

*MCDANIEL COLLEGE*

*GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES*

**MASTER'S THESIS HANDBOOK**

## Table of Contents

I. Introduction .....	2
II. Approaches to Research .....	3
III. Topic Selection .....	3
IV. Thesis Advisor and Committee .....	4
A. Advisor .....	4
B. Committee Members .....	4
V. Proposal .....	5
A. Research Topics .....	5
B. Proposal Development .....	5
C. Institutional Review Board .....	6
D. Academic Integrity .....	6
VI. Thesis .....	7
A. Research .....	7
B. Thesis Completion .....	7
C. Presentation .....	8
D. Final Evaluation .....	8
E. Publication and Institutional Dissemination .....	8
VII. Formatting Guidelines .....	8
A. Organization .....	8
1. Chapter I: Introduction .....	8
2. Chapter II: Literature Review .....	9
3. Chapter III: Methodology .....	9
4. Chapter IV: Data Analysis/Results .....	10
5. Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusions .....	10
B. Style Manuals .....	10
C. References .....	10
D. Formatting Samples .....	10
VIII. Appendices .....	11
A. Master's Thesis Checklist .....	11
B. Thesis Proposal Application .....	12
C. Sample Title Page .....	13
D. Certificate of Approval .....	14

## Introduction

McDaniel College is committed to the development of liberally educated women and men who think critically, creatively, and humanely. Grounded in these principles, programs in Graduate and Professional Studies prepare culturally competent professionals dedicated to leadership in their field. To achieve this mission, McDaniel College offers a variety of opportunities for graduate candidates to construct knowledge, refine their academic skills, and advance scholarship in their respective disciplines.

Graduate candidates seeking a substantive culminating experience to their program may pursue the thesis option. The thesis provides an opportunity for in-depth critical inquiry into an educational issue, question, or problem that leads to original research and a scholarly treatise on the candidate's investigation. Working collaboratively with graduate faculty, candidates...

- identify a focused educational topic to investigate;
- critically review relevant research literature;
- synthesize information from a variety of sources;
- develop reasoned hypotheses;
- design a methodologically coherent study;
- conduct an investigation;
- collect data/systematic observations;
- analyze and interpret findings;
- prepare a written manuscript of the research;
- present the thesis.

Candidates considering a thesis should discuss this possibility with their academic advisors. Such a discussion should occur early in a candidate's program planning. The course entitled Planning a Thesis (RSM 503) provides opportunities for candidates to explore research issues and thesis requirements, determining whether the thesis option is a viable one for them.

All McDaniel College graduate candidates must complete a minimum of three credits in the area of research design and methodology. Candidates may select from among the following courses:

- RSM 503 Planning a Thesis (1 credit)
- RSM 520 Quantitative Methods (2 credits)
- RSM 530 Qualitative Methods (2 credits)
- RSM 540 Applied Research in HRD (3 credits)
- EDU 550 Introduction to Research Methodology (3 credits)

Prior to enrolling in any of the research courses noted above, candidates should meet with their faculty advisor to indicate their interest in completing a thesis. Candidates pursuing the thesis option should approach the research course with the goal of writing a thesis proposal. The proposal draft will consist of three chapters: thesis introduction, review of literature, and

procedures. Once the research course is completed, candidates should have their faculty advisors review their research course product as an initial step in developing the thesis proposal.

Candidates should pursue scholarship in their respective fields, reading the research literature, becoming active members of professional organizations, and attending conferences. Professors may advise candidates in these decisions, suggesting appropriate journals, professional associations, and conferences.

### **Approaches to Research**

Study designs incorporate quantitative or qualitative methods or a combination of both approaches. Candidates planning a quantitative study collect numerical data for statistical analysis and interpretation, drawing conclusions on the basis of their findings. Candidates choosing qualitative research generate verbal narratives for analysis and interpretation of investigated phenomena. The following descriptions provide examples of common educational research designs.

