Advanced Masters Programs

M.A. Thesis Handbook

College of Education

DePaul University 2011-2012
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Introduction

The master's thesis can be considered the capstone experience in each student's progress toward a Master of Arts Degree in Education. It provides the culminating experience for students and allows each individual to meaningfully and personally explore the relationship between theory, educational practice (broadly defined) and educational inquiry. In many ways, this should be seen not as an end but as a synthesis and continuation of one's scholarly studies and professional development. It is also important to recognize that this means a continuation and redefinition of one's relationship with the faculty in the College of Education. In this sense, working together with the faculty who compose one's thesis committee should be seen as a process that leads to a work in which students actively participate in making sense of their world. And while this work, one's thesis, is central to the completion of the Master of Arts in Education, it is the process of collaborating and working closely with faculty that represents the dynamic and reflective nature of the thesis project. This process provides the opportunity for both students and faculty to engage in critical inquiry surrounding shared interests in educational phenomena, issues, questions, and/or problems. Hopefully, this will provide the basis for an ongoing examination of educational issues.

This handbook will explain the purpose of the master's thesis and outline the procedures you will need to follow to successfully satisfy the requirements.

Purposes of the Thesis

The general purposes of the master's thesis are to demonstrate an ability to engage in research, critically analyze and explicate, in a well documented, organized and coherent manner, an (educational) issue, problem(s) or question(s); to demonstrate knowledge in a substantive area in the field; and to prepare to conduct further independent research. More specifically, the master's thesis is an exercise in problem-posing research.

Problem-posing research is more than the posing of a problem. It is also the process of learning how to question the taken-for-granted assumptions, ideas and beliefs that inform various educational research methodologies, theories, practices and policies. Problem-posing research requires that you open up for examination and debate the nature of the choices made regarding education, the ends to which they are to be directed, and the means by which they are to be achieved and the interests served. The primary purpose of the master's thesis should therefore be to reflect upon the tentative and problematic nature of educational theory, practice, policy and research.
Approaches to Thesis

Various approaches, research methodological perspectives, or ways of looking at an educational issue, problem or question are appropriate for the master's thesis. Approaches to the thesis can either be theoretical/synthesis, theoretical/applied, qualitative (narrative analysis, discourse analysis, ethnographic), quantitative, or an appropriate combination.

The role of theory in a theoretical/synthesis or theoretical/applied approach should help you to problem-poser questions you wish to ask regarding education and to identify ways of interpreting educational problem(s) or issue(s) and the specific and broader implications of various interpretations for educational research, practice, policy and theory. Theory should also help you to problem-poser questions and conduct inquiry regarding the nature of the knowledge produced by your research methodology or methodologies (statistically analysis, historical narrative analysis, discourse analysis, ethnography, critical ethnography, etc.) and by other educational studies that investigate similar themes or topics, identifying the appropriateness, limitations and possibilities for your study.

The thesis discussion should be extended to include philosophical, psychological, historical, cultural/anthropological, sociological, political and/or thematic perspectives regarding specific topics or themes in, for example, curriculum, pedagogy, human development, child development, psychosocial development, learning, organizational theory, administration, counseling or systems theory. The types of investigations that form the basis for the thesis might take a variety of shapes. For example:

(A) Theoretical/synthesis theses: This type of investigation should include a theoretical analysis and synthesis, that is, a review of the literature that inquires into the beliefs, assumptions, and ideas that inform a specific theoretical framework, or multiple theoretical frameworks and critiques of those theoretical framework(s) that influence how one looks at educational issues, problems or questions, whether in the context of schooling or education defined more broadly.

(B) Theoretical/application theses: The investigation should include a theoretical analysis and review of the literature that inquires into the beliefs, assumptions, and ideas that inform a specific educational practice, and a critique of what practice that brings to bear on a particular educational issue, problem or question related to the application of that practice, whether in the context of schooling or education defined more broadly.
Format

In this section, you will find specific guidelines for the organization and presentation of your master’s thesis. It should be emphasized that the guidelines for the organization of your chapters are suggestive, not restrictive. However, you will be expected to write the masters’ thesis in an approved style with appropriate citations and references. Discuss these matters with the faculty member who is directing your master’s thesis before you begin. Also, keep in mind that the actual number and organization of chapters or sections may be different from the example that follows.

