

Dissertations and Theses

Both the PhD dissertation and the LLM thesis are substantial pieces of writing prepared under the supervision of at least one Law faculty member and ultimately examined by way of an oral thesis defence.

Length and Style

Dissertations and theses have much in common. They both:

- follow the requirements of the most recent edition of the *Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation* (McGill Guide),
- follow the [Graduate Student Paper Style Guide](#) (unless otherwise directed by the supervisor),
- include a table of contents and an abstract of approximately 150 words,
- are written in an appropriate academic style, i.e. formal, but clear and straightforward,
- use proper grammar and spelling, and
- need not include a bibliography, unless required by the instructor.

An LLM **thesis** reflects extensive, original legal or sociolegal research and analysis on a topic. LLM theses are approximately 100-120 pages (30,000 – 36,000 words) in length, inclusive of footnotes.

Each doctoral candidate will be required to produce a research-based **dissertation** that is a significant and original contribution to scholarly knowledge in law. Both manuscript-based and traditional monograph-style dissertations are possible, although current practice in the field of law tends toward monograph-styled dissertations. Manuscript-based dissertations require the permission of the supervisor and Graduate Programme Director. The typical dissertation will be approximately 250 to 350 double-spaced pages in length (i.e., between 75,000 and 105,000 words), excluding the bibliography.

The rules regarding supervision, formatting and the completion and filing of the thesis are set out in the [Academic Regulations](#) section of the Graduate Calendar.

An Original Piece of Work

In a thesis or dissertation, the student must make a novel contribution to the state of knowledge in the field, such as by investigating a topic on which there is no previous research or by advancing a new position or new insights in an established area of research. Work that is merely general, descriptive, or summative of the research of others will be insufficient. A thesis or dissertation must be the original work of the student's own mind, the product of the student's own research and analytical effort.

A thesis or dissertation must demonstrate insight, understanding, and a high level of critical analysis of all of the relevant issues and authorities. The analysis of previous work must be integrated into the student's own argument and analysis. A thesis or dissertation may also set out recommendations for legal or policy reform.

A thesis or dissertation must make a clear and cogent argument that leads to a well-reasoned and well-supported conclusion. The work must be structured in a logical and coherent way. The introduction should advance a clear and original argument and should set out the objectives of the work and how the argument will be developed. The rest of the text should unfold according to the design articulated in the introduction.

A thesis or dissertation must be well researched and properly referenced. It must make effective use of both primary sources (e.g. cases, statutes, and treaties) and secondary sources (e.g. books and articles). It should draw on non-legal sources where appropriate. All sources must be fully and accurately cited and attributed, and all citations must be appropriate, accurate and reliable. The [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) addresses breaches of these requirements.

Developing the Thesis or Dissertation

The **proposal** is ordinarily developed in Law 703, with input from the course instructor and the faculty member whom the student anticipates having as supervisor. Law 703 is usually taught in the fall, and students usually begin their programs in the fall, so the process of identifying a supervisor and developing the proposal can take place organically. Doctoral and thesis-based LLM students also take Law 705, which is aimed at helping them work through the theoretical bases for their projects. We expect these students to develop their projects and begin working on them during the first year of their program, while also completing their courses, so that they can devote themselves to their projects full-time once they have finished their coursework. For thesis-based LLM students, this timeframe is usually what is required to permit a student to complete a thesis in two years, which is our target. (The maximum time permitted for completing the thesis is three years, after which extensions may be permitted on a case by case basis.)

Completing the LLM Thesis

Doctoral students must refer to the faculty [Candidacy Requirements](#) for information about supervision and their timelines for completion.

The final steps of the thesis-based LLM program generally take about three months. The first steps toward planning the examination usually take place a couple of months ahead of it. The committee must be identified, the time and date agreed to, and the paperwork done. Most LLM thesis examining committees are composed of the supervisor, the co-supervisor (if any), and two other Law faculty members, but it is also possible to substitute an external examiner, who could be from a different faculty or a different university. There is also a neutral chair – another faculty member – who does not read the thesis but chairs the exam and makes sure it is properly conducted.

To set up the examination, the supervisor certifies to the Faculty of Graduate Studies that the thesis is examinable. The examination begins when the examiners are given the thesis, about four weeks before the examination. Most examinations result in corrections, either minor or major. The student then has one more month to complete minor revisions and submit the thesis for final filing, or six months for major revisions. Here is an example of how this might work:

- Late January: supervisor, student and Graduate Program Director begin discussing dates and potential committee members
- Early to mid-February: committee members are identified and time/date set
- Mid-February: paperwork for setting the examination is completed and filed with Faculty of Graduate Studies
- Late February: FGS officially schedules examination
- February 27: student submits thesis to examining committee; examination begins
- March 27: oral examination, result = “pass with minor revisions”
- April 25: student files final, approved, corrected thesis in “The Vault” and graduation paperwork is completed
- If the result of the exam were “pass with major revisions,” the student would have until the end of September to complete the revisions and submit the final thesis.

Thesis-based students may also benefit from reviewing the document [Major Research Paper Requirements](#).

Submitting Your Thesis or Dissertation

LLM theses and doctoral dissertations must comply with the policies and practices of both the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Faculty of Law. The instructions for finalizing the formatting of your thesis and submitting it are available [here](#). It will then be lodged in the University of Calgary’s longterm digital storage facility and indexed through the library.

As well, the Faculty of Law requires a PDF copy of the final version of your thesis.