

# GUIDELINES FOR MASTER PROJECT

## MASTER OF ARTS in STUDENT SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Each student will complete a Master Project that must be completed and submitted in their final semester of the program. The general learning objectives for the Master Project Study are for the student to:

1. Integrate and synthesize theory and practice in the administration of student services
2. Demonstrate a greater understanding of the internal and external factors that influence administrative practices;
3. Exhibit good written communication:
4. Develop and refine basic analytical skills; and
5. Generate specific suggestions for improving administrative practices in student services.

### *Select a Topic*

Given the importance and level of effort required to complete the project, the student must carefully choose the topic. Select a topic of importance, one that interests you, it can be job related and is must be researchable. A case project is a vehicle for exercising creative talents and for presenting a solution to a student services administration problem. An effective administrative project is specific and concise.

There are three major types of projects. The first is a historical analysis and review of particular student service area: The second is a review of the current literature regarding a student service area and recommending improvements in the service delivery: The third is a specific research project that analyzes quantitatively or qualitatively a specific research problem.

Below is a set of hypothetical examples that illustrate the action component.

**Historical Analysis:** In this project/paper the student would select a student service domain and conduct a historical research effort in describing how the service area has evolved including key elements and moments of service transformation. For example a students might select to write about the History of Residence Halls in Colleges and Universities. They research might include how the historical residential model in the UK with Masters and Tutors influenced the development of American Residential staffing. Another example might be the evolution of the College Admission Process including how the admission process has evolved in the USA over the past 200 years.

**Review of Current Practice and Recommendations for Improvement:** In this descriptive project the student will select a current student service area and review the current literature regarding best practices of service and then assert a grounded analysis suggesting how the practice may be changed and improved in the future. For example in a project/paper on Health Services the student would review literature, identify best and emerging practices across the country and then recommend how the delivery of Health Services might be changed in the future.

**Research Project:** The student proposes a research project that quantitatively or qualitatively assesses a research question. Following the format suggested in the Research Methods Class, the student would conduct a study regarding a specific problem in a student service area at an institution to which they either work or have access to. For example the student might research academic persistence for students who have student leadership positions. Another example might be what factors influence the final admissions decision of a student. The student would need good access and cooperation of the student delivery area.

The MASSA Program Coordinator must approve the topic as part of the Research Methods Class or subsequently prior to starting the project/paper.

### ***Project Proposal Outline and Presentation***

At the end of the Research Methods course, students will present an outline of their proposal consisting of description of the service area and the approach to the project. While the final project topic may be selected during the Research Methods class it may be changed with the approval of the program coordinator. The student will submit the completed project prior to being approved for graduation, preferably at the beginning of the semester in which the student expects to graduate.

### ***Grade Criteria for Masters Project Case Study:***

A project is a valuable learning tool that enables the student to critically and comprehensively analyze an administrative problem related to improving student services. The project proposal and on-line presentation will be graded on a pass/fail basis. To receive a passing grade, the student must meet all of the following requirements:

1. A proposal of the topic to be approved by instructor (to be submitted to the instructor prior to the end of the Research Methods class. A copy of the proposal will be filed in the student's School of Administrative Science/MASSA file.
2. The paper should be 15-20 double-spaced typed pages in length and use a 12 point font and one-inch margins.

3. There will be a minimum of six outside references (journals, books, government documents) excluding non-academic references (newspaper or magazine articles) and assigned readings.
4. The paper must meet acceptable standards of grammar and structure.
5. The paper is clearly cited using the American Psychological Association style. If the case study is not properly cited, the student will be required to resubmit. All ideas, facts, and conclusions that are not the author's own intellectual property must be cited. Otherwise, it is an issue of academic integrity.
6. The project will be graded on a pass/fail basis.
7. An executive summary/abstract will be posted by the student in an on-line forum at the beginning of the semester that the student expects to finish the program. The student will participate in reading other student projects and post observations and assessments of the projects.

### **General Principles Related to Writing the Master Report**

#### **Language**

The following three guidelines will help you select appropriate language in your report:

1. Choose accurate and clear words that are free from bias. One way to do this is to be very specific rather than less specific.
2. Avoid labeling people whenever possible.
3. Write about your research participants in a way that acknowledges their participation.
  - For example, use the active voice (e.g., “the participants constructed”) and describe the participants/subjects in specific terms such as *college students experiencing test anxiety*.