Organization and Structure

What follows is a sample of the manner in which your thesis may be organized. It is not the only way that a thesis may be organized and presented and the inclusion of the following structural outline should not be considered to be the definitive organizational paradigm.

Chapter I. Introduction
a) Statement of your study’s purpose, rationale, significance, and background;
b) Identification and definition of key concepts related to your specific topic or theme;
c) Limitation(s) of your study;
d) Nature and order of presentation.

Chapter II. Review of Existing Literature
a) Summary of different points of view on the specific topic or theme found in books, periodicals, and articles; and historical development of ideas(s) and problem(s) under study;
b) Critical analysis of these views, indicating strengths and weaknesses of previous research and scholarship;
c) General conclusion(s) about recent advances in the specific topic or theme at the time of your literature review;
d) Rationale for current study—an explanation of the contribution this research could make to the topical area.

Chapter III. Conceptual Framework and Methodology
a) Statement of your educational research issue(s), problem(s) or question(s);
b) Discussion of research methodology used;
c) Discussion of the relationship between the issue(s), problem(s), and the purpose(s) of your study;
d) Discussion of the sources, means and appropriateness of obtaining certain information, material, or data (data is broadly defined as observation, narratives, text, existing data sets, etc.);

e) Special emphasis should be placed upon the limitations and conclusions generated by the methodology used.

**Chapter IV. Analysis of the Information, Material Data**

a) Analysis of the issue(s), problem(s) and question(s), using the information, material, or data collected. At the end of each chapter in this part of the thesis, it might be useful to develop emergent conclusions concerning the problems, issues and questions analyzed in the chapter;

b) A brief summary/synthesis should be given at the end of each chapter or section.

**Chapter V. General Conclusions**

a) Restatement of your study’s purpose;

b) Conclusions with respect to the issues, problems and questions raised in your study;

c) Conclusions with respect to stated purpose of the study;

d) Discussion of possible implication(s) of the study for educational theory, practice and/or policy;

e) Suggested areas for further research and study.

**Thesis Presentation**

In preparing your thesis, there are some considerations that you have regarding style and presentation. Below are some suggestions that should be considered in preparing your thesis. If you wish to employ a style of presentation that is different than the one presented below, please consult with your thesis chair.

**Style**

A master’s thesis may be written in any acceptable style approved by the chair of the thesis committee. Examples of acceptable styles include:

- APA
- MLA
- Chicago Style
References

While there is no prescribed number of references, it is expected that the selection of reference materials be appropriate to the methodology and scope of the issues, questions and/or problems under examination. As a working number of sources, one should aim towards a minimum of 50. When possible, a range of sources should be included – books, articles, chapters, interviews, data sets, etc. – and documented in full citation in the references.

Figures and Tables

In your master’s thesis, it is suggested that figures, tables, and footnotes be incorporated appropriately within the text. Short tables and figures and other inserts (e.g. photographs) may appear on a page with some text. Each long table, long figure or other long insert is placed on a separate page immediately after the page on which the table or figure is first mentioned.

Typeface and Font Size

The typeface or font must be sufficient in size and clarity to facilitate the reading of the thesis. To this end, you should use a 12 point type in a font that is clear and legible. Do not use compressed typeface or any other setting that would decrease the spacing between words or letters that would result in reduced legibility. The type on the paper must be dark, clear, and easy to copy and read. Exotic fonts such as calligrapher are not to be used.

Paper, Corrections, and Margins

It is important that the final copy of the master’s thesis be produced on paper of sufficient weight to provide durable copies for the library, for the College of Education and for any others who may request a copy. Onion skin or erasable papers will not provide sufficient durability for handling by future readers. It is suggested that, as a minimum, 20 pound weight be used. Each copy should be printed on one side of 8 ½ by 11 inch paper. Do not use half pages or pages onto which text or tables are glued.

