Thesis Schedule

Fall Semester:
Below is an approximate outline of expectations for the fall semester, precise due dates will be determined by your advisor. The goals of the fall semester include preparation of a preliminary annotated bibliography, literature review, identification of data sources and methods, IRB submission, and a draft research proposal.

Week 1: Identify Topic Area
Week 2: Submit Sample Research Question (Advisor Assigned)
Week 3: Faculty Advisor Group Meets
Weeks 4-6: Thesis Proposal Presentations
Week 7: Complete IRB Training Modules and begin IRB Protocol Process
Week 9: IRB Information Session

Winter Break:
Students are expected to use the break to collect data and begin the research phase of their thesis.

Spring Semester:
Students hold regular meetings with their advisor on an-as needed basis. Students should formally identify a Reader, from within or outside the GSAPP faculty, who can provide particular expertise on a topic. Finalize IRB approval by February 1.

Friday, February 21st  Identify Reader(s) – All GSAPP faculty/adjuncts are eligible to act as a reader. Potential readers outside of GSAPP must be approved by your advisor.

Monday, March 24th  Penultimate Draft due to Advisor and schedule Thesis Jury with permission of Advisor

April 7th-18th  Thesis Jury Weeks – Required for Graduation
Thesis Juries with student, advisor, and reader. The readers must receive a copy of the draft thesis no fewer than 14 days before the review date. Failure to submit the draft in a timely manner is cause for cancellation of the jury review. A successful jury is required for a passing grade in the course.

April 18th – end of classes  During this period students will make final edits to their theses based on comments received at jury. The date revisions are due to your advisor will be determined at your jury.
Final copy due to advisor for grading and a digital copy of your thesis with the signed agreement form should be dropped off to the UP office. In addition, a word document of your abstract that includes your name, the title and advisors name should be emailed to Leigh Smith at lb663@columbia.edu. In addition, before submitting your thesis, you will be required to sign an agreement form acknowledging that your thesis will be archived on-line. You will have the right to keep your thesis closed to public viewing for up to two years. This form should be saved as a PDF and included on your media storage with the copy of your thesis for submission. If you do not submit the final version of your thesis by this date you will not be eligible to participate in the graduation ceremony.

Wednesday, May 13th Grades Due

Wednesday, May 20th Graduation!

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I. What is the Thesis
The thesis is an essential part of the urban planning curriculum. It is an individual investigation of the student’s own choice that is supervised closely by a faculty member of the Urban Planning Program. It is intended to demonstrate the student’s ability to structure an argument about an issue or problem significant or clearly relevant to planning practice, planning thought, and/or the planning profession. Structuring an effective argument is the process of organizing and making a compelling and logical case for an idea, theory, testable hypothesis, policy position, or empirical finding. In research, this involves gathering and analyzing evidence in a systematic way.

The thesis is the culmination of the two-year course of study and should demonstrate a synthetic understanding of the professional skills and substantive knowledge bases, which form the content of the curriculum of the Urban Planning Program.

While the particular form and components of the argument will vary depending on the problem being addressed, some basic steps are common. These include:

1. defining a problem as a conceptually (logically) ordered set of questions, each of which will need to be answered or addressed;

2. developing knowledge of the relevant bodies of theory, concept, and methods, and of previously performed empirical research;

3. judging the validity of this literature;

4. identifying the most appropriate methods of evidence or data collection for answering the questions;

5. qualitatively and/or quantitatively analyzing or evaluating the available evidence;

6. organizing the evidence to produce findings;

7. writing in a clear, coherent, and succinct style so that the reader can follow your argument; and

8. drawing implications from your findings, thus pointing the way toward improving existing practice.
The program gives three thesis awards at graduation. See Appendix C.

II. The Scope of the Thesis

1. While the “proper” length of the thesis varies for different topics, a normal length for a well-specified topic should typically be between 50 and 75 double-spaced, typewritten pages of text. The bibliography and appendices (where relevant) are additional pages.

2. You should work closely with your advisor at the early stages to focus your topic and to select a topic within your ability and the time allowed for completion.

3. The topic of the thesis can come from a wide variety of subject areas but you should select a topic within your concentration (Housing and Community Development, International Development, Economic Development, or Land Use, Transportation, and the Environment). It can be in functional areas of planning (e.g., housing, economic development, health planning, transportation), focus on a particular geographic area, or address a particular aspect of planning thought or method. The research design can be a case study, a comparative analysis, a mathematical model, a program evaluation, or a statistical assessment. The student should work closely with his or her advisor, to choose the most appropriate design for that particular topic. In general, a thesis consisting of only a review of existing literature in a certain topical area is unacceptable. On the other hand, doing extensive original research is well beyond the acceptable thesis standards at the Master’s degree level.

4. Thesis students will meet as a whole at the start of the fall semester and then break into smaller groups to work with their faculty advisor. In the spring semester, students will meet with the advisor on an as-needed basis and will be submitting drafts of the thesis on a regular basis.

III. Writing the Proposal

In the fall semester, each student will write a thesis proposal. The research design specified by the proposal will be implemented in the spring semester.

The following should be observed in writing a proposal:

1. a succinct statement of the problem(s) or issue(s) being addressed;
2. a statement of the significance or relevance of the problem(s);

3. a set of logically ordered questions that follow from the problem statement and need to be answered;

4. presentation of the background to the problem;

5. a review of the pertinent literature;

6. techniques, data sources, methods, and a research design that will be used to answer the questions;

7. a listing of the most important bibliographic references;

8. an outline of tentative chapter headings; and

9. a timetable for conducting the key research and writing tasks.

In general, a proposal should not exceed 20 double-spaced pages.

IV. The Thesis Advisor

1. Each student will be assigned a thesis advisor to supervise the progress of the work. The thesis advisor will be a faculty member of the Urban Planning Program. In special cases, other faculty members within Columbia University may be used.

2. The thesis advisor’s responsibilities are:

   a. to help a student develop a topic—to define its scope and focus on key issues or questions to be addressed;

   b. to aid in research and provide research resources;

   c. to provide advice and judgment on theoretical and methodological problems which might arise;

   d. to review and provide written comments on drafts of the chapters;

   e. to guide the preparation of the jury presentation; and
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f. to conduct the student’s jury, review subsequent revisions, assign a grade, and supervise the final completion and submission of the thesis.

3. It is expected that the student will work closely with his or her advisor. This means weekly meetings during the fall term and at least every two weeks during the spring term. Keep in mind that the advisor has to be satisfied that in his or her judgment the penultimate draft is at least adequate to pass the thesis jury.

4. The thesis advisor must be given ample time to review drafts and to make written comments, in most cases about a week. Do not expect overnight feedback.

V. Thesis Jury

1. A complete draft of the thesis must be presented to a thesis jury for review and advice. Thesis juries typically take place in the second or third week of April.

2. The jury consists of at least two jury members:
   - a. a thesis advisor; and
   - b. a reader; i.e., one other member of the Urban Planning program or another program within GSAPP; or, if requested, a person outside the GSAPP faculty must be approved by the thesis advisor.

3. The student must contact all jury members to ascertain their availability to meet. It is the student’s responsibility to arrange a date and time by completing and submitting a Thesis Jury Sign-up Form (signed by your advisor) to Leigh Smith in the Urban Planning Office.

4. The student must distribute the required number of copies (one for each member of the jury) of the thesis to the jury members at least two weeks prior to the scheduled jury date. Juries cannot be schedule until the faculty advisor has received this draft and approved it for a jury.

5. At the thesis jury, each student will give a 10-12 minute oral summary of his or her thesis (audio-visual aids may be used), covering the following points:
   - a. the purpose and significance of the thesis;
b. what the argument is and how it has been studied; and

c. the major conclusions and implications that can be drawn: e.g., recommendations for new programs, legislation, policy, techniques, procedures, allocations, theories, information, or institutional changes.

6. The thesis jury will vote to either:

a. approve and pass the thesis as it is (or with minor revisions);

b. withhold approval until major revisions are made (the thesis jury has the option of asking for another jury or allowing the advisor or another member of the jury to make final approval; without holding another jury); or

c. not approve the thesis.

7. If revisions are required, a list of these will be recorded by the thesis advisor and given to the student immediately after the jury. This list will be the basis for the approval of the revised thesis. The student should submit minor revisions on the date recorded on the thesis form.

8. The student will graduate as long as he or she receives a **Passing** grade. In order to graduate, the student must submit one copy of the thesis to the advisor for grading and one digital copy with signed agreement form to Leigh Smith for Avery Library to be digitally archived.

VI. **Institutional Suitability Review**

All university-based projects involving human subjects must be submitted in proposal form to the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The general purpose is to prevent human subjects from harm. Approval must be attained prior to field research. See Appendix A.

VII. **Miscellaneous Style Advice**

1. References

You must cite all of the sources you use in preparing your thesis. Any ideas that are not your own or not common knowledge should be referenced. Presenting ideas that are not your own without properly citing the sources is plagiarism and a serious academic offense.
You can use the author-date system described in Chris Hart’s *Doing a Literature Review* (1998) on page 210 to cite your sources or follow the style of a planning journal such as the *Journal of the American Planning Association*.

2. Footnotes
Because you are using the author-date system to cite your references, footnotes should be used only to

1. amplify discussion beyond the text and
2. provide cross-reference to related parts of the thesis.

Footnote form should be **consistent**. Above all, footnotes are a form of communication with the reader, enabling him or her to check with ease. Footnotes should be prepared using the format specified in Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, latest edition. Students are strongly urged to use the format even in the writing of draft chapters.

3. Graphic Materials
1. Graphic materials should be placed as close to the text reference as possible. The numbers and pages of graphic materials should be cross-referenced in the text. These materials should have appropriate titles.

2. All graphic materials will have to be reproduced for inclusion in thesis copies. Original graphic materials should be in black and white for easy reproduction. Colors may be added to the reproduction. Scales and north arrows should be indicated on all maps and drawings when applicable.

5. Cover: the form of the cover must follow the example on the following page.

6. Abstract
The page following the cover page will include a short (one page or less) abstract or summary of the thesis. The abstract should include the thesis title, thesis question, the research design and the key findings.

Please also send a copy of your thesis abstract as a word document that includes the title and advisors name to Leigh Smith, the UP Program Assistant @ *(lb663@columbia.edu)*. The abstract may be posted on the web to help future generations of students and scholars around the world identify more precisely the contents of your thesis before they read the full version on Academic Commons.

For further instructions, see Appendix B.
DOES RE-ZONING MAKE A DIFFERENCE?
A STUDY OF ZONING CHANGES IN NEW YORK AND PHILADELPHIA

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of Architecture and Planning
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Urban Planning

by

Anita Clemente

May 2012
VIII. Policy for Students with an Incomplete Thesis

The thesis for the Master of Science in Urban Planning is the centerpiece of your education, and should reflect the thought and rigor that makes it, literally, your “master” piece. Following University policy, a student who fails to finish their thesis by the required due date they will be given an “F”, a grade that erases the credit for that course. In this case the thesis can only be completed if the student re-registers and pays for the required thesis course. The only exception is when there is a documented medical issue or extenuating circumstances that have been approved by the Admissions Office, in which case you would be given a CP (Credit Pending) or INC (Incomplete) and would be given until the beginning of the fall term to complete your thesis.

Registration must take place the week prior to each semester – in other words, in the week preceding Labor Day for the fall semester, and in the week preceding the Martin Luther King holiday for the spring semester. Students register and pay the current tuition rate for the thesis course that is missing. If thesis is not offered in the semester you register, you may use an Advanced Research course number for the purposes of registration. Consult the registration office for how to register for Advanced Research or Independent Study.

Prior to re-registering to complete your thesis, you must contact your advisor and Urban Planning Thesis Coordinator Xin Li (xl2426@columbia.edu) or Assistant Director Trisha Logan (tkl2116@columbia.edu) to discuss your thesis. You should have a clear idea of your methodology and timeline for completion before you register, so you are certain you can complete your work in the semester in which you are paying tuition. You will continue to coordinate with your chosen advisor and readers and will be required to hold a thesis jury prior to receiving your final grade.

IX. Digital Thesis Guidelines

Theses produced for the Master of Science in Urban Planning are submitted in digital form to the Urban Planning Program and to Academic Commons, the University’s digital research repository. More information about Academic Commons at Columbia University can be found here: http://academiccommons.columbia.edu/

This requirement does not eliminate any responsibility for the student to provide paper review copies as requested by advisor and reader(s).
Requirements for Submission
Students are required to submit their thesis and abstract as separate documents, saved as a .pdf document, to the Urban Planning Office no later than Friday, May 8, 2015. Each file should be clearly labeled as shown below:

Thesis
LastnameFirstname_GSAPPUP_2014_Thesis

Abstract
LastnameFirstname_GSAPPUP_2014_Abstract

Theses may be delivered via email or sent through a file transfer tool, such as Dropbox, or if the file is too large it can be brought to the Historic Preservation office to be manually uploaded.

Academic Commons
Students are recommended to submit their thesis to Academic Commons for digital archiving. For posting of your thesis onto Academic Commons, students must include a signed author agreement form (available within these guidelines and on the Urban Planning Program’s website) which permits Academic Commons to post your thesis on their website. Students have the right to keep their thesis closed from public view for one or two years (this option is on the form) which is generally used by students who wish to publish their thesis material.

The program will deliver theses to Academic Commons and upon receipt; they will assign a permanent URL to each thesis. This will allow a link to the full thesis from the GSAPP website as well as for the library catalog. The theses will be located and accessed via the Internet; there will be “universal access” to this material (i.e., it will not be restricted to those with a Columbia UNI/log-in).

Where student work incorporates the intellectual property of other authors and creators their copyright needs to be respected and credited – this is especially important because your work will be readily available on the Internet and rights-holders can easily identify where their work has been cited or reproduced. For additional information about utilizing copyrighted material within your thesis, please visit the webpage of Columbia’s Copyright Advisory Office: http://copyright.columbia.edu/copyright/