

## Getting Going on the Thesis or Project

### Thesis and Project Guidelines and Procedures for the College of Education

#### GETTING STARTED

1. The project or thesis option should be introduced as early as possible in order to encourage students to consider this type of culminating experience well in advance of an anticipated start date. Both the project and thesis share the following characteristics:

- They are an original work
- Research-based
- Often lengthens the student's program
- Student enrolls for two semesters in 698, totaling six units
- Takes minimum of 15 months (more likely 18 months) from inception of the research idea to filing the document
- Thinking about and constructing the thesis/project begins long before the student enrolls in 698 (dispels the notion that a competent thesis can be completed in two semesters)
- Requires a committee of at least 3 members

The thesis can further be described as:

- May be mainly empirical, historical, or theoretical
- Containing at least five chapters (structure is to be negotiated with the thesis committee Chair; see appendix A for a sample structure)\*
- May be of publishable quality
- Would likely put a student interested in pursuing a doctoral degree in a better position for admissions

The project can further be described as:

- Practice or application-oriented
- Containing two parts – a written narrative and a product
- The written component generally contains three chapters (alternative structures can be negotiated with the project committee chair)

2. Students who are considering the thesis or project option approach their program advisor with ideas as early as possible so the process can begin. At this point, the advisor can direct the student towards instructors, literature sources, and topical courses that are in line with the student's research interests. It would be wise for students to take courses with as many different instructors as they can in order to widen their net for committee members, not to mention learning different research agendas.

3. When appropriate, a student and instructor can discuss tailoring course assignments to align with the student's thesis or project topic.
4. As students commit to the thesis or project option, they: a) pay attention to the research design of studies they read for courses or reading recommendations by their advisors; b) read filed theses or projects from the library; c) purchase the university thesis and project guidelines from the bookstore.

### GETTING THROUGH

5. As a first step when ready to undertake the thesis, students must submit a thesis plan. The plan may be developed as the assignment for EDP 696. Other options include preparation of a draft of Chapters 1-3 or a 10-page summary under the committee Chair's direction. This plan is developed well in advance of intended deadlines in order to allow potential committee members time to review the document. Likewise, when ready to undertake the project, students must submit a project plan. The plan may be developed in the candidate's research class (e.g., EDP 520, 595, or 696). Other options include preparation of a draft of the first two chapters of the narrative portion of the project or a 10 page summary proposing the content of the narrative and the nature of the project to be developed. For both the thesis and project, the Chair directs the student in determining which planning option best fits the student's needs. As stated in the University Catalog, the committee Chair selection is key for the following important reasons:

- Chair is the major contact point with the student and oversees the other committee members' work with the student
- Chair assures that the editorial and format standards appropriate to the mechanical preparation of a thesis or project are followed
- Chair helps establish guidelines for the student and timetables to be followed to ensure completion of thesis or project in a reasonable time
- When required, Chair arranges for the oral defense of the thesis
- Chair is responsible for reporting the grade agreed upon by the committee members

Some elaborations:

- The committee includes two full-time faculty members from CSULB, at least one of whom must be tenured or tenure track. The Chair must be full-time tenured or tenure track from department authorized to offer a graduate degree. The third regular member may include a faculty member from another university, a school site principal, or other professional advocates of the student. All members must hold at least a masters degree.
- The Chair and the student collaboratively determine the structure of the committee
- The Chair communicates to the committee the expectations and process that it will follow.
- The Chair takes the lead in helping the student frame the study, such as generating research questions, determining with the student the target literature whose gap(s) the

research attempts to fill, and helping create the thesis or project structure, including an appropriate methodology to answer the research questions.

- Because thesis and project Chairs receive .5 units for every 698 they direct, their work load and involvement with the thesis or project is higher compared to that of regular committee members.

Additionally, the Chair assists the student in selecting the remaining committee members based on the following considerations:

- The student's working relationship with faculty
- The student's needs, such as theoretical, methodological, topical, etc.
- The student's style of work
- The constructed committee's ability to work harmoniously together

The role of regular committee members includes:

- Supporting students with insight, information, and counsel
  - Suggesting ideas for revisions and strengthening of student's thesis or project
  - Coordinating with Chair to avoid repetition of comments on student's work and resolving conflicting views or interpretations of it
6. During the first semester of the project, the student collects any data necessary to complete the product portion of the project as well as conducts a literature review to contextualize the project's focus. The introductory chapter may also be written during the first semester. During the second semester, the actual product is constructed.
  7. Once the student receives informal support from committee members, s/he files an "Application for Thesis/Project" with the Graduate Studies Office, which contains a description of the tentative statement of the problem and signatures of all committee members. It must be filed by October 1 for spring or summer enrollment, and by March 1 for fall or winter enrollment. Registration into 698 is handled through the Graduate Office.
  8. All students engaged in thesis or project research are required to submit an Institutional Review Board, or IRB, proposal for university approval prior to collecting any data from research participants ([www.csulb.edu/~research/](http://www.csulb.edu/~research/)). The Chair helps the student craft the proposal to fit the IRB format, which includes permission from the research site. The IRB proposal is required even for students requesting exemption. After the proposal is completed and approved, student may proceed to enter the research site to collect data.
  9. Student is ready to enroll in the first semester of 698. During the first semester of 698, student collects data for the study. Collecting data is in a recursive relationship with the student's writing and revision of Chapters 1-3. Student allows a minimum of two weeks for committee members to return drafts with comments. Depending on the committee's schedule and the amount of text the student submits, turn around time may exceed two weeks.

