



US Fencing Coaches Association

Submission of a Master's Thesis to the USFCA

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General Information

The Master's Thesis is an academic paper required of every candidate for the certification level of Master. This thesis paper demonstrates that the candidate has a sound knowledge of fencing, presents the results of research into a topic, and adds to the body of knowledge for the coaching community.

A thesis paper may propose to solve a problem, challenge existing ideas, discuss or interpret existing literature or provide other information valuable to the coaching community. The exact content and nature of the thesis should be determined with the input of the CAB.

A candidate should expect that a thesis paper should be approximately twenty five pages in length, plus bibliography, footnotes, and other appropriate references or appendixes.

A thesis paper and video presentation is now permitted. The paper and video can compliment, explain and expand on the concepts behind what is presented in either format.

An alternative to the thesis is available (especially for ESL coaches) to obtain a USFCA Master Certification. The alternative to the thesis may involve, but not limited to, answering a series of Research Questions relative to fencing that will require research and analysis. Questions may relate to pedagogy, fitness, business acumen or others as deemed appropriate by the CAB.

Thesis Topics for Submission

The possible topics for a Fencing Master's thesis paper are myriad. Fencing has distinct physical requirements, in addition to the general requirement for intense athletic endeavors; it has sport and general psychological aspects; it has unique technical and the tactical requirements; it is accessible to a variety of athletes; and fencing has a long and distinct history.

The topic is acceptable as long as it contributes to the body of knowledge of the fencing coaching community. Following are a few examples of acceptable and unacceptable thesis topics.

- Thesis papers containing a 'lesson plan' for classes (or the many variations on this theme) are not contributing to the knowledge - group teaching is now the accepted standard for beginner instruction. However, a thesis would be valid if it addressed instruction methods for a unique population for whom no conventional plans already exist.
- Discussing different exercises for developing fencers is very conventional and is an unacceptable topic. However, comparing specialized exercises used in fencing and generalized ones used in other activities and their relative effectiveness in developing various physical capacities might be an acceptable topic.
- A historically oriented thesis topic should include discussion of how the historical techniques/issues relate to modern fencing, and what a coach can gain from the historical technique or perspective.



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Possible thesis topics:

Ethics and rules that affect behavior between coaches, students and parents. Ethics control how coaches associate with other coaches, what is expected, what is done in the case of ethics violations.

Detailed information on developing a successful Veteran's or Youth fencing program.

How can we keep our top athletes fencing after college?

Is the NCAA fencing college program good or bad for fencing in the US? Why? What is the impact of having a good college fencing program in your town?

Administration, coach, fencer and parent perceptions and concepts of what they want to see in fencing.

Data, facts about private fencing clubs and programs.

How can we take the USFCA to the next level? Keep membership, increase exposure, respect and finances. What do coaches expect from the USFCA?

Information about and from Masters that have had a positive impact on US fencing. Lessons we can learn from them, advice for other coaches, including interviews of top older Olympian and world class coaches.

How US Fencing is advancing to the next level with more Olympic and World medals.

How to introduce fencing to public school systems. Why school programs are very successful in certain areas, why the areas support fencing, how can we spread fencing to other areas cross the USA.

Summary of the Thesis Submission and Approval Process

- The candidate applies to the CAB for a topic or submits one.
- The CAB recommends that all candidates work with their choice of advisor.
- The thesis topic is discussed and approved.
- The candidate writes the first draft and submits it to the CAB thesis committee (combination of 2-3 members of the CAB or other experts in the related field of the thesis).
- The committee provides feedback for the candidate.
- If requested the candidate changes the thesis according to the committee's suggestions. The changes are done when possible and reasonable and the thesis is resubmitted for approval.
- The candidate submits the final draft to the committee.
- Once approved, the thesis is published and placed on USFCA web site.
- The candidate begins the process for the practical exam.



Details of the Process and Logistics

- An applicant pays \$100 online for the CAB review and approval process.
- The applicant then contacts the CAB chair describing or sending an outline of the intent and the subject matter covered in the thesis. The candidate may select anyone to use as an advisor (mentor). The applicant does not have to have an advisor and the CAB will not be involved in selecting or paying an advisor.
- The CAB chair reviews the subject matter to see if it could be considered a valid subject for a Masters thesis. It should be some form of academic level "paper" that involves either empirical research or a study of literature, or other form of investigation that adds to the volume of knowledge in our sport. Description of just how the candidate teaches or a discussion about how something should be done is not acceptable. It is also not a personal opinion paper or a soap box to preach a philosophy of fencing.
- After approving the subject matter, the CAB chair tries to find a Master or expert in the topic who may have knowledge or an interest in this area. The CAB chair will use that expert on the review committee to work together with other reviewers.
- The applicant has one year from the date of their application and online payment to the Treasurer to submit their thesis. They may apply to the CAB chair for a one year extension for unusual circumstances. After the deadline is reached they must apply again and pay their \$100 fee.
- Upon completion of the thesis paper contact the CAB chair.
- Then the chair asks the selected review panel of 2-3 people (at least one is to be a Master) to review and either:
 - a: accept the thesis
 - b: send back to applicant with suggestions before approval
 - c: reject the thesis

The decision would hopefully be a consensus but a majority vote would be the final decision. They would have 30 days to complete their work.

- CAB chair will contact the panel for a decision. If there is still no decision, responsibility for the decision will then fall to the CAB chair.
- If rejected each panel member will personally be required to write a signed document, indicating clearly why it was rejected by them and what, if anything, could be done to make the thesis paper acceptable. The documents will be given to the CAB chair and forwarded to the applicant. All suggestions will be given the applicant in writing.
- The applicant will then have an additional 90 days to make any changes and to resubmit to the CAB chair.
- Following the resubmission, the panel has an additional 30 days in which to review the thesis paper and render a decision on it.
- If the thesis is approved the 2-3 review panel members will state so in writing to the CAB chair with any comments they may wish to add.
- All the documents described above should be submitted by email.
- When notified that a thesis has been approved the chair will notify the applicant and the CAB secretary within 7 days. The thesis will be posted on the USFCA website and an announcement will be published in the Point-in Line newsletter.



Format of the Thesis Paper

The structure and format of the work must be appropriate. An example of a basic structure is:

- Statement of problem – This section describes the subject of the thesis (generally it will address some problem), the purpose of the thesis paper, and the reason the thesis is being studied or reviewed.
- Methodology – This section describes how the problem will be addressed.
- Review of literature – This section describes other written material on this problem or related subjects that pertain to the problem.
- Body of subject material - This section is the main part of the work, describing what was studied, how it was done and the outcome of the study. Any and all assertions must be supported either by the work being done or by references to related works and properly footnoted (part of the statement of problem should address the assertions that are made).
- Conclusion – This section summarizes the work on the problem and any assertions made in the thesis paper, why it is important, and any suggestions for future work.

All quotes should, of course, be properly footnoted. The paper must include a bibliography according to standard academic notation, chapter structure etc. The paper must follow academic guidelines and styles for thesis papers, for which there are many sources.