#### ***Sample Research Designs:***

- *Experimental and Quasi-experimental* research involves manipulating an independent variable to study its effect on a dependent variable, controlling for extraneous factors. Both designs attempt to establish cause and effect relationships between variables.
- *Correlational* research explores the relationship between two or more variables, suggesting but not establishing causality.
- *Descriptive and Historical* studies investigate and describe contemporary or historical educational phenomena, interpreting events, ideas, or conditions.
- *Ethnographic* research describes, documents, and analyzes cultural behaviors in the naturalistic conditions of a specific social group.
- *Causal-Comparative* studies examine cause and effect relationships that already exist, suggesting but not establishing causality.

### **Topic Selection**

Candidates considering the thesis option should plan early. The first few classes within a graduate program, typically a combination of required courses and electives, provide opportunities to explore a variety of ideas. During this time, candidates may discuss the possibility of the thesis option and potential topics with professors and advisors, narrowing an area of interest to a specific research topic. Candidates may also begin to review relevant literature as part of other class assignments, writing annotated bibliographies to keep information organized. It is important to note that many journal articles end the discussion section with “directions for future research.” This can be a good starting point for ideas.

Following full admission to graduate study, candidates should consider enrolling in RSM 503: *Planning a Thesis*. This one-credit course will guide candidates through the process of completing a thesis. Candidates will also have opportunities to explore questions in their discipline, review sample theses from different programs, and analyze the intent of all chapters within a thesis.

## **Thesis Advisor and Committee**

### ***Advisor***

The thesis advisor is a full-time McDaniel College faculty member in the discipline who is responsible for guiding the candidate through the thesis process. The selection of the thesis advisor should be related to the candidate's choice of topic.

#### **Path 1: The candidate has identified a topic.**

After selecting a topic, the candidate may contact a faculty member in the discipline with a similar research interest. The candidate should schedule an appointment and come prepared to discuss ideas and goals. This is also a good time for the candidate to request that the faculty member serve as his/her advisor. If the faculty member declines, the candidate may ask for a suggestion for another advisor.

#### **Path 2: The candidate has not identified a topic.**

The candidate may build on an existing relationship with a faculty member, identifying a professor who already knows the candidate's work. When making this choice, the candidate should carefully consider the quality of the professor's feedback on class assignments. Once the decision has been made, the candidate should schedule an appointment and come prepared with an area of interest and a vague idea of research topics.

Regardless of the path followed, candidates should start the thesis process early and monitor their progress with the *Master's Thesis Checklist* (Appendix A).

### ***Committee Members***

The Thesis Committee consists of a thesis advisor and two additional faculty members.\* This committee should provide as much support as possible; therefore, members' potential strengths should be considered during the selection process. The candidate will formally present the thesis proposal and Thesis Proposal form to the Thesis Committee. The Committee is charged with providing a full review of the proposal and approval of the thesis project. This feedback may address development of research questions, project strengths and weaknesses, timetables, relevant literature, study design, and data analysis.

\*Upon approval, one member of the committee may be a faculty member or professional colleague from an institution of higher education, school district, education agency, or professional society outside of McDaniel College. All such designees must be approved by the Dean of Graduate and Professional Studies.

Once the committee has approved the proposal, the candidate should register for the Thesis XXX-590 (e.g., EDU 590) and formally begin his/her research project. The thesis advisor will submit one copy of the thesis proposal application (Appendix B) to the Graduate Registrar and another to the Office of Graduate Records for the candidate's permanent file.

### **Proposal**

Topics should be narrow enough to be manageable, yet still contribute new ideas to the candidates' disciplines. Candidates should discuss topic ideas with professors who can provide guidance selecting relevant literature, focusing ideas, and assessing the feasibility of the proposed research. They should expect an advisor to thoroughly edit a proposal prior to its presentation and review by a thesis committee.

### ***Research Topics***

Following the parameters of course assignments, candidates can begin writing about an approved topic. In some courses, the writing might include a literature review on what is known about a particular topic (see RSM 509: Writing and Information Literacy). In others (e.g., EDU 550: Introduction to Research Methodology), candidates may explore the research questions and methodologies specific to their ideas.

