



## MARSLAC Thesis Guidelines for Co-Advisors and Students

### The MARSLAC Thesis

#### Overview

The MARSLAC thesis is meant to demonstrate a student's ability to apply formal training in Latin American and Caribbean studies toward a specific and original research problem. The thesis must be an original piece of research, interpretation, or analysis based, at least in part, on primary source materials. Students may take a comparative, critical approach to extant research and scholarship; analyze data already collected by others; or test established theories in new situations.

MARSLAC theses should be about 50 pages in length (using double-spaced, standard 1-inch margins, and 12-point font), which is approximately 12,500 words. Additional formatting information (including a template for the title page and some citation guidelines) is available in the "MARSLAC Thesis Formatting Guidelines": [http://ilas.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/MARSLAC-Thesis-Formatting-Guidelines\\_2018-update.pdf](http://ilas.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/MARSLAC-Thesis-Formatting-Guidelines_2018-update.pdf)

#### Thesis Development Process

The M.A. thesis is developed and written in conjunction with the required MARSLAC core courses, and under the supervision of the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) and a co-advisor. MARSLAC students develop their thesis through participation in the required two-semester core course sequence.

These courses are LCRS G6400 (Scholarly Literature and Research on Latin American and Caribbean Studies I) and LCRS G6401 (Scholarly Literature and Research on Latin American and Caribbean Studies II). These two courses must be taken in sequence starting in the Fall. The DGS of the MARSLAC program serves as the instructor of these two courses.

During the Fall semester, students develop a proposal for a M.A. thesis (i.e., the thesis prospectus) in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) and another faculty member from the specific field of the student's interest, who serves as a co-advisor. The thesis prospectus is expected to be about 10 to 15 pages (excluding bibliography).

The Spring semester core course serves as a thesis development workshop, where students write their thesis based on the prospectus finalized in the preceding semester. Students continue to work with the DGS and consult with their co-advisor to refine and develop their ideas into a full thesis.

### Thesis Timeline

The standard final deadline to complete the thesis is the end of April for May for degree conferral. If students require more than two semesters to complete a satisfactory thesis they can do so in consultation with the DGS and second reader. Students may, for example, want additional time for writing and revision of the thesis, or for further data analysis. Some students may also opt to conduct field research for their thesis over the summer, such as archival, ethnographic, or survey research. In these cases, the deadlines to submit the final thesis are September 15 for October graduation or November 15 for February graduation. Please see chart below for a general overview of the thesis timeline.

Draft thesis prospectus completed	November
Final thesis prospectus completed (December)	December
Individual thesis chapters developed	January-March
Full thesis draft completed	late March or early April
Final thesis completed (for <i>May degree conferral</i> )	late April (consult with the DGS for the exact deadline)
Final thesis completed (for <i>October degree conferral</i> )	September 15
Final thesis completed (for <i>February degree conferral</i> )	November 15

### Academic Integrity and Responsible Conduct of Research

Students are expected to fully abide by Columbia GSAS guidelines and standards for academic integrity and responsible conduct of research. Students are expected to exhibit a high level of personal and academic integrity and honesty as they engage in scholarly discourse and research. Violations of university standards include copying from or paraphrasing another source without proper citation; falsification of citations; and building on the ideas of another without citation. It is important that students are familiar with the distinctions between original writing, summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting, and the applicable academic norms of attribution in this different instances. In addition, your thesis work should be your own work (hiring someone to write a paper is a violation of the university's academic standards). Students should be aware that plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses and will be dealt with severely under Dean's Discipline. If you have any doubts about the expectations and norms regarding academic integrity, please consult with the DGS. You are expected to fully review the GSAS statement on Academic Integrity and Responsible Conduct of Research available in the following link. This GSAS page also has some very useful information and guidelines regarding academic integrity and the use of sources: <https://gsas.columbia.edu/student-guide/research/academic-integrity-and-responsible-conduct-research>

### Human Subjects Research

MA students who conduct research involving human subjects for a thesis are required to apply to the Institutional Review Board for exemption or approval *prior to* engaging in the human subjects component of their research. Application for IRB exemption or approval should be completed in coordination with the DGS, when the thesis prospectus is completed (typically by the end of the Fall Semester). The review process typically takes 2-4 weeks, and students must take and pass short online course modules on human subjects research ethics and procedures prior to initiating the process. It is the responsibility of students to plan ahead accordingly to ensure that they are able to carry out fieldwork during anticipated timelines. For more information on the IRB process see: <https://gsas.columbia.edu/student-guide/research/institutional-review-regarding-human-subjects-research>

## Thesis Advisement: Faculty Co-Advisors

### Introduction

The DGS serves as the primary thesis supervisor, with students working with a co-advisor that possesses relevant expertise as an additional mentor on their thesis project. Students will identify—in consultation with the DGS—an additional faculty co-advisor with pertinent disciplinary, thematic, and/or country knowledge or other intellectual affinity to the thesis project. The main role of the faculty co-advisors is to 1) provide mentorship and feedback in the development and writing of the thesis and 2) evaluate the final thesis.

