LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

THESIS HANDBOOK

2014–2015
INDEX

1. INTRODUCTION TO LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE THESIS
   a. Overview

2. THE FIRST YEAR: ESTABLISHING A FOUNDATION
   a. Formal Intention to Complete Thesis

3. THESIS PREP (THIRD/FIFTH SEMESTER)
   a. Thesis Prep Overview
   b. Thesis Prep Seminar Structure (GSD 9341)
      i. Seminar Structure
      iii. Articulation of the Design Project
   c. Reviews
   d. Grading
   e. Thesis Prep Seminar Semester Schedule

4. THESIS (FOURTH/SIXTH SEMESTER)
   a. Thesis Completion Overview
   b. Independent Thesis Course (GSD 9342)
   c. Reviews
   d. Grading

APPENDICES

Appendix I: General Readings for Thesis
Appendix II: Final Thesis Submission to Loeb Library
Appendix III: Final Thesis Permissions Release
Appendix IV: Final PDF Creation Examples
1. INTRODUCTION TO MASTER IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE THESIS

a. Overview:

This handbook serves as a guide for students who are undertaking a design thesis in the Department of Landscape Architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. The thesis provides an opportunity for students in the Master in Landscape Architecture program to pursue graduate-level research and deeply explore a topic of their interest through design. The design thesis builds upon the core program in landscape architecture at the GSD. This handbook provides a summary of key thesis requirements and offers an overview of the thesis process, from selection of a topic to submission of the final thesis.

For landscape architecture students interested in completing a thesis, the process begins in the pre-to-final year, however the thesis project begins in earnest in the final year, through thesis prep and final thesis completion, in fall and spring semesters, respectively. In the spring of the pre-to-final year (fourth semester for MLA I students, second semester for MLA I AP and MLA II students), students must formally state their intention to complete thesis, and are encouraged to begin conceptual thinking about a thesis topic. In their pre-to-final semester (fifth/third semester) students complete a detailed design thesis proposal. In their final semester (sixth/fourth semester) students complete, present, and submit their design thesis. Each of these stages, and associated requirements, are described in detail in the following pages.
2. THE FIRST YEAR: ESTABLISHING A FOUNDATION

a. Formal Intention to Complete Thesis

While thesis takes place over the final year at the GSD, planning for thesis begins in the spring of the previous year. Students considering pursuing an MLA design thesis are invited to meetings with faculty, including the thesis coordinator, in the spring semester prior to declaring thesis. These informational sessions outline the thesis process, the advantages and disadvantages of thesis, the commitment required from students, as well as the support offered by the department for the design thesis.

Students who opt to pursue a design thesis are required to declare their intentions in late March of the spring before their final year. The thesis declaration form, as well as associated deadlines, can be found on the department’s “Information for Current Students” page: http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/#/academic-programs/landscape-architecture/info-for-current-students.html

In selecting their topics, students are encouraged to build upon previous work and to use the summer months to pursue their individual projects, such as developing their precedent studies, and topic.

Students who pursue a design thesis are required to take an option studio offered by the department of landscape architecture in the fall semester. This is to ensure that all graduating students have at least one option studio in landscape architecture. (MLA II students who have taken a landscape architecture option studio in their second semester may choose an option studio outside the department for their third semester.)

While students do not need to officially declare a potential topic or advisor at this point, they are encouraged to begin reaching out to faculty before and during the summer.
3. THESIS PREP (THIRD/FIFTH SEMESTER)

a. Thesis Prep Overview:

During the fall semester of the final year, students begin a formal process of thesis preparation. Over the semester, students complete the department’s four-unit thesis preparation seminar, GSD 9341: Preparation of Design Thesis Proposal for Master in Landscape Architecture. This weekly seminar is required for MLA candidates electing to pursue a design thesis. The intent is to define the parameters of the design thesis and to help students to develop and frame their individual design proposals.

