

MLA CAPSTONE GUIDELINES

(Approved by the Department Faculty on 11 January 2012; amended 25 September 2013, 15 August 2015)

1. PURPOSE OF THE CAPSTONE

Completing an MLA capstone represents the culmination of your graduate program with the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Washington. It is designed to be a project and process that builds your confidence and sense of competence in the field of Landscape Architecture, particularly in developing your ability to connect theory and practice and to broadly reflect on those connections.

The faculty is committed to helping each of you complete your capstone whether in the form of a thesis or project. They will work with you to frame, shape, and develop it, sharing their experience and expertise.

As approved by our faculty, the Department offers three capstone options for Master of Landscape Architecture (MLA) students. Whichever option you pursue, your work should exemplify the highest standards of professional education representing the culmination of the MLA education.

The first option is the *Thesis*, for which four alternative types have been approved: Research, Design, Design Critique, and Professional Project. The *Thesis* option offers the opportunity to pursue design research in the format of a traditional thesis. With guidance from a faculty thesis committee, this work is done individually or may be petitioned for collaboration with one or more other students (see Appendix A).

The second option is a *Group Project* for small groups of students wishing to engage a collaborative research agenda related to landscape architectural scholarship and inquiry. This option offers the opportunity for small teams of students to work over the course of a full academic year (three quarters) on an advanced design or research problem with the guidance of a faculty member, culminating with an integrated record of findings in the form of a project report.

The third option is a *Studio Option* in which students work with a studio instructor over two quarters (winter and spring) on a project or theme determined by the instructor, following the Capstone Seminar. This option offers opportunities to work on a project at an advanced level over two academic quarters, culminating in rigorous output and deliverables.

2. CAPSTONE SCHEDULE FOR A TYPICAL 3-YEAR MLA PROGRAM

First Year

The first year of your study consists of a structured sequence of skill-building courses. The purpose is to provide you with a foundation to pursue topics related to landscape architectural scholarship and inquiry at the advanced level in the second and third years. Through the various courses, you will have a chance to become familiar with the faculty's areas of interest and the available resources and expertise in the Department in consideration for your capstone options and topics.

Second Year

The theory and scholarship course LARCH 570, along with other courses in the second year will further provide the intellectual foundation for students to consider their capstone options and topics. In addition, courses in research methods such as 571 will provide necessary skills to carry out research activities in relation to your capstone

projects. Capstone topics might arise from a theory course or a studio. The advanced studios often have projects that can turn into an excellent, well-supported capstone project. In addition, it is wise to begin refining your capstone ideas and options by the spring of the second year in consultation with potential committee members or faculty supervisors.

An early attempt to focus your ideas and identify potential faculty members to work with makes it more likely that you will finish on time, and also enables coursework for you in the spring of your third year. It may also be necessary to begin or accomplish all of your data collection in the summer between your second and third years, if you decide on a topic and method that requires such an approach.

Third Year

At the beginning of the Fall Quarter in the third year, students are required to respond to a capstone survey with their selection of capstone options. In the case of Thesis and Group Project options, they must include a topic and a brief statement of what they intend to work on, and who they would like to work with among the faculty as well as potential student collaborators.

For those choosing the THESIS option, a faculty committee will be assigned to each student following a survey of your preferences. In indicating your preferences, you must select at least one LA Dept. Graduate School faculty member (regular or adjunct) to Chair your thesis committee. The other member of the committee can be a UW Graduate faculty outside the department. In addition, you may also ask non-Graduate School faculty, non-LA faculty, and people outside UW to be on your committee as readers, but they will not be able to sign the capstone. This responsibility is reserved for members of the Graduate School faculty from our Department faculty list including adjunct faculty.

If you select the GROUP option, you will need to identify and ask one LA Department Graduate School faculty member (regular) to chair the project (you may also ask a second as a committee member).

If you select the STUDIO option, the instructor will be assigned from the faculty, while student requests will be considered. While students are welcome to consult and seek advice from the faculty on their projects, no faculty committees will be assigned.

