



MA Program in Psychology

Webster University Leiden Behavioral & Social Sciences (BSS) Department

Guidelines for Thesis

Course Description

The master's thesis consists of an individual research project designed by the student and carried out under the direction of a Thesis Faculty Supervisor. The thesis project allows students to contribute to the research in the field, gain important research experience necessary, and for entrance into a doctoral program. All thesis topics need to be approved by the Faculty Thesis Supervisor and the BSS department. Students are expected to develop a topic, design the study, collect and analyze data, and report the results of their research in APA format. Following completion of the thesis, students are encouraged to submit their work for possible publication.

Practical Issues

Students need to keep in mind the complexity and intellectual demands of completing a research thesis. The time allowed for the thesis is one semester (2 terms). Thus, students are encouraged to reflect on their thesis topic and research questions as early as possible, preferably in conjunction with the course PSYC 5400 Research Design and/or Psyc 5900 Applied Statistics & Research Methods.

Topics and Supervisors

The student should identify a topic that is to be the subject of the research thesis. In selecting a topic, the student should consult faculty members preferably with a doctorate degree. The Head of Department/ Thesis Coordinator will assist in making contact with suitably qualified potential supervisors inside the faculty group at the University. Any such arrangements will need to be approved by the Program Coordinator or the Academic Director. Specific contracts are drawn up for research supervision conducted by adjunct faculty thus all paperwork (forms) must be completed in a timely manner.

The topic should be within the area of counseling psychology, broadly defined, or in an area which clearly has implications for counseling and within the research area/specialization of the faculty member.

Supervision Arrangements

It is expected that the Supervisor will meet regularly with the student, at agreed times. These formal sessions should normally occur at least 8-10 times over the course of the enrollment. In many contexts, there may be other informal interaction with the Supervisor at other times. Thus, the pattern of consultations within the enrollment period may vary from student to student. The Supervisor is expected to read one draft of the thesis, not necessarily in one complete version (i.e., the introduction, method, or other sections may be read separately). There should be no expectation that the Supervisor will read a second draft once the first draft of the thesis has been read.

The thesis itself is the work of the student, although the intellectual property may well be shared between a numbers of people who are involved in the project, including the Thesis Supervisor although as per legal stipulation it is owned by Webster University. It is expected that an explicit discussion takes place about authorship of any papers arising from the research. The agreement about authorship should be expressed in written form, possibly through an email exchange, in order to avoid later disputes or misunderstandings. A final copy should be given to the Head of BSS Department/ Thesis Coordinator.

Formal Submission of Thesis Intention and Topic

Students are required to complete an “Intention to Undertake a Research Thesis Form” available through and turned in to the Head of BSS Department. The form will require a working title for the thesis - which can be modified later. ***This form should be submitted (in Week 2) one semester/two terms before the registration in the PSYC 6100.*** Any likely special requirements (type of facility, room, tests, equipment, materials, etc...) should also be indicated.

Submission of Thesis Proposal

Following formal approval to undertake the preparatory work on the topic, the student will normally begin work on a thesis proposal in which the aims, design, methods, planned analyses and other relevant material are described. ***This will be acquired and must be handed in to the Head of Department using the “MA Research Thesis Approval Form” by Week 6 of the same term the “Intention” was completed.***

The following are the necessary pieces of information on/attached to the MA Research Thesis Approval Form:

- ☐ There should be a very brief review of the relevant literature – enough to establish the context for the research, but not in the detailed format required in the thesis itself (2 pages would be sufficient for the brief review).
- ☐ Arising from that review should be a set of clearly stated aims. The questions or hypotheses that the research addresses should be clear to the reader (approximately ½ to 1 page).

- ☐ There should be a simple statement on the design of the project in conventional terminology (e.g., a 2 x 2 factorial design, or development and psychometric evaluation of a questionnaire; survey on ***, etc.)
- ☐ The method (approximately 5 – 10 pages, depending on the complexity) should be described in adequate detail, including the likely number and source of participants, participant inclusion and exclusion criteria, the consent form and information to be given to participants about the research (if relevant), measures to be used, any equipment or special conditions, randomization methods (if relevant), and the overall procedure such as the sequence of steps in the research.
- ☐ There needs to be a clear statement of the anticipated data analysis that is consistent with the hypotheses. It is not sufficient to state that a “correlational analysis will be performed”. Students must state which variables will be correlated with one another, what type of correlational analysis will be performed, and so forth in accordance with the type of data to be collected and requirement meeting the various statistical methods. The same point applies to other analytical methods.
- ☐ Finally, the proposal should include a reference list (APA format) to the works cited in the text.
- ☐ Copies of all questionnaires (copies of the testing material as it applies), the consent form and the demographics form must accompany this form. English translations will need to be attached.

Research rarely runs quite as smoothly and predictably as one might imagine. There are bound to be peaks and troughs in demand on students’ scheduling as they proceed through the various steps involved in the research and writing. Time spent at the planning stage may well save a lot of heartache later. It is very important to have a good idea of the way in which the data will be analyzed ahead of time. Students can always conduct trial runs of the data analysis with made-up data or small portions of the actual data, so that they can become very familiar with the programs and the kinds of output that they produce.

Thesis Review Panel

Once the Head of BSS Department / Thesis Coordinator have received the “MA Research Thesis Approval Form”, the proposals will be discussed with the Thesis Proposal Review Panel/Thesis Committee, consisting of a panel (Supervisor, faculty member, and/or advisor). The Committee will meet within one month’s time. Students may need to amend the written proposal following this discussion, and the final proposal will need to be returned for final approval by Program Coordinator/ Academic Director and the Supervisor. Only after this departmental approval will the student and Supervisor be allowed to send the proposal to the Webster University IRB.

