

# How To Do a Master's Project in Architecture, at FIU

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### 1. What is a Master's Project?

A master's project is a design proposal developed and defended by the student that is an original contribution to the field. In the School of Architecture, a master's project is a two-semester, creative exploration of a question relevant to the field, developed in research and design. Students have the option of pursuing a Research Thesis governed by the regulations of the Florida International University Graduate School ([www.fiu.edu/~ugs](http://www.fiu.edu/~ugs)), but most choose to complete a Master's Project governed by the School of Architecture. Master's projects are independent work completed under the guidance of an assigned studio critic and a team of faculty members who review the work regularly and

must approve the completed projects. All completed master's projects are bound and shelved in the School of Architecture as books. The School also keeps a digital record of the work.

A master's project (or a research thesis) is required for completing a Master's degree in Architecture. A successful master's project must meet the standards of the program and the School, therefore it must be reviewed and found acceptable by the faculty team, the Department Chair and, the Director of the School.

A master's project should include:

- 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 project book must present the author's ideas clearly, precisely and correctly. The book should guide a reader to understand: what the master's project proposes, why it is relevant to the field, how the design project explores the master's project question, and what conclusions are reached.

## **2. Master's Project Sequence**

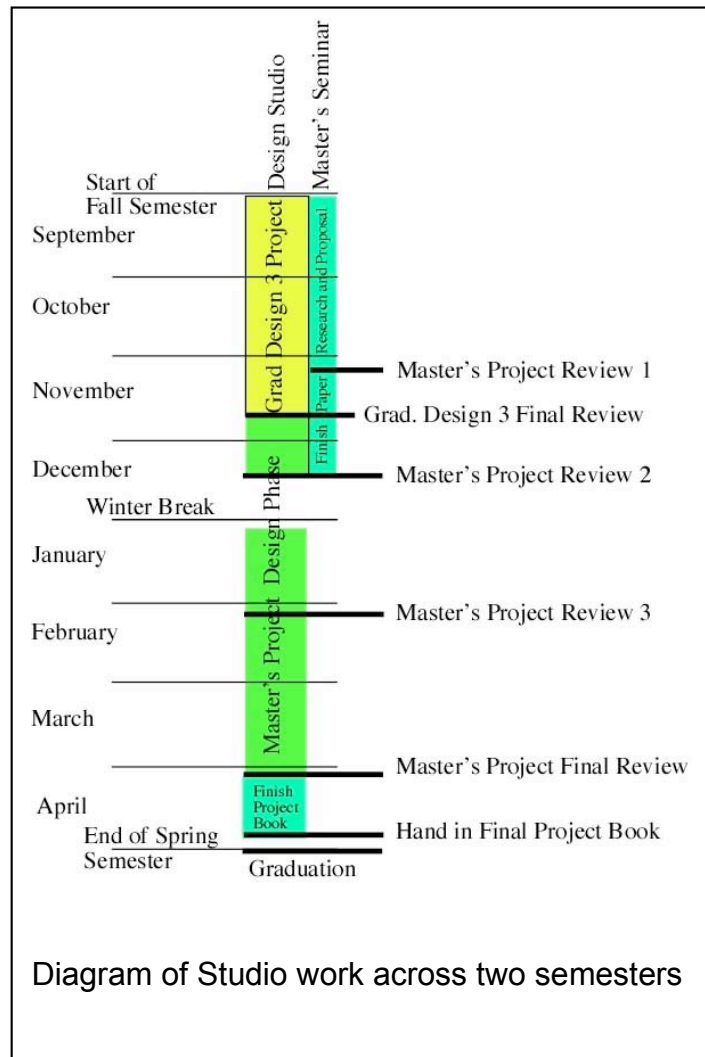
In their final year of the graduate program, students are assigned a studio professor for two semesters who will guide them through a Graduate Design 3 project as well as the development and completion of the independent Master's Project. Each studio has an associated team of faculty who review the projects at scheduled presentations and are available to students for consultation throughout the process. In the fall semester, students take Graduate Design 3 and the Master's Seminar class devoted to framing the master's project through research and analysis. While working on a Graduate Design 3 project, students develop an independent master's project proposal under the guidance of both the Master's seminar professor their studio critic. In early November of the fall semester, students present their proposals to a jury of their professors and the faculty team. If the project is accepted by the jury, the student may proceed into the design phase of the work. In late November, the Graduate Design 3 project is completed and students begin the design phase of the Master's project in their studios. In the Master's Seminar class, students complete their research paper for the Master's Project book.

## How To Do a Master's Project in Design at FIU

In the spring term, students continue design work in studio with the same professor and faculty team. A mid-review is scheduled in early February and a final review in early April. Immediately after the final review, students must add design drawings to their Master's seminar paper to produce a final Master's project book for submission in the third week in April (11" x 17" format can be downloaded here). The final book must be approved and signed by the studio professor and chair of the department, and the Director of the School of Architecture. When master's project work is accepted and all coursework complete, students are cleared to graduate at the end of April. Congratulations.