The LARCH 590 Capstone Preparation Seminar is offered in Fall Quarter of the third year for all MLA students regardless of which option they select.

3. THESIS OPTION

The *Thesis* option is primarily self-initiated; thus work throughout the third year should be planned, scheduled, and completed in close collaboration with the thesis committee. The student will select the thesis type and outline a research question(s) to be addressed through the thesis process.

For the *Thesis* option, you are required to complete the 700 form before you register for 700 credits (a total of 9 credits is required). The Department considers you to be officially working on your thesis when you have (1) selected an appropriate topic, (2) arranged your committee, and (3) filed your 700 form (with a proposed outline and an abstract of your intended thesis questions and methods).

Products

- Thesis Proposal: Research overview and proposal, literature review, precedent studies, and timeline for completion of project (completed as part of LARCH 590 Capstone Preparation Seminar in Fall Quarter).
- Thesis Presentation (proposal, mid-review, and final): present visual and written products as scoped through your related course(s) and with advising faculty. Professional practitioners, scholars, and faculty in related departments will be invited to review presentations for design theses at appropriate times.

- Thesis: a final report that includes the standard sections of a thesis or other professional report (see Appendix A) and reflects the rigor of methods and depth of evaluation explored over the course of the capstone.

Types of thesis

The Department's faculty members have approved four thesis types for the Master of Landscape Architecture:

1. Research
2. Design
3. Design Critique
4. Professional Project

A general description and outline for each of these thesis types is provided in the attached Appendix A. You and your committee will develop a more detailed outline, and perhaps modify these suggested chapters and their order depending on the details of the project and thesis type selected. In general, however, the inclusion of all of the suggested chapters represents a level of scholarly and professional rigor that we consider necessary to the completion of a Master's thesis in Landscape Architecture.

Learning Objectives

- Engage in rigorous research
- Learn to develop a thesis proposal
- Learn to define and develop a landscape architectural question or problem, to address a range of scales appropriate to the project (if a design thesis) and to competently resolve the problem as defined.
- Learn to effectively communicate key ideas, theories, or design principles that address the topic.
- Develop a clear research and/or design philosophy and critical stance
- Refine presentation skills in multiple modes (written, visual, verbal)

4. GROUP PROJECT OPTION

For students pursuing the *Group Project* option, you will work with your student team and one faculty advisor to schedule a project studio during Winter and Spring Quarters.

Note that for a *Group Project* option, you must identify at least two other students interested in pursuing the same topic. This team of students must then identify a primary faculty member as a faculty supervisor. There is not a requirement for a second committee member although project teams are encouraged to draw on the expertise and knowledge of the Department and University faculty as they address their research/project area of inquiry.

Products

- *Group Project* proposal: Topic proposal, research overview, literature review, precedent studies, and timeline for completion of project as well as expected contributions of each of the students engaged in the project (completed as part of LARCH 590 Capstone Preparation Seminar in Fall Quarter).
- *Group Project* presentation (proposal, mid-review, and final): present visual and written products as scoped through your related course(s) and with advising faculty. Professional practitioners, scholars, and faculty in related departments will be invited to review these presentations at appropriate times. Each student must take an active role in developing narrative and drawings and making the presentations.
- Project document: a full research report that reflects the rigor of approach and depth of inquiry into the project to include the standard sections of a professional report. Each student will contribute significant sections to the document as well as contribute to team-authored sections as deemed appropriate in consultation with the faculty supervisor. For a more detailed outline of the *Group Project* document, see Appendix B.

Learning Objectives

- Engage in rigorous design research at the level of professional practice
- Learn to work effectively in small teams on a research and/or design project
- Develop group and individual design or research proposals exploring specific areas of research in design
- Learn to define and develop a landscape architectural problem, to address a range of scales appropriate to the project and to competently resolve the problem as defined.
- Learn to effectively communicate key ideas, theories, or design principles, and a design process
- Develop a clear research and/or design philosophy
- Refine presentation skills in multiple modes (written, visual, verbal)

5. STUDIO OPTION

The STUDIO capstone option is intended for students to further their design skills in a two-quarter long studio under the guidance of an instructor who will determine the topic and scope of the studio project. The goal of the studio is examine a contemporary or emerging topic in the field and undergo a rigorous research and design process to culminate in a highly developed and innovative solution as well as crafted deliverables.

