

WAYNE STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

**SW 8999      Master's Thesis Research and Direction      3/3 credit hours**

**Master Syllabus**

**A.      Definition of Thesis**

The master's thesis must demonstrate evidence of scholarly study and writing and contribute to the knowledge base associated with some aspect of social work theory, practice or policy. It should be based on an original idea or seek to advance social work knowledge through theory, conceptualization, design, testing of tools, instruments, or procedures relevant to social work. The thesis is recommended for students progressing toward a doctoral (PhD) degree, who are interested in careers in social work research or for whom the thesis is relevant to their professional development in a particular field of practice, theory, or method of intervention. The worth of the thesis is founded in its originality and the merit of the thesis is a product of its methodology.

The exact focus and strategy of the thesis is to be arrived at in consultation with the individual faculty advisor and a second reader. The length and structure of the thesis will depend on the type of material involved, the research question, and the method. That the thesis is not just another term paper makes the thesis a special educational experience that typically exceeds other forms of scholarship students have experienced in graduate school. The thesis represents the candidate's culminating written work that is more substantive than any previous paper and demonstrates "mastery" of the particular field of study with social work.

**B.      Prerequisites**

Completion of SW 7830, SW 7810 or admission to Advanced Standing in School of Social Work is a prerequisite for this course. It is recommended that students consult with faculty members at an early stage, typically spring of the core year, or summer before moving into the advanced year or into advanced standing. It is the student's responsibility to allow sufficient time to do the necessary bibliographic research before trying to define a specific topic. Students are encouraged to begin discussions with a thesis advisor early in the graduate program or even before matriculation. It is preferable that students contact faculty members at the time of application or admission to begin discussion of their thesis ideas and understand the process for proposal development.

**C.      Thesis Advisor/Second Reader**

Thesis advisors must be full-time faculty members as well as regular members of the Graduate Faculty. The student and faculty advisor will then decide on one additional faculty member who will be asked to co-approve the proposal and serve as the student's second reader. Second readers may include full- or part-time faculty members within the School, faculty members from other units at the University, or other qualified professionals (e.g. agency personnel).

#### **D. Research Proposal**

The student will select a thesis topic in consultation with their thesis advisor who serves as primary reader of the thesis. After general agreement concerning the scope and organization of the thesis has been reached, the student is to write up a formal proposal of four to six pages, which should include: (1) a clear statement of the topic and its significance; (2) a statement of the thesis research question; (3) a brief literature review; (4) a working outline of the thesis; (5) a preliminary working bibliography; and (6) a plan for data gathering and analysis. The student's thesis advisor and second reader approve the final draft of the research proposal. The approved proposal must be submitted to the graduate advisor no later than November 1 for inclusion in the candidate's academic file.

#### **E. Research and Writing**

After the proposal has been accepted, the student should meet with the faculty advisor to work out a practical schedule of work for completing the thesis. The University has established deadlines for the submission of the final draft of the thesis. It is the student's responsibility to consult with the faculty advisor on the dates of these deadlines. Students must also keep the faculty advisor informed on the progress of the thesis, to arrange for consultations, and to turn in sections or chapters of the draft well in advance of the date on which they wish to discuss them.

The document should be a well-written, coherent exposition of the subject matter, reflecting a depth of knowledge, and demonstrating originality of perspective. While the format of the thesis may vary, the following sections are expected to be included in the final draft of the thesis: (1) a comprehensive review of the relevant literature; (2) description of the theoretical approach used in the thesis; (3) a description of the plan for data gathering and analysis or research design; and (4) presentation of research findings.

#### **F. Submission of Thesis to School of Social Work**

A full rough draft of the thesis needs to be submitted to the faculty advisor at the beginning of February in the semester that the student intends to complete the project and receive the degree. A copy of the thesis should be submitted to the second reader no later than mid-March.

Students will be expected to make a public presentation or a summary of the research findings to a professional social work audience. Such presentations might include but not restricted to: on-campus colloquia, poster sessions, class or seminar presentations, brown-bag presentations to students and/or faculty, presentations at agency settings, written summaries of research published in the School of Social Work *Visions* newsletter, papers read at scholarly meetings, or even as published research reports or articles.

#### **G. Graduate School Requirements**

All thesis research protocols must be submitted to the Human Investigation Committee (HIC) for review and approval prior to their implementation. Further, students will be expected to complete the University's online course for the protection of research participants prior to submission of their proposal to the HIC committee.

Students will be expected to submit a final draft of their thesis to the PhD Office in the Graduate School two weeks prior to their scheduled presentation for a format check (if said presentation is offered during the semester in which the student will graduate; otherwise it is due to the Graduate School no later than three weeks before the end of the semester). In addition to Graduate School formatting requirements, the School of Social Work requires that students use the American Psychological Association guidelines for formatting the thesis. Final copies of the thesis need to be submitted to the PhD Office of the Graduate School within two weeks of the presentation. This final version may be submitted as a paper copy or an electronic copy.

Note that the final version of the thesis must be submitted to the Graduate School no later than the May graduation date of the student's final semester; otherwise MSW certification/graduation will be delayed for one year.