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Graduate Handbook

Master of Education in Special Education

2017-2018

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Useful Contact Information

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Useful Websites

D2L – Online Course Management System

<https://d2l.viu.ca>

Sample graduate applied projects and theses, VIU Library VIUSpace

<https://viuspace.viu.ca/handle/10613/488>

Master of Education in Special Education (VIU Calendar)

<https://calendar.viu.ca/education/master-education-special-education>

VIU Faculty of Education

<https://www2.viu.ca/education/>

Graduation Information

<https://www2.viu.ca/graduation/>

VIU Research Ethics Board

<https://www2.viu.ca/REB/>

Introduction

In keeping with the mission of the Faculty of Education, the Culminating Experience provides graduate students the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to develop scholarly, valid, and useful knowledge that will make a contribution to the field of special education. The purpose of this handbook is to assist students in making a smooth transition from their course work to the successful completion of their graduate culminating experience. It is also a resource for supervisors and assigned faculty who support these candidates.

What is the Culminating Experience?

The culminating experience allows students to demonstrate their mastery of a body of knowledge and demonstrate an ability to integrate and apply theory and practice. In the Master of Education in Special Education (MEDS) program at Vancouver Island University (VIU), the culminating experience is one of two choices, a graduate applied project or a thesis. Students who successfully complete the culminating experience demonstrate a capacity to exercise analytical skills, integrate and apply theory and research and skillfully address educational issues.

What is a Graduate Applied Project?

A MEDS graduate applied project is an independent, educationally-based project that highlights an aspect of working with students with special needs. In general, the scope, breadth and structure of the graduate applied projects will be more flexible than is expected in a formal research thesis-only Masters. The scope of this integrative learning activity is substantial. Graduate applied projects involve the design of a product, such as a curriculum, a workshop, a guidebook, a video, a unique application of a method or teaching model. The candidate provides a rationale for the project based on a comprehensive review of the literature. The applied project must contribute something new and/or significant to the field and it must be based on a review of the research.

What is a Thesis?

A thesis involves the design and implementation of empirical research. Graduate students who undertake a thesis will design an original study, obtain and/or develop data collection tools, input and analyze data, and write the results and conclusions. At VIU, any research conducted involving people or where information about people is used must have approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) prior to commencing the research.

When Should I Begin my Culminating Experience?

It is never too early to start to think about your culminating experience. Officially, graduate students are enrolled in the MEDS 630 and 640 during the final two semesters of their program. Typically, this is the time when students work on their culminating experience. As part of the requirements for MEDS 540 (Research Methods), students develop a research proposal which must be approved by the course instructor or program coordinator. Students must achieve a minimum grade of a B in the course before

they can be enrolled in MEDS 630 and be assigned a supervisor who will support them in completing their culminating experience.

Department and University Procedures

Enrollment and Graduation - Dates and Protocols

Graduate students are enrolled in all of their classes each semester through the department. Students do not need to register for courses but they need to refer to the VIU graduation site, which lists critical university deadlines for term payments and graduation timelines. Since the dates differ each semester, it is crucial that graduate students obtain the timeline at the beginning of the semester that he or she plans to graduate. It is the student's responsibility to meet these deadlines. Further information can be found at <http://www2.viu.ca/convocation/graduation.asp>.

Research - Human Subjects

All research involving human subjects or information about human subjects must receive approval from the VIU Research Ethics Board (REB). Please view and prepare the relevant REB forms on the Research website. Students may not contact any participants or conduct any research until their research has been approved. The application must be completed by the student but checked by the Supervisor. The initial application is submitted to REB by the Supervisor; the student can submit directly to REB only after subsequent requests for revisions and after having those revisions approved by the Supervisor.

REB meets once a month and all paperwork must be submitted a minimum of two weeks prior to the scheduled meeting time. The application form and further information can be found at <http://www2.viu.ca/REB/reports.asp>.

Research - Intellectual Property

The completion of the Graduate Applied Project may result in the creation of new knowledge, processes or tools. Ownership of this new knowledge, process or tool can often be complicated, especially if the outcome of the research has potential commercial applications. In most cases, the owner of the new knowledge, process or tool is the originator of the idea (i.e., the VIU student/graduate candidate.)

Examples of intellectual property may include:

- a completed website, CD-ROM, DVD or other technology-based media;
- curriculum design and development in, or out, of a Learning Management Systems;
- a program, course or unit of study to be delivered fully online or in a blended/hybrid context;
- policy development and/or implementation etc.

