School of Natural Resource Sciences  
Graduate Student Policies

M.S. and Ph.D. Thesis Research Proposal

The proposal is intended to develop research plans and to summarize the necessary literature. The proposal shall be of sufficient detail so that someone not familiar with the project can understand what the project is about, including how the research will be conducted and how it advances the respective discipline.

Full-time students should meet with their advisory committee regularly to discuss your graduate program, including your classwork and original research. A thesis research proposal is due to the advisory committee by at least the end of the second semester (before the end of the 12th credit for part-time students) of enrollment. Two weeks prior to the meeting, the student should submit a written preliminary research proposal giving the advisory committee an opportunity to provide feedback.

The proposal should include the following information:
- Title and Signature Page
- Abstract (not more than 1 page)
- Introduction
- Significance of Research Plan
- Background (literature review)
- Objectives and Hypothesis
- Methods and Materials
- Expected results
- Timetable (not more than 1 page)
- Literature cited
- Appendix sections (as applicable): IACUC, IBC, IRB approval; Recombinant DNA training; Radioisotope training; etc

After discussion and revision, the thesis proposal must be approved by the student, the advisor, all members of the advisory committee, and the Director of SNRS. After the committee meeting, the student should submit to their respective department a final research proposal that incorporates the committee’s suggested revisions. An electronic copy of the proposal will be kept in the departmental files and by the advisor. Periodic meetings with your graduate committee will help keep your committee aware of progress and changes in your plan of study and/or thesis/dissertation research; this will help avoid problems later. Any changes in the proposal must be approved by all members of the advisory committee.

The graduate student should take advantage of opportunities to learn research techniques from others in related areas or disciplines at the institution. The graduate student is expected to be involved in other research projects in the laboratory of the student’s major advisor as well.

1 The thesis research proposal is specifically designed for M.S. and Ph.D. Plan A students. Requirements for MNRM and M.S. Plan B students will be developed at a later date.
The **University Graduate Bulletins** contain information about academic programs and student services offered by North Dakota State University. It also contains general University and undergraduate and graduate academic policies and degree requirements. This bulletin (or catalog) is published online only. The bulletin is intended to complement other university information including specific materials supplied by schools, colleges, departments, and programs.

[https://bulletin.ndsu.edu/graduate/policies/](https://bulletin.ndsu.edu/graduate/policies/)

**Supervisory Committee**

The supervisory committee should be formed during the term immediately after the major advisor is identified for the student, and members should be identified before the Plan of Study is formulated so that all committee members have a chance to contribute to the Plan of Study. The supervisory committee agreed upon by the major advisor and student, and approved by the program administrator and the academic dean shall be recommended to the Dean of the Graduate College for final approval.

**M.S. Degree**

The supervisory committee will have at least three members. The members consist of:

1. The major advisor, who must be a full or affiliate member of the graduate faculty Level 1 or 2. The student selects the advisor with approval of the program administrator and the Dean of the Graduate College. The major advisor-student relationship must be a mutually acceptable one. The major advisor will act as the chair of the student's supervisory committee and will be in charge of the Plan of Study. The remaining members of the committee must be agreed upon by the student, the major advisor, and the Dean of the Graduate College.
2. A second member, who must be a full or associate member of the graduate faculty.
3. A third member, who could be either a faculty member from outside the student’s program or a qualified off-campus expert in the field. If this committee member is not a full or associate member of the graduate faculty, the approval of the Dean of the Graduate College is required. Approval by the Dean requires a recommendation from the program administrator accompanied by rationale and a curriculum vitae.

**Ph.D. Degree**

The supervisory committee will have at least four members. The members consist of:

1. The major advisor, who must be a full or affiliate member of the graduate faculty Level 1. The student selects the advisor with approval of the program administrator and the Dean of the Graduate College. The major advisor-student relationship must be a mutually acceptable one. The major advisor will act as the chair of the student's supervisory committee and will be in charge of the Plan of Study. The remaining members of the committee must be agreed upon by the student, the major advisor, and the Dean of the Graduate College.
2. A second member, who must be a full or associate member of the graduate faculty.
3. A third member, who could be either a faculty member or a qualified off-campus expert in the field. If this committee member is not a full or associate member of the graduate faculty, the approval of the Dean of the Graduate College is required. Approval by the dean requires a recommendation from the program administrator accompanied by rationale and a curriculum vitae.

