

# Theses vs. Capstone Reports

Observations from GWC and TPO, across NPS Programs - Updated March 2020

## Similarities

- Systematic research (have a plan, follow it)
- Demonstrates mastery of a field of study
- Requires academic tone and writing quality
- Has introduction and conclusion, significance, research question, methods, background, data, citations

### Theses

### Differences

### Capstone Reports

Theses often do not have a sponsoring agency providing a question or topic.

Frequently test a theory to refine understanding about the case(s) and theory itself.

Engage theory in scholarly literature, looking for gaps to fill with new knowledge that can be gained from the study.

Methodological rigor is important and field-specific.

The document should explain case selection.

Policy recommendations are less important than what the results mean for refining theory.

Results are focused on: "What did we learn?"

The findings are generalizable in that the expectation is to apply results to other similar cases.

Often the topic is provided by sponsor or the research is an effort to answer a question for a sponsoring agency.

May solve a specific problem to help a specific organization perform better.

Theory in literature is of secondary importance; literature may inform definitions, models used, and variables examined.

Methodology can be adapted to a specific case and may not be as defined by the field or be as rigorously followed.

Case may be chosen by sponsor; student should explain significance of problem and why the case is relevant to it.

Likely to have policy recommendations that help solve specific problem; there may be few or no theoretical implications.

Results are focused on: "How can we fix the problem?"

The findings are *less* generalizable, and may only be applicable to the case studied.