Note: Ideas are not considered intellectual property until they have been recorded in some medium that others can read, review, touch and/or see.

The issue of intellectual ownership becomes difficult when the student conducting a research study is either a paid employee or a paid contractor of the firm for whom the Graduate Applied Project is being conducted. In these cases, ownership of intellectual property should be clarified before the Graduate Applied Project is undertaken. Students who may create intellectual property as part of their Graduate Applied Project should inform themselves of the current intellectual property guidelines adopted by VIU and liaise with their sponsoring institution in this regard.

Copyright and the University

Copyright is the right to copy, distribute, publish and/or sell all or part of an academic, artistic or commercial product. The author of a Graduate Applied Project or Thesis owns the rights to his or her product and should claim copyright on the title page (see sample title pages in Appendices 1 and 2.)

As a condition for the awarding of the degree, all students, via their Supervisor, are expected to submit their approved Thesis or Graduate Applied Project to be made accessible online via the Library's VIUSpace to circulate the paper for scholarly purposes and to make use of the material and ideas in the paper in the preparation of further papers for potential publication. If the student has a strong reason for not wishing to make their work available online, he/she can write a letter to the program coordinator with that request.

Extensions

From time to time, unavoidable circumstances will arise that prevent the student from completing his/her Culminating Experience requirements within the regular program timeline. Where these circumstances warrant an extension beyond the duration of the regular program, students will need to register in an Extension course and extension fees will be applied. Each Extension course is a semester long and students must be continuously registered in an Extension Course until they meet all program requirements and receive approval to graduate. Extension requests are subject to approval by the Dean of the Faculty of Education.

Leaves of Absence

Students may request a leave of absence for a variety of reasons or circumstances, such as personal parental, medical or other. Normally, tuition is not assessed during a leave. While on a leave, the student will not have access to any support from their Supervisor. The leave may be granted for a maximum of one year from date of application. It is the responsibility of the student to contact the department before the end of the leave to make arrangements to resume their studies or request an extension to the leave.

Roles and Responsibilities

Graduate Applied Project or Thesis Supervision

Overview

Every student completing a Graduate Applied Project/Thesis will be supervised, assisted and encouraged by a Faculty Supervisor.

Role of the Faculty Supervisor

The Faculty Supervisor is expected to:

- review and understand this handbook;
- at the beginning of the supervisory period, communicate expectations for academic work, communication procedures and frequency and other pertinent aspects that clarify expectations for the student (best times to receive work, type of feedback provided, expected feedback timeline, etc);
- early on, negotiate a mutually agreed upon schedule of due dates (to be initially drafted by the student) for the submission of draft chapters and completion of Graduate Applied Project/Thesis. It is expected that the Graduate Applied Project/Thesis will be completed within two consecutive academic terms (13 weeks each);
- coordinate meetings with the student as required;
- facilitate writing of initial submission of REB application; submit initial application to REB on behalf of the student; review all student work on subsequent requests for revisions by the REB;
- maintain regular contact with the student during the period of supervision to review and discuss issues arising from the Graduate Applied Project/Thesis;
- inform Program Coordinator of any issues or concerns in the supervision process;
- if temporarily unavailable for support, inform student and make alternative arrangements, if necessary;
- provide timely, constructive feedback and advice on the material submitted and discuss required changes;
- be familiar with Graduate Applied Project or Thesis criteria;
- review the Graduate Applied Project or Thesis for adherence to APA style and academic rigour;
- review and approve revisions based on feedback and recommendations from 2nd reader;
- review the final Graduate Applied Project or Thesis for Acceptance and recommend the candidate for graduation on successful completion;
- submit the complete Graduate Applied Project or Thesis to Program Coordinator.

Role of the Student

The student is responsible for planning, implementing and completing the Graduate Applied Project/Thesis. This entails that the student:

- review and understand this handbook;
- is familiar with and use APA www.apastyle.org;
- ensure academic rigour and high standard of work, with appropriate attributions throughout his/her research and project development;
- ensure that work submitted for Supervisor's review is edited (spelling, grammar, punctuation, formatting) in accordance with graduate academic standard;
- draft and then adhere to a mutually agreed-upon schedule with deadlines for completion for all stages;
- maintain regular contact with Supervisor to inform on progress and review and discuss issues arising from the Graduate Applied Project/Thesis;
- complete the culminating experience in accordance with the approved REB application, if applicable, and in accordance with VIU guidelines;
- suggest a 2nd reader for Supervisor's approval; it can be faculty, a colleague, or someone with a graduate degree and expertise in the field the student is researching;
- act on the recommendations of the Faculty Supervisor;
- be informed of all pertinent dates and apply to graduate.