The final copy, to be submitted for binding, must have a left margin of 1 ½ inches to facilitate binding.

Length

There is a suggested but not mandatory minimum of 60 pages.
Title Page

The title page should include the title of the thesis, your name, the expression “presented to the faculty in partial completion of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree”, the school and institution name (College of Education, DePaul University), and the month and year of the thesis. A sample title page can be found in the appendix to this handbook.

Abstract

With the final copy of your thesis, you are required to include an abstract of no more than 125 words. The abstract should reflect the purpose of your work and must be precise and specific. You should include the purpose of the study and (some of) the most important of the findings and/or conclusion(s). A sample abstract can be found in the appendix to this handbook.

Procedures

This section details the steps that you will need to follow in the process of completing your master’s thesis. If you have any questions after carefully reading this section, please consult with the chair of your thesis committee.

Identify Area of Interest

The first step in the process of preparing for a master’s thesis is the identification of an area of interest for inquiry and research. Defining a question, questions, a problem or a set of problems should evolve out of the natural course of your graduate study. You are encouraged to consider issues of interest that arise in your ongoing academic work, through papers that you have done for a class, and the range of experiences that you may have in schools or other educational settings in the broader community. It is recommended that you begin to identify your interest(s) towards the end of your first year in graduate school. This should provide ample time during your second year to refine your question(s), engage in the research inquiry, and work in well planned and collaborative manner with your thesis chair and other thesis committee members.
Select a Faculty Member to Serve as Chair of Your Committee

Once you have decided that you would like to do a master’s thesis and have an idea of the issue(s) that you would like to investigate, contact a faculty member to discuss your interests. Before choosing a thesis chair, you should feel free to explore your interests with faculty members with whom you have had classes or to approach others whose area of expertise may be relevant to your proposed research inquiry. Your thesis chair is the person with whom you will spend the most time consulting in the formation and investigation of your research question and in developing your thesis.

Registration

When you and your thesis chair have reached an agreement about advisement, have agreed upon a topic for investigation, and the style and process of your work together, you should register for the Thesis Research Course. Obtain a copy of the Thesis Course Request Form (available on-line at http://education.dePaul.edu/_Downloads/forms/M.A._Thesis_Course_R.pdf and in the appendix to this handbook). This form must be signed by your thesis chair person. Upon completion of the form, please return it to the Department Administrative Assistant so that you can be registered for the thesis course.

Prospectus

To clarify the focus of your research inquiry and to engage potential thesis committee members, you must write a 2-3 page prospectus. This is a brief statement of your research question, including some discussion of the issues that you would like to explore, rationale and significance of your question, and possible methodologies for inquiry. The prospectus is not an exhaustive document, but it is a first step in presenting your ideas in written form which should follow considerable reading and discussion with your thesis chair. As a cogent statement of your intended work, you may use it to engage other faculty members as possible thesis committee members. It will provide an opportunity for them to become familiar with your question of inquiry, give you initial feedback on your ideas, and determine their interest in serving on your committee. As an exploratory document, you should expect the ideas in your prospectus to change as you continue to read, have discussions with and receive feedback from your thesis chair and other faculty who may or may not be members of your thesis committee and as you refine your own ideas about the goals, purpose, and focus of your research proposal.
Formation of Committee

A thesis committee is composed of three members: your thesis chair and two other individuals. The committee should have at least one full-time faculty member of the College of Education. The two other members could be from the College of Education (but do not necessarily need to be), other faculty from the University, faculty from other universities, or, perhaps, from different non-university settings (such as Glenview) who may be able to add to the thesis process. All members of the committee must have at least a master’s degree. If there is only one person from the College of Education serving on your committee, s/he should be the chair of the committee. It is recommended that at least one member of the committee be from the student’s home department.

After you have shared your prospectus, you will need to reach agreement with two other people to serve on your committee. It is recommended that you have an initial meeting with your committee after members have agreed to serve. This will provide an opportunity to share ideas about your prospectus to facilitate the development of your thesis proposal, and will be a first step in the formation of working thesis committee.

Develop Proposal

The next step in the process is the development of a thesis proposal. The proposal is a clearly developed paper which has three distinct sections: 1) Introduction – statement of your study’s purpose, rationale, and significance; 2) a brief literature review that suggests some of the themes, issues, or topics that may be mentioned in the expanded Review of Literature that is Chapter 2 of your completed thesis; 3) Conceptual Framework and Methodology – a brief summary statement of research question(s) and rationale for proposed methodology of inquiry. These three sections are analogous to, but not as comprehensive as, the first three chapters of your completed thesis.

The proposal should be based on considerable reading, discussions with faculty, and some preliminary inquiry. Drafts of your proposal should be shared with committee members as you work, for ongoing input and discussion. Individual consultation and periodic committee meetings could facilitate this process in preparing for the proposal review. As a guide, consider that a viable proposal, framing your research with significant development of the literature review and methodology, will be between 10-15 pages.

There is a substantial guide to research with human subjects. All students must follow that guide, which is available on the DePaul website: http://research.depaul.edu/IRB/IRB%20Home.html. As you begin to plan your thesis research, please keep in mind the need to comply with University regulations regarding Research Participants on Human Subjects. The University must approve any research involving people before any data
can be gathered. The procedure for securing University approval begins with submission of a proposal and forms to the Local Review Board (LRB) of the College of Education. Research proposals and relevant attachments should be directed to their attention so that the College of Education may review them and refer to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for University approval.

When submitting the proposal, the student must choose among the following options for review: exempt, expedited, full review for subjects at risk. Students are responsible for following the Rules and Regulation for Research with Human Subjects as they appear on the DePaul webpage. These are updated from time-to-time in compliance with federal regulations.

The proposal submitted to the Local Review Board (LRB) must be approved by the thesis committee prior to submission to the LRB. Students are encouraged to incorporate the required processes and procedures at the outset of the development of a thesis process.

The LRB/IRB process takes at least 4 to 10 weeks, depending on when the proposal is submitted. No data can be gathered until approval for the research is granted by the IRB.

Students must secure research participant approval from school districts or other sites selected for their research and allow time for the process.

The thesis proposal is the basis upon which your inquiry will be conducted, and must be approved by the thesis committee and LRB/IRB (where appropriate) prior to conducting your study.

Proposal Review

Following the completion of your proposal, you should confer with your thesis chair to schedule a formal meeting with your thesis committee to approve the proposal that you have developed.

In this stage, the committee will deliberate and may make one of the four following determinations: 1) acceptance of the proposal essentially as is; 2) acceptance of the proposal with minor changes in conceptualization and/or methodology of the study; 3) recommendation of acceptance pending major revisions; or 4) non acceptance. Optimally, this meeting should be a collaborative discussion of your work, including suggestions for refinement. In order to proceed with the implementation of your research, you must have the Approval of Thesis Proposal Form (a copy of this form is available in the appendix of this handbook) completed with signatures from each of the committee members. This form documents your thesis approval and any required changes to the proposal. You may not distribute surveys, questionnaires, etc., without the explicit approval of your committee and the LRB/IRB (where appropriate). Once the form is signed and dated by all committee members, please return it to the Department secretary to be included in your student file.
Research Inquiry

The formation of a question or questions for inquiry is a crucial initial step in the process of doing a master’s thesis. As the foundation upon which your ongoing reading and research will be conducted, it should follow some reading and careful discussion with your chair as well as the other committee members. During this stage, you are actively engaged in the process of investigating the question(s) posed in your proposal through data collection or other forms of inquiry. As is the case in any dynamic process of investigation, you may encounter unanticipated information or obstacles as you work. It is important that you discuss pivotal issues and concerns as they arise with your committee to determine how this may reframe your initial question or lead to adjustments in your methodology.

