



## **Guidance for the Thesis or Equivalent Standard (9-104 and 9-109) By the ABAI Accreditation Board**

### *Thesis or Equivalent*

*(Required for master's degree programs, optional for doctoral degree programs)*

*Contact hours as required by the institution.*

*Purpose:* To develop competence in defining a research problem, designing a method to address the problem, and conducting and reporting an investigation that carries out the method to conclusion.

The following guidance was added to the self-study application form in 2019: The thesis or equivalent must involve a proposal and include evaluative components. A project that is the equivalent of a thesis normally involves a proposal that describes the work to be conducted, the work itself, and a report of the work that describes the rationale, method, outcome, and an evaluation of the outcome.

This summer, the Board evaluated the standard and clarified the requirements and parameters for the thesis or equivalent. The Board approved the guidance below in August. The Board expects to see these thesis/equivalent items in place for at least the last two years of data in the application for accreditation or renewal of accreditation.

### **Guidance**

The thesis or equivalent is a scholarly research project in behavior analysis that must include three parts:

1. A written proposal that describes a research problem, places it within a scholarly framework based on a review of relevant literature, and describes a method for addressing the problem. The method normally involves an experimental approach, but if appropriate to the problem, the method could be a correlational study or a review of the literature. The problem can be basic or applied, as long as it is behavior analytic in nature. A review must be substantial and systematic in addressing a problem to yield new insights. The length, format, and formality of the proposal is at the discretion of the program. The proposal is evaluated by a committee consisting of a supervising faculty member who is a doctoral-level member of the program's core faculty and at least one additional faculty member with relevant expertise. The additional faculty member(s) may be from inside or outside the program. The project must have appropriate approval from an institutional review board, as required for human and animal research, as applicable and determined by institutional requirements.



2. An investigation that carries out the proposed method. During the investigation, if modifications of the method are desirable or necessary, they must be approved by the supervising faculty member.
3. A formal written report of the work that will be understandable to behavior analysts outside the program. Reports of empirical investigations should include an introduction to the problem that reviews the relevant literature and provides a rationale for the investigation, a detailed description of the method, a presentation of results that is sufficient to address the problem, and a discussion of the results that relates them to the problem and the relevant literature. Reports of literature reviews should include an introduction to the problem, a description of the parameters of the literature review, a systematic review and analysis of the relevant literature, and a description of the advancement in addressing the problem that is afforded by the literature review. The report is evaluated by the committee described above. The length and format of the report is at the discretion of the program. The approved report must be retained by the program and submitted, in a readable electronic format, to the Accreditation Board when the program applies for accreditation or renewal of accreditation.

The requirement for a thesis or equivalent is in addition to the course hours used to meet content area requirements. In other words, a program would not be able to use a project completed during another course to fulfill the thesis or equivalent standard if the contact hours from that same course are also being used to meet another coursework standard.

The difference between a thesis and a "thesis equivalent" is nominal. If a master's degree program does not require a thesis, it must require the equivalent of a thesis as described above, even though it may call the project something else. The "equivalent" descriptor is to be taken literally: A "thesis equivalent" must meet the same standards as a thesis.