

# Master's Thesis Guidelines

Ensuring the academic rigor and high standards of master's theses at the Lebanese American University (LAU) is of paramount importance. This document outlines the policies governing the master's theses at LAU. These university guidelines establish the requirements for all master's programs at LAU incorporating the most up-to-date requirements from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), including relevant decrees such as 488/2023/٢.

Individual academic programs may develop and implement additional requirements relevant to their field of study and thesis conventions provided that such program-level guidelines do not contradict the requirements set forth in this document.

This document outlines the roles and responsibilities of both the student and faculty advisor as well as the thesis committee across the timeline of the thesis registration and completion process. The timeline for completing a master's thesis is illustrated in Figure 1.

## I. Before Registering for the thesis

Each student is responsible for checking whether the thesis is a graduation requirement in their program or whether it is an elective requirement in lieu of course work or a graduate project.

Whether a student is required to or elects to do a thesis, the requirements below are the same. Before registering for a thesis, the student must complete the Responsible Conduct of Research CITI certification; instructions to obtain this certification may be found [here](#).

Each program may have prerequisites for thesis registration; it is the responsibility of the student to confirm the prerequisites within their department.

## II. Selecting an Advisor

The first step in registering for a thesis is selecting an advisor. The advisor must meet the following qualifications: The primary advisor for a master's thesis or project should be a **full-time faculty member at LAU, holding a PhD in the thesis field**, who has **completed at least two years of service at LAU in the rank of Assistant Professor or higher** and accumulated **at least 150 teaching hours** at the institution. Additionally, eligible faculty must have published **at least three Scopus/Web of Science-indexed journal articles or equivalent within the five years prior** to serving as an advisor<sup>1</sup>. The advisor should not have close personal nor familial ties with the advised student.

An LAU faculty member can serve as an advisor for a maximum of four theses in any one semester and a maximum of six theses in any one academic year.

For additional guidelines on the selection, roles, and responsibilities of both advisors and advisees, see Appendix A.

---

<sup>1</sup> Note: This LAU requirement for Scopus/Web of Science-indexed publications is more demanding than the MEHE Decree 488/2023/٢ (Article 5, (١)), which allows for ranked and peer-reviewed conference papers in proceedings as an alternative to journal articles.

