



University Council

April 10, 2020

UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM COMMITTEE – 2019-2020

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Undergraduate Student Representative – Melissa Hevener

Graduate Student Representative – Jordan Henley

Dear Colleagues:

The attached proposal from the College of Environment and Design to offer the existing Master of Landscape Architecture (M.L.A.) with a non-thesis option will be an agenda item for the April 17, 2020, Full University Curriculum Committee meeting.

Sincerely,

John Maerz, Chair

University Curriculum Committee

cc: Provost S. Jack Hu
Dr. Rahul Shrivastav

**Proposal to Add a Non-Thesis Option to the Master of Landscape Architecture (MLA)
College of Environment and Design**

Submitted to: Ron Walcott, Interim Dean
Graduate School
University of Georgia

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Basic Information

Program: Master of Landscape Architecture (M.L.A.)

Proposed Change: Non-thesis option for students pursuing a non-research, professional track

Start Date: Spring 2021

Program Description

The Master of Landscape Architecture (M.L.A.) program in the College of Environment and Design requests that a non-thesis option be added to the M.L.A. degree to better meet the needs of students pursuing careers in the professional practice of landscape architecture. This non-thesis path would be an optional plan of study within the accredited M.L.A. (accredited by the LAAB - Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board).

The addition of a non-thesis option for the M.L.A. would help satisfy student demand for professional preparation that better aligns with skills required in industry jobs with limited research applications. The program would provide graduates with knowledge that would enable them to be competitive in the job market by providing additional design exploration, guided by relevant theory, in a direct application of contemporary problems in the discipline of landscape architecture.

A design research non-thesis option in the Master of Landscape Architecture would integrate written and graphic studies, with an emphasis on design and graphic communication as the vehicle to explore research and its application to contemporary trends. Similar in other ways to the existing thesis track, design research option in the M.L.A. program should tell a clear story of how concepts were derived from applicable literature and theory, in some combination of written or graphic form, depending on the individual student and exploration. Design research is focused on mastery of existing knowledge more than development of new knowledge and may

be in the form of an application of existing knowledge to a unique site or new situation. Five key elements must be delineated:

1. Identification of the design program and objectives;
2. Definition of the research question;
3. Review of relevant literature and precedent designs, e.g., the identification of seminal readings and other resources, accompanied by a description of their relevance and value in supporting evidence-based design;
4. Articulation of the site-specific design research, whether that is primarily written or graphic, from analysis, to concept idea, to alternatives, to evaluation of those alternatives, to final design;
5. Reflection on the process and outcome of the design research in the form of evaluation, discussion, and conclusion.

To improve the research sequence for both the thesis and non-thesis tracks, coursework has recently been modified from the existing sequence, but is designed to be equivalent for both options. (Note: The M.L.A. has both a first-professional degree track and an accelerated track for students with undergraduate degrees in the disciplines of landscape architecture, architecture, or other closely related design fields. This is determined during the admissions process.)

The multi-semester focus on research is prescribed as follows:

I. Fall Semester LAND 6950, Research Strategies (3 hours):

Research Strategies focusing on methods, identification, and development of the research question, including a CED colloquium (ideally cross-program) featuring faculty research (3 hours);

II. Spring Semester LAND 6911, Independent Project (3 hours):

Proposal Development and research methodology (3 hours guided collectively as a required course); *

III. Fall-Spring Semesters LAND 7200, Non-Thesis Course (3 hours) or LAND 7300, Master's Thesis (3 hours):

Design Research focusing on final execution of the research culminating in public presentation/defense/documentation (6 hours of LAND 7200 guided by a major professor).

*With approval of the graduate coordinator and the major professor, a student may petition to substitute independent research hours with the major professor (LAND 7200 or LAND 7300) for the Proposal Development course. This course is currently taught as an elective under a 6911 number. It will be submitted for approval as a new course with a permanent number. LAND 7200 will also need to be created as a new course.

The only difference between the thesis and non-thesis options is non-thesis students complete LAND 7200, where thesis students complete LAND 7300.

MLA DEGREE (78 credit hrs.)
(3-year path for students with non-design degrees)

Fall 1 st year			Spring 1 st year		
LAND 6010	5 hrs.	Landscape Studio I - Foundations	LAND 6020	5 hrs.	Site Applications
LAND 6210	3 hrs.	Representation and Communication I	LAND 6220	3 hrs.	Representation and Communication II
LAND 6320	3 hrs.	Plant Communities	LAND 6570	3 hrs.	Contemporary Landscape Design Theory
EDES 6550	3 hrs.	History of the Built Environment I: Landscape	LAND 6340	3 hrs.	Landscape Engineering
Fall 2 nd year			Spring 2 nd year		
LAND 6030	5 hrs.	Nature and Sustainability	LAND 6040	5 hrs.	Community and Place
LAND 6310	3 hrs.	Landscape Ecology: Materials and Processes	EDES 7350	3 hrs.	Landscape Management
LAND 6330	3 hrs.	Landscape Construction		6 hrs.	Electives
LAND 6950	3 hrs.	Research Strategies	LAND 6911	3 hrs.	Independent Project (Proposal Development)
Fall 3 rd year			Spring 3 rd year		
LAND 7050	5 hrs.	Landscape Studio - Engagement		3 hrs.	Elective
LAND 6710	2 hrs.	Professional Practice	LAND 7200*/7300	3 hrs.	Non-Thesis/Thesis
	3 hrs.	Elective			
LAND 7200*/7300	3 hrs.	Non-Thesis/Thesis			

*New Course

ACCELERATED DEGREE (52 credit hrs.)
(2-year path for BLA or BARCH graduates)

Fall 1 st year			Spring 1 st year		
LAND 6030	5 hrs.	Nature and Sustainability	LAND 6040	5 hrs.	Community and Place
LAND 6310	3 hrs.	Landscape Ecology: Materials and Processes	LAND 7350	3 hrs.	Landscape Management
LAND 6330	3 hrs.	Landscape Construction	LAND 6340	3 hrs.	Landscape Engineering
LAND 6950	3 hrs.	Research Strategies		3 hrs.	Elective
			LAND 6911	3 hrs.	Independent Project (Proposal Development)
Fall 2 nd year			Spring 2 nd year		
LAND 7050	5 hrs.	Landscape Studio - Engagement		2 hrs.	Elective
LAND 6710	2 hrs.	Professional Practice (or Elective)	LAND 7200/7300	3 hrs.	Non-Thesis/Thesis
	6 hrs.	Electives			
LAND 7200/7300	3 hrs.	Non-Thesis/Thesis			

Faculty Vote

The Graduate Faculty in the Master of Landscape Architecture program voted 10-1 in favor of the non-thesis proposal.

Justification for the Proposed Non-Thesis M.L.A. Option

This non-thesis research design option would enhance career preparation for graduates by providing additional training in the application of theory to design projects. Top tier landscape architecture firms, such as OLIN in Philadelphia, Scape in New York City, NBW in New York/Charlottesville, and West 8 in Rotterdam, are increasingly applying research directly into their design process. Our students aspire to be hired by this tier of firm.

The addition of a non-thesis option would help to make the M.L.A. program competitive with peer institutions in recruiting students. In 2019, a review of 33 peer and aspirational M.L.A. programs revealed that all 33 programs have added a non-thesis option, referring to the terminal requirement by a wide range of titles, including "advanced design studio," "final culminating experience," "project," "professional report," "practicum," and "design research." Nine have discontinued the traditional thesis track entirely.

The non-thesis option would be helpful in recruiting students to the program and potentially increasing our College's graduate enrollment numbers, which have not shown significant growth in over 6 years. Recruiting has become increasingly difficult as the number of M.L.A. programs in the last 10 years have doubled nationally. By offering the non-thesis option, the University of Georgia will be more attractive to both domestic and international students who are looking for a competitive edge by enhancing their portfolios. The emphasis on graphic communication will especially enhance the appeal of the M.L.A. program to ESL international students who have a language barrier in drafting the written thesis.

Admission Procedure for Domestic Applicants

The admission procedure will be the same for thesis and non-thesis option students. Prospective students submit through the Graduate School portal: (1) the Graduate School application and fee; (2) official academic transcripts from all colleges and universities attended; (3) GRE scores; (4) three letters of recommendation; (5) a letter of intent. While all applicants are encouraged to submit a design portfolio, applicants with prior design training or education are required to submit a portfolio. These are submitted directly to the College.

Admission Procedure for International Students

The admission procedure for International applicants is identical to that of domestic students except that TOEFL scores are taken into consideration, and their portfolios may be submitted online.

Impact on Current Students

There will be no adverse effects on current students. The addition of a non-thesis option will provide the opportunity for students to focus on advanced design preparation for practice in landscape architecture by integrating research and design in a way that mimics the integrative research and design work being done by leading practitioners of the profession today. Current students will have the ability to switch to the non-thesis option. Future students will be able to declare their plan of study selection upon admission.

Financial Impacts

No new faculty, facilities, or funds will be needed to implement the non-thesis option for the M.L.A.

Assessment

The current assessment plan for the M.L.A. projects assessment of the thesis to begin in the 2020-2021 assessment cycle. A rubric will be developed to assess the learning outcomes of the non-thesis path. Expected student learning outcomes to be evaluated include proficiency in:

1. Relevant theory of the discipline of landscape architecture;
2. Design processes and procedural theory;
3. Design thinking skills;
4. Communication skills, including digital and/or analogue techniques.

Approvals on File

Proposal: Offer the Existing Master of Landscape Architecture (M.L.A.) with a Non-Thesis Option

College: College of Environment and Design

Department: College of Environment and Design

Proposed Effective Term: Spring 2021

School/College:

- College of Environment and Design Dean Dr. Sonia Hirt, 3/12/20

Graduate School:

- Graduate School Interim Dean Dr. Ron Walcott, 3/19/20