The course addresses a series of themes essential to developing a cogent thesis proposal. It includes the study and critique of precedent projects and representational techniques in landscape architecture, questions of site and program, and the identification of sources for research. The course also addresses practical necessities such as writing a thesis statement, site selection, base documentation, and data collection and analysis. By the end of the semester students have prepared individual design thesis proposals and are able to present and defend their design proposals verbally and on paper.

b. Thesis Prep Seminar Structure (GSD 9341)

- **Seminar Structure:**
  The course meets weekly for three hours. The usual format includes a one-hour session held with all students, followed by work in smaller groups for the purpose of reviewing assignments and work in progress. In addition to the class sessions, pin-ups, and reviews, meetings with instructors are an important aspect of the pedagogy of the course. Furthermore, students are expected to identify and secure a thesis advisor during the first weeks of the semester.

  Students complete regular assignments relevant to their theses, and the theme of each weekly seminar. Sessions focus on discussion and analysis of relevant readings, examination of different thesis models and approaches, and exploration of emergent student work. Since the seminar is run as a graduate seminar / studio, students are expected to provide critical and thoughtful responses to their peers’ work and engage in informed and mature discussion of the issues found in the readings.

- **Conceptual Framework of the Design Thesis:**
  The first half of the semester introduces the thesis as a conceptual frame and identifies key elements common to all design theses. Students are required to begin drafting a thesis statement, develop a specific topic for their proposed thesis, and simultaneously explore and collect a body of precedent research to help define the form and type of project they intend to produce. A thorough examination of precedent material and simultaneous iterative development of the thesis statement is emphasized, with the intention of allowing students to develop broad ideas and concept of what a thesis is, as well as specific direction for their individual work. The analysis of precedent work is an iterative process that leads to the definition of the thesis.
Precedents:
Students are required to review and critically evaluate relevant literature and projects that will inform their anticipated thesis project. By considering a range of project types and format, students will amass a body of work to draw from when defining the parameters to which their design thesis will respond. This body of work should define a genre within which the individual thesis project will fall, in this way placing the student’s work within a larger professional and academic context at an early stage. The selected precedents should demonstrate stylistic qualities, conceptual approaches, and presentation structure intended for the final thesis. This literature and project review serves as a resource to students moving forward through the thesis prep and into the final thesis semester.

Students are expected to explain their choice of selected precedents, and communicate their analysis and critique of each project to the seminar class. Precedents are critically evaluated through verbal explanation and analytical drawings exploring a range of key elements including design, representation, and site.

Topic:
The thesis topic is addressed following the precedent studies. Students iteratively refine both their thesis statements and precedent analyses during this section of the seminar.

Advisor Choice:
Advisor choices are due in early October so that the advisor-student relationships can be confirmed before the mid-term reviews. Typically students will list their preferred advisors in order of preference. These are then validated with the advisors, in concert with their individual teaching roles and responsibilities. While the student-advisor choices are confirmed in October, often these discussions begin much sooner. Students are encouraged to choose an advisor they might work well with.

Site:
Students begin to articulate an idea of site through both the precedent analysis and thesis topic development. At this point in the thesis prep semester, the site may remain an abstract concept, defining parameters that will inform the selection of a specific project site, or if the site is fundamental the topic of the thesis, students may identify a more specific, physical site for their work. After identifying a site, students continue through the remainder of the semester to hone in on specific site selection and study through mapping and analytical drawing.

Selected readings include Deming and Swaffield (2011); Gray and Malins (2004); Kwon (1997); Lopez-Pineiro (2010); Meyer (2005); Ries and Trout (2001); Treib (2004); Weilacher (2004) and Williams (1976).

This section of the seminar concludes with the Mid-Term Review, where students present the conceptual framework of the design thesis, through their precedent analysis, thesis statement, preliminary site definition, and beginnings of a design project. Typically, students will have a minimum of four boards for the midterm review, at 36 x 24 inches.
- **Articulation of Thesis Design Project:**
The second half of the semester focuses on developing the design project, and producing an outline of the work to be completed in the final thesis semester for the final design project. At this stage, the regular thesis prep seminar sessions are followed by individual meetings with the instructor(s) rather than the meetings of small groups. By the end of thesis prep, students are required to have defined the design project of their thesis, as well as the methods of research, production, and representation they intend to use to complete the final project. This work provides the basic structural framework for the design project, preparing students to continue directly into the final design project in the following semester.

**Design Project:**
Students are required to launch directly from feedback of the Mid-Term Review toward a more refined definition of a design project for the design thesis. The design project will be refined through iteration over the course of thesis prep, but the idea of site, program, and scope must all be addressed.