Role of the 2nd Reader

The 2nd reader reviews the student's work and considers whether and how it contributes to the field of knowledge in special education. The Graduate Applied Project/Thesis is the final component for completing the Master of Education in Special Education Degree, and the 'approval' of both the Supervisor and 2nd Reader serves as a committee review of the student's work.

The focus for the review of the Graduate Applied Project/Thesis is to answer the following questions:

- a) Does this study successfully answer the research question?
- b) Does the study both recognize and contribute to the research field in which it is located?
- c) Are there omissions or errors that need to be corrected before approval?

The 2nd Reader is expected to:

- read thoughtfully to understand what was accomplished. It is valuable for the student to hear what was learned from the work;
- note any discrepancies, errors, lacks or gaps in the work that need to be addressed and provide specific expectations and suggestions. These may include: important theories/theorists in the field that are not recognized; missing or erroneous comments, explanations or descriptions; steps in the research process that are unclear, contradictory or missing; important thematic areas in the interpretations that have been neglected, over-stated, or perhaps misinterpreted; conclusions or recommendations in the discussion that could be added, expanded, or revised;
- note significant ideas, knowledge or information that is provided in the thesis/project and share these with student;

- prepare at least 2 meaningful questions that encourage the student to further discuss and extend her or his work. For example, ask about particular applications of the knowledge created, encourage the researcher to extend thinking, or ask about recommendations for next steps in the field.

The 2nd Reader is *not* expected to:

- focus on typos, APA problems or editing errors, though these should be mentioned, particularly if they interfere with meaning making. The 2nd reader can request that specific editing concerns be addressed, and the supervisor will take responsibility for these.

** Be clear about any requirements for revisions before thesis/project is approved; always cc Supervisor in your feedback email to the student.

The Graduate Applied Project or Thesis

What do I need to know?

Typically during the course of your MEDS program (sometime after the successful completion of MEDS 540 and before enrollment in MEDS 630) you will be assigned a supervisor by the Program Coordinator. You may request a specific supervisor and requests will be accommodated when possible. In negotiation with your supervisor, you agree on goals, direction, timelines and steps to complete your culminating experience. It is recommended that you regularly inform your supervisor of your progress or of any challenges you are facing.

In order to receive Credit for MEDS 630 your supervisor needs evidence that you have made progress towards the completion of your culminating experience. There will be a check point before the end of MEDS 630 and if your supervisor is satisfied with your progress he/she will contact the Program Coordinator to recommend that you receive CR for MEDS 630 and proceed with enrollment into MEDS 640. If no progress has been made the student will need to meet with Program Coordinator to discuss and develop a plan to ensure timely completion of their culminating experience. If unable to agree on a plan, a leave or withdrawal from the program may be recommended.

When you and your supervisor agree that your work is nearing completion, you suggest a person to provide a "second reading." It is recommended that this person be a VIU instructor; however, if there is a specialist in your field who has graduate qualifications whom you would like to ask, please have this approved by your supervisor. Do not send your document to your 2nd reader until you have completed the revision and editing process and had your project approved at this stage by your supervisor. Please cc your supervisor when you send your work to the 2nd reader. Additionally, we encourage you to ask a MEDS colleague (present or past cohort) to provide a peer review.

What is a Graduate Applied Project?

A MEDS graduate applied project is an independent, educationally-based applied project that highlights an aspect of working with students with special needs. In general, the scope, breadth and structure of the graduate applied projects will be more flexible than is expected in a formal research thesis-only Masters. The scope of this integrative learning activity is substantial. Graduate applied projects involve the design of a product, such as a curriculum, a workshop, a guidebook, a video, a unique application of a method or teaching model. The candidate provides a rationale for the project based on a comprehensive review of the literature. The project must contribute something new and/or significant to the field and it must be based on a thorough review of the research.

What does a graduate applied project look like?

Typically, there is flexibility about the final form of the graduate project product. However, there are some key components that must be included in your project.

Key components

- an introduction that provides a context that includes a rationale for this project, a statement of need or problem and purpose;
- a literature review that explores and synthesizes the research that are relevant to your project and the creation of your product;
- an overview of the product you have created and useful information on how to use or implement it;
- a reflection that highlights and summarizes your evolving learning and understanding through the creation of the product;
- the fully developed product itself.

Is there a sample template for a Graduate Applied Project?

