Preparing to Defend and Graduate: Graduate Milestones

Your time in the MFA program will culminate in the production of your thesis, which will be a book-length manuscript. It's assumed you will defend your thesis within the three years/six semesters of the program. Thesis requirements are established by both the Graduate School and the MFA faculty and must be completed in order to receive your degree. These requirements are identified by the Graduate School as Milestones:

- Thesis Committee
- Master's Degree Eligibility
- Thesis Defense & Submission
- Thesis Submission

MILESTONE #1 Thesis Committee

Establishing Your Thesis Committee: Committees are comprised of a chair and two committee members (or readers). Your chair must be a faculty member in your genre. One of your readers must also be a faculty member in your genre. The other should be an individual you and your chair agree will add to the conversation (e.g. MFA faculty, other faculty, writers or poets you admire and who might be willing to participate, etc.). You may request an exception to this composition from the MFA Program Director in consultation with your thesis director. As soon as your committee is selected and each member has agreed to serve, let Barbara know. She will submit the formal request to the Graduate School for their appointment. For a spring defense and graduation, typically committee establishment should be completed by the second semester of your second year.

MILESTONE #2 Master’s Degree Eligibility Form

The Master’s Degree Eligibility form tells the Graduate School you have completed all of your requirements and expect to graduate at the next official graduation date. This form must be submitted by the Graduate School deadline, the dates vary from year to year.

- May 12, 2017 graduation: Deadline is April 1, 2017
- September 1, 2017 graduation: Deadline is August 31, 2017
- February 1, 2018: Deadline is December 1, 2016

For all practical purposes, a September degree is equivalent to a May degree; no additional fees or extensions are required.

The form is available at the Graduate School website here.
• List only those classes, independent studies, practica, seminars, etc. that you want to use towards your degree. You may include teaching practica for Writing Program and English. You need at least 60 credits. Please note that every course you list will count towards your degree. Should you decide to pursue another advanced degree in the future, any courses listed on this form will not be transferrable.

• List all the courses taken by semester, not by course type. The Grad School reviews this by comparing it to your transcript, so semester by semester is their preference.

• Include all relevant “in progress” credits—count credits in overall total; just leave grade column blank. This means any courses you are currently enrolled in during the semester you are filling out the form and any Thesis Credits (which will continue to show up as “IP” credits).

• Print form, sign it, and give it to Barbara. She will get the additional signatures and get it to the Graduate School. Please don’t leave this until the last minute, as the Department Chair must sign and may not be available.

MILESTONE #3 Thesis Defense

Scheduling Your Thesis Defense: It’s your responsibility to schedule your defense with your chair and committee members. Confirm the date with your chair, then reach out to other members of your committee. As soon as your defense is scheduled, let Barbara know the day and time; she will help you reserve a room, if needed. Defenses may take place throughout the year but remember, faculty are generally unavailable during the summer and over the winter break. Discuss the timing with your chair. You’re encouraged to schedule as far in advance as possible. There are advantages to not waiting until your final semester to defend as you will have more time for faculty input on revisions and advice for publication. To ensure a May graduation, your thesis defense must occur by the April 6 deadline. Defenses that take place after April 6 will have a September 1, 2017 graduation date.

Distribute Manuscript: At least two weeks prior to your scheduled defense, distribute your final manuscript, including the introduction, to all members of your committee. The introduction is mandatory for your defense, but optional for submission to the Graduate School. If you have questions about the introduction, you can ask Barbara to show you some examples, and/or speak with your thesis committee chair. The manuscript should be paginated, include a table of contents, and single-sided. A prose thesis should be double-spaced with one inch margins in a 12 point font. The thesis is distributed in hard copy to advisors at the address to which they agree.

Thesis Signature Pages: Several days prior to your defense, Barbara will print out the required two copies of your signature page on the required acid-free paper. You should bring these to your defense along with a black ink ballpoint pen. Be sure to have all committee members sign these pages. Return signed pages to Barbara, who will get the additional signatures required and bring it
to the Graduate School. Please note: When you upload your thesis you will need to include a blank signature page (not the ones you had signed). Barbara can email you the blank page.

**Thesis Defense:** The thesis defense is the time when you will meet with all three of your committee members to talk about the manuscript you’ve written. It will be similar to a long, thorough workshop of your manuscript. Defenses are generally scheduled for no more than two hours. Assuming a positive outcome, Barbara will send a formal announcement of the successful completion of your defense of to the Graduate School.

**MILESTONE #4 Thesis Submission**

The MFA thesis is required to be electronically submitted and incorporated into ScholarWorks, an open-access web archive maintained through the W.E.B. Du Bois Library. You’ll work with the Graduate School Student Service Center to submit your official thesis online according to Graduate School specifications.

Visit the [Graduate School web site](#) for complete information about thesis submission, the Master’s Graduation Degree Eligibility Form and all other graduation-related tasks. You can log into ScholarWorks and look at previously submitted theses no longer embargoed for samples of the required formatting, or ask Barbara to show you some older bound theses that are kept in the program office.

When you upload your thesis on ScholarWorks you will have two options:

- The default option is Open Access Thesis. Open Access permits anyone with internet access to view the thesis. The second option, Campus Access, must be selected from the drop down menu. Campus Access limits the access to only those with a UMass IT NetID username and password, or through interlibrary loan.

- An embargo period, during which the thesis will not be available, is also offered. The default is No Embargo Required. The drop down menu also includes a One Year Embargo option. The Graduate School allows a 5 Year Embargo with a memo of support from the MFA Program Director. The staff of the Graduate Student Service Center will set the embargo date when the memo is received.

A memo from the MFA Program Director requesting the 5 Year Embargo will automatically be sent to the Graduate School along with your Degree Eligibility form. If you prefer a different option, please let Barbara know when you give her your Degree Eligibility form.

Information about the University of Massachusetts’ Intellectual Property Policy can be found [here](#).