Guidelines for B.A. Thesis: Environmental and Urban Studies

Thesis-Wide Criteria – Form, Style, and Citation Requirements
1. The full thesis is **40-60 pages** in length, excluding the bibliography (double spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font).
2. The thesis document opens with a **cover page** (example cover page below). The **title** of the thesis appropriately describes the topic of the project and the author’s main contributions.
3. The thesis is **clearly organized** with relevant headings and sub-headings.
4. The author includes **introductions** and **conclusions** within each section, and **transitions** effectively between each section.
5. The author **avoids spelling and syntax errors**, and their writing is easy to comprehend throughout the thesis.
6. The author selects **one voice and tense** (i.e., active/passive, present/past) and applies it consistently in each thesis section.
7. The author **cites all necessary sources**. One **citational format** is applied accurately and consistently in each section (i.e., Chicago or APA). Hyperlinked texts or standalone webpages are not considered full citations.
8. The author includes a **bibliography** with accurate and consistent formatting.

Introduction
1. The introduction describes the author’s **thesis topic** clearly and accessibly. It provides enough background or **contextual information** for a (knowledgeable) first-time reader to understand the project.
2. The introduction articulates the author’s main **research problem or question(s)**. This moves the author beyond a mere statement of the topic at hand, toward the narrower research “gap” that they seek to address.
3. The introduction emphasizes the **stakes or significance** of the research problem. For example, why should the reader care about the project and its implications? What conceptual or practical issues motivate the study? The author may include a compelling anecdote, powerful example, or real-life puzzle to establish this.
4. The introduction clearly states the author’s main **argument or thesis** (a contestable claim that the author will defend in the thesis writ large). The author’s main argument adequately responds to their initial research question(s).
5. The introduction concludes by giving the reader a “**road map**” to the overall paper, briefly explaining the order of the upcoming sections and what each will accomplish.

Background/Context/Literature Review
1. The author includes **introductory** and **concluding/summary paragraphs** in this thesis section.
2. The author engages with **reputable scholarly material** (i.e., current primary or secondary sources written by credentialed authors, published by journals and presses that engage in peer-review processes). Tertiary sources are avoided or used sparingly in the literature review. (However, to be clear, tertiary sources such as news articles or social media content may be relevant sources of data in the thesis writ large.)
3. The author defends why they include and review specific materials or sources, making sure to specify how these sources inform their narrow research question(s). These materials may be theoretical, historical, or contextual, for example.
   a. With regard to contextual information, for example, authors may provide more background on a particular case study or locational site that animates their study.
   b. Authors using case studies also defend 1) why they are using the case study method as opposed to/in addition to other methods, and 2) why they select the particular case(s) that shape their project.
4. The author introduces and follows a clear organizational structure in presenting their literature review or background section. For example, the author may present the information chronologically or thematically. Or, the author may use subheadings to effectively organize the material (i.e., theoretical frameworks, historical overview, etc.)
5. The body of the literature review provides a successful synthesis of their sources, where relevant ideas and texts are put into conversation with one another. Key concepts, ideas, or trends are presented together as a coherent whole, rather than as disjointed fragments. Any relevant comparisons and contrasts are identified by the author in this synthesis.
6. The author not only provides a synthesis of the literature, but analyzes, interprets, or evaluates it where necessary. Put differently, the author provides arguments about the significance, strengths, and/or limitations of prior literature when it is relevant to the overall shape or scope of their project.
   a. This analysis may involve the explanation and defense of a “literature gap” or “research gap” that the author seeks to address in their project.
   b. The author might instead be putting distinct fields in conversation with one another, or expanding/complicating the current scope of a research program.
7. The author is thorough but concise; they include all necessary literature but avoid going into detail about less pertinent topics. For example, the author is careful not to provide detailed information about topics that extend beyond the main research question(s).

Data and Method
1. The author includes introductory and concluding/summary paragraphs in this thesis section.
2. The author provides detailed information to defend why they utilize certain data/evidence to answer their research questions. The author uses plain language and whole sentences to introduce any technical terms proper to their evidence and methods.
3. The author also explains how the data was collected or generated. (The author’s use of data may include, for example, survey data sets, case studies, interviews, census data, GIS layers, etc.)
4. The author specifies and defends which methods or tools they utilize to analyze the data under review. (Examples of relevant methods include statistical analysis, GIS mapping, content analysis and synthesis, etc.)
5. When relevant, the author includes visual elements (such as figures, charts, photos, maps, tables, etc.) to further illustrate data or method. Visual representations of data are properly labeled and explained so that the reader can understand the information that is being presented.
6. The author discusses the relevant limitations to their collection of data and methodological approach. If relevant, they also discuss any problems that they
anticipated in the data collection or analysis process, and the steps taken to minimize these problems from occurring.

7. The author is thorough but concise; they include all necessary detail but avoid irrelevant information about the data or method that shapes the study.

Results and Analysis

1. The author includes introductory and concluding/summary paragraphs in this thesis section.
2. The author clearly articulates their main claims in the body of this thesis section, and grounds their claims in reasons and evidence. The author is sure to defend the significance of their findings.
3. When relevant, the author includes visual elements (such as figures, charts, photos, maps, tables, etc.) to further illustrate their key findings. Visual representations of data are properly labeled and explained so that the reader can understand the information that is being presented.
4. The author discusses the relevant limitations or applications of their results or arguments. For example, the author is careful not to make unsubstantiated generalizations or correlations.
5. The author anticipates reasonable criticisms or questions from the reader about their results and claims. The author acknowledges and responds to these potential criticisms/questions. (This is sometimes described as modeling a “conversation” with the reader.)
6. The author is thorough but concise. Their arguments are well-grounded, but the author does not provide unnecessary or irrelevant evidence in support of their main claims.

Conclusion

1. The conclusion reiterates the main point or argument of the thesis. Rather than simply “summarizing” the main points of the thesis, the author provides key judgements about the project – for example, its significance within the context of a larger body of literature.
2. The conclusion articulates the limits of the study. For example, the author describes how widely their ideas apply; specifies the strengths and weaknesses of their data and method; or considers how well their findings answer their initial research question(s).
3. While being aware of the study’s limitations, the author also considers other potential applications or implications of the project. Such implications may further elevate the importance of the study. The author is careful, however, not to overstate or overpromise the applications of their research.
4. The conclusion identifies where further research is needed to understand different facets of the research problem at hand – or to generalize findings to other contexts or situations.
[Title of Thesis]
By [Author]

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:
BACHELOR OF ARTS
IN ENVIRONMENTAL AND URBAN STUDIES [and additional major, if relevant]
at THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Faculty Advisor: [Name]
Environmental and Urban Studies Preceptor: [Name]
[Additional advisors and preceptors from other departments]

[Date]