

Faculty Guidelines for Serving on Interdisciplinary Studies Thesis (MAIS 799) Committees

The Interdisciplinary Studies program culminates with a capstone research endeavor that reflects students' mastery of relevant subjects and skills in their course work, experiential learning opportunities, and research.

Interdisciplinary Studies Thesis vs. Project

Interdisciplinary Studies students must choose between doing a traditional thesis (MAIS 799) or doing a project (MAIS 798). An MAIS thesis involves the same creativity, originality, and intellectual rigor as required for a master's thesis in any other program. The project option enables students to produce a less ambitious piece of text or a non-traditional deliverable (computer model, business plan, film, etc.), but it should not be regarded as "easier" than doing a thesis. Both options, regardless of deliverable, involve a significant amount of writing.

Thesis Requirements

All theses must:

- Be based on a proposal approved by the student's committee. (*See below.*)
- Make an original contribution to knowledge using original data.
- Be a formally written, thoroughly cited, substantial piece of text.
- Be formatted and submitted in accordance with University Dissertation & Thesis Service guidelines.

Interdisciplinary Studies Project Proposals

MAIS 797: Proposal: This required, 1-credit course is designed to facilitate the proposal writing process. Course deliverables include a complete draft of the proposal and a poster presented in a public forum.

Committee Approval: In addition to completing MAIS 797, students must develop a final version of their proposal that is approved by the entire committee. This can happen during MAIS 797, but usually happens after the course is over. Students must submit the final proposal in hard copy to Interdisciplinary Studies, with a signature sheet indicating committee approval, in order to be registered for their thesis credits.

Faculty Feedback on Project Proposals & Research

Committee Composition: Thesis committees must be composed of three Mason graduate faculty members.

Committee Chairs: Thesis committee chairs play a role in the MAIS 797 proposal course, in that students notify their committee chairs that they will be registering for the course and keep them apprised of their progress. Committee chairs should expect to provide feedback to students throughout the semester of the course.

The Review Process: Passing MAIS 797 does not equal committee approval of the proposal. Students are instructed to factor a revise-and-resubmit process into their timelines starting at new-student orientation. Every member of the committee should feel free to delay signing off on a thesis proposal if they feel more work is required. The same is true of signing off on the thesis itself. Chairs should provide guidance to students at the start of the research process about how they would like the circulation of drafts to the committee to proceed.

Assigning Grades (for committee chairs only)

The committee chair is the instructor for MAIS 799 and must upload a grade at the end of each semester. The chair must not submit a final grade of S (satisfactory) until every member of the committee approves the thesis!

Grade options for MAIS 799 are limited to:

- **IP:** In Progress, for when the thesis extends beyond a single semester. *Do not use IN (Incomplete)!*
- **NC:** No Credit, for when it is clear the student will never finish the degree.
- **S:** Satisfactory, for when the student completes the thesis and the entire committee approves it!