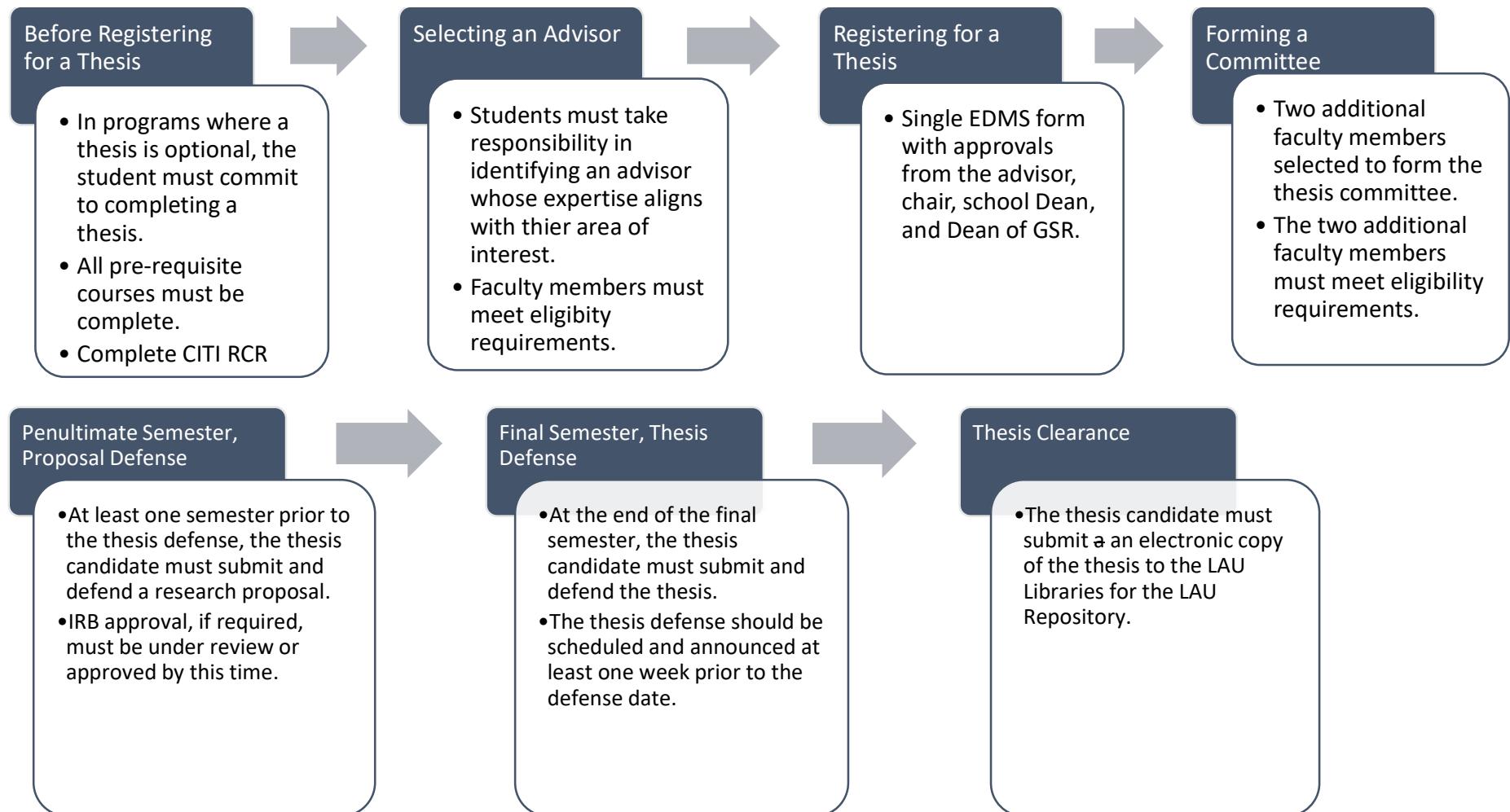


Figure 1 Timeline of thesis process.

### **III. Registering for the Thesis**

Students may submit the **EDMS form** that allows them to register for a thesis at any time but no later than the end of the drop/add period in which they plan to commence the thesis work; all forms received between the end of the previous semester's drop/add period and the current drop/add period will be enrolled into the thesis in the current semester. The EDMS form will be initiated by the student, approved by the advisor, department chair or program director (for programs with a director).. Upon approval, the form will be automatically sent to the Registrar's Office, with a copy to the school's Dean and the Dean of GSR. The Registrar will then enroll students in the appropriate thesis course, assigning the designated advisor as the faculty member of record.

### **IV. Forming the committee**

The student and advisor will discuss the committee formation with the advisor ultimately selecting the members of the master's thesis committee. The master's thesis committee plays a crucial role in guiding the student's research and evaluating the final thesis. To ensure the quality and effectiveness of this process, the following guidelines shall be followed.

The members should, optimally, be invited to serve on the committee within the first semester that the student registers for the thesis, but no later than the second to last semester that the student registers for the thesis.

The thesis committee shall be made up of three members including the student's advisor. At least one member of the thesis committee (besides the advisor) must be a full-time faculty member from the same or a closely related program at LAU at LAU. The second committee member may be external to LAU.

Committee members from within LAU should typically be full-time faculty who meet eligibility criteria for research involvement. External committee members should have a demonstrated record of engagement in research which typically means meeting the publication requirements outlined for LAU faculty advisors. An individual, LAU or external, shall not serve on the thesis committee of a student that is either a family member<sup>2</sup> or a business associate<sup>3</sup>.

An LAU faculty member can serve as a committee member for a maximum of six theses in any one semester and a maximum of eight theses in any one academic year.

The role of the committee members is to review and assess the student's work while providing constructive feedback in a timely manner. The committee members shall be kept informed of the progress of the thesis/project through regular reports. If at any time a committee member feels that they would like to step down from the committee, they may do so in writing to the advisor with the department chair in copy.

---

<sup>2</sup> A family member constitutes spouse, parents, children, siblings, siblings of parents, first cousins and any person related to one of these individuals by marriage, or any other relation who resides in the same household with the faculty member.

<sup>3</sup> A business associate is a faculty member who has served as an officer, director, partner, trustee, owner, or controlling stockholder of an organization related to the student.

The thesis committee will be appointed and approved via an [EDMS form](#) submitted by the advisor and requiring the acknowledgement of all committee members and approval of the department chair and the school Dean.

#### **V. Proposal Defense, First Semester of Thesis Registration**

Students must successfully defend their thesis proposal before the members of their thesis committee normally within the first semester in which they register for the thesis. Once the proposal is approved, the thesis advisor files an [EDMS form](#) indicating successful defense of the proposal – this form is acknowledged by each committee member and approved by the department chair and school dean, with notification to the Office of Graduate Studies and Research (GSR).

For any project involving human subjects and requiring IRB approval, the IRB proposal should be filed prior to the proposal defense. IRB approval is not a prerequisite for the proposal defense, but the application should be in-process with the IRB at the time of the proposal defense.

#### **VI. Thesis Defense, Last Semester of Thesis Registration**

In the last semester of thesis registration, at a minimum the second semester of registration and at a maximum the fourth regular semester of thesis registration, the thesis advisor sets the date of the defense in consultation with the student and the committee members. The defense date shall not be set until the advisor has agreed that the draft of the thesis they received is defensible. If there is any doubt, the advisor should encourage the student to delay defending the thesis.

The advisor then notifies the school dean, in writing, about the details (student's name, title and abstract of the thesis, date and place of the defense) relevant to the announcement of the defense.

The thesis defense should be public, and the date should be announced to the entire LAU community, by the concerned school dean, at least one week in advance.

The thesis defense session shall start with the candidate giving a public presentation. This will be followed by an open question/answer/debate session.

The thesis committee will then deliberate in private in the absence of the candidate to reach a final decision.

