

THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER EXPECTATIONS AND DUTIES

The MS Program in CMM is delighted that you are considering service on a Thesis Committee for one of our students! The thesis represents the capstone training experience for our students and requires faculty input to shepherd students through the process. The information below describes the thesis process for CMM and what is expected from faculty who serve on a thesis committee.

Thesis Format: The thesis in CMM consists of a scholarly and thorough treatment of a novel research project. Laboratory, non-laboratory (literature-based) and hybrid projects are options for students. The student's research project will be agreed upon by the student and the thesis committee (comprised of at least three faculty members, at least one of whom must hold a faculty appointment in CMM). As a guideline, a laboratory-based thesis should be in the format of a publishable manuscript for an appropriate journal, typically with an expanded introduction.

A non-laboratory-based thesis should be in the format of a full-length review article in a major biomedical journal such as *Cell*, *Nature Cell Biology*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, and others, typically between 10,000-20,000 words (not including references). A key component of the literature-based thesis is a model with hypothesis that is justified from the literature. Tests of the hypothesis should be offered, with consideration of the potential outcomes. In other words, the thesis is not only an in-depth review of a field, but it also includes a novel, creative, and scholarly contribution to the field. Students are required to think critically about the field, identify gaps in our understanding, and propose new mechanisms to explain the process under study.

The writing of a graduate thesis is a training process, iterative in nature with substantial back-and-forth with the Thesis Committee. *Students are required to take at least 5 units of "Thesis" (CMM 910) and these may not all be taken in a single term.* Benchmarks have been established for each thesis unit and can be found [here](#).

Committee Duties and Time Commitment: Member of the thesis committee will assist students throughout the thesis process, providing:

- Guidance on topic selection and development. This is especially important for the literature-based thesis, wherein students often require help to define an important, outstanding question in their field of interest. This often involves a one-on-one meeting of the student with each committee member to get input and advice.
- Critique and feedback throughout the writing process. Students are encouraged to seek feedback on their writing for clarity and breadth, among other things. The Thesis Advisor usually provides the bulk of the early feedback on writing; see below.
- Attend committee meetings and thesis defense. In our program, students typically have one committee meeting prior to the thesis defense, though some students may have more.
- Review of the thesis for the defense and final approval of the thesis following the defense, ensuring requested revisions are incorporated in the final document.

Students are required to identify a **Thesis Advisor from among the committee members. This person will be the main point-of-contact for the student, especially during the early stages of writing, providing the initial feedback on early drafts of thesis sections. The time commitment for this faculty member will be more than for the other members of the committee.