Products

- Project presentation: specific format and deliverables will be determined by the instructor.
- Project portfolio: at the end of the studio, students are required to produce a portfolio of studio work that include results from both research and design phases of the project.
- Additional products may be required by the studio instructor.

Learning Objectives

- Develop a critical stance to a defined studio project.
- Undertake design research for a defined studio project.
- Undergo design iterations and examine multiple approaches and solutions.
- Articulate research findings, design process, and design solutions through effective and highly crafted visual representations.
- Additional learning objective may be defined by the instructor.

6. SELECTING A TOPIC (for THESIS and GROUP PROJECT options)

There are many ways to identify a topic. The most obvious is to ask yourself what kind of work you want to do after you graduate, and design a capstone that lets you develop and showcase your skills in that specific area of work. Another approach is to ask yourself what topic, project type or research question you are sufficiently interested in that you would like to work on it for 6-9 months. Both of those questions can help you identify what is interesting and important enough for you to commit to as a capstone topic.

A critical question for you to ask is —who is going to be on my committee, and what are those faculty interested in studying with me? If you identify a topic that is closely related to the research interests of two faculty members, you'll be much more likely to get to work with those two individuals! To learn more about faculty interests, take a look at the topics each faculty member has advised in the past, look at his or her CV to find out what he or she writes about, or make an appointment during their office hours to find out their interests.

7. WORKING WITH A COMMITTEE OR FACULTY SUPERVISOR (for THESIS and GROUP PROJECT options)

The Committee Chair (for *Thesis* option) or Faculty Supervisor (for *Group Project* option) sets the standard for how the committee or project group will operate (when and how often it will meet, etc.), and negotiates with the other committee members on any disagreements about the scope or method of the project. Each student should negotiate these issues with the Chair or Faculty Supervisor first, letting her/him know what you would like to do, but she/he has the authority of final acceptance. Your chair/supervisor holds the responsibility for upholding the Department's standards for the capstone, and communicating these standards with regard to scope, methods, and products.

It is essential that you manage your process by emailing your committee/supervisor after meetings. This email should summarize what you discussed and what you agreed upon. It is also essential that you seek a regular appointment time with your committee members/supervisor; they will not be able to keep track of you, and will expect that you will come to them to meet when you need direction or have something to show them. You are expected to register for 700 credits with the faculty member(s) on your committee.

8. APPLYING TO GRADUATE

Apply online to graduate by submitting a Master's Degree Request at:

<http://www.grad.washington.edu/student/mastapp.aspx>

This request should be done the **first two weeks of the quarter** you plan to graduate, especially Spring Quarter, if you would like to have your name to appear in the UW Graduation Program. You must apply to graduate by the **last week** of the quarter and be enrolled in at least (2) credits, the quarter you graduate. Be sure and check the most current Master Degree Request due dates. The Application to Graduate System closes down between the 10th week until the first day of the next quarter.

Thesis Option students should refer to the Thesis Checklist for more information for preparing the thesis document and some helpful websites.

The application to graduate generates a hardcopy **Warrant**, which you can pick up in the Dept. office. Have it signed by your L ARCH 702 instructor (for Group Project Option), your Thesis Committee (for Thesis Option), or faculty supervisor (for Group Project Option)

Submit your signed **Warrant** to the Counseling Services Coordinator, in the Dept. Office, by the end of Spring Quarter. You will be officially checked out of the Dept., on MyGradProgram.

Thesis Types:

The followings are samples of thesis outline to demonstrate the differences between the four thesis options. It is your responsibility to develop an outline in consultation with your thesis committee.

RESEARCH THESIS (THEORETICAL, EXPERIMENTAL OR CORRELATIONAL)**1. Introduction and Literature Review**

What is the issue you will explore, and why is it important? Is it typical or unusual for this issue to arise in design practice? What methods have been used to answer questions like yours in the past? How can you group these methods, in terms of their assumptions about the subject area? Who else has written about this subject, and in what fields? What patterns can you detect in the way others have addressed this question, or similar questions? What approaches remain untried, or have not been confirmed by repeated studies in different contexts?