## GETTING DONE

10. At this point, the nature of the relationship between the student and Chair solidifies, and the tone for the committee as a whole is set with respect to submitting drafts, including the amount of text submitted at any one time. The relationship with committee members again is set by the primary relation between the student and Chair. For example, student and Chair may agree that only the Chair can see and comment on the first drafts of the chapters. Then, following revisions of the chapters and upon the Chair's approval of them, the chapter drafts may then go forward to the rest of the committee for comments, thus generating another round of revisions. Or, along the same lines, the Chair may ask the student to forward the revised chapters in chunks, such as only a couple chapters at a time rather than all chapters at once (e.g., Chs. 1-3, then Chs. 4-5). The Chair and student may also work it out so that the student submits a chapter at a time to the regular committee members. The Chair, student, and committee members **may** agree to a final oral defense towards the conclusion of the thesis. This event also serves as a celebration to the finalization of the thesis or project. As part of the iteration process, students are expected to address with good faith the Chair and committee members' suggestions for revisions. Note that formatting the thesis or project according to the university's guidelines occurs at every stage of revisions, not only in its final version.
11. The process of revision is a time-intensive process. Students are encouraged to plan their desired graduation date with this in mind. Students note that faculty are less accessible during summer and winter breaks. The thesis or project is considered finished when all committee members approve of it and sign off. If the student's thesis or project is not approved by the conclusion of the second semester of 698, the student enrolls in GS700.
12. As indicated by completion of the signature page, when the thesis or project chapters have been approved by all committee members and all conditions have been met, the student may proceed to file it with the thesis/project office. There are four periods for thesis or project submission, which coincides with the date of degree, indicated on the student's graduation records: spring, summer, fall, and winter degrees. The dates for filing theses changes every year. For the most current dates, students may visit [www.csulb.edu/library/guide/serv/thesis.html](http://www.csulb.edu/library/guide/serv/thesis.html) or call the thesis/project office at 985-4013. The last date for submission per semester falls well before the end of that semester. For this reason, students should note that they do not have the complete semester to conclude their thesis or project writing. After the thesis/project office approves the document, the grade roster for 698 is sent to the Chair, at which point s/he reports the grade agreed upon by the committee members.
13. To conclude the filing process, the student submits the thesis or project to campus copy for fee payment and duplication, then calls the thesis/project office with the receipt number.

## Appendix A A Sample Structure of a Thesis

### I. Chapter 1: Overview of the Study

#### A. *Introduction*

The introduction should be four to ten page overview to the broad issues in education which led to this particular thesis.

#### B. *Statement of the Problem*

Focus on what is not, but needs to be, known, or what remains problematic within the broad topics described above. Do not describe what the study will do.

#### C. *Purpose of the Study*

1. The purpose of the study describes what the study will do: a direct response to what needs to be known.
2. The research questions are presented here. Typically they are a list of three to five questions.

#### D. *The Importance of the Study*

1. The importance of the study is to describe what contribution to the broad literature of set of broad educational issues would be made when the study is finished.
2. The importance is typically written for as importance for specific audiences. For example, one paragraph could explicitly point out how the answers found in this study could be useful for practitioners. The next paragraph might focus on researchers Concerned with site-based management, etc.

#### E. *Definitions*

Provide operational definitions of key terms in alphabetical order.

### II. Chapter 2: Literature Review

#### A. *Introduction*

Provide Orientation to the purpose and topics of the chapter.

#### B. *Synthesizing the literature*

The order of topics is from the general to the specific.

#### C. *Conclusion*

Make very explicit how the literature is contributing to the study.

### **III. Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### *A. Introduction*

1. The purpose and research question for the study may be reviewed.
2. This section usually has an overview to the methodology: how research questions will be answered.

#### *B. Subjects*

Sampling can include type of sampling used, criteria for selection, process of selection, sample selected, sampling issued within the school, teachers, classes, etc.

#### *C. Instrumentation*

1. Relation of research questions to instrumentation.
2. Description of instruments and conceptual framework for the instrument content.
3. Psychometric issues-reliability and validity

#### *D. Procedure*

Detailed description of how the study will be carried out.

#### *E. Data Analysis*

### **IV. Chapter 4: The Findings (Results)**

#### *A. Introduction*

#### *B. Findings by research questions*

### **V. Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, Implications**

#### *A. Discussion*

1. Compare and contrast the findings to the literature and explain any possible reasons for discrepancies.
2. “What do the findings mean” is the issue.
3. Limitations and delimitations
  - a. Limitations refer to limitations on the study which are beyond the control of the specific researcher.
  - b. Delimitations are limitations which the researcher chose to use.

#### *B. Implications*

#### *C. Conclusions (include future research directions)*