

All M.S. students are required to complete a M.S. final oral exam to obtain the degree. The final exams should be taken on-campus. In special cases, exams can be conducted remotely.

Plan of Study

A Plan of Study must be submitted and approved in GradPath. You can watch videos how to access and complete the form in [Graduate Student Videos](#). All of the coursework on the plan must be completed at the end of the semester you will graduate. Even if you have completed more than the required units, try to put the exact number of required coursework (32 thesis or 35 non-thesis) on your Plan of Study. While only 32 or 35 units will be on your plan, the other courses that you have taken will be on your transcripts. You can make changes to your Plan of Study if needed by clicking “Modify” in GradPath.

Summer or Winter Defenses

M.S. students who plan to defend in the summer or winter semesters must enroll in at least one unit during that specific term. If you are having difficulties finding the appropriate course for that semester, please contact the [Graduate Advisor](#) who can help with enrollment.

For International Students: Applying for Optional Practical Training (OPT)

If you are an international student on an F-1 visa and plan to do an internship or work for a company in the U.S. after graduation, make sure to speak to [International Student Services \(ISS\)](#) to learn how to apply for OPT. Note this can take time to process so do not wait until the end of the semester to talk to ISS!

Selecting Your Faculty Advisor

All M.S. students must select a faculty advisor who will help prepare them for the M.S. final exam. Faculty advisors are usually selected after a student has complete 12-18 units, but can be chosen at any point in the degree. If you are planning to do the master’s report or thesis, make sure to select a faculty advisor in this timeframe to ensure adequate progress on your paper.

The faculty advisor will serve as the chair of your final exam committee. Faculty advisors must:

- Be an OSC affiliated faculty member
- Be tenured, tenure-track, or tenure equivalent
- If an Emeritus, must be in Emeritus status for less than one year

To find an OSC faculty member associated with one of the four optics specialties, you can visit the [Specialties](#) page. Click on the specialty that you most relate and scroll to the bottom of the page to find the list of associated professors. Additional OSC professors can be found in the [Faculty Directory](#). Please note not all of those listed in the faculty directory are tenured, tenure-track, or tenure equivalent. You will want to confirm with the individual that they have one of these appointments.

Once you have determined an advisor that you would like to work with, you will contact that faculty member by email or by visiting their office to make the request. The professor will accept or decline your request. If declined, ask that professor if they can provide you with other suggestions.

You will confirm your faculty advisor by submitting the Faculty Advisor Confirmation form found in [Graduate Student Forms](#). In various GradPath forms, you will be required to input your faculty advisor’s name. Use the name of the advisor that you have agreed to work with in these sections.

You can change your faculty advisor at any time. Make sure to submit a new Faculty Advisor Confirmation form if you do change.

Selecting Your M.S. Exam Committee

You will work with your faculty advisor to determine at least two other faculty members to serve on your M.S. final exam committee. Master's [committee](#) must consist of three members; at least two must be current tenured, tenure-track, or approved tenure-equivalent UA faculty members. If the third member is not a current tenure-track UA faculty member, that person must be approved by the Graduate College as a special member. A member who is not a current tenure-track faculty member will not be eligible to serve as sole chair of the committee but can serve as co-chair if approved to do so by the Graduate College. If you would like to request a special member, email the OSC [Graduate Advisor](#) with the special member's name along with an electronic version of that person's latest CV. The Graduate Advisor will submit the request to the Graduate College.

Once your committee has been selected, you will fill out the Master's/Specialist Committee Appointment Form in GradPath. You will assign your faculty advisor as the *Chair*. If you have two faculty advisors, you will assign the two as *Co-Chair*. The other members of your committee will be assigned as *Member*. Special members will be assigned as *Special Member*.

The Graduate College will charge you a \$35 candidacy fee to your bursar's account after this form is approved. You only have to pay the fee once regardless of term that you graduate.

Scheduling Your M.S. Final Exam

You should refer to the Graduate College's [Important Dates and Deadlines](#) to ensure you will defend by the appropriate date. If you defend or submit your M.S. thesis (if applicable) to the Graduate College after the deadline, you will be considered a graduate of the following semester and will be required to enroll in one unit for that following term.

You are responsible for organizing a date and time for your M.S. final oral exam. Generally, M.S. exams are scheduled for two hour blocks, but can be scheduled for an hour and half if the committee needs. Many students find it useful to use a scheduling tool like [Doodle](#) to find a time that works for the whole committee.

Reserving a Conference Room

The Graduate Advisor can help you reserve a conference room for your M.S. final exam. You can email the [Graduate Advisor](#) with the date and time of your exam, or you can fill out the [M.S. Final Oral Exam Scheduling Form](#). Please try to request a room no later than two weeks before your defense if possible. This ensure that a space will be available for you. The room will be reserved for the two hours for the exam along with a half an hour for setup.

Conference Room Setup

OSC conference rooms are all equipped with white boards, table space for your committee, and a projector. The rooms do not have a computer, so you will need to bring your own. Academic Programs has a laptop for loan if needed. Please make sure to request to borrow it before the exam. The projectors are equipped with a VGA plug. If your computer does not have a VGA input, you will want to bring an adapter with you. Academic Programs does not have an adapter to borrow, but you can check with the [IT Systems Manager](#), to see if there is one for loan. The UA Libraries also have [technology to borrow](#).

Attire

You will want to look presentable while defending to your committee. Dress in business casual attire for your exam. You do not need to wear a full business suit unless you desire.

Providing Snacks for Committee

It is customary to bring a light snack and drink for your committee. Students in the past have brought items like pizza, donuts, cookies, or fruit. You can bring in a beverage like juice, water, or coffee. If you would like Folgers coffee prepared for the exam, please contact the [Graduate Advisor](#).

Exam Grading

The committee will be provided with an exam packet provided by the Graduate Advisor. Once the M.S. final exam is complete, the committee will vote if you pass or fail. Generally, the committee will tell you the defense results at the end of the meeting.

If you pass the M.S. final exam, you will be eligible for graduation. If you fail the exam, you will be allowed a second attempt and should work with your faculty advisor to better prepare and select a new defense date.

ORAL EXAM FORMAT

Technical Writing

The defense will be scheduled for a two hour block, but generally, the exam will last one to one and half hours. The formatting of the exam will be up to you and your advisor. Some students put together a PowerPoint discussing what was learned during the program and present that to the committee. Others do not give a presentation and only answer questions from the committee regarding coursework.

In either case, the committee has a list of the courses that you took during your degree. The committee will ask questions from those classes and you will need to display that you have an understanding of the concepts from those courses.

Master's Report

A Master's Report is a literature review where the student selects a topic in optics, collects data from scholarly papers, and summarizes the collected information into a final paper. The paper does not require the student to conduct their own research and report final results, though some MS Reports will incorporate some work that a student has done.

Papers vary in length depending on content and are usually between 20-60 pages. Formatting should follow the same as the M.S. thesis. These guidelines can be found on the Graduate College's website at: <https://grad.arizona.edu/gsas/dissertations-theses/dissertation-and-thesis-formatting-guides>. You can also reference the [OSC Alumni Directory](#) to view examples past M.S. Reports. A final PDF version will be submitted to the Graduate Advisor for OSC archival. M.S. Reports do not need to be submitted to the Graduate College.

The defense will be scheduled for a two hour block, but generally, the exam will last one to one and half hours. You will send an electronic version of your M.S. Report to your committee prior to the exam for initial review and approval. Hardcopies are not required at the M.S. final exam.

At the exam, you will prepare a 15-30 minute presentation about your paper. Most students create a PowerPoint to accompany it. After the presentation, the committee will ask any follow up questions and may also ask questions regarding the courses you took through your graduate program.

Master's Thesis

A master's thesis is a summary of a research project that the student has conducted during the graduate program. The summary will discuss the research along with the results of the study. Research may be conducted in a UA lab or externally.

Papers vary in length depending on content and are usually between 50-100 pages. Formatting should follow the Graduate College's guidelines, which can be found at: <https://grad.arizona.edu/gsas/dissertations-theses/dissertation-and-thesis-formatting-guides>. You can also reference the [OSC Alumni Directory](#) to view examples past M.S. theses.

The defense will be scheduled for a two hour block, but generally, the exam will last one to one and half hours. You will send an electronic version of your thesis to your committee prior to the exam for initial review and approval. Hardcopies are not required at the M.S. final exam.

At the exam, you will prepare a 15-30 minute presentation about your paper. Most students create a PowerPoint to accompany it. After the presentation, the committee will ask any follow up questions and may also ask questions regarding the courses you took through your graduate program.

Students will need to have the [Thesis Approval Page](#) signed by their advisor and committee before submitting to the Graduate College. It is advised you print this form and bring it with you to the defense.

AFTER PASSING THE EXAM

Technical Writing

Complete the [Student Clearance Form](#). Online students will just need to contact the [IT Manager](#) to remove you from the grad student listserv and to merge your optics email account to another email account.

Complete the [College of Optical Sciences Exit Survey](#).

Complete the [Graduate College Exit Survey](#).

Master's Report

Complete the [Student Clearance Form](#). Online students will just need to contact the [IT Manager](#) to remove you from the grad student listserv and to merge your optics email account to another email account.

Complete the [College of Optical Sciences Exit Survey](#).

Complete the [Graduate College Exit Survey](#).

Email a PDF copy of your final MS Report to the Graduate Advisor.

Thesis

Submit an approved committee draft of the thesis to the [Graduate College](#). The Graduate College will check the thesis's format. Formatting corrections can be completed after the submission deadline as long as the initial committee approved thesis is submitted by the deadline.

Complete the [Student Clearance Form](#). Online students will just need to contact the [IT Manager](#) to remove you from the grad student listserv and to merge your optics email account to another email account.

Complete the [College of Optical Sciences Exit Survey](#).

Complete the [Graduate College Exit Survey](#).

After the Graduate College has approved your thesis, email a PDF of the final draft to the Graduate Advisor.

GRADUATION AND DIPLOMA

Commencement

OSC hosts a graduation ceremony for optics graduates after the fall and spring semester. Summer and winter graduates may also participate in these ceremonies. At the OSC event, you will have the opportunity to have your name called, walk across the stage, and be hooded by your faculty advisor or the dean. An email with commencement details will be sent out toward the end of the semester with more details.

University of Arizona offers a commencement ceremony in the spring for all UA graduates. Information for the event can be found on the [Commencement](#) webpage.

Graduation Attire

Cap, gown and hood can be purchased directly from the [UA Bookstore](#), either in person or online. Stoles of gratitude are optional. OSC will provide a college-specific tassel for your cap when you check in on the day of the commencement ceremony. The most important piece is the regalia hood, where the dean or your faculty advisor will ceremonially put it on you. Since Optical Sciences does not have a designated hood color, students usually select orange (for engineering) or gold (for science).

Diplomas

Diplomas are printed and sent from a third party. They will be mailed to your Permanent Address in UAccess. You have the option to create a Diploma address. To learn more about the diploma process, check the website of the [Office of the Registrar](#).