Drafts of Master’s Thesis

Following the data collection, inquiry, and analysis, you will develop drafts of your master’s thesis. The thesis contains approximately five (5) chapters or sections, of which three are an expansion of the three sections of your proposal, and the remaining (two) chapters or sections should include the analysis of the material and conclusions/implications of the research. Drafts of each chapter or section should be developed in close conjunction with your thesis chair as well as the other committee members, optimally on a periodic basis. In addition, throughout this process prior to your oral examination, it is suggested that you should meet with the other members of your committee for discussion and input.

Preparation for Oral Review

In preparing for the oral review with your committee, you should confer with your thesis chair and the other committee members to plan a date for the oral discussion. At least 10 days prior to the date of the meeting to be devoted to the discussion of your thesis, you are required to submit three (3) copies of the completed thesis and three (3) copies of a one page abstract to your thesis committee in preparation for the review.

Final Oral Review

The purpose of the oral review is for you to discuss and defend your research inquiry, conclusions, significance, and implications for future work. You should bring the original copy of your thesis and any supporting information that is necessary for you to make a summary presentation of your work to the review. During the review, committee members will raise questions
and inquire about relevant literature, conceptualizations and methodology, and conclusions from your research. If you have maintained regular contact with your committee throughout the entire thesis process, the oral review will be an additional opportunity to engage in further dialogue about your research, what you have learned form the process and issues regarding future study.

The oral review will be held for a minimum of 45 minutes with the student. The committee will then convene privately to determine the outcome of the theses and oral review: 1) acceptance of your thesis; 2) conditions for acceptance (e.g. recommended changes in the thesis); or 3) rejection of the thesis.

Once your thesis is approved, your chair and the other committee members must complete the Thesis Report Form and the Report on the Final Oral Examination (copies of these forms are available in the appendix to this handbook). The Thesis Report Form will be marked as either “Acceptable – Student may proceed to make _____ copies” or “Not Acceptable” and a reason must be provided.

The Report on the Final Oral Examination must also be completed and signed by all committee members, with the Pass/Fail status recorded. Oral Reviews may be deemed “Average Achievement”, “Above Average Achievement”, “With Distinction”, or “Failure”. If distinction is recommended, the committee chair must then submit the thesis to the designated faculty committee, whose role is to review theses recommended for distinction and make determinations regarding those to be so accorded.

Both of these forms should be turned in to the Department Administrative Assistant to be included in your student file.

**Deadline for Submission of Theses for Distinction**

Thesis committee chairs must submit outstanding theses to the designated committee by April 30 (this date is subject to change) for consideration for distinction. In order to graduate with distinction, one must have a cumulative GPA of 3.75 or higher and a thesis awarded distinction by the Thesis Review Committee. (See Criteria for distinction, discussed below.)

**Submission of Paper**

One PDF copy of the completed thesis, with revisions, must be submitted to the appropriate Department Administrative Assistant for electronic submission to the University, and submission for binding. The student must also submit the completed Abstract and Keyword, and Author Submission Agreement forms for electronic submission; and the binding request form for the bindery. One bound copy of the final thesis is required for submissions to the College of Education. It is also recommended that students have a copy bound for their Thesis Chair. Additional bound copies may be purchased for the student’s personal use.
Timeline for Completion

The completion of a thesis from conceptualization to completed document reasonably takes a year but is subject to variation based on topic, program, and the directions provided by your chair and/or committee.

Failing Grade

If your thesis is deemed unacceptable and you receive a “no pass” grade, you may make changes in your present research and thesis as recommended by the committee, or begin on a completely new topic with another committee. In the latter instance, the process begins again with the constitution of a new committee, the development of another prospectus, proposal, plan of action, etc. It is not acceptable to form a new committee and submit work that had not been passed by the previous committee.

Criteria for Passing

Quality of writing, organization, style, development of ideas, etc.
- Logical organization
- Coherent discussion of issues and ideas
- Careful description of problem(s), issue(s), or question(s), including research methodologies, and research epistemology used
- Appropriate style
- Readability of charts, graphs and illustrations, clarity of photographs.

