



Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences – Food Security Program

Guidelines for Thesis and Non-Thesis (Project) Selection and Registration

The Master of Science in Food Security degree program requires successful completion of a thesis (FSEC 399)¹ or a project (FSEC 397)² prior to graduation. The thesis or project is subject to guidelines of the American University of Beirut (as per the Graduate Catalogue), however these guidelines do not proscribe the selection of the thesis or project topic or provide detailed direction for students in selecting or registering their thesis or project topic. The Food Security Program accordingly provides supplementary guidelines for thesis and project selection and registration for current and future students.

Student Guidelines:

Students are suggested to consider the following questions in selecting a thesis or project topic.

- What is the topic of the thesis or project?
 - What is your interest in this topic?
 - Is this topic academic or applied? Is the topic theoretical or practical?
- Why is the topic important? What is the significance of this thesis or project?
 - What are the leading theories or theoretical frameworks to approach the topic?
 - What are the academic debates on the issue?
 - What is the current state of knowledge on the topic?
 - How do you intend to contribute to the existing literature?
- How are you going to do the thesis or project work?
 - What are the preferred methodological approach and tools to apply?

Options for Topic Selection:

Students pursuing an MS in Food Security degree generally have two options when selecting a thesis or project topic: (1) to pursue an original research topic or (2) to pursue topic building on an ongoing or established research project.

¹ For students enrolled in the MS in Food Security degree program prior to the fall 2018 term, the thesis requirement is equivalent to 9 academic credits. For students enrolled in the MS in Food Security degree program during or after the fall 2018 term, the thesis requirement is equivalent to 6 academic credits.

² The project requirement is equivalent to 3 academic credits.

Under the *original research option*, the student identifies a previously unexplored but relevant research question, as well as the research objectives and the methodology to be applied. The student takes the principal role in this identification, but should discuss and consult with faculty members and his/her intended thesis or project advisor.

Under the *ongoing or established research option*, the student may do one of the following:

- Perform principal research duties (including data collection and/or data analysis) for a research question or objective falling under the umbrella of a wider, previously established research project; or
- Utilize an existing dataset collected under an ongoing or established research project by analyzing it in new or previously unexplored ways to address a novel research question or to apply a new methodology.

Practical Considerations:

In selecting a thesis or project topic, students may wish to consider the following:

Time Requirement – Students pursuing original research will typically require more time than students building on ongoing or established research in order to determine the research topic and objectives, to identify appropriate methodologies, and to develop or adapt research tools such as survey questionnaires or interview questions. Students pursuing research that entails primary data collection should allocate additional time into the thesis or project timeline.

IRB Approval – Students pursuing original research will bear the primary responsibility for securing the approval of the Institutional Research Board (IRB) for their proposed research. The IRB will require documentation of the research topic and objectives, including a literature review, a clear and detailed description of the proposed research methodologies, and all research tools such as survey questionnaires, interview questions, and participant consent forms (translated and submitted in all languages in which they will be used).

Students pursuing research that builds on an ongoing or established research project are strongly recommended to inquire and confirm with its primary investigator if their proposed research question falls within the scope of the project, as previously approved by the IRB. In the event that the proposed research question is beyond the scope of this approval, the student bears the primary responsibility for assisting the supervisor/primary investigator of the project in securing the approval of the IRB of the proposed research.

The process for IRB review and approval can be time intensive. Students are recommended to allocate a minimum of one month to receive preliminary feedback from IRB for an exempt project, and a minimum of four months to receive feedback from IRB for expedited projects or those that require full board approvals. Studies involving human subjects for nutritional or medical intervention typically require additional time for approval. Guidelines on the IRB review and approval process are available online through AUB's [IRB website](#).

Financial Resources – The costs of conducting research may include software or computer licenses; phone or data services linked to primary data collection (e.g., the administration or survey

questionnaires); and printing services (questionnaires, consent forms), local transportation, and other field expenses linked to primary data collection. Students pursuing original research will bear the primary responsibility for securing funding to undertake their proposed research. Limited funding to support student research may be available directly through the Food Security Program, but is not guaranteed and would be subject to AUB financial regulations.³ Students pursuing research that builds on an ongoing research project are strongly recommended to inquire and confirm with its primary investigator if funds are available to cover allowable research costs as incurred by the student, before incurring such costs.

Plagiarism – Students may explore several thesis or project topic ideas with different professors or researchers before determining their preferred research topic. Students must take care to avoid plagiarism when elaborating an original research question so as to avoid replicating or otherwise copying the objectives of ongoing/established research projects communicated to them by professors or researchers during the preliminary topic discussions.

Thesis or Project Advisor and Committee:

The composition of the student's thesis or project committee should adhere to the University Graduate Catalogue guidelines and additionally adhere to the following:

- The committee must include the student's thesis or project advisor;
- The committee must include at least two faculty members holding their full-time position within the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences; of which at least one has taught the student a course (core or elective) during the student's enrollment in the MS in Food Security degree program.

Documentation of Thesis or Project Topic Selection:

Following discussion of thesis or project ideas with faculty members, students should make an oral agreement and commitment with a thesis or project advisor and other committee members to confirm the preferred topic and committee membership. If students have had conversations with multiple faculty members, it is strongly recommended that they inform all faculty members of their final topic selection and committee membership once determined as a professional courtesy.

Once an oral agreement and commitment has been made with the thesis/project advisor and committee members, students are required to obtain written permission of their thesis or project topic selection and document it through completion and submission of Form 1. Form 1 should be prepared by the student following discussion with the thesis or project advisor and committee members. Form 1 should be printed (one copy); provided by the student to the student's thesis or project committee for signature; provided by the student to the Food Security Program committee chair for signature; and delivered by

³ If available, such funds would be allocated to students only after (1) the successful completion of FSEC 396: Comprehensive Exam and (2) the provision of a reasonable cost estimate in line with the thesis or project research proposal. Allocations generally should not exceed a maximum of \$500 per student pursuing a thesis, or a maximum of \$250 per student pursuing a project. Students receiving program funds to cover relevant expenses would be required to comply with AUB financial processes, including the payment of costs on a reimbursement basis following the submission of valid receipts for all costs incurred. Materials purchased with research funds and remaining productive after the research period would remain the property of AUB and the Food Security Program.

the student to the FAFS Office of Student Services. Form 1 is subject to the review and approval of the FAFS Graduate Studies Committee, which has the authority to require the student to revise and re-submit his/her Form 1. The student will be provided a copy of the completed Form 1 once the result is registered, and should retain this copy for his/her records. A copy of Form 1 can be found below, or online at https://website.aub.edu.lb/fafs/fafs_home/StudentResources/Documents/Graduate-Form%201.doc.

Form 1 must be submitted before completion of the comprehensive examination (FSEC 396) and before submission of Form 2.

Registration of Comprehensive Exam, Thesis, and/or Project:

A student should register the comprehensive exam, thesis, and/or project in the section that indicates the name of her/his thesis or project advisor. If a student attempts to register and a section that indicates the name of her/his advisor is not listed within AUBsis/Banner, then the student should request that such a section be opened by the FAFS Office of Student Services.

Students must register their thesis or project within the AUBsis/Banner system, beginning in the semester in which they expect to substantively begin their research work and in every subsequent semester in which the research work is ongoing (until graduation). This requirement applies to the fall and spring semesters only: Students may but are not required to register a thesis or project during the summer term.

A student may register thesis or project before IRB approval is received. Data collection work may not begin until a student has received IRB approval. However, the student may begin research tasks such as literature review and secondary data analysis prior to receiving IRB approval.

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

FACULTY OF AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD SCIENCES

FORM 1

**FULL PROGRAM OF GRADUATE STUDY
TO BE COMPLETED BY THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR**

Name of Student: _____
(First Name) (Family Name) (Student #)

Major: _____ Thesis
Non-Thesis

Conditions of Acceptance: _____

Date of Commencing Graduate Work: _____

Expected Date of Graduation: _____

Credits

1. Total credits in prerequisites: _____ credits
2. Total credits 300 and above: _____ credits
3. Total credits to be taken: _____ credits

Supervisory Committee

	Name	Position/Faculty/Dept	Approval Signature
1.	_____ (Advisor)	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____

Dept. Chairperson: _____

Date Submitted: _____

Date Approved by the Graduate Studies Committee: _____

Thesis students complete **part I** only, non-thesis students complete **part II** only.

I. 1. Thesis title:

2. Objectives of the study:

3. Brief summary of intended methodology:

II. 1. Project title:

2. Brief summary of intended work:

Distribution: Advisor
Chairperson
Student
File