Keeping in mind the above guidelines, you should give special attention to the following issues that are explained more fully in our chapter and, especially, in the *APA Publication Manual*:

- Gender. The bottom line is to avoid sexist language.
- Sexual Orientation. Terms such as *homosexual* should be replaced with terms such as *lesbians*, *gay men*, and *bisexual women or men*. In general, avoid loaded or stereotypic terms that denigrate people.
- Racial and Ethnic Identity. Ask participants about their preferred designations and use them. When writing this term, capitalize it (e.g., African American).

- Disabilities. Do not to equate people with their disability. For example, refer to a participant as a *person who has cancer* rather than as a cancer victim.
- Age. Acceptable terms are *boy* and *girl*, *young man* and *young woman*, *male adolescent* and *female adolescent*. *Older adults* is preferred to *elderly*. Call people 18 and older *men and women*.

## Writing Quantitative Research Projects Reports Using the APA Style

There are seven major parts to the research report:

1. Title page.
2. Abstract.
3. Introduction.
4. Method.
5. Results.
6. Discussion.
7. References.

### 1. Title Page

- Contents include a running head, title, author, and institutional affiliation of the author(s), and author note.
- Your paper title should summarize the main topic of the paper in 12 words or less.

### 2. Abstract/Executive Summary

- This should be a comprehensive summary typically ranging from 150 to 250 words. For a manuscript submitted for review, it is typed on a separate page.
- The abstract should include a brief statement of:
  - Problem Statement.
  - Participants.
  - Method used.
  - Key result(s).
  - Major conclusion.

### 3. Introduction

- This section is not labeled. It's assumed that the reader knows that the first section is the introduction.
- It should present the research problem and place it in the context of other research literature in the area, and identify any hypotheses to be tested.
- It includes the "literature review."

### 4. Method

- This section does not start on a separate page in a manuscript being submitted for review.
- The most common subsections of Method are:
  - Participants** (e.g., list the number of participants, their characteristics, and how they were selected, and inclusion and exclusion criteria).

--**Design** if a complex design is used (otherwise the design is explained in the procedure section).

--**Apparatus** or *Materials* or *Instruments* (e.g., list materials used, why they were used, and the psychometric properties of the instruments).

--**Procedure** (e.g., provide a step-by-step account of what the researcher and participants did during the study so that someone could replicate it).

## 5. Results

- This does not start on a separate page in your manuscript.
- It is where you report the results of your data analysis and statistical significance testing.
- You need to be sure to report the significance level that you are using (e.g., "An alpha level of .05 was used in this study") and report your observed effect sizes and/or confidence intervals along with the tests of statistical significance.
- Tables and figures are expensive but can be used when they effectively illustrate your ideas.
- Organizing your results section by research question can be effective.

## 6. Discussion

- This is where you interpret and evaluate the results presented in the previous section.
- It is important to state whether your hypotheses were or were not supported.
- Also, you must answer the following questions:
  1. What does the study *contribute*?
  2. How do the results relate to prior research?
  3. How has it helped solve the study problem?
  4. What conclusion and theoretical *implications* can be drawn from the study?
  5. What are the *limitations* of the study?
  6. What are some *suggestions for future research* in this area?

## 7. References

- The word References should be centered at the top of the page, and all entries should be double-spaced.

### **Writing Historical Review or Current Practice Project Reports**

It is recommended that qualitative researchers who are presenting a Historical Project or Review of Current Practice also follow the guidelines given above when writing manuscripts although more creativity within those sections is fine.

Here are a few thoughts using the same seven major parts that were discussed for the quantitative research report.

- Title Page and Abstract. The goals are exactly the same as before. You should provide a clear and descriptive title. The abstract should describe the key focus of the study, its key methodological features, and the most important findings.
- Introduction. Clearly explain the purpose of your study and situate it in any research literature that is relevant to your study. In qualitative research, research questions will typically be stated in more open-ended and general forms such as the researcher hopes to "discover," "explore a process," "explain or understand," or "describe the experiences."
- Method. It is important that qualitative researchers always include this section in their reports. This section includes information telling how the study was done, where it was done, with whom it was done, why the study was designed as it was, how the data were collected and analyzed, and what procedures were carried out to ensure the validity of the arguments and conclusