

K-State Food Science Graduate Program

Guidelines to Pursue the Report or Thesis Option by Distance

The Food Science MS Program by Distance has three degree options—the Non-Thesis/Non-Report (i.e., coursework-only) option, the Report option, and the Thesis option. Unless otherwise specified, all students admitted to the Food Science MS Program by Distance are accepted to pursue the Non-Thesis/Non-Report option; this is, in fact, the option that will be completed by the vast majority of distance program graduates.

In select special cases, the program does allow for a student to complete either the Report or Thesis option by distance. However, a student must first seek and be granted permission to do so. To pursue the Report option, approval from the student's Major Professor is required. To pursue the Thesis option, the student and the Major Professor must petition the Food Science Graduate Coordinating Committee (FS-GCC) in advance for approval to do so, with petitions considered according to the criteria and guidelines outlined below.

Report Option

As outlined in the K-State Graduate Handbook (see Chapter 2, Section I), a master's report is generally shorter than a thesis, and may present the results of a more limited original investigation. Alternatively, it may present a comprehensive review of the state of a particular scholarly or scientific problem. It is generally expected that a master's report project would also culminate in a manuscript for peer-reviewed journal publication.

A student may only pursue the Report option by distance after being granted approval to do so by the Major Professor. The student must discuss the feasibility of completing the report option with their Major Professor within the first two semesters of entering the program. Faculty advisors are not obligated to advise report projects by distance; the choice to do so is left to individual faculty advisors. At the discretion of the Major Professor, the student may be asked to prepare a proposal outlining the report topic. If granted approval to do so by the Major Professor, the student may then pursue the report option.

Thesis Option

Regardless of whether completed on-campus or by distance, the purpose of a master's thesis is to "demonstrate the candidate's ability to conduct original research of a type appropriate to the academic discipline, to analyze the information obtained from the research, and to present the results in a form acceptable to the supervisory committee" (K-State Graduate Handbook, Chapter 2, Section I). It is generally expected that a master's thesis would also culminate in a manuscript for peer-reviewed journal publication.

As per the K-State Graduate Student Handbook, a master's thesis:

- must present the results of an original investigation of a problem or topic approved by the candidate's supervisory committee (Ch. 2, Section I),
- must be sufficiently complete to allow an independent investigator to repeat or verify all of the work leading to the author's results and conclusions (Appendix B, Section A), and
- as an original contribution to knowledge, should be publicly available to interested scholars outside of Kansas State University (Appendix B, Section B).

A student may pursue the Thesis option by distance only after petitioning and being granted approval to do so by the Food Science Graduate Coordinating Committee (FS-GCC), as outlined below.

Preliminary Process: The following steps should be completed prior to submitting a thesis petition to the FS-GCC:

1. The student must discuss the thesis option with their Major Professor within the first two semesters of entering the program to determine if it is a viable alternative. Students should be aware that faculty advisors are not obligated to advise thesis projects by distance; the decision to do so is at the discretion of individual faculty advisors.
2. The student must identify an on-site Mentor with a Ph.D. degree in a relevant scientific field who will be present at the research location to supervise the thesis research. The on-site Mentor may serve as an additional member of the student's supervisory committee (with approval from the Graduate School; see Graduate Handbook, Ch 5, Section D.6.).
3. The student must arrange an opportunity for the Major Professor and on-site Mentor to discuss the proposed thesis research (i.e., via teleconference or other appropriate means). The Major Professor and on-site Mentor must agree to the breadth and depth of the research project. The research project and thesis must meet the same requirements and expectations as that completed by a campus-based student. A plan to address any potential intellectual property issues should be discussed and developed at this time (refer to appropriate sections of the University Handbook as necessary).
4. The student or sponsoring employer must pay for an on-site visit by the Major Professor to travel to the research facility to meet with the on-site Mentor and view the research capabilities.
5. Based on the steps above, the Major Professor will make an initial determination as to the probability of the student being able to successfully complete the thesis option. If deemed appropriate by the Major Professor, the student may proceed with the petition process below.

Thesis Petition Process:

1. The thesis petition should be submitted to the FS-GCC as early in the student's program as possible, preferably by the end of the student's second semester in the program.
2. The thesis petition should include the following elements:
 - a. A letter of commitment from the Major Professor providing support and justification for the thesis petition as well as a brief summary of the completion of the preliminary process outlined above.
 - b. A research proposal authored by the student, with review and approval by the Major Professor and on-site Mentor. The proposal should include a brief justification or literature review, a clear statement of research objectives, a general description of the materials and methods to be employed, a description of the research facilities to be used, and an explanation of how any intellectual property or confidentiality issues will be addressed.
 - c. A letter of commitment and support from the on-site Mentor.
 - d. A brief CV (2-5 pgs) for the on-site Mentor.
3. The Major Professor should submit the complete petition package to the Chair of the Food Science Graduate Program.
4. The FS-GCC will review the petition within one month of submission and make the final determination; the Chair of the Food Science Graduate Program will notify the student as to the approval status.