the student and the Thesis Advisor is established at the beginning of the Thesis Program by a *common agreement* between the parties after they have discussed the intended research topic and methods and the Faculty member has accepted to act as the student's advisor. The Department of Architecture maintains a list of the Faculty who are eligible to serve as Thesis Advisors. 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 SEQUENCE

### 5<sup>th</sup> Semester

*The goals of the Thesis Program in the 5<sup>th</sup> semester are that students outline the aims of their remaining course of studies, define their research interests, and meet with potential Thesis Advisors.*

During orientation week, the Thesis Program Director meets with the fifth-semester class to introduce them to the Thesis Program. Early in the semester, each student meets individually with his or her Academic Advisor to discuss a tentative course of studies for the coming three semesters that will be organized around the student's stated disciplinary interests and educational goals; in particular, a program of studies for the fifth semester is to be established at this meeting.

Thereafter during the semester, the student is responsible for subsequent meetings with the Academic Advisor and other Faculty to discuss his or her progress, both in identifying a Thesis Topic from his or her coursework and in identifying Faculty members that could be appropriate advisors for that area of research. By the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> semester, each student will begin to meet with these potential Thesis Advisors to discuss his or her Thesis Topic (Applications for enrollment in Directed Thesis Studios may be due during the 5<sup>th</sup> semester; specific deadlines will be announced by the Department of Architecture when it offers a Directed Thesis Studio.)

### 6<sup>th</sup> Semester

*The goal of the Thesis Program in the 6<sup>th</sup> semester is that students complete the foundational research work on the selected Thesis Topic, identify and secure the commitment of a Thesis Advisor, and submit their Thesis Proposal.*

At the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> semester, each student will meet with potential Thesis Advisors to discuss his or her course of study and will determine which courses will provide the basis for research in the Thesis Topic. **By the Add/Drop deadline of the 6<sup>th</sup> semester, each student must submit the Thesis Advisor Agreement form to the Department of Architecture.** This form also serves as the Preliminary Thesis Proposal with the student identifying one primary course and one or more secondary courses (either already completed or to be taken in the 6<sup>th</sup> semester) that will serve as the basis for preparatory research work on the Thesis Proposal. [Note: students pursuing the semester split option will secure the agreement of an advisor and file the Agreement Form by the Add/Drop deadline of their 7E semester.]

Each student will ordinarily meet once or twice with his or her Thesis Advisor during the second half of the semester as he or she develops the Thesis Proposal. At the end of the semester, the final Thesis Proposal is submitted to the Thesis Advisor for evaluation. Some guidelines for the Thesis Proposal format are given in the section on 'Documentation.' Ordinarily, the format of the proposal will be determined by the student and the Thesis Advisor, taking into account the methods of research employed in the Primary thesis research course.

The Department of Architecture may at times offer Directed Thesis Studios, in which a group of students works under the supervision of one or more Faculty advisors on a topic of research defined by those advisors. Students participating in a Directed Thesis Studio will enroll in a specified elective during their 6<sup>th</sup> semester, and will prepare their Thesis Proposal as the required coursework for that elective.

## 7<sup>th</sup> Semester

*The goal of the Thesis Program in the 7th semester is that students successfully complete their final Thesis Project.*

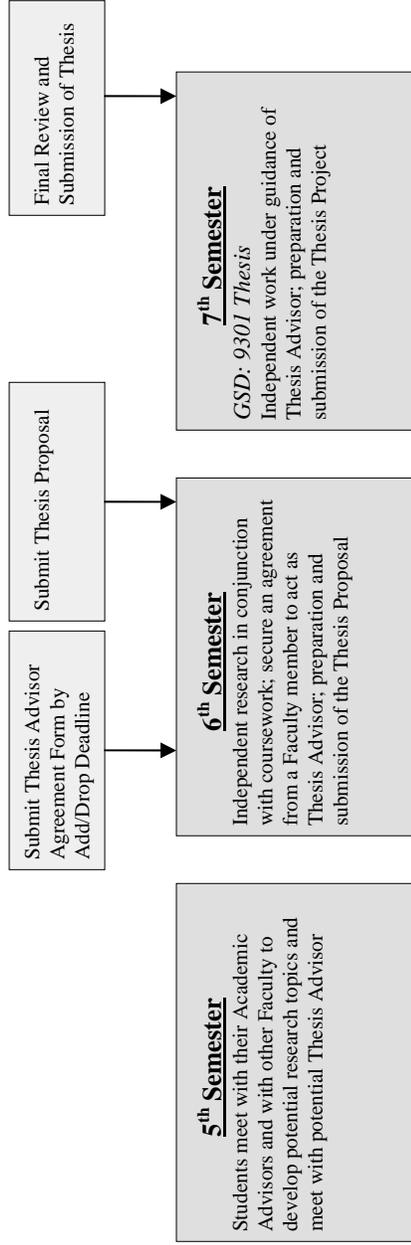
Students enroll in GSD 9301: *Independent Design Thesis in Satisfaction of the Degree Master in Architecture* under the supervision of their Thesis Advisor. [Note: students pursuing the semester split option will enroll in GSD 9203 in their 7E semester and GSD 9301 in their 7T semester.] Each student works on a final Thesis Project based upon the research presented in the Thesis Proposal. Each Thesis Project must be the independent work of the student, unless it is undertaken under the guidelines of a Directed Thesis Studio, or other guidelines set by the Department of Architecture.

Each student meets biweekly throughout the semester with his or her Thesis Advisor on a schedule previously established between the Advisor and student. At least two formal reviews of student work will be required: one, ordinarily to be held no later than 2 weeks into the semester, will assess the student's translation of his or her Thesis Proposal into a preliminary Thesis Project; the other required review will be a formal Mid-Review organized by the Advisor and student with at least one invited guest critic, to be held approximately 10 weeks into the semester. After this Mid-Review, a mid-term report on each student's progress is submitted to the Department of Architecture. At this time, 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 whether to defer or extend their work, subject to the rules already established in the Graduate School of Design Official Register.

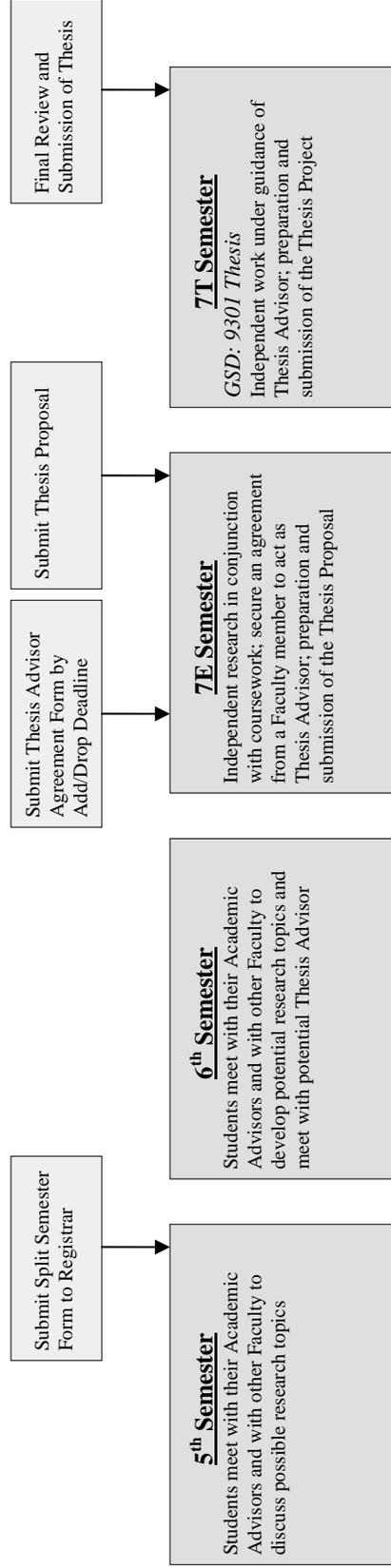
The final Thesis Project, having attained a sufficient standard of completion, will be presented and defended at a final, open review consisting of a panel chaired by the Thesis Advisor and composed of members of the Faculty and outside guests. The schedule of such reviews is established by the Department of Architecture. The composition of the review panels and their specific formats are established by the Thesis Director, who solicits recommendations and advice from individual Thesis Advisors, students, and other faculty members. Students who will complete a Thesis Project requiring assessment in a format other than a panel review (e.g. a written document, a film, etc.) must consult with their Thesis Advisor prior to mid-semester to determine requirements for the final presentation, in consultation with the Thesis Director. A final documentation following established uniform formats should be filed with the Department of Architecture after final review.

*Note: Specific dates for all deadlines (such as "end of the semester") will be established each term by the Department of Architecture or by the Registrar's Office.*

### Thesis Sequence



### Thesis Sequence (Semester Split Option)



## EXAMPLES

Through the Thesis Program, the Faculty desires to encourage an expansive range of rigorous and provocative inquiry. It is neither possible nor desirable to formulate conclusively the acceptable topics or methods a Thesis Project might engage, but the following list of possibilities may be taken as useful illustration of proposals that might be pursued:

- (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.
- (d) the formulation, through projections of zoning and master planning, of typical architectural developments in an urban or suburban area.
- (e) the theoretical and technical design of an advanced structural or building system including the projection of specific material and constructional processes.
- (f) the development of an original piece of computer software to support some design task.
- (g) the development of new prototypical fabrication processes.
- (h) the development of techniques within existing software platforms to carry out defined architectural tasks.
- (i) the experimental adaptation of an existing technology to improve the environmental performance of typical architectural components or types.
- (j) a project that elaborates a social space incorporating current and future media and electronic technologies.
- (k) a project that proposes an addition to a notable existing architectural object.
- (l) a housing project designed to maximize a aspects of economic performance.
- (m) a theoretical speculation, undertaken through architectural thinking, upon the changing aesthetic potentials made possible by digital technologies.
- (n) an interpretation of a historical architectural object or urban condition that proposes new sites and techniques for architectural engagements.
- (o) a critique of a prevailing cultural condition undertaken through the manipulation of the architectural consequences of that condition.

The preceding list of examples should by no means be considered exhaustive. It is intended only to provide examples and, further, to demonstrate how the categories of assessment will relate to specific topics. Some of the examples given above might result in a thesis that is presented in a format different from the conventional panel review, such as an oral discussion of material reviewed by jurors in advance.

## EVALUATION AND GRADING

### ***GSD 9301 – Independent Design Thesis in Satisfaction of the Degree MArch***

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. The Thesis Advisor and the Faculty will evaluate the Thesis Project according to relevance, competency, persuasiveness, and other criteria agreed by the Faculty.

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

## Thesis Proposal

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. It is essential, however, that the student maintain a clear relationship between the topic of study and the methods being deployed to examine that topic. This relationship will first be defined in the Preliminary Thesis Proposal, submitted as part of the Thesis Advisor Agreement Form, which identifies one primary and one or more secondary courses that will serve as the basis for the preparatory research work on the Thesis Proposal. Ordinarily, the format of the Thesis Proposal will be determined by the student and the Thesis Advisor, taking into account the methods of research employed in the Primary thesis research course.

While taking into account the broad diversity of potential topics, it is still possible to note the following common aspects of all thesis projects that should be addressed and documented in the Thesis Proposal: (1) the thesis, understood to the proposition being advanced in relation to contemporary professional and academic discourse; (2) the method, understood as the techniques and modes of research brought to bear on the topical area of the thesis; (3) precedents, understood as prior iterations or engagements with the topic as a whole or with discrete elements of the topic; (4) the context of the thesis, understood as the various cultural, technological, social, natural, economic, and other conditions that influence or affect the outcomes within the thesis topic; and (5) program, understood as the projective, effective, performative, or intentional dimensions of the thesis that are to produce and sustain particular consequences.

The following are guidelines for the Thesis Proposal document to be submitted prior to enrollment in 9301. 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 should 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 thesis must be the clear priority.

## *Typical Content for Thesis Proposal Document*

### **Title Page**

### **Table of Contents**

### **Synopsis of Thesis Proposal (one page).**

1. **Proposed Thesis:** A developed statement of at least 2500 words describing the topic and method of study and the intellectual content of the design Thesis. Should delimit the specific themes to be researched and addressed by the design project.
2. **Precedent:** Written and graphic analysis and interpretation of the relevant precedents and prior iterations of the issues and problems of the thesis.
3. **Context:** A narrative description of the contextual factors of the thesis (such as environmental, cultural, technological, material, or economic conditions) that elaborates on the current relevance and prior effects of these factors. Graphic analyses may supplement this description.
4. **Program:** A narrative description of the programmatic intentions of the thesis, including a detailed specification of the manner in which the propositional or projective intentions of the thesis would be realized in specific or prototypical form. This narrative description should be supplemented with quantitative and graphic materials.
5. **Bibliography and Appendices:** Listing of sources and reference materials
6. **Schedule:** Outline of work to be completed during the seventh semester.
7. **Preliminary Work:** Sketches, tests, experiments, schematics and other initial design work.

### ***GSD 9301 – Independent Design Thesis in Satisfaction of the Degree MArch***

The documentation presented by the student at the Final Thesis Review must be complete and comprehensive. The format and the content of this document is to be developed by the student under the guidance of his or her Thesis Advisor.

In addition, 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 ordinarily be an electronic document be in an 8 ½” x 11” format consisting of two parts, the Thesis Proposal document of the sixth semester and the Thesis Project of the seventh semester. 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. The first page of the document must include the student’s name, the title of the Thesis Project, the name of the Thesis Advisor, and the month and year of degree completion. This file should be submitted to the Department of Architecture on a cd labeled with the student’s name, the title of the Thesis Project, and the name of the Thesis Advisor. The Thesis documentation may become part of the permanent Thesis Archives of the Frances Loeb Library and the Library may change or update the format requirements from time to time.

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

## EXCEPTIONS

Exceptions to the Thesis Program regarding content, format, or process 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.