Please remember this is an example and that there is flexibility in how these main components are presented. You will need to get approval from your supervisor as to your unique presentation.

Chapter 1 - Introduction. This chapter includes a description and general overview of the challenge, problem or opportunity being addressed, along with the potential impact or contribution of the product you are creating. Possible headings include:

Statement of Purpose (The purpose of this project is to...);

Personal Context (what are the personal situations and the experiences, questions that have guided you, motivated you to want to do the project); *(Optional)*

Statement of the Problem (what is the issue/gap/problem that justifies the need for your 'product');

Rationale for creating the 'product' (discuss the reasons for the significance of your 'product', the contributions to address the issue/gap/problem).

Chapter 2 - A Review of the Literature. This is a very important chapter. The literature review focuses on research pertaining to the topics discussed in your area of study. In this chapter you need to demonstrate a thorough understanding of your field and the main theorists/researchers related to your topic; you need to discuss pertinent research studies and findings in order to justify the significance of your Graduate Applied Project. You need to demonstrate an ability to read, review and synthesize empirical research. It is very important that you use current peer-reviewed literature. Unless justified, try to use academic sources from the last 5-7 years.

Chapter 3 - Overview of the 'product' and Considerations for Implementation. In this chapter you provide an overview of the product created and required information for successful implementation/use of your product. For example, if your product is a workshop you need to indicate if there is criteria for participating/attending the workshop, if you are using groups you indicate if there is a specific way to form the groups, if there is any follow-up what it is, etc. Where applicable, you need to ground instructional and implementation decisions in relation to the findings in your literature review.

Chapter 4 - Conclusions and Reflection. This chapter includes a concise summary of the conclusions and a reflection that highlights and summarizes your evolving learning and understanding through the creation of the product;

Reference List in APA format for all articles, resources, books, policies cited in the thesis. APA style (6th Edition) must be applied. It is recommended that bibliographic software such as RefWorks, Mandalay etc. be employed to assemble and cite reference sources and collate the bibliography.

Appendix/Appendices. The appendix contains the fully developed product AND any information that is not essential to explain your findings, but that supports your analysis validates your conclusions or pursues a related point should be placed in the Appendix. Examples of information that could be included in an Appendix include figures/tables/charts/graphs of results, statistics, questionnaires, pictures etc.

What is a Thesis?

A thesis involves the design and implementation of empirical research. Graduate students, who undertake a thesis will design an original study, obtain and/or develop data collection tools, input and analyze data, and write the results and conclusions. A thesis demonstrates the student's understanding of, and capacity to, employ research methods appropriate to their discipline(s). It should normally include a general overview of relevant literature in the field of study, be well organized and academically written. At VIU, any research conducted involving people or information about people must have approval from the Research Ethics Board prior to commencing the research.

What does a thesis look like?

There are some key components that must be included in your thesis.

Key components

- an introduction that provides a context that includes a rationale for this project, a statement of need or problem and purpose;
- a literature review that explores and synthesizes the research that are relevant to your project;
- a description of the methodology and steps in conducting the study;
- a presentation of the findings of the study;
- a section analyzing and discussing the findings and themes;
- conclusions and recommendations.

Is there a template for the thesis?

Please remember this is an example and that there is flexibility in how these main components are presented. You will need to get approval from your supervisor as to your unique presentation.

Chapter 1 - Introduction. Included in this section is a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and definitions of the critical terms;

Chapter 2 – Literature review. This chapter begins with a reiteration of your research question(s), and describes the organization of the chapter. The literature review focuses on research that is pertaining to the area of study that demonstrates an understanding and application of current research in the area as well as a justification for the Thesis. Students need to demonstrate an ability to read, review and synthesize empirical research. It is very important that you use current peer-reviewed literature. Unless justified, try to use academic sources from the last 5-7 years.

Chapter 3 – Methods. This chapter begins with a reiteration of your research question(s), hypothesis and describes the organization of the chapter. The methodology section includes a description of: your sample; all of your instruments, tools and methods; your research design; and procedures for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4 – Results. This chapter begins with a reiteration of you research question(s). Included in this chapter is a detailed description of your sample, results for each tool used and /or question and a brief synthesis of results.

Chapter 5 - Analysis of the Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations. In this chapter you analyse your findings and discuss the emergence of main themes; you then prepare a concise summary of the conclusions and findings on completion of the research. This section should include links between your findings in respect to the reviewed research presented in the literature review. Recommendations and implications for future consideration should be presented. Finally, the potential for future policy and/or practice should be suggested.