### 3. Framing a Research Topic and Design Project

[Click here for Suggested topics and Bibliography](#)



Start this process as early as possible. During the Research Methods course, you should do research in an area within your field that interests you. 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 Master's Seminar, 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.

The project should be crafted to give you an opportunity to explore your design question in depth. This is a good trick and takes some creative thought. The project should also be doable: not too big, not too complex, and the site should be accessible to you. If you choose a site outside of Miami, you must visit the site and get complete site information by the middle of the fall semester.

You will write a Master's Project proposal (6 - 8 pages) that describes the ideas and design questions that you developed in research, your analysis of case studies, and the project you wish to pursue in design. The paper should conclude with a list of design principles that you gained through research and analysis. This paper will be included in the final Master's Project book.

Suggestions of Topics and Bibliography

[Examples of Topics and Projects](#) from recent Master's Projects

#### **4. 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. See this website:

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocChicago.html>

##### **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.

## 5. Writing a Master's Project Proposal

A 6 - 8 page master's project proposal must be handed in to your seminar professor, studio professor and the faculty team at the review in the beginning of November. The proposal must include descriptions of: your research, case study analysis, design project, bibliography. The proposal must be well-written: precise, complete and grammatically correct. Your Master's Seminar professor will review a draft of the proposal before it is ready to be handed in.

At the review, you will present your proposal graphically to the studio professor and faculty team

### Sample Outline for Master's Project Paper

First paragraph is an abstract of master's project proposal which should include:

- Title of Master's Project, generally in this format
  - "The Topic: The Project"
- Topic: What area of your field are you are 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)

Next 6 - 8 pages should 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
  - Project 1
  - Project 2
  - Project 3
- 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)
  - 1.
  - 2.

- 3.
- 4.
- Your master's project
  - Site
  - Program
  - How does this project help you to investigate your topic?
- Conclusion: **What innovation would you like your design to accomplish?** (When you finish your design, you will change this section to describe whether and how your building accomplishes the goals that you set for yourself)
- 2- page Bibliography

### References and Bibliography

Footnotes and bibliography in Chicago Style

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocChicago.html>

### Examples

Read essays in completed master's project books in the library

At the end of the semester, you will hand in a final copy of the master's project proposal to your Master's Seminar professor and your studio professor.

## 6. The Design Project

In the spring semester, you will complete your design project in the context of The Master's Project Studio. Studio will meet regularly and you are required to be in studio for the entire period.

Your studio professor is your principal critic and advisor, but you may ask for advice or a critique from any of the faculty members on your studio team.

The design schedule includes a series of formal reviews at which you present your work to your studio professor and the faculty team.

## 7. The Master's Project Abstract

At the Pre-Final stage of design, you will hand in a 150-word abstract as part of a that will be posted to advertise the final review of project.

The abstract is based on the first page of your proposal, though you may have to cut it down to 150 words.

[Sample Format](#)

[Examples](#) (Scroll down to see several)

## 8. Master's Project Book

The game here is format. The format of the master's project book is proscribed and your submission must conform. In the 11" x 17" format, the book must

contain: abstract, your proposal, and a representation of all drawings proposed for final review. Your proposal should already have been reviewed by your committee and corrected by you. At this stage, it should include a conclusion stating what you learned about the topic through your design. Drawings should have captions that explain your design in terms of your topic. A non-architect should be able to read the book and understand your analyses and design proposal clearly. Please keep in mind that the better polished your submission in Master's Seminar, the less you have to scramble at the end. Ideally, you should have places for all your drawings so you can simply add them after the final review. Time is very short.

### **Master's Book Format in Word File**

[Download here](#)

## **9. Finishing the Master's Project Book**

After your final review, you have about one week to complete your master's project book. This includes reformatting the drawings presented at the Final Review and making all corrections recommended by your professors and faculty team. The final book must be letter-perfect.

Submit complete master's project book (on ordinary paper) to your studio professor for comments (red-marks).

**Paper:** Final Master's Projects books must be printed on 24 lb. Paper, 25% cotton, bright white. This is not easy to find in 11" x 17." Office Max often carries it or try MacPaper at 5900 NW 176<sup>th</sup> Street, or Paper Plus.

Tip: You might print out two copies of the signature page of the book on good paper at this point and start collecting the signatures you need.

You must respond to all comments and make all corrections. Make three final copies of the book on the proscribed paper:

- Two copies for submission to the School of Architecture. The SOA will bind these and shelve them in the SOA library.
- One copy for yourself.

Then bring both the red-marked copy and the final copies to your studio professor and the Chair of Architecture for signature.

Congratulations.  
You are a Master of your field.  
Go celebrate