Ethics Committee Review

The final approval to commence data collection will be contingent upon submission to Webster University’s IRB ethics committee and their approval. To begin with the data collection it is necessary to send the IRB their application approximately in Week 2 of the second term after the “Intention” is turned in (Week 11 on the semester calendar). Whether or not, the WU IRB ethics committee extensively examines the proposal will depend upon a number of factors: the involvement of other collaborating institutions and the identification by the panel of potentially intrusive, risky, harmful,

or otherwise ethically and socially contentious procedures. The IRB requires a statement about American/Dutch/European ethics.

The IRB will decide, if the thesis will need an Exempt Review, an Expedited Review or a Full Board Review. The Exempt and Expedited Reviews can take up to two weeks. The Full Board Review can take up to four weeks. For more information, please see <http://www.webster.edu/irb/policy/>

It is common that the IRB requests more information or changes in the design, thus beginning the process in a timely manner is critical.

All MA theses must go through an ethics committee. If another collaborating institution wishes that the proposal be submitted through their own research ethics committee, Webster University will accept the outcome of that committee's deliberations as final.

Once the approval of the IRB or another collaborating institute's ethics committee is received, the MA student may add a statement to the consent form stating that the research project has been approved by the given ethics committee, and only then may s/he begin with the experiment.

Registration

After the departmental approval (Committee) and the IRB approval, the MA student may register for the research thesis for the coming 2 terms of 3-credit hours each during the advertised period. Terms last 8-weeks at Webster University, and two terms are equivalent to a semester. Registration for the thesis (PSYC 6100) must occur during two concurrent terms. The total credit value of the master's thesis is 6. The Thesis Coordinator/HOD will assign an appropriate 2nd Reader for the student.

Format of Final Thesis

The text of the thesis can vary in length (excluding references, table of contents and other preliminary pages), depending on the nature of the thesis, numbers of tables, and other aspects. This will be agreed upon in collaboration with the thesis supervisor. The print must be in 12-point font on A4 single sided pages, double spacing, with margins of 2.54 cm (top and bottom) and 3.17 cm (left and right). The thesis should be written in conformity to APA style in its entirety. It is to be considered a "print read" research report for a professional journal. One good source, in addition to WUL's Writing Center, is the Purdue University OWL website: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>. The following sections are expected in the thesis and each begins on a new page:

Title Page (required)

Title, author, Webster University Vienna, date and following text:

"Master's thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology."

Dedication (optional)

Acknowledgements (optional)

Preface (optional)

Table of Contents (required)

List of Tables (required if tables are used)

List of Figures (required if figures are used)

Abstract (required)

Chapter 1: Introduction (Review of Literature)

Chapter 2: Methods

Chapter 3: Results

Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusions

List of References (required)

Appendices (optional)

Examination of the Written Thesis

The thesis will be examined by the Supervisor and a 2nd Reader, who is assigned or invited by the Head of BSS department/Academic Director or Thesis Coordinator. The final version of the thesis to grade will be sent – electronically – to the Supervisor, HOD/Thesis Coordinator and 2nd Reader, by the set deadline (Week 6 of the last term of attendance). The Supervisor and the 2nd Reader have approximately 7-10 days to grade the thesis and make a list of comments for the student. Questions will be collected by the Supervisor for the upcoming Thesis Defense.

The Thesis Supervisor provides a type-written one-page verbal thesis evaluation, including a grade for the thesis.

Results Lab

There is an opportunity for students to present their results 3 weeks (1st/2nd week of April) before the submission of their first draft within a group setting. The presentations are moderated as part of a statistics class led by a statistician. This provides the students with an opportunity to discuss their research results with their colleagues.

Thesis Defense

The Thesis Defense is the oral examination of the graduate student regarding his/her work. They will be held in Week 8 of the term (Week 16 of the semester) after the student has submitted the electronic version to the Thesis Supervisor and the 2nd Reader. ***This date will be set by WUL in advance, and it is expected that the student and advisors reserve that day for their appointment.*** The Defense can only be held, if the Supervisor and 2nd Reader can attend. In case of exceptional circumstances, the 2nd reader can also send their questions in advance to the HOD. A third faculty member/HOD will serve as the moderator. The presentations are ca. 20 minutes long and are followed by 20 minutes of questioning.

Directly after the defense, the Supervisor and 2nd Reader will confer on the grading. In cases of disagreement across grade boundaries, they will be invited to discuss the source of the discrepancy and agree on a final grade. If no agreement can be reached, a third reader may be invited to facilitate a final decision on the grade. The grade will be credit/no credit following the Thesis Defense.

The Thesis Defense is a public hearing, thus other faculty members, students and members of the public may attend. The Thesis Coordinator is responsible for making the presentations public.

Submission

Initially an electronic copy is submitted to the Head of BSS Department Dr. Sheetal Shah, the Supervisor and the 2nd Reader. After the Thesis Defense, *a final approval of the theses supervisor must be given after any/all necessary changes* were made. The student will then submit an electronic copy in pdf. Format to the Head of Department and Thesis Supervisor.

The due date for submission of the thesis will normally be the final date of the second term of enrollment in the Research Thesis.

In the case that the student cannot complete his/her work by the set deadline, requests for extension should be made in writing to the Academic Director, stating the circumstances and the reasons why the work cannot be completed by the due date. The Academic Director must give their approval. Extensions should be requested at least three weeks prior to the due date to adjust all WUL contracts made in connection with the student's thesis.

If you have any further questions, please send an email to Dr. Sheetal Shah, Head of Department of Behavioral & Social Sciences. Shah@webster.nl