MFA Writing Program
Prose Thesis Packet

Hamline University
Graduate School of Liberal Studies

(Last updated September 2010)
MFA Thesis Packet: Prose

(This information, updated September 2010, supersedes all previous capstone guidelines.)
This packet contains the materials an MFA student needs to complete all required steps for graduation. See the Graduation Requirements page on GLS website. www.hamline.edu/gls.

What is Thesis?
Theis (also called Capstone) is the major creative project all MFA students complete after concluding their coursework. Thesis requires two semesters to complete (Thesis 1 and Thesis 2); the finished project should illustrate the student’s mastery of the craft in his/her chosen genre. Thesis 1 and 2 cannot be taken concurrently. Students in prose have two options for Thesis:

• The Standard Option is a manuscript that is 80-100 pages in length (24,000-30,000 words). Students are required to have written a substantial body of work (e.g., 50 pages/15,000 words) before registering for Thesis 1. These pages may be part of a novel or memoir; novella; short stories; collection of essays; novella-length essay; multi-genre work, etc.
• The second option is a Book-Length Manuscript. Because it takes so long to revise a whole book, students are required to begin Thesis 1 with a full draft of the manuscript. (Note: this does not need to be a polished draft, but the book must be written through to the end.) Students who choose this option will be expected to spend both thesis semesters in deep revision of the Book-Length Manuscript. (If students have finished their coursework and do not have a complete draft done, they are encouraged to take an independent study or take a semester off to write.)
• Students must choose an option when they register for Thesis 1.

When is a Student Ready to Register for Thesis?
As a general rule, students must complete all coursework before registering for Thesis 1. On occasion, with the approval of their advisor, students may take their last class in the same term as Thesis 1. All students are required to take both “Groundings in the Craft” and “Advanced” in their thesis genre prior to registration for Thesis 1. In the case of a multi-genre thesis, students are required to take “Groundings in the Craft” in all genres represented and “Advanced” in at least one genre. It is recommended (but not required) that these students take “Advanced” in other genres as well.

What is the Timeline for Thesis?

Step One: Choose a Primary Advisor
The primary advisor should have expertise in your chosen genre and must be a GLS-approved advisor (see link on Graduation Requirements page, www.hamline.edu/gls). S/he will read one full draft of your project in Thesis 1 and again in Thesis 2, and will meet with you during Thesis 1 to provide substantive feedback for revision in Thesis 2. The primary advisor will identify strengths and weaknesses in the draft and will provide suggestions for further revisions. Each advisor will commit ample and focused time to your project, though that focus is necessarily limited to a set amount of time per student. Please plan to work with your
primary advisor to prioritize the time s/he has to offer your work. (In some situations with the Book-Length Manuscript, the advisor may read the manuscript thoroughly at the beginning of Thesis 1 and will provide substantive feedback then, whereas in other cases, it may make sense for the advisor to give a quick read to a select number of pages, offer general feedback, and read the entire manuscript thoroughly at the end of the semester.) You and your advisor will work out details about the process in Thesis 1 when you meet for the prospectus meeting (see below).

**Suggested deadline for choosing a primary advisor:** As soon as possible, preferably a semester before the term of Thesis 1 registration. Please be aware that faculty members can only sit on a certain number of committees so it is important you confirm with your advisor as soon as possible.

**Step Two: Turn in a Prospectus and Schedule a Prospectus Meeting**
The prospectus is a written statement of three-five pages describing the scope of your intended thesis and the way in which it will be pursued. You should discuss briefly the subject matter and theme(s) of the work, your intended audience, any outside reading or research necessary (you may include a bibliography if you wish), your process in developing the material, etc. You can include a chapter outline or discuss methodology. Attached is a guideline for use in preparing your prospectus. *(Attachment 1)*

Once you have prepared your prospectus, you should schedule a prospectus meeting with your primary advisor. You should provide a copy of your prospectus document to him or her at least one week prior to the meeting. At the prospectus meeting, you and your advisor will discuss the subject, methodology, process, and s/he will make suggestions for improvement or expansion. You and your advisor also will develop a plan of action for the semester. The prospectus document will then be signed by your advisor and placed in your MFA file.

**Step Three: Register for Thesis I**
**Deadline:** same as other Special Registration courses as listed on the academic calendar (listed as “last day to register” on the academic calendar). This is usually two weeks after the semester has started. Students should have their primary advisor sign the Thesis 1 Registration Form *(Attachment 2-i)* at the end of the prospectus meeting.

**Step Four: Choose an Optional Outside Reader**
Students may choose to have an outside reader as part of their committee. (The outside reader takes the place of the previous secondary advisor.) The outside reader offers a fresh pair of eyes and new insights on the manuscript. S/he will read your Thesis 2 draft and will participate in the Capstone Conference with your primary advisor at the end of Thesis 2. *If you wish to have an outside reader, you should discuss this with your primary advisor at the prospectus meeting.* A list of available outside readers will be posted on the website each semester (see the link for Outside Readers on online “MFA Thesis Packet” web page). These readers will consist of available faculty and writers in the community, including alums who have published widely in literary journals and/or received other significant literary recognition.

**Step Five: Statement of Intention to Graduate**
Deadline: November 1.
Students must submit (2 pages) the **Intention to Graduate & Degree Completion Form (Attachment 3)**.

**Step Six: Turn in a Complete Draft to Your Primary Advisor**
The Thesis 1 manuscript must be delivered to your primary advisor by December 1 (fall registration) or April 15 (spring registration). The draft must be carefully edited and proofread. Any manuscript that contains significant grammatical errors will be returned to the student unread and will need to be revised. (If the revision cannot be done and the manuscript read by your advisor within the semester timeline, you will have to register for another semester of Thesis 1.) The student is responsible for arranging the delivery of the hard copy to the Primary Advisor.

All students are welcome to turn in their thesis before December 1 or April 15, whether you do the Standard Option of 80-100 pages or the Book-Length Manuscript.

**Step Seven: Schedule a Meeting with Your Primary Advisor**
The meeting should be scheduled after December 15 or April 30. At this meeting you and your advisor will discuss the Thesis 1 manuscript.

**Step Eight: Register for Thesis 2**
Deadline: same as other Special Registration courses as listed on the academic calendar. Students can register for Thesis 2 after receiving a passing grade for Thesis 1. Students should fill out a **Capstone Registration Form for Thesis 2 (Attachment 2-ii)**. Those who choose the Book-Length Manuscript option in Thesis 1 may choose to revise the entire manuscript, or 80-100 pages (24,000-30,000 words). Students and primary advisors will work out their process for communication, including meetings if needed, at the beginning of Thesis 2.

**Step Nine: The Artist Statement**
The Artist Statement is an essay of 10-20 pages required of all graduating MFA students. Think of this essay as “The Conscious Artist Statement” in which the writer deeply explores and conscientiously conveys what he/she has learned as an artist in the process of completing the thesis manuscript. This can include reference to texts or other literary influences that helped to guide or shape the project. The Statement serves as a kind of self-recognition and closure in which insights and lessons are arrived at that can benefit future writers. The Artist Statement should not be essential to the reader’s comprehension of the thesis. It is a separate document (though it will reside as a preface to the final bound copy of your thesis.) While the essay may take the form of a traditional, formal essay or a more experimental lyric essay, it must be a well-written, unified piece of writing. You should give a copy of your Artist Statement to your primary advisor at least one week prior to your defense date.

**Step Ten: Turn in Final Draft to Primary Advisor (and Optional Outside Reader)**
The student completes a **Thesis 2 draft by November 1 for fall registration or March 1 for spring registration.** The Thesis 2 draft should be a complete body of revised material at the level of work ready to be submitted for contests, grants, agents, or editors. It should address the craft concerns raised by the primary advisor in Thesis 1. The draft must be carefully edited.
and meet standard MLA guidelines. Any manuscript that contains significant grammatical corrections will be returned to the student unread for revision. (If the revision cannot be done and the manuscript read by your advisor within the semester timeline, you will have to register for another semester of Thesis 2.) Note: if a student writing the Book-Length Manuscript chooses to revise the whole manuscript, s/he may do so. However, expectations for quality will focus on the first 80-100 pages.

**Step Eleven: The Capstone Conference**  
At the end of the thesis process, MFA students participate in a Capstone Conference. Students must complete and submit a Capstone Conference Notification Form (Attachment 4) at least two weeks prior to the Capstone Conference. Spring Capstone Conferences must take place by April 15. Fall Capstone Conferences must take place by December 15. At the conference, students should be prepared to make a formal presentation (approximately 15 minutes) about their thesis. This could include discussion of influential books or writers, instructors or courses, process, turning points, obstacles, etc. The presentation may cover topics addressed in the Artist Statement. This meeting will further include discussion of the accomplishments of the thesis manuscript and the student’s experience with the project. The primary advisor (and outside reader, if applicable) may pose questions and make suggestions for future revision. It is the student’s responsibility to coordinate a day and time for the meeting with the GLS office, his/her primary advisor, and outside reader (if applicable). The GLS office staff will reserve a conference room or another suitable location on campus after the form has arrived.

**Step Twelve: Final Formatted Copy**  
**Deadline: Two weeks prior to graduation**  
Once you have successfully participated in your Capstone Conference, THREE final, revised, unbound copy (in correct format) of your thesis (based on the revisions suggested by your primary advisor) is due in the GLS office two weeks after your Capstone Conference. Format your title page according to the MFA Capstone Title Page Template (Attachment 5).  

See the MFA Capstone Writing Guidelines for style and format information (Attachment 6).

**Step Thirteen: Graduation**  
Once all steps have been successfully completed, the student is ready to graduate! Information on graduation will be sent to students closer to the date, including information about the GLS Award Banquet, Commencement, gown ordering, etc.
Frequently Asked Questions

**What if I can’t complete the work in either Thesis 1 or Thesis 2 within the semester allotted?**

*May I take an incomplete?*

No. Students must complete Thesis 1 and 2 in concurrent semesters. Primary advisors are unable to grant extensions. If a student needs more time to finish, s/he must register for another semester of thesis. Only the dean can grant an extension due to severe personal or familial emergency. The student will receive a NP (No Pass) for the semester. (A grade of NP does not affect GPA.)

**Is it possible to begin Thesis in either fall or spring semester?**

Yes. Students may begin Thesis 1 in fall or spring; the only requirement is that they complete Thesis 1 and 2 in consecutive semesters.

**Is it possible to begin Thesis 1 or 2 in summer session?**

Yes, though we do not recommend it. It is very difficult to complete the requisite work in such a short amount of time. Students who wish to enroll for thesis credit in the summer must complete the coursework within the summer session timeline. Also, the primary advisor must be available to read the manuscript in August.

**Does my primary advisor need to write in my genre?**

Yes. It is necessary for your primary advisor to have expertise in your genre.

**Are there exceptions to these rules?**

Yes. See below.

a. Those students registered for Thesis 2 in spring, summer, or fall 2007 may have one extension without reregistering, and may still proceed with a secondary advisor. They will receive an Incomplete until they are finished, at which time a new grade will be posted.

b. Those students registered for Thesis 1 in spring, summer, or fall 2007 may have one extension without reregistering. They will receive an Incomplete until they are finished, at which time a new grade will be posted. If they choose the Book-Length Manuscript, they do not have to have a complete draft before beginning Thesis 1. The revision in Thesis 2 can be 80-100 pages or the entire manuscript.

**What are the expectations for the final Thesis 1 manuscript?**

In order to pass Thesis 1, the manuscript must demonstrate a solid understanding of the elements of craft within the genre and meet the length requirement. Necessary revision work must be possible within the framework of Thesis 2. The draft must be proofed carefully re spelling, grammar, etc. Manuscripts that require more than minimal copy editing will be returned.

Students whose work does not meet these requirements will be required to register for a second semester of Thesis 1.
What if I don’t wish to use work written in the program but have an idea for a new project? The thesis is meant to reflect work done within the program, work that has already benefited from peer and instructor feedback. While all projects will include some new work, we do not advise beginning a new project for the purpose of thesis.

What if I haven’t taken the required courses but wish to write a thesis in that genre? The thesis is meant to illustrate the craft and course knowledge acquired in the MFA program. For this reason, students must complete the requisite coursework.

I am concerned that the primary advisor I want to work with may be requested by many students. Is there a limit to the number of students a primary advisor may take? Yes. It is possible for faculty to reach a limit on the number of projects they take on. In that case, you will need to ask another faculty member.

How do I know whom I can choose as an outside reader? Each semester GLS will post a list of outside readers on the GLS website. The list includes available faculty and writers in the community, including alums who’ve published widely in literary journals and/or received significant literary recognition. If an individual reaches his/her limit of outside reader commitments, s/he will be taken off the list.

What are the expectations for the Thesis 2 manuscript? The goal of Thesis 2 is to complete a body of revised material (e.g., 80-100 pages/24,000-30,000 words) at the level of work ready to be submitted for contests, grants, agents, or editors, or to be publishable in short form. The Thesis 2 manuscript should address the craft issues raised by the primary advisor during Thesis 1. Manuscripts must be carefully edited and proofread and must meet university guidelines. (See all posted guidelines on GLS website.) Manuscripts that require more than minimal copy editing will be returned. Note: if a student who chooses the Book-Length Manuscript wants to revise the entire manuscript, s/he may do so. However, expectations for quality will focus on the first 80-100 pages.