

Master's Design Thesis in Architecture

A master's design project should include the following components:

- Identification of an area of interest within the student's profession,
- A specific design question developed through research of theoretical sources and graphic analysis of case studies.
- An explanation of how the question is relevant to the profession
- A well-resolved design project that explores the question and proposes a creative solution
- A conclusion based on the design that advances the profession
- Documentation and bibliography

A completed Master's must present the author's ideas clearly, precisely and correctly. The thesis should guide a reader to understand: i) what the master's thesis proposes, ii) why it is relevant to the field, iii) how the design project explores the master's research question, and iv) what conclusions are reached.

Framing a Research Topic and Design Project

Start this process as early as possible. Find recent articles in your area then follow the bibliographic references to other articles and books. Ask your professors for references. You may define your topic with a faculty member's help within his or her area of expertise.

In ARCH 692, you should continue to refine your topic and analytical techniques in order to frame a proposal for a design project. Focusing your topic into a specific design question and defining your project will develop together. Read more. Collect bibliography and do library research on your topic in order to focus your thinking toward a design question that can be explored in a project. Many students select a single theoretical text (book), study it and describe how the ideas relate to a project they have in mind.

You will also analyze buildings (case studies) that seem to address similar themes and develop a series of design principles that will be helpful for your own design project. You need to craft your thesis so that you give yourself an opportunity to explore your design question in depth. The project should also be doable: not too big, not too complex, and the site should be accessible to you.

You should write a Master's thesis proposal (6 - 8 pages) that describes the ideas and design questions that you developed in research, literature review and case studies, some preliminary analysis, and the project you wish to pursue in design. The proposal should conclude with a list of design principles that you gained through research and analysis and wish to further explore in the thesis.

Research and Analysis

Research must include a review of current thought on your topic in books, articles and built work. The ideas that you gain from reading are the intellectual groundwork for your graphic analysis of case studies and your definition of a design project.

Tips for reading:

- Always take notes when you read.
- Always note the source and page number so you can footnote it easily when you write.
- Always look at the footnotes in the articles and books you read. They can lead you to other sources.
- Explore sources outside the design field.
- Ask your professors for references.
- Read with a purpose. What do you want to know? Does the book answer your question? If not, perhaps find another source, or reframe your question.
- List references in a bibliography.
- Format footnotes and bibliography in Chicago Style.

Tips for Analysis:

- Establish terms of analysis from your reading. What qualities are you looking for?
- Find projects that you think are successful in the terms you establish.
- Find and trace plans and other drawings of successful projects.
- Show graphically how and why the project is successful. You may have to invent a way to diagram the project that is suited to your question.
- Use arrows, color-coding, massing models, light studies, collage or whatever graphic means you need to show the qualities that interest you.
- You may do experiments directly, such as blowing smoke through a model to show air circulation, or find similar circumstances locally and chart light, temperature, scale or color etc.
- Draw it up.

Writing a Master's Thesis

Your Master's Thesis (having a design focus) must include descriptions of: introduction of your research, literature review (case study analysis), design project/proposal, recommendations/conclusions, and bibliography.

Sample Outline for Master's Design Thesis

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Master's project/thesis proposal will include:

- Topic: What area of your field are you investigating?
- Design question: What is the specific question that you have explored in research and will explore (if not answer) in design?
- Project and site (short description)

Chapter 2 - Literature Review/Case Study Analysis

Explain your research and your project in more detail with precise description, diagrams, analysis, conclusions. All research must be footnoted correctly.

- Research: What is the current theoretical thinking in your area? What resources in other fields that are relevant? How? How does contemporary design address topics similar to yours?
- Describe the specific design question you will explore in your project and why it is relevant to the field
- Graphic analysis of projects that have successfully addressed similar issues (for example Projects 1, 2, 3, etc.)
- List of critical points that you have derived from your study of the issue and analyses (these points will be the basis of your design project)

Chapter 3 - Design Project/Proposal

- Site
- Program
- Design options (show how your design is informed by what you found in the literature)

Chapter 4 - Recommendations/Conclusion:

What innovation did your design to accomplish? (When you finish your design, you will change this section to describe whether and how it accomplishes the goals that you set up earlier)

Bibliography