After narrowing a topic, the candidate will develop a hypothesis or hypotheses, if appropriate, and research methodology. Strengthened and justified by a careful review of the literature, hypotheses provide the theoretical framework for testing the possible relationship between two or more variables. Therefore, when generating research questions, candidates should define the variables so they are both operational and measurable.

Flexibility is essential, so candidates need to embrace the dynamic nature of the thesis process, considering divergent perspectives and maintaining an open mind to committee feedback. Revisions to questions and/or hypotheses are an integral part of this process.

### ***Proposal Development***

The thesis proposal requires the completion of the first three chapters (written in future tense) of the candidate's master's thesis: Introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology. Candidates can refer to the thesis organization information (pp. 8-10) under *Formatting Guidelines*.

Once drafted, the proposal should be submitted to the thesis advisor; the advisor will forward the document to committee members. A follow-up meeting with the advisor must be scheduled for the candidate to review the committee's feedback. Regardless of who is present, feedback from all committee members should be discussed, so it is important for the candidate to provide ample time prior to the meeting for the committee to review and respond to the proposal. If revisions are required, the candidate should make the recommended changes and resubmit for feedback and approval. The proposal approval is then forwarded to the Graduate Registrar and to Office of Graduate Records for the candidate's permanent file. Following committee approval,

the advisor and candidate should submit paperwork for project approval by McDaniel College's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

### ***Institutional Review Board***

When using human subjects, candidates need to obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from McDaniel College and any other institution where subjects may be recruited (McDaniel IRB page (<http://www.mcdaniel.edu/3898.htm>)). This process must be completed prior to data collection. Candidates performing research within a school district or institution need to retain the appropriate approval according to the system guidelines.

IRB paperwork must include a title page for the proposed project, an overview and supporting documentation indicating proposal approval, and a copy of the informed consent form. Once the packet is completed, the appropriate application material can be obtained online. Candidates should work with their advisors to prepare the IRB forms and to obtain the appropriate signatures. Some designs qualify for exempt status, whereas others require an expedited or full review process. Advisors will help candidates identify their research type.

Additionally, candidates should complete the online tutorial (through National Institutes of Health) on Human Subjects Research that can be found at <http://ohrp-ed.od.nih.gov/CBTs/Assurance/login.asp>. After logging in and completing the modules, candidates will receive a dated certificate of completion. Candidates should save one copy and submit another to their advisors for the thesis file. A copy of the application and subsequent approval should be given to the advisor for placement in the candidate's file.

**Note: It takes 2-4 weeks for IRB approval; therefore, candidates should submit IRB paperwork as soon as they receive their committee's approval. Research may not begin without this approval.**

### ***Academic Integrity***

#### *GPS Policy on Professional Ethics and Standards*

Candidates are expected to do their own academic work and submit original work. Where resources and sources of information are used, credit must be given to the original source using the guidelines of the program's professional affiliation.

Dishonesty in academic work, including but not limited to cheating, academic misconduct, fabrication, or plagiarism is unacceptable. Plagiarism is the intentional or unintentional presentation of another person's idea or product as one's own. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to the following: copying verbatim all or part of another's written work; using phrases, charts, figures, illustrations, or mathematical or scientific solutions without citing the source; paraphrasing ideas, conclusions, or research without citing the source; and using all or part of a literary plot, poem, film, musical score, or other artistic product without attributing the work to its creator. Candidates can avoid unintentional plagiarism by carefully accepted scholarly practices. Notes taken for papers and research projects should accurately record sources of

material to be cited, quoted, paraphrased, or summarized, and papers should acknowledge these sources in footnotes. We advise candidates not to lend or share previous course work with other candidates, as this could lead to work being used by others for academic advantage. In this situation, the original owner of the course work may be liable for academic action regardless of his/her knowledge or lack of the other candidate's intent.