Significance of theses problem(s), issue(s), or question(s)
- Problem(s), issue(s), or question(s) of current/ongoing concern to the field
- Potential of study to add new insights

Quality of analysis
- Thoughtful analysis of problem(s), issue(s) and question(s) in relation to the information, material, and data collected
- Considers limitations and generalizability of the study

Quality of conclusions and/or findings
- Connects theory and practice
- Poses questions for further inquiry
Criteria for Distinction

Coherency, creativity, and originality
- Outstanding articulation of the theses problem(s), issue(s) or question(s) and the rationale for why the problem(s), issue(s) or question(s) is/are worth studying

Comprehensive presentation of existing literature
- A review of the literature that coherently and creatively articulates both: a) the historical development of the problem(s), issue(s) or question(s) under study; and b) contending strands, schools of thought and perspectives that bear on the topic
- Treatment of literature review goes beyond a mere summary and critically assesses the limitations and possibilities of the previous literature in relation to the study

Coherency in presentation of the methodology
- Describes and provides rationale for the appropriateness—the possibilities and limitations—of the research methodology or methodologies, and research epistemology or epistemologies used in developing the conceptual framework(s) of the study

Conclusion(s)
- Critically addresses the generalizability and applicability of the study and its contribution to extending the bounds of previous research in terms of originality of insight

Interplay of the thesis to other work
- Coherently describes the interplay of the study's definition of problem(s), issue(s) and question(s) and the implications for the collecting, evaluating and analyzing of information, material and data

Potential publishability
- Thesis has extraordinary high quality, unusual thoroughness, comprehensiveness, cogency and creativity of arguments, treatment, and analysis of problem(s), issue(s) or question(s)
- Exceptional writing
- Clarity and cogency of organization
- Comprehensive development and examination of issues and ideas
- Virtual absence of serious grammatical, syntactical, and spelling errors
Appendix

Checklist for Completion of Thesis

✓ Select faculty thesis chair and discuss topic/question.
✓ Register for thesis course.
✓ Develop a prospectus that is shared and discussed with the chair as well as other potential committee members as a point of departure for framing the thesis project.
✓ In consultation with the chair of your thesis committee, select two additional committee members to form thesis committee.
✓ Write thesis proposal. Meet with committee to discuss and approve proposal or changes necessary for approval. Secure approval of the LRB/IRB, if appropriate.
✓ Upon approval of the thesis proposal, the form is signed by all committee members and submitted to Department Secretary to be included in your student file.
✓ Begin writing chapters with guidance from thesis chair and other committee members.
✓ Ongoing meetings and consultation with committee to discuss working draft(s) of thesis chapters or sections. Meetings should occur at least two times before oral examination.
✓ Select date and location of oral examination and confirm with your committee.
✓ Confer with the chair to confirm readiness for final oral review.
✓ Submit final draft of the thesis to committee at least 10 days prior to final oral review.
✓ Should the committee suggest changes in thesis, make these changes as soon as possible.
✓ Submit three copies of approved thesis to College of Education Office Assistant (SAC 302). There is a $75 fee for thesis processing, in addition to a $10 per copy binding fee.
Resources

Listed below are the titles of some books that may be beneficial to you as you progress through the different stages of writing your thesis. The list is not exhaustive and your committee may be able to suggest additional references.


A CASE STUDY OF INTERGENERATIONAL LIVING

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Graduate Division of
Human Services and Counseling
College of Education
DePaul University
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

Suzette O. Student

January, 2005

DePaul University
Chicago, IL
Abstract

A Case Study of Intergenerational Living

Suzette O. Student

This study examined twelve individuals living in an adult-adult intergenerational living setting. The purpose of this study was to determine the benefits of intergenerational living for seniors and young adults. There were six senior participants and six younger adults. This study compared the similarities and differences between the seniors and the young adults in two intergenerational houses. It was apparent through this research that intergenerational living provides a reduction in caregiver burden, decreased loneliness for the senior, and, from the mixing of generations, learning for both the seniors and for the young adults. For the younger adults, there was a sense of family and a sense of purpose. There is a need for further evaluation of intergenerational living, but from this research, intergenerational living seems to be working and should be continued.
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