

***Department of History***  
**California State University Bakersfield**

**MA Thesis Guidelines**

Embarking upon a thesis requires a substantial commitment of time and effort, yet creation of an original contribution to our collective body of knowledge can bring profound satisfaction. As you consider pursuing the thesis track, remember some guidelines that will be important as you bring the thesis to completion.

**Timeline –**

A thesis takes time, no matter what your topic and sources. That said, the sooner you identify what you want to work on, and who you want to work with, the better it will be for you. Start thinking early on about these things, and about how you plan to establish the time needed to research and write. At the latest, you should select your topic by the time of classification to ensure timely progress (see below).

**Committee –**

You will need to organize a committee of three faculty members, one of whom will serve as your thesis chair and primary reader. This person undoubtedly is the most crucial member of the committee; it is imperative that you and your chair have a mutual understanding of your project, and that you keep in regular contact.

**Sources –**

Intrinsic to a thesis is the idea that you are contributing an original, substantive piece of scholarship. Thus, you will use primary sources as the basis for your thesis. You and your thesis chair must be satisfied that the source material necessary for the topic is available.

**Scope & Length –**

A good master's thesis is a significant piece of work. Expect your thesis to be somewhere between 75-125 pages of text, depending on the topic. You are expected to write in proper English and follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*; your committee does not serve as a panel of copyeditors. If the writing is poor, the thesis committee may reject the thesis outright. The thesis committee will judge whether or not the thesis is a sound piece of research and ensure that it meets the standards of the profession in originality, scholarship, and written English.

**Process -**

- Within your first 1-2 semesters, a committee chair and topic should be settled upon. Your thesis chair should approve a 3-4-page thesis proposal, which explains the focus of your thesis, its historiographical context, and possible chapters. Attached to this should be a bibliography with a preliminary list of sources and the location of those sources. Naturally a thesis develops and changes, so think of this proposal not as a rigid contract but a declaration of intent. ***A copy of this approved proposal must be filed with the graduate coordinator.***

- The semester before you intend to file your thesis your three-person committee must be in place, and each member must have approved your thesis outline. This 8-10 page outline should provide a clear, chapter-by-chapter roadmap of your thesis. ***A copy of this approved outline must be filed with the graduate coordinator.***
- The semester you file, you must submit the thesis to members of your committee 4-6 weeks prior to the filing deadline to allow enough time for them to read, comment upon, and return your thesis for any necessary changes. If your committee agrees, you may have the thesis chair approve the thesis before it goes on to the second and third readers, but all readers must receive a copy at least four weeks before the filing deadline. It is your responsibility to be aware of the university filing deadline for that semester.
- Finally, the university has formal procedures and requirements for filing a master's thesis, and it is incumbent upon you to make sure that you adhere to and complete that process. Check with Graduate Student Center (DDH C100) for details.