A Note on the “Thesis Option” for an MS in CS at UCI

One of the paths to getting an MS in Computer Science at UCI is the “thesis option”. Under this option, an MS student will write a research thesis under the supervision of a member of the faculty and present it for approval by a committee of three of members of the Computer Science faculty. This memo is intended to answer a handful of frequently-asked questions about this path to getting an MS in CS – and it also gives some guidelines about the expected timetable for thesis work and the thesis “end game”.

What constitutes an MS thesis?

An MS thesis project may be undertaken by any MS student in lieu of two elective courses. The student will register for two quarters of MS thesis supervision (CS 298) with a faculty advisor and should submit a planned outline of the thesis prior to the start of their final quarter of supervision. Once the thesis outline has been approved by the advisor, the student will file an MS Advancement to Candidacy form with the ICS Graduate Student Affairs office and the UCI Graduate Division. This also needs to take place in the quarter prior to the quarter in which the MS degree is to be conferred.

An MS thesis results from an extended research project that can sometimes lead to one or more publishable papers on the topic explored. While there is no set length for an MS thesis, a range of 40 to 100 pages is typical. The written thesis must be in English and is expected to be of high quality. Non-native English writers will need to allocate ample time for their writing and may even need to consider engaging outside editing assistance in order to ensure a quality thesis as well as a timely graduation.

What does the MS thesis research & writing “end game” look like?

Regular contact with the faculty advisor is highly recommended for all students undertaking a thesis. A full draft of the thesis should be submitted to the faculty advisor no less than four weeks prior to the UCI deadline for thesis submission, and an edited draft, approved by the advisor as being ready for committee circulation, should be submitted to the rest of the committee no less than two weeks prior to the deadline. Students should check with their committee members well in advance to avoid any scheduling conflicts that the committee members may have, and may need to work towards an earlier date in order to finish on time in the event of such conflicts. (Students not adhering to this timeframe should not expect to graduate on time and should make no post-UCI plans based on such expectations.)

It is common, though not required, for students to present their MS research findings in a one-hour presentation scheduled within the last two weeks of the quarter in which the student is to graduate. Please be sure to discuss this with your advisor, to see what the requirements are for his or her research group, well in advance of the deadline for thesis submission and graduation. In addition, be aware that the Graduate Division’s deadline for thesis submission is not the end of the quarter in which the student is to graduate – it is often several weeks earlier than the end of the quarter. Students must be sure to carefully check the academic calendar for their intended graduation quarter and then plan accordingly.