Any form of cheating, which includes plagiarism or collusion should be reported to the program coordinator and Dean of Graduate and Professional Studies. Candidates who are aware of academic dishonesty as well as instructors are expected to report their observations. *Click on <http://www.mcdaniel.edu/2333.htm> for the full GPS Policy on Professional Ethics and Standards.*

## **Thesis**

### ***Research***

Once the Thesis Committee has approved the proposal, the candidate is responsible for completing the research project. Candidates may collect data once they receive IRB approval. Data collection must adhere to the approved methodology and the APA guidelines for the ethical treatment of participants. If informed consent is necessary, candidates must explain the consent forms and have participants sign two copies (one for their records and one for the candidate's). Following the investigation, candidates should debrief their participants.

### ***Thesis Completion***

After collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data, candidates will need to complete Chapters 4 and 5, Data Analysis and Conclusions respectively. A draft copy of the concluding chapters will be reviewed by the thesis advisor and all edits completed before a final full draft of the thesis is prepared.

The final draft of the thesis will include all chapters of the thesis and related thesis components: references, appendices, tables and figures. The thesis is often developed from the proposal, which is written in future tense; therefore, the candidate should convert the text to past tense to indicate that the study has now been completed. The final draft of the thesis will be thoroughly reviewed and edited by the thesis advisor and committee members.

The completed thesis should reflect a logical and scholarly assessment of the candidate's topic. The results and discussion sections must show clear integration of the study purpose and address the research questions posed. The candidate should consult with his/her advisor and thesis committee members regularly for feedback on analysis, interpretations, integration, and writing style (see *Formatting Guidelines* on pp. 8-10). Once the final draft is submitted, the candidate and advisor should meet to discuss the thesis. Following the meeting, the candidate should make the recommended changes and resubmit the proposal for approval, forwarding final copies to committee members and the Dean of Graduate and Professional Studies.

### ***Presentation***

The presentation of the thesis will include a summary of the work, including an analysis of the results, conclusions, and next steps. The Thesis Committee will have the opportunity to discuss the completed project with the candidate and suggest any changes to the final draft.

### ***Final Evaluation***

Following the thesis presentation and discussion, the Thesis Committee must agree to accept the thesis as fulfilling all requirements of this project (Appendix D: *Certificate of Approval*). Grades for the thesis may be letter grades or Pass/Fail or Pass with Distinction.

### ***Publication and Institutional Dissemination***

Even though a thesis has been accepted by a Thesis Committee it is not quite finished. Edits are inevitable. Once the candidate and faculty advisor have completed all final edits and revisions, the final thesis is submitted for campus publication. Typically seven copies of the thesis are bound and reproduced by the College's copy center. The Thesis Committee members each receive a final copy. The candidate receives two copies and two copies (and a pdf file) are submitted to the College's library.

## **Formatting Guidelines**

### ***Organization***

The thesis typically consists of five sections or chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Data Analysis/Results, and Discussion/Conclusions.

**Chapter I. Introduction:** This section provides a theoretical framework that establishes the relevance for the study within the context of previously published research.

- *Study Background/Overview of Relevant Research:* The context for the rationale of the study is established by describing what is known about key issues related to the thesis topic, what is not known about specific areas connected to the thesis inquiry, and how this study will contribute to the body of research. The overview does not need to be as comprehensive as the literature review in Chapter II, but it should highlight major points while identifying the most relevant research. This section should lead to a logical rationale for the purpose of the study.
- *Statement of Problem/Purpose:* This statement establishes the need for the study, the reason why it is worthwhile. The problem or need can be identified as well as how this research will address the issue.
- *Research Questions and Hypotheses:* Depending on the research design, specific questions or hypotheses can be developed that will be addressed by the investigation. Independent and dependent variables should also be identified.

- *Study Limitations*: All studies have limitations that can be anticipated, whether related to participant accessibility, procedural issues, or research design. These should be recognized and identified. The candidate will address these limitations later in the conclusion section.
- *Definition of Terms*: Vocabulary terms that are specific to the study should be defined in regard to their relationship to the research. Operational definitions are effective in describing measurable variables and outcomes.
- *Thesis Organization*: This statement provides an overview of the remaining chapters.

