MASTER’S DEGREE:
CULMINATING ACTIVITY
PROJECT VERSUS THESIS VERSUS EXAM

Graduate students pursuing a master’s degree through the Interdisciplinary Studies Program have three options for a culminating activity: a project, a thesis or a comprehensive examination. The examination is an easily understood proposition – it is a test which covers material from all the areas of study that have comprised the student’s graduate degree. However, many students are confused about the difference between a project and a thesis. This sheet is meant to define the differences between those options so the graduate student can make an appropriate choice.

Interdisciplinary Studies Program - Master’s Degree Project (INTDIS 591)
The Master’s Degree Project is experientially based and is an alternative to the more traditional, research based Master’s Degree Thesis. The Boise State University Graduate Catalog course description provides an effective and succinct explanation:

Students are expected to draw critically upon the two or more disciplines studied and to integrate disciplinary insights. Before beginning the Project, a prospectus must be approved by the student’s graduate committee. After its completion, the Project must be defended at an oral examination scheduled by the graduate advisor.

Interdisciplinary Studies Program - Master’s Degree Thesis (INTDIS 593)
A project differs from a Thesis in that the Thesis is considered a scholarly work. The Boise State University Graduate Catalog course description makes the distinction clear:

A Thesis must reflect scholarly integration of the two or more disciplines studied and demonstrate original research or new and logical interpretation of existing data. Before beginning the Thesis, a prospectus must be approved by the student’s graduate committee. After its completion, the Thesis must be defended at an oral examination scheduled by the graduate advisor.

Very soon after being admitted to the IDS Program, the graduate student should decide which culminating activity suits him or her. If the choice is a project or a thesis, the student should consult with his or her graduate committee as early as possible about a topic, a research strategy and tactics. The Graduate College has developed an instructional guide for use in conjunction with Projects and Theses. The guide, Standards for Preparation of Theses and Projects in the Graduate College, is available in the BSU Bookstore and is a necessity for properly preparing the final, printed version of the piece.
Before enrolling in thesis or project courses (INTDIS 591 or 593), the student must submit a proposal that is reviewed and approved by the student’s advisory committee. The approved proposal must be filed with the IDS office.

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