



Instructions for the Thesis

As a terminal degree, the MPA develops practical skills in an applied setting, as well as in the classroom. The experiential learning courses offer students the opportunity to further develop their competencies in a professional setting. The content of these courses is unique to each student and specially designed around the student's needs and interests.

PADM 6900 Thesis is one of two experiential electives available to all MPA. Students may choose to enroll in PADM 6950 Professional Project, as an alternative to PADM 6900 Thesis. Responsibility for creating the thesis falls upon the student. However, the Director and MPA faculty can provide preliminary ideas, and students interested in pursuing the Thesis option should consider expanding research projects completed for MPA courses. Students should refer to the Student Handbook for further guidance on whether to select a Professional Project or Thesis as the experiential learning requirement.

Students are encouraged to discuss the options for a thesis early in their program with any of the MPA faculty. All MPA faculty are available to supervise a thesis. Adjunct faculty who earned a Ph.D. or J.D. can supervise a thesis on a case-by-case basis. The faculty advisor serves as Chair of the thesis committee and as a mentor to the student throughout the entire process.

The thesis option is strongly recommended for those students who intend to pursue doctoral work and represents a traditional academic endeavor. Students should recognize that writing a thesis is an iterative process between the Chair and student. Seldom, if ever, are submissions accepted without revisions until the final thesis is approved by the Chair and committee.

Students who elect the thesis option should complete the steps listed below. The sequence of steps may vary depending on the topic, but should be adjusted only with advisement of the Chair.

1. *Develop a research question.* The student can develop a concept by soliciting ideas from peers and/or faculty. Similarly, research projects completed for MPA courses can be used to explore potential thesis topics. Students are encouraged to engage in discussions with multiple faculty in order to select a knowledgeable Chair, and committee members who understand the topic and appear interested in serving on the thesis committee.
2. *Form a thesis committee.* Once a general idea is developed, the student should ask a member of the MPA faculty to serve as advisor and Chair. If the student would like an MPA adjunct to serve as Chair, the student must first discuss this option with the Director of MPA, and the MPA faculty nucleus must approve the selection. The student should identify a second member of the MPA faculty to serve on the thesis committee, along with a third member from outside the MPA faculty. The third member must meet the MPA standards for professionally or academically qualified faculty, be willing to serve, and be approved

by the faculty nucleus.

3. *Submit a written proposal.* Students must develop a written proposal and submit it to the Chair before distributing it to the committee. The proposal is considered a roadmap that will guide the research and inform the committee. Once agreed upon by the committee and student, significant changes should not be made to the research. All written submissions should follow APA format unless otherwise specified by the Chair. The thesis proposal should include all of the following information unless otherwise determined by the Chair:
 - a. Title of thesis – This should be a succinct statement which holds enough detail to convey the objective of the research.
 - b. Introduction – Usually one to two pages of narrative containing a definition of the problem or area of study along with an explanation of what the reader should expect in the completed thesis.
 - c. Research Objective – A short statement that outlines the research question, the goal or objectives of the researcher, and the items to be defined and explored in the thesis. In many instances the hypothesis or intended results are briefly outlined.
 - d. Literature – A brief list and discussion (with references and citations) of the academic and professional literature the student expects to use in the research or in preparation for the study.
 - e. Methods – Description of the research approach (exploratory, scientific, problem solving, etc.), the tools and research methods (survey, observation, etc.) and a clear statement of the methods for explaining or demonstrating the data and material obtained during the study period.
 - f. Timeline – A brief statement that outlines the time for conducting the research as well the time within which the thesis will be presented.
 - g. Tentative conclusions or recommendations – Assuming the hypothesis or research question is confirmed, a description of conclusions and recommendations.

Once the proposal has been accepted by the Chair, a copy should be distributed to the committee members. Their comments or concerns should be addressed and incorporated into the proposal. Any disagreement among the committee members should be resolved through a majority vote.

If the research method requires human subjects, the student must seek approval from SUU's Institutional Review Board (<http://suu.edu/pub/policies/pdf/PP620Institutional.pdf>) before initiating the research. The Chair can advise the student about this approval process.

4. *Register.* You and your Chair can decide the optimum semester for you to enroll in PADM 6900 Thesis and the number of thesis credit hours. You can enroll when initiating the proposal or after the proposal has been approved by the Chair and committee members. The Chair must approve the student's registration. It's fairly common for the thesis work to extend beyond the semester in which the student registers. In this case, the student will receive an Incomplete or Temporary grade until the thesis is complete.
5. *Complete the research and write the thesis.* The student and Chair should reach agreement on when to meet throughout the thesis development and set expectations for the meeting. For example, they may choose to meet on a regular basis (e.g. monthly) or when key portions of the research are completed (e.g. outline; literature review). Students should consult their committee members about various aspects of the research as needed. Once the Chair approves a final draft, the thesis should be sent to the committee members for review. Students should inform and consult the committee members as the research unfolds.

6. *Finalizing the thesis.* The Chair and student should decide how to receive and respond to comments from the members. An oral defense is recommended, but optional. All committee members must be satisfied that the thesis meets the academic standards for quality research. Disagreement among the committee should be resolved through a majority vote.
7. *Administrative requirements.* Students must submit a copy of the thesis to the Gerald Sherratt Library and ensure it conforms to the standards set forth by the Library. Additionally, students must submit a copy (hard or flash drive, but not via email) to the MPA Administrative Assistant so it can be placed in the student's file.

In addition to the above, students are responsible for conforming to all university policies and requirements related to a thesis.

Students must notify the Chair any change or disruption in the research. Also, students must immediately notify the faculty supervisor of any significant conflict, harassment, accident, or incident during the research.

For additional information, contact:

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