Below are some general guidelines on thesis advisement and the respective roles and expectations of faculty co-advisors and student advisees. Both advisors and advisees should not hesitate to contact the DGS (Gustavo Azenha, [ga2161@columbia.edu](mailto:ga2161@columbia.edu)) or Student Coordinator (Eliza Kwon, [ek2159@columbia.edu](mailto:ek2159@columbia.edu)) whenever questions arise that the co-advisor cannot answer, or when an issue arises that should be brought to the attention of those who are overseeing the graduate program.

### Selection of Co-Advisors

For full time students completing the program in two semesters, the co-advisor is identified by the end of the first semester of the MA program. For students completing the program in more than two semesters, please consult with the DGS to determine the timeline for co-advisor selection.

Students are responsible for finding their own faculty thesis co-advisors. The DGS provides guidance and suggestions on potential co-advisors, but it is up to the student to communicate with and secure a co-advisor. All co-advisors must be current Columbia faculty members of a relevant department and must hold a Ph.D. or other comparable degree. Every attempt is given to match students with co-advisors from their own fields, though sometimes faculty research leaves or administrative duties make this impossible.

While students are encouraged to seek out ILAS-affiliated faculty as co-advisors, they may also consider faculty from other Columbia institutes or departments with relevant expertise and interests. Most academic department websites list faculty profiles and research concentrations. Students are encouraged to review faculty information to target possible co-advisors and contact faculty early to discuss the thesis.

### Co-advisor & Student Advisee Responsibilities

Co-advisors have a responsibility to schedule meetings promptly and to respond to student inquiries made via email within a week, even during breaks. It is, however, the advisee's responsibility to communicate with the co-advisor and to initiate meetings. Co-advisors in turn are expected to make it a priority to find time to meet when asked, during office hours when mutually convenient, or otherwise at another time. At least twenty minutes should be blocked out for each of the two required meetings each semester.

### Meetings Between Co-Advisors & Students

Typically, students meet with their co-advisor at least twice a semester. During the Fall semester they should have a preliminary meeting to discuss their initial thesis project ideas. By the end of the semester they should meet a second time to discuss their full thesis proposal (i.e., the thesis prospectus).

During their final Spring semester, students should meet with their co-advisor towards the beginning of the semester to touch base on thesis progress. They should also schedule a meeting to discuss the first full draft of their thesis (this full draft is usually completed and sent to the co-advisor in late March or early April).

Students are encouraged to seek out co-advisors for additional meetings, as necessary and mutually agreed upon. With attention to the final deadlines determined by the MARSLAC program (see page 1), the student and the co-advisors must agree on their own schedule for discussions, revision, and grading of the thesis. It is the responsibility of advisee to be sure to allow enough time for the supervisor(s) to read and grade the thesis and to make any final revisions based on their comments.

Below is a *suggested* timeline to guide co-advisor meeting timing:

Preliminary meeting to discuss their initial thesis project ideas	September- November
Meeting to discuss their draft thesis proposal (the thesis prospectus)	November
Meeting to touch base on thesis progress and provide any updates	January or February
Meeting to discuss the first full draft of their thesis	late March or early April

### Thesis Evaluation Process

The DGS determines the student's thesis grade in consultation with the co-advisor. Upon submission of the thesis, the co-advisor receives a "MARSLAC Co-Advisor Evaluation Form" (a copy of this form can be obtained from the DGS). In this form, the co-advisor provides 1) an evaluation of the thesis and its strengths and weaknesses and 2) a recommended grade for the thesis. This evaluation and the recommended grade are sent directly to the DGS ([ga2161@columbia.edu](mailto:ga2161@columbia.edu)).

The thesis grade will take into account the co-advisor's recommended grade as well as that of the DGS. The thesis grade will be the main component of the grade the student receives for the Spring semester core course (LCRS G6401; Scholarly Literature and Research on Latin American and Caribbean Studies II). While the course grade is primarily comprised of the thesis grade, it also encompasses student's performance in the thesis workshop, as assessed by the instructor of the MA core course.