The result of the defense is reported on the [Thesis Approval Form](#). The thesis approval form will be filed by the advisor and will include all requested changes to the thesis. These changes will be sent to the student who must then upload a copy of the final, corrected thesis manuscript within one month of the defense. Once the thesis is uploaded, the form returns to the advisor who must verify that the thesis meets all requirements and includes all requested changes. If approved, the form is conveyed to the committee members for their approval before being sent to the department chair.

Once all approvals and acknowledgements are complete, a final copy of the form is conveyed to the student for upload to the LAU Libraries EDMS as part of the clearance process.

#### **VII. Thesis Clearance**

The Candidate must provide the Library Archives, via the Library Clearance EDMS, one soft copy in PDF of the final approved manuscript of the thesis for format finalization and archiving. In addition to

*Approved in Council of Deans, 30 October 2025*

uploading the thesis to the Library Clearance EDMS form, the student must also upload a copy of the Thesis Approval Form (generated by EDMS in the previous step), the “Plagiarism Policy Form” and “Thesis Copyright Form”.

The Archives will issue a Library Clearance certificate once the Library Clearance EDMS form process is completed.

The advisor sends the Change-of-Grade EDMS form together with the proposal defense form, thesis approval form, and the Library Clearance certificate to the Registrar’s Office.

## Appendix A: Selecting and Working with a Thesis Advisor

### **Tips for students seeking an advisor**

Students seeking a faculty advisor should remain attentive to emails sent to alert students to thesis advising orientation sessions when applicable. These orientation sessions can serve as fora to meet potential thesis advisors. The search for a faculty advisor should begin at least one semester prior to the intended first registration of the thesis. For example, a student seeking to commence their thesis in Fall semester should use the Summer semester to find an advisor.

To identify an advisor, students are encouraged to do research on potential advisors by reading their recent publications, discussing research areas of interest with the potential advisor, and attending seminars delivered by the potential advisor. If possible, take a course with the potential advisor to build a rapport prior to asking if they might become an advisor. An advisor should be chosen on the basis of research interest, not simply because the faculty member is portrayed as agreeable or easily approachable.

If your research interests span multiple disciplines, consider reaching out to multiple potential advisors across the different domains of interest. While you will need a single primary advisor in your department, you can always seek guidance from faculty in other domains who can serve on your committee later in the process.

Do not be afraid to have open discussions with potential advisors about their expectations and working style. A good advisor will also be open to such discussions.

Whenever approaching a faculty member about becoming an advisor to your research, do so politely, using professional communication. Faculty members retain the right to turn down advising requests.

### **The Advising Relationship – Rights and Responsibilities**

It is critical to choose the thesis advisor carefully, as the working relationship between advisor and student is crucial to the success of the research. In this relationship, both students and advisors have rights and responsibilities.

Specifically, the advisor will establish a schedule of regular meetings with the student; the student must prioritize attending these meetings. As a team, the student and advisor should develop a clear research plan, including timelines for project stages, literature review, research methods, data management, and adherence to ethical standards, such as avoiding unfair practices, respecting copyright, and abiding by LAU's AI guidelines for research

(<https://myportal.lau.edu.lb/sites/FS/UniversityProcedures/Artificial%20Intelligence%20Guidance%20-%20Research.pdf>).

The advisor should work to coach the student as a researcher by assessing the student's academic background and providing guidance on subject-specific knowledge and skills. If the student has any special needs these should be disclosed to the advisor who is expected to accommodate via the resources available at LAU.

If at any point, it becomes apparent that any part of the research plan requires adaptation, it is the advisor's responsibility to discuss the issue directly and clearly with the student. When warranted a new timeline may be jointly agreed upon.

It is the duty of the advisor to inform the student about the University's Institutional Review Board Policies and support the filing of an IRB application when warranted.

The best way to ensure a good advising relationship is through regular, uninterrupted communication – this includes in-person, online, and over the phone communication.

It is the responsibility of the student to provide all requested work to the advisor by the agreed upon deadlines. It is the responsibility of the advisor to review and offer feedback on all submitted work – especially drafts of the thesis.

The advisor in collaboration with the student will select an appropriate committee and mentor the student through the process of communicating professionally with that committee.

An advisor is an ally and coach in the process of submitting a high-quality thesis on time; an advisor is not required to run analysis nor write the thesis. A student is an engaged learner in the process of submitting a high-quality thesis on time; a student is not required to do anything their advisor asks outside the scope of the agreed upon plan.

### **Resolving Conflict**

In the process of completing a thesis, conflict can sometimes arise. The best strategy is to address the conflict via open, clear communication between the student and advisor. If communication becomes difficult, both the student and the advisor have the right to request a mediated conversation with the department chair first. If no resolution is found, the school Dean and/or Dean of the GSR may become involved

Throughout their work on the thesis/project, students may petition to shift to another option as allowed in the concerned program (see Section I). Students shifting from the project to thesis option will be required to pay only for the extra credits, provided that the student remains with the same advisor. Students shifting from thesis to project/course(s) option will pay for the additional courses. Any changes in thesis enrollment shall be made at least one semester before graduation and shall carry the approval of the department/school.