4. The Graduate School Representative (GSR) is chosen by the student, in consultation with the committee chair, at the time of the supervisory committee formation.

**Eligibility Requirements:** The GSR must be a full member of the graduate faculty, AND be either a tenured faculty member outside the committee chair’s/co-chairs' home department(s) or a faculty member outside the primary college of the committee chair/co-chairs. If the student is in an interdisciplinary program, the GSR must also be outside of that program. Additionally, the GSR must be clear of any conflicts of interest with either the student or the committee chair/co-chairs (i.e., budgetary relationships, family or financial, personal relationships, or research and/or publication relationships between the GSR and either the student or the committee chair are examples of possible conflicts of interest).

The role of the GSR is to ensure that Graduate College policies are followed, that the expectations for the student’s performance are reasonable, that the interactions with the supervisory committee are conducted on a professional basis, and to submit a report to the Graduate College after each examination. Graduate School Representatives serving on a committee for a program that has been approved by the Graduate College to use an outcomes-based approach to assess doctoral student performance also have the responsibility to document that the process and assessment of the student’s performance in the doctoral program matches the defined program outcomes. A list detailing the specific responsibilities of the Graduate College appointee is available here (https://bulletin.ndsu.edu/graduate/graduate-school-policies/doctoral-degree-policies/#planofstudysupervisorycommitteetext).

**NOTE:** Other qualified individuals may participate as committee members following approval by the Graduate Dean upon a recommendation accompanied by rationale and curriculum vitae by the appropriate program administrator and academic dean. The supervisory committee agreed upon by the major advisor and student, and approved by the program administrator and the academic dean shall be recommended to the Dean of the Graduate College for final approval.

Each committee member shall have an equal vote in committee decisions. The committee is to assist the student in the preparation of a plan of study and to advise him or her during the period of graduate work. The supervisory committee is encouraged to convene at least once per semester and meet at least once per year to review the progress of the student.

**Plan of Study**

The Plan of Study shall be appropriate to meet the interests and needs of the student in his or her chosen field as determined by the supervisory committee and approved by the program administrator and the Dean of the Graduate College.
The Plan of Study should be submitted to the Graduate School for approval not later than the term immediately after the supervisory committee is formed and must be filed in the Graduate School prior to scheduling the comprehensive/preliminary examination. The Plan of Study shall include the specific courses the student is expected to complete and any other special requirements of the particular master's degree that the student is seeking.

Revisions in the program of study must be approved by the student, supervisory committee, program administrator, and Dean of the Graduate School. The graduate dean will officially notify the student, supervisory committee, program administrator, and the academic dean of all changes.

**M.S. Degree**
The total credits will be determined by each program but must not be less than 30 graduate credits. Each program has the responsibility of defining the requirements for a major in its disciplinary area. For the Thesis Based Masters, of the required minimum 30 graduate credits, at least 16 credits must be approved for graduate credit numbered from 601-689, 691; 700-789, 791; 801-889 and 891 while the research credits (798) must be not fewer than six nor more than 10 credits. Once these minimum requirements have been met, any other graduate courses can be used to satisfy the remaining Plan of Study requirements. For the Comprehensive Study Based Masters (non-thesis based), of the required minimum 30 graduate credits, at least 21 credits must be completed using courses approved for graduate credit numbered from 601-689, 691; 700-789, 791; 801-889 and 891 while the research credits (797) must be not fewer than 2 nor more than 6 credits.

**Ph.D. Degree**
The total credits will be determined by each program but must not be less than 30 semester graduate credits for M.S. degree, and not fewer than 90 semester graduate credits for Ph.D. degree. A student matriculating with a master's degree, including a degree earned at an international institution, must earn not fewer than 60 graduate credits at NDSU. Each program has the responsibility of defining the requirements for a major in its disciplinary area. Not fewer than 27 credits must be in courses approved for graduate credit numbered 601-689, 691, 700-789, and 791 (referred to as didactic courses). Of these 27 credits, not fewer than 15 credits must be in 700-level course work (700-789 & 791). Of these credits, not fewer than 15 credits must be NDSU courses at the 700 level (700-789 & 791). For specific requirements, the student should consult the specific programs.

Approved by SNRS Faculty, June 20, 2016