

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS WHEN WRITING YOUR MA IN MEDICAL SCIENCES THESIS

GETTING STARTED ON YOUR THESIS

What are the University requirements for registration when completing my thesis?

You must be registered the semester you plan on submitting your thesis. The University requires each student to be registered for 4 semesters before MA completion. These 4 semesters can span 12 mo (Fall, Spring Summer I and II) , 1.5 year (Fall, Spring, Summer II and Fall) or 2 years (Fall, Spring, Fall, Spring) . Full-time tuition is paid for the student's first two semesters while the continuing student fee is paid for the last 2 semesters while completing thesis work.

How many credits of the 32 required for a MA degree can be thesis research?

Each student may register for up to 8 credits of research throughout their time in the program. It is not required to register for all 8 credits but if planning to perform a laboratory thesis most students choose to in order to maximize the advantage of earning 8 credits of A following honors recognition. Most students register for 2 research credits (GMS MS 971 and 972) each of the 4 semesters in the program. If completing a library thesis some students opt to complete extra electives rather than register for all 8 research credits.

When should I start my thesis?

The majority of students begin to think about thesis topics of interest and whether they are interested in performing a lab or library thesis at the beginning of their second semester in the program. Generally, each student will meet with their advisor and discuss the pros and cons of a lab versus library thesis and discuss areas of interest. During the course of the second semester students should meet with potential thesis advisors and ideally settle on a topic for their library thesis or find a laboratory to perform the research in.

Most students do not start working on their thesis till their coursework is complete. If completing the program in 12 months, students primarily complete a library thesis over the two summer sessions (I and II). If a student is remaining in the program for the second year, many students tend to focus on their AMCAS applications and MCAT studying over the summer and start working on their thesis late summer or in September.

How do I choose between a lab and a library thesis?

The main differences between a lab and a library are:

- Page limit
 - Library – minimum 45 pages: average 45-65 pages
 - Lab - minimum 35 pages: average 35-55 pages
- Graded
 - Lab thesis can earn a student 8 credits of “A’s (thereby improving their GPA)
 - Library thesis is graded pass / fail and does not affect GPA
- Duration
 - Lab thesis range from 6-9 months with students working 25-40 hours/wk (up to 8 credits of research)
 - Library thesis can be completed in approximately 2 months – this includes the library research and document writing

The decision to perform a lab or library thesis is a personal choice and should be discussed with your GMS advisor. Many factors come into considerations such as

- Time restraints (If a student has Medical School applications pending and expects to matriculate in September they will need to complete a library thesis over the summer).
- Financial restraints.
- Previous experience in clinical or basic science research
- Current GPA

Can I do my thesis research work at an institution other than BU?

Yes. Students can perform their research at BUSOM, BMC, GSDM, or any institution in the Greater Boston area or in their home state. If performing thesis work under the direction of a non-GMS faculty you must complete a Special Appointment form and enlist a first reader who is GMS faculty. This *in-house BU* first reader is strictly an administrative first reader. He or she is responsible for oversight on the thesis, i.e. legal issues – patent infringement, plagiarism, institutional standards, etc. and is not considered an author on any publications arising from the thesis. The laboratory mentor, the 2nd thesis reader, is provided full responsibility regarding publication and authorship. There are however, instances in which the *in-house BU* mentor and mentor at a distant institution have collaborated on a project involving shared interests and publication authorship; this decision has generally preceded the start of the student’s involvement. In some of these instances, the collaboration had been pre-determined and waited for an appropriately talented student.

What Is Considered a Laboratory–Based Thesis? Does it have to be bench research?

Laboratory theses are quite variable and do not necessarily need to be traditional bench research projects. Many students do perform these types of projects and get valuable research experience however other types of projects are also available. These “other” thesis opportunities include (i) clinical research working with patients directly, (ii) retrospective studies of previously collected

data including statistical work-up and (iii) the development of a survey eliciting information on topic of interest followed by data collection and analysis.

There are many unusual “research” experiences that often can serve as lab theses. If in doubt about your thesis topic please speak to a thesis advisor in GMS. If research is publishable it usually can serve as a lab thesis.

Once I find a lab to perform my research in what else do I need to do?

You and your mentor should define your project’s goal, discuss expectations (i.e. time spent per week in lab and attendance at weekly lab meetings) as well as agree on a tentative timeline for completion of the project. Some mentors like you to begin by reading literature in the field, others ask for an initial outline, and others will want you just to spend time integrating in the lab and gaining exposure to the field of research. Each lab is different and it is up to you and your mentor to decide how your time is spent. Most mentors will want you to extend the work of the laboratory.

Once I find my readers for a library thesis what else do I need to do?

You and your mentor should define your project’s goals and timeline for completion. Several meetings may occur to define topic and scope of the thesis. Other mentors like you to begin by reading literature in the field and requiring an initial outline. How you move forward is up to you and your reader(s).