2. Methods and Study Area / Study Participants

What ontological or epistemological frame will you use to approach your topic, and why? What kind of data will you need, and why? Specifically, how will you collect your data (details of mapping techniques, or interview protocols, or field and lab work of other kinds)? How will you analyze your data, and why?

3. Results

What did your analyses show? (Typically, this section contains figures and tables that summarize your results.) How do you judge the significance, accuracy, internal consistency, and repeatability of the methods that produced these results?

4. Discussion

Did your analyses of the data allow you to answer your questions? Were you surprised by any of the results? How do your results compare to the findings of others cited in your literature review? How did your actual use of the methods you selected contribute to answering your questions? Were there any results that led you to believe that you and /or others have framed the questions inappropriately, and led you to any insights about how this subject might be approached in the future?

5. Reflections on Your Approach and Implications for Design

Did you succeed in addressing the questions you raised, in whole or in part? How generalizable are your findings (i.e., do you think they can be expected to apply in many situations, or only a few)? How might a practicing designer find your results useful?

6. References

DESIGN THESIS

A Design Thesis is a distinct form of scholarly research that utilizes a design process. This track may focus more on integrating critical theory and precedents to establish a design framework, with a design exploration as a means of testing this framework. Conversely, the thesis may relate to design theory/scholarship through an extensive documentation of a design process and related outcomes. The structure of this track should be developed in consultation with your thesis committee.

1. Introduction

Significance of the issues/questions/prototypes the student will explore (personal, theoretical and social). Introduce the case or cases that will be the focus of this thesis. Introduce the methods that will be used to establish a critical position and to determine the success of the design studies presented in the thesis.

2. Literature and Precedent reviews

What has been written about this subject? Who else has tried to design something like this, and how did they do it? What related prototypes exist that could be useful to your design studies? What do you think has not been done by others, either in theoretical work or design work, that needs to be done in order for you to answer your questions/address the issues you feel are significant in your design?

3. Development of a Critical Position/Framework for Design

How will you use your literature and precedents to define a "good" design outcome, in relation to the issues addressed in chapter 2 (such as existing theories of aesthetics, landscape/site functions, and cultural/social meaning)? Are there new theories or organizations of theories that you need to propose in order to pursue your questions and frame your design work?

4. Site Analysis and Design Studies

This section needs to clearly represent your design process and outcomes.

5. Reflections and Conclusions regarding your design studies

This section should "close the circle" of your thesis, by referring back to all 4 previous sections. This is where you honestly and explicitly compare your outcomes to your intentions, and compare your work to your critical position/framework and to the work of others.

6. References

DESIGN CRITIQUE THESIS

1. Introduction and Literature Review

What is the issue you will explore, and why is it important? How does it fit within design theory and/or practice? Is it typical or unusual for this issue to arise in design practice?

2. Precedent Studies

Who else has explored this issue, or related issues, in design? What insights can you gain that may help frame your priorities?

3. Development of a Critical Position

What are your priorities for critiquing the functional and aesthetic goals of these designs, and why do you believe these are important goals? Given these goals, what are the most important elements of the designs you reviewed (i.e., what explicit, generalizable framework(s) will you use to describe the designs you wish to critique)? In what ways could you say that they succeeded or failed (i.e., what generalizable framework(s) will you use to judge the success of a design or set of designs)?

4. Design Critique

In the particular design situation you have selected as the focus of your thesis, what insights can you gain by applying your descriptive and evaluative framework(s)? Does the design(s) accomplish the functional and aesthetic goals you have identified as important?

5. Reflections on the Critique Framework(s)

Did you succeed in addressing the issues you raised, in whole or in part? How generalizable are your critical position and framework(s) (i.e., can it be used in many situations, or only a few)? What or how did the designer(s) describe the design intent? How does that relate to your framework? How can you reconcile the priorities of your critique with the goals of the designer and client?