Reference List in APA format for all articles, resources, books, policies cited in the thesis. APA style (6th Edition) must be applied. It is recommended that bibliographic software such as RefWorks, Mandalay etc. be employed to assemble and cite reference sources and collate the bibliography.

Appendix/Appendices. Information that is not essential to explain your findings, but that supports your analysis validates your conclusions or pursues a related point should be placed in the Appendix. Examples of information that could be included in an Appendix include figures/tables/charts/graphs of results, statistics, questionnaires, pictures etc.

Graduate Applied Project or Thesis Assessment

Submission of a Graduate Applied Project/Thesis

Ongoing formative assessment will be conducted between the student and the Faculty Supervisor. Upon submission of the complete draft of the Graduate Applied Project or Thesis, the Supervisor will endeavour to assess the submission within 21 days. Work deemed to be not meeting the academic standards and criteria will be returned to the student for revision and re-submission.

Assessment Criteria

The Graduate Applied Project/Thesis must be a sustained, creative, independent and original piece of work. VIU requires that the paper:

- be defensible by the author, in that all claims, observations or recommendations made must be supported by intellectual and practical constructs;
- conform to the Publication Manual of the APA (6th Edition) www.apastyle.org
- is presented in a manner that is suitable for archiving and cataloguing;
- and that the paper be open to critical examination and review by peers, scholars and practitioners

Grading

The Graduate Applied Project/Thesis receives a Credit/Fail grade. It is graded as Acceptable, or Not Acceptable/Rejected. Only papers that are assessed as Acceptable will earn a course grade of CR.

Before final approval can be granted, the Graduate Applied Project/Thesis will be reviewed by a 2nd reader. It is possible that the 2nd reader will ask for revisions to the Graduate Applied Project/Thesis. If this is the case, the Faculty Supervisor will review the recommendations with the student. After the student completes the required revisions, the paper must then be re-submitted to the Supervisor who will re-assess the revised document.

When the paper is deemed to be Acceptable, the supervisor will submit the final and complete Graduate Applied Project/Thesis to the Program Coordinator and recommend that the student be approved to graduate.

In the case that the student is unwilling or unable to make the revisions required by the Supervisor and 2nd reader to an Acceptable level, the student's Graduate Applied Project/Thesis will receive a Not Acceptable/Rejected assessment. At that time, the Graduate Applied Project/Thesis plus all assessment documents and other supporting materials will be forwarded to the Chair of Graduate Programs for review. The chair will determine whether the student should be assigned a failing grade of F, or be given an opportunity to re-submit their revised Graduate Applied Project/Thesis. Students who are assigned a failing grade can proceed to appeal procedures.

Student Appeal Procedures

Appeal Process. Student appeals will be required to comply with VIU's institutional policies for appeals.

Graduate Applied Project or Thesis Submission

Submission Process

Once the Graduate Applied Project/Thesis has been given an Acceptable designation, it will be submitted to the Program Coordinator of the Master of Education in Special Education by the Faculty Supervisor. All questions about submission need to be directed to the Faculty Supervisor or Program Coordinator rather than the Faculty of Education.

Students are responsible for ensuring that the Faculty Supervisor receives an electronic or digital copy of their complete Graduate Applied Project or Thesis.

Signatures on Title Page

The title page must be formatted in accordance with the sample title page (Appendices 1 & 2). The Faculty Supervisor is responsible for coordinating initial sign-off of the paper.

Once the final paper has been approved, the title page with the Faculty Supervisor's signature will be submitted to the Dean of the Faculty of Education for final sign-off.

Processing

The Program Coordinator will ensure that the Graduate Applied Project or Thesis is uploaded to the VIU Library's VIUSpace scholarly archive to be made available online.

Graduation

The student is eligible to have his/her name forwarded to the VIU Registrar for graduation approval once all program requirements are met. The student must apply for graduation through the Registrar's Office by the designated date. Students who are unsure if all program requirements for graduation have been met are encouraged to contact the Program Coordinator.

Appendix 1
Graduate Applied Project Title Page

Full Project Title Here

by

Student Name with middle initial (if applicable)

AN APPLIED PROJECT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY

We accept the Applied Project as conforming to the required standard.

Name, Graduate Applied Project Faculty Supervisor
Faculty of Education,
Vancouver Island University

Date

Appendix 2
Thesis Title Page

VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY

Title of Thesis (double-spaced, bold)

by

Name of Student

(previous degree/s optional)

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF EDUCATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION
Faculty of Education

© Name of Student, year

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