**Representation:**
Students are required to review and discuss the main representational techniques they intend to use in their final thesis project. Representation methods must be analyzed to explain their effectiveness and appropriateness to each proposed thesis. A number of seminar sessions will be dedicated to exploring various representational techniques through tutorial and workshop.

**Methodology:**
Students are required to review and discuss their intended methodology(ies) for research and design work. The selected methodology should reflect the anticipated topic and program of the final thesis. Defining the method simplifies the design process for students later by defining the manner of making fundamental decisions and moving forward throughout the final thesis project. This basic decision-making is fundamental to successful progress of the final thesis.

**Schedule and Deliverables:**
Throughout the second half of thesis prep, students are required to refine a list of media and deliverables to be produced for the final thesis project, as well as a draft schedule for the completion of thesis. The media and deliverables should reflect, and be heavily informed by the precedents selected by each student. The draft schedule will inform the progression of work for the final semester.


This section of the seminar concludes with the Final Presentation of Thesis Proposals, where students present proposed design project, through both their thesis statement and precedent analysis, and panels outlining site analysis. Students will typically have 6–8 boards, at 36 x 24 inches, accompanied, where appropriate, by a digital presentation.
c. Reviews:

Small Group Seminar Reviews:
Progress reviews occur each week within the seminar. For the first half of the semester students meet each week in small groups with a seminar instructor, alternating groups and instructors frequently. This allows students and instructors to have more individual review and comments for each project as students develop the initial thesis concept. This also encourages discussion and critique between students.

Students are encouraged to meet with other classmates to share emerging work and to learn from each other’s successes and struggles. Developing a strong peer network of fellow thesis students is an excellent strategy for self-motivation and keeping the thesis on track, both temporally and intellectually.

Mid-Term Review:
For the thesis-prep Mid-Term Review, students present their work and receive feedback from a panel including their thesis advisor, other MLA thesis advisors, thesis prep instructors, and additional reviewers from within the Landscape Architecture Department faculty. Students are expected to have articulated a thesis statement, and present precedent projects, site description and the beginnings of a design proposal at the Mid-Term Review.

Deliverables:
A minimum of 4 boards, 36 x 24 inches.

Individual Seminar Reviews:
Following the Mid-Term Review, weekly progress reviews within the seminar occur one-on-one between students and instructors. This allows students and instructors to have individual, project-focused time as students begin developing in more detail the thesis design proposal.

December Presentation of Design Proposals:
For the Final Presentation of Design Proposals in December, students will present work to a panel of advisors mostly from within the faculty of the GSD. Students are expected to present their work from the semester, encompassing precedents, topic, method, site, and focusing on the proposed design project.

Deliverables:
6–8 boards, 36 x 24 inches.

Advisor-Advisee Meetings:
A regular meeting schedule is encouraged between advisor and thesis candidate. Once advisors are selected, students are encouraged to meet regularly throughout the semester with their advisor and develop a working relationship and progress the thesis. To track progress, students should stay in close contact with their thesis advisor over the thesis preparation term. Regular meeting and feedback will also allow the student to iteratively develop a final proposal that meets the requirements and expectations of the
department. This semester is the time for students to work closely with advisors, whether through office hour appointments or other meetings, and develop the core ideas underpinning your thesis.

d. Grading

Course requirements include class attendance and participation (30% of the final grade); mid-term and final presentation (20% of final grade), and class assignments (50% of final grade / late assignments will not be graded).

Assignment grades will be determined by:

1. Representation: demonstrating a clear argument graphically as well as visually
2. Engagement: showing consistent inquiry throughout the semester
3. Proposal: the potential of the design project