**Chapter II. Literature Review:** This section includes a comprehensive description of the related literature in the field and develops the theoretical framework for the study. It should be current, thorough, and critically analyzed as related to the problem being investigated. Subheadings are often used within the text to organize the review, with brief summaries at the end of each of these sections. The review should avoid listing a summary of research articles but rather organize the discussion to relate points and issues among the studies available. The candidate is responsible for appropriate documentation, both for in-text citations and the list of references at the end of the thesis. Sources may include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following (in order of preference):

- Peer-reviewed article in a professional journal
- Chapter in a textbook (edited text)
- Published monograph (including a complete dissertation)
- Presentation at a conference
- ERIC document/Dissertation abstract

**Chapter III. Methodology:** This section is a detailed discussion of the research process. It should include descriptions of the following:

- *Protocols, Methods, Research Design*: The type of research design should be identified, along with any specialized methods or protocols considered.
- *Participants*: An explanation of the selection process and participant characteristics (e.g., age, gender, test scores, etc.) should be included. The description must maintain confidentiality of those participants. The candidate should also describe how the research design affected the selection process (see *APA Manual* for confidentiality statement).
- *Materials*: All study materials and data collection instruments should be listed, along with examples and appropriate citations. Relevant materials and/or instruments may be included in appendices.
- *Procedures*: The study procedures should provide an in-depth explanation of how the research was conducted. The explanation should be specific enough that another researcher could replicate the study on the basis of this description.

- *Data Collection and Analysis:* A description of the data collection and analysis should be sufficiently detailed to enable an outside reader to develop an equivalent data collection system. This information also provides evidence that the candidate used appropriate analytical methods for reviewing the results of the study.

**Chapter IV. Data Analysis/Results:** This section includes a comprehensive description of all research results and data. The discussion is an objective presentation of the results of the study. Tables and figures are usually included in this section. Although the narrative includes a description of the results, all tables and figures should be self-explanatory and include appropriate labeling.

**Chapter V. Discussion and Conclusions:** This section provides an interpretive critique and discussion of the results of the study. The conclusions are drawn from the analysis in Chapter IV and may be described in the context of other reported data. Limitations of the study, both those recognized previously as well as others that may have developed during the course of the research, should be addressed. Recommendations and/or implications for future research are usually included.

### ***Style Manuals***

In preparing the thesis, the candidate should consult the latest edition of the style manual required by the individual's program. These manuals typically include specific information regarding formatting of professional papers, as well as guidelines for developing tables and citing references. The following guides are often used:

- *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA)*
- *Modern Language Association (MLA) Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*
- *Modern Language Association (MLA) Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*
- *Chicago Manual of Style*

### ***References***

References include an alphabetical listing of all citations (those sources identified throughout the text). Candidates are responsible for ensuring that the sources for all in-text citations can be found in the list of references; hence, all references should also relate to an in-text citation. Candidates should refer to the style manual for details regarding format.

### ***Formatting Samples***

Candidates should refer to the appropriate style manual for specific formatting guidelines and examples.

## Appendix A

### Master's Thesis Checklist

	<u>Date</u>
1. Research topic discussed with, and approved by advisor - - - - -	_____
2. Thesis Committee appointed - - - - -	_____
3. Research proposal approved by advisor - - - - -	_____
4. Research proposal approved by Thesis Committee - - - - -	_____
5. Obtain IRB approval, as appropriate - - - - -	_____
6. Register for "Thesis in . . ." - - - - - (e.g., CED: 590, Thesis in Counselor Ed.)	_____
7. Thesis completed and approved by advisor - - - - -	_____
8. Final copies of thesis given to committee members and Dean of Grad. Studies - - - - -	_____
9. Thesis approved by Thesis Committee - - - - -	_____
10. Candidate approved for graduation - - - - -	_____

## **Appendix D**

Department of Education