

Thesis vs. Non-thesis: What's the Difference?

Many students wonder what the difference is between our thesis and non-thesis options. Basically, the thesis option has more research, while the non-thesis has more classes. However, ALL master's students must conduct some sort of research or project.

Thesis students will conduct a large research project, which will likely involve several semesters of work. These students must write a thesis, which is a large document that is likely to be published. The thesis option is for students who wish to get a background in intense research, such as students who are going to pursue a Ph. D., or students who will be conducting research.

Our non-thesis option is designed to be more flexible and is tailored for students who don't necessarily need a great deal of research training. Non-thesis students will take 6 more hours of electives than thesis students, but they take 6 fewer hours of research credit. Non-thesis students still must do an "Advanced Biological Project". These projects are flexible; some examples of non-thesis projects include:

- Creating a new learning module for a class you are teaching
- Working as an intern at a zoo
- Performing a small research project that is not as involved as a thesis
- Developing an educational display for a public park
- Etc.

As you can see, students can potentially perform a wide range of projects for the non-thesis option!

Non-thesis students will have to write a document describing their Advanced Biological Project. This document is less involved than the thesis and is not necessarily expected to be published. The non-thesis option is for students who don't wish to perform a large scale project like a thesis, or who are working and cannot commit to the time necessary for a thesis.

NOTE: all students must complete either a thesis or an Advanced Biological Project, which means that ALL students must have a faculty member advise their projects. Students are not assigned to a faculty member; instead, the student must take the initiative to contact a faculty member working in their area of interest. The sooner a student finds an advisor the better!

More information can be found in the Department of Biological Science's *Graduate Handbook* and *Thesis Guide*, both of which can be found on the Department's website.