1. Overview

A master’s thesis in the nutrition field is a written piece of work, which documents a student’s original research. It is one of two degree options in the Nutrition MS program, and is highly recommended to any students who are interested in careers in academia or research, and especially those who are considering pursuit of a PhD.

The process of producing a thesis includes working under the supervision of a faculty committee; writing a thesis proposal in accordance with a literature review to justify the project’s rationale and design; conducting research by collecting, analyzing, summarizing, and presenting data, as necessary; writing the final thesis and defending the results to your supervisory committee. The process takes approximately one calendar year, but the timeline is highly individualized.

PROCESS OVERVIEW

Recommended timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Semester</th>
<th>Second Semester</th>
<th>Third Semester</th>
<th>Fourth Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify a topic</td>
<td>Identify a thesis advisor &amp; committee</td>
<td>Write thesis proposal in consultation with advisor &amp; committee</td>
<td>Register for NUTR 799 Nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write thesis proposal in consultation with advisor &amp; committee</td>
<td>Conduct research!</td>
<td>Register for NUTR 799 / Continue research</td>
<td>Write thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defend thesis proposal</td>
<td>Register for NUTR 799 / Continue research</td>
<td>Defend thesis (one month before library deadline)</td>
<td>Edit thesis as necessary before final submission to library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. **Identify a broad topic.**

Multiple considerations must be weighed when identifying a topic, including:

- Your interests and skills;
- The research interests and expertise of Nutrition & Food Studies faculty, other Mason faculty, and other available experts;
- Available time (including both day-to-day availability and long-term timeline);
- Available resources (grant funding, equipment needs, etc.);
- Relevance and novelty of the topic to nutrition; and
- Ethical considerations.

3. **Identify a thesis advisor and thesis committee.**

The master’s thesis committee is composed of at least three members of the Mason graduate faculty, and at least two must come from Nutrition & Food Studies. Faculty who are not members of the graduate faculty (Ex: adjunct faculty), or other appropriate persons not affiliated with the University (Ex: government, non-profit, or corporate nutritionists) may serve as additional members.

One faculty member will serve as committee chair, and you will work most closely with this individual as your thesis advisor. We encourage students to review faculty interests, to get a sense of where interests align and who may be best suited as advisor. It is generally recommended to identify your advisor, who can then guide the assembly of your remaining committee.

4. **Create your thesis proposal: Write your literature review, write your research question, and define objectives.**

Conduct a literature review on your topic to identify gaps in the existing literature, and refine your topic into a specific research question. The literature review is a large portion of your thesis proposal. Work with your advisor and committee to craft a research design that you will employ to answer your question.

The proposal should contain a detailed description of the work to be conducted, its relation to previous published work, and the research methods to be employed. Proposals should include a clear research question and hypotheses (if appropriate).
A hypothesis is not necessary for descriptive studies, but should include one or more objective(s) instead.

5. **Defend your thesis proposal.**
A finished copy of the written proposal must be delivered to the thesis committee, and the committee will ask questions to determine the validity of the proposed design and your readiness to conduct it. Typically, the proposal defense occurs as a meeting with a short presentation of the proposed project by the student, followed by a question and answer session. The committee may choose to accept your proposal, request that you rewrite and resubmit, or reject it. We suggest that you work closely with your committee before your defense to avoid surprises.

Two forms must be signed and submitted following a successful proposal defense:

- [The Master's Thesis Committee Designation form](#) (can be submitted earlier, but not necessary)
- [The Thesis Proposal Defense Form](#) (required before you can register for NUTR 799)

6. **Register for NUTR 799 (Thesis Research), and conduct your project!**
You must register for at least 3 credits of NUTR 799 in your first research semester. Following that, you can register for as little as 1 credit per semester, but you must maintain continuous enrollment in the fall and spring terms.

All research must be conducted ethically and responsibly, according to University policy. Research using human subjects or animals must be approved by the Institutional Review Board and/or other relevant review unit (Radiation Safety Committee, Institutional Biosafety Committee, Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, etc.) prior to beginning research.

