Thesis Guidelines
Latin American Studies Program

Requirements for the Thesis
The thesis is ideal for students who have developed research topics and want more experience doing research and writing. Before students begin the thesis, they need to have completed at least 12 semester units of their required and elective courses in the graduate program and they need to have been advanced to candidacy.

Students will also identify three faculty members who are willing to serve on the thesis committee. These faculty members must review and approve the thesis proposal before a student can begin doing research and writing the thesis.

In addition, students must be enrolled in the university during the semester in which they submit their finalized thesis. *While writing the thesis, students must complete at least 3 semester units of LAS 5990. If a student has completed 3 units of LAS 5990 as well as all other graduation requirements, but continues to work on their thesis, they must enroll in UNIV 9000 through the Professional and Global Education (PAGE) Office: http://www.calstatela.edu/page/university-9000-univ-9000*

During the semester in which the student submits the final thesis, students will conduct an oral defense of the thesis before the members of the thesis committee.

Thesis Topics
The first step is to choose a research topic. A thesis is supposed to represent an original contribution to scholarship in your area of research. Students should develop a thesis topic in consultation with the LAS graduate advisor or a LAS faculty member. The campus library has a collection of all theses completed if you would like to see what a thesis looks like and what kinds of research students have previously done.

Most students have multiple research interests, so deciding which to pursue can be difficult. A review of the published literature on the topic can help you understand what scholars have already done so that you can think about how you can contribute to knowledge production in this area. Your topic should also be something that is financially feasible and for which there are faculty on campus willing to support you.

Thesis Committees
Theses require a committee of three faculty members who will mentor the student and evaluate the quality of the thesis, with one faculty member serving as the chair. Committee members should be members of the CSULA faculty with expertise in the student's area of research, although in appropriate cases qualified scholars from off campus may serve on the thesis committees. *Once the student has formed a committee of three faculty members who have approved the thesis proposal, the student must submit the GS-12 form to the LAS Office: http://www.calstatela.edu/sites/default/files/users/u93141/gs-12.pdf*

This form must be signed by committee members and include the title and an abstract of the thesis.

Thesis Proposals

The thesis proposal is a vital part of the process of writing a thesis. In writing the proposal, the student fully develops the thesis question, methods of research, and preliminary literature review. If students begin a thesis without having these elements fully developed, it can be difficult to finish or to do well. *The thesis proposal should be in the range of 8-10 pages double-spaced. It should clearly explain the thesis topic or question, why it is important to pursue, the methods the student will use, and how the research relates to the literature already published on this or related topics*. Usually, the proposal is developed with the help of the thesis committee chair.

The thesis proposal should contain the following elements, though each proposal may be different in format and tone:

- An **introduction** to the topic of the intended research with a statement of the problem and the goals of the research.
- A section that provides the **background** necessary to demonstrate your knowledge and ability to undertake this research, as well as the information your reader will need to fully appreciate the research question.
- A section that **reviews the key published works on this topic** or closely related topics so that you can demonstrate your mastery of the scholarly or theoretical debates. In this section, you need to situate your own research in relation to what others have done or are doing by articulating the linkages between your project and the larger questions in the literature.
- A **methodology section** that spells out the student's plan for research, including the research strategies or methods that will be used and a proposed schedule or calendar for research and writing.
- **References**, including all the resources used in the writing of the proposal as well as others that may be used in the thesis itself. The student should consult with members of the thesis committee to choose an appropriate formatting style.

Funding Your Research

There are few options available for funding research at the M.A. level; however, students should pursue funding, especially if your research involves travel. The campus Office of Graduate Studies can provide some funding for students and can help students identify and apply for off-campus funding: http://www.calstatela.edu/graduatestudies/funding-opportunities

Additionally, Harvard University maintains up-to-date and searchable databases of grants for graduate study. Although the majority are for doctoral level research, the database does allow you to filter for those grants where "stage is not specified, may include master's students:" http://gsasgrants.fas.harvard.edu/ggg.cgi

Doing Research with Human Subjects

Students planning on doing interviews or surveys of people, or other forms of research with human subjects, may need to apply for permission from the university before proceeding. The campus Institutional Review Board-Research with Human Subjects (IRB) is meant to protect the subjects of research from potential abuse and to protect researchers from legal liability during research. Students doing certain kinds of oral history interviews may be exempt. Your faculty advisor or the chair of your thesis committee can help you through this process.

Applying for and getting approval to do research with human subjects can take 3 months or more, so students need to begin this process with sufficient time to obtain approval before beginning research. For more information, see the Cal State LA IRB website: http://www.calstatela.edu/orad/research-human-subjects-irb

Writing the Thesis

It can be difficult for students to complete the thesis when they do not have the structure and deadlines of a formal class. Many students benefit from joining a writing group where they can get feedback and support from fellow students. Creating deadlines with the committee chair for each phase of the thesis or for each chapter can also help.

Most M.A. theses are in the range of 50-100 pages. Students should present the thesis draft, either as a whole document or chapter by chapter, to all committee members so that they can give you feedback. Students usually have to write multiple drafts of each chapter, so you need to leave time in your research calendar for your committee members to read your draft and give you feedback, and for you to rewrite based on their comments.

Writing can be a difficult and time-consuming process, but most students find the end results very rewarding and students improve their research and writing skills through this process. Faculty and peer (student) support can be key to getting through this process.

Submitting the Final Thesis

Theses are submitted electronically to the campus library. Students can arrange to work with the library thesis reviewer, who may review and approve your thesis before it is uploaded. Usually, students must make an appointment with the thesis reviewer, so be sure to check in with the thesis reviewer early on so you are aware of their requirements and deadlines. The library establishes deadlines every semester for both review and final submission: http://www.calstatela.edu/graduatethesis/deadlines

The library also offers regular workshops every semester on the thesis process and thesis review. For more information: http://www.calstatela.edu/graduatethesis

Thesis Defense

The oral defense of the thesis is a time for all committee members to come together with the student to evaluate the thesis. The student should be prepared to give a short presentation on the thesis, and then to respond to committee member questions. In compliance with the university requirements, the thesis defense is recorded and the audio recording is stored for 5 years. The defense is usually scheduled during the final weeks of the semester in which the student is submitting the final thesis. *After the defense, your committee will sign the GS-13 form, which is the final form necessary to approve your thesis:* *http://www.calstatela.edu/sites/default/files/groups/Graduate%20Thesis%2C%20Project%2C%20and%20Dissertation%20Guidelines/gs13-4.pdf*

Office of Graduate Studies

Please consult the Office of Graduate Studies' website to ensure you have the most up-to-date forms and information regarding thesis deadlines, formatting, workshops, and other relevant topics: http://www.calstatela.edu/graduatestudies