

## **Additional NSA Department Thesis Guidance**

The thesis is considered the capstone of a student's master's study, and it involves a higher standard of research, analysis, and writing than is expected of regular course work. It is a significant work of research and analysis, and a chance for students to draw on their previous learning at NPS and engage in intensive research on a topic relating to their curriculum and to national or international security. It should also be something the student is personally interested in, because for most it will be the most significant writing project you will have done. And because most theses are unclassified and unrestricted and are posted on the web through DTIC, it is likely to be associated with you on the web forever.

All thesis proposals will follow the general structure of the department's thesis proposal template, although students are allowed (with the permission of their thesis advisors) flexibility in the order and titling of the main sections.

The final thesis must follow the formatting guidance provided by the NPS Thesis Office, but students (again with the approval of their advisors) have flexibility to shape the thesis in such a way that it best accomplishes the goals for that thesis, whether that is to advance scholarly knowledge about an important issue, develop an in-depth understanding of a particular situation or case study, provide policy advice about a real-world problem, or accomplish some other goal appropriate to the student's curriculum and professional goals and interests.

Many students will write a relatively traditional academic thesis, which typically includes the following standard elements:

- Asks a clear research question or poses a clear problem for policy.
- Explains the significance (theoretical, policy-related, or methodological) of the question or problem.
- Demonstrates knowledge of the relevant literature and explains where the question or problem fits into that literature.
- Systematically collects and analyzes empirical evidence (the research process).
- Provides conclusions, which may be theoretical, policy focused, or both.

A thesis may, however, take a different form, such as a historical study or a policy analysis. The key is to work closely with your advisors and gain their approval as you go through the process of identifying a thesis question, writing a proposal, and researching and writing the final thesis.