7. **Write your thesis.**
Use the [thesis template](#). All theses must conform to Mason formatting requirements. Guidelines are directly above it on the same website.
The department does not have a required reference citation style, so you and your committee can decide what is most appropriate for your specific area of nutrition and food research. We recommend managing your references with a reference management software, such as Mason’s own, free software, Zotero.

8. Go through the required Format Review with University Dissertation and Thesis Services (UDTS).

The library recommends submitting your thesis for format review as early as possible, but at least 2-3 weeks before your thesis defense date. Instructions are here. Pay attention to the ultimate deadline on their website. (You can continue to edit the document after the format review. They review only format, not content.)

9. Choose the UDTS face-to-face or emailed Submission Consultation.

They'll give you all the forms you need to submit your thesis to the University.


Let your committee know when you’ll have the written thesis completed for their review (usually at least a week in advance of your defense), and schedule a meeting date and time for your defense. Generally, we recommend that your defense be at least a month before the library’s final thesis submission date, to allow adequate time to make needed edits, for the committee to review edits (as necessary), and obtain signatures.

The defense usually entails the thesis candidate’s presentation to share results (usually about 30-40 minutes), followed by a question and answer period with the committee. The committee asks questions and makes suggestions aimed at improving the final thesis.

Bring two copies of your signature sheet to your defense to collect your committee’s signatures. They MUST use black ink.

When finished making edits required by your committee, print a copy of your final thesis and submit with your signature form to the department manager, Mr. Joe Wilson, who will obtain signatures from the Department Chair and the Dean. (Plan for at least 1 week for this step.)
11. Submit the final thesis to UDTS with required forms. Pay attention to final deadlines on their website—they are NOT flexible.

UDTS Final Submission

12. Celebrate!!

REQUIRED COURSEWORK

To complete the MS thesis option, students must complete the 30-credit nutrition core requirements, 3 credits of elective courses, and 6 credits of NUTR 799 – Thesis Research. (Full information on course requirements are available in the University Catalog.)

Students may only register for NUTR 799 after successful defense of the thesis proposal and with approval of their advisor.

- Students must register for a minimum of three credit hours in their first semester of NUTR 799. Following that semester, students may enroll for one credit of NUTR 799 and be considered full time if the student, advisor and department chair certify the student is working full time on the thesis. FTE Status declaration form
- Students must maintain continuous enrollment in NUTR 799 while writing and submitting a thesis. This applies to fall and spring semesters, but not summer. However, if a student intends to graduate during the summer term, he/she must be enrolled in at least one credit of NUTR 799 during that term.
- Note: Students receive a grade of IP (in progress) each semester until the thesis work is complete and submitted. Then, all semesters convert to S (satisfactory). If not completed, the grades convert to NC (no credit).
RESOURCES

- **University Dissertation & Thesis Services** (UDTS) in the University Libraries
  - Helps prepare, format, complete and submit the thesis correctly and on time.
  - Dictates final submission deadlines for graduation.
  - Provides the **thesis template**, with the mandatory format.
  - Provides the **Thesis, Dissertation, and Project Guide**
  - Also provides **workshops** to use the thesis template properly.

- University Catalog **Requirements for Master’s Degrees**

- **Recommended Course Sequence**, Department of Nutrition and Food Studies.

- **Student Resources**, Department of Nutrition and Food Studies, website.
  - Includes **MS thesis Committee Designation Form, Proposal Defense Form**, and **Thesis Defense Signature sheet**.

- **Master’s Thesis Research Full Time Equivalent Status form**, Office of the Registrar.
  - May only be used after the first semester of NUTR 799.
  - Allows you to be classified by the University as **full-time status**, to qualify for certain financial aid (i.e., to avoid loan repayment).

- **Extension of Graduate Time Limits**, Office of the University Registrar.
  - For students who need more than the allotted 6 years to complete their MS degree.

- **Note:** the thesis process is separate from the graduation process. You still need to apply separately to graduate on PatriotWeb. **Instructions here.**