PDFs of all course work will be required for final submission.
## e. Typical Thesis Prep Seminar Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Design Thesis</td>
<td>One paragraph description of proposed thesis precedent analysis – literary and graphic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Precedent I: Projects</td>
<td>Continue precedent analysis of selected precedent projects in landscape architecture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Precedent II: Sites + Subjects</td>
<td>Draft 300-word illustrated thesis statement due. Continue precedent studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Site II: Specificity, Type, Prototype, Representation</td>
<td>2 draft boards for Site Description and Representation — 24” x 36”, horizontal format. Refine previous work. Arrange meetings with thesis advisors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tutorials I: Library Methods</td>
<td>Group tutorials by Loeb Library staff on resources of the library, and library research methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mid-term review</td>
<td>Minimum requirements: 6 boards, 24” x 36”, horizontal format, plus thesis abstract printed for reviewers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tutorials II: Design Methods</td>
<td>Individual meetings with thesis prep instructors to review the mid-term and plan for the rest of the semester.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Method II: Program</td>
<td>Individual meetings with thesis prep instructors to review the mid-term and plan for the rest of the final review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Method III: Reception, Presentation</td>
<td>Final class meeting and review of the semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Final review</td>
<td>Presentation of Design Thesis Proposals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. THESIS (FOURTH/SIXTH SEMESTER)

a. Thesis Completion Overview:

During the spring term, the final semester of the graduate and post-graduate degree program, students electing to do thesis complete the final design thesis for defense. Students must be enrolled in the 12-unit course, Independent Thesis in Satisfaction of the Degree Master in Landscape Architecture (GSD 9342). Following Thesis Prep (GSD 9341), each student pursues a topic of relevance to landscape architecture, which must include academic inquiry and design exploration.

Throughout the semester students are expected to work closely with their advisors, participate in organized peer and external reviews, and demonstrate significant self-motivated, and disciplined independent work on the development and completion of a final design thesis project. By the end of the semester, students will have developed rigorous design proposals and be able to present and defend these proposals both verbally and on paper, through comprehensive drawing, modeling, and other means of representation. Completion of the final thesis project requires public presentation of the project and its defense, as well as the submission of the thesis book, documenting the final thesis for Harvard University’s own record. This document will be made available to future years of thesis students in the Frances Loeb Library.

b. Independent Thesis in Satisfaction of the Degree Master in Landscape Architecture (GSD 9342)

**Structure of Semester:**
Launching from the research and work done in the fall semester, students focus in their final semester on the completion of a comprehensive design project to satisfy the thesis framework set out by the department, and outlined by the individual student during Thesis Prep.

Final thesis work is carried out largely independently. Students are encouraged to meet regularly with their advisors, and are required to participate in any reviews, workshops, or meetings arranged for all thesis students by the Thesis Coordinator. Interim and final reviews throughout the semester are scheduled by the Thesis Coordinator. Additionally, the Thesis Coordinator will organize a number of required workshops for thesis students throughout the semester, covering themes including mapping and book making. These are typically held bi-weekly and at a time suitable to all students.

c. Reviews:
The formal reviews listed below are all to be coordinated by the Thesis Coordinator. Any additional internal reviews between students, and between student and advisor, should be arranged independently.
January reviews:
Reviews are held at the end of January. These are less a repetition of December reviews and more a review of work done since the December meeting and a planning meeting for the coming semester.

March reviews:
Mid-term reviews are typically held in the week before Spring Break. The deliverables for these reviews are set with the individual advisors. A first draft of the thesis book is advisable at this stage.

April pre-final reviews:
Pre-finals allow students and instructors to meet with other faculty from the GSD to review the students’ individual progress and their presentation for the finals. They are usually held in a semi-private setting.

Final reviews:
The finals are scheduled in mid-May in front of a panel consisting of external reviewers in addition to the GSD design thesis advisors and other reviewers.

d. Grading:
Thesis grades will be determined by:

1. Representation: demonstrating a clear argument graphically as well as visually
2. Engagement: showing consistent inquiry throughout the semester
3. Proposal: the potential of the design project
4. Excellence of design response

Submission requirements:
PDFs of all final boards will be required for final submission.

A final packaged and printed thesis book is required for completion of the final design thesis. In addition to the design project, this book should document the precedent and site research begun in the fall semester, as well as clearly outline the thesis statement.

A signed statement of permission allowing Harvard University’s libraries to archive the thesis work is required at the time of submission of the thesis book for grading, and should also be included as a page in the printed hard copy. In general, this statement is included on the thesis internal cover page. Please see attached addenda with specific instructions from the library on PDF creation guidelines and cover page with permission statement template. Supplemental materials such as video or additional photos are permitted, and should be included on a DVD, also according to library guidelines included at the end of this document.