6. References

PROFESSIONAL PROJECT THESIS

This type of thesis is the most flexible, and the brief outline below is intended as a starting point between you and your committee members. The goal of a professional project thesis is to simulate as closely as possible what the format and content of a professional consultant's report would be on your topic. It also generally requires you to identify and work with a client, although the need for this is ultimately up to your committee. Your committee must decide what examples to use that will set the exact format and content guidelines. Often the professional project thesis is completed under the guidance of a practicing landscape architect. If the project is more design-oriented, you may find that using the outline for the "design thesis" as a starting point is more appropriate. If you are working on a project that is more research-oriented, this outline below may be a better fit.

- 1. Executive Summary**
- 2. Background and Issues Studied**
- 3. Method and Rationale for Method**
- 4. Results of analysis or observations**
- 5. Discussion and recommendations**
- 6. References**

COLLABORATIVE THESIS REQUIREMENTS

By special permission of the Graduate School, two or more students may collaborate on certain aspects of their thesis, provided the character of the work is such that each participant is assured sufficient opportunity for individual contribution as well as responsibility to the study as a whole. In this case, a concise account of the contributions of each collaborating individual should be included in the preface or acknowledgment section of the thesis.

Students considering a collaborative effort must petition the Graduate School during the quarter in which they intend to complete the work. This will ensure conditions mentioned previously will be met. It will reassure that preparation and submittal requirements of the Graduate School will be met. For specific information, consult the Graduate Program Adviser.

Rules Governing The Presentation Of A Collaborative Thesis

1. Permission to present a collaborative thesis must be obtained in advance from the Graduate School. This is accomplished by means of petition.
2. Each student presents one (1) copy of the collaborative thesis to the Graduate School.
3. Each copy must show all authors' names on the title page.
4. Each student places a "Collaborative Thesis Statement" in the thesis, following the title page. Copy of statement is shown below.
5. Each student places a standard "quote slip" (see Graduate School Manual) with his/her signature(s) on the copies they present to the Graduate School.

Sample

COLLABORATIVE THESIS STATEMENT

This thesis is the result of a collaborative effort of _____ and _____ (modify for three or more) by the authority of the Graduate School. All work was done under the direction of Professor _____.

APPENDIX B. SAMPLE OUTLINE FOR THE GROUP PROJECT REPORT

1. Introduction

Significance of the issues/questions/prototypes the student team will explore (personal, theoretical, professional, and social). Introduce the case or cases that will be the focus of this project. Introduce the methods that will be used to establish a critical position and to determine the success of the design studies presented in the project. Why is a team approach appropriate? What will be gained by working as part of a collaborative team?

2. Literature and Precedent reviews

What has been written about this subject? Who else has tried to design something like this, and how did they do it? What related prototypes exist that could be useful to your design studies? What do you think has not been done by others, either in theoretical work or design work, that needs to be done in order for you to answer your questions/address the issues you feel are significant in your design?

3. Development of a Critical Position(s) for Design

How will you use your literature and precedents to define a "good" design outcome, in terms of the existing relevant theories and practice? What framework might you develop to guide your design? Are there new theories or organizations of theories that you need to propose in order to pursue your questions? How will the position or positions framed by the group be tested?

4. Design Studies / Research Results

This section needs to represent the design work as clearly as possible for each individual student as well as the team design work, including relevant analyses. If it is a research project, then this section should address what your analyses showed. (Typically, this section contains figures and tables that summarize your results.) How do you judge the significance, accuracy, internal consistency, and repeatability of the methods that produced these results?

5. Reflections and Conclusions of individual research and investigation

This section should "close the circle", by referring back to all 4 previous sections. This is where each student explicitly compares his/her outcomes to intentions, and compares the work to the work of others.

6. Reflections on Conclusions of team research and investigation

This section should "close the circle" of the larger Group Project, by referring back to all previous sections through the lens of the team. This is where the team honestly and explicitly compares outcomes to intentions, and argues for how the project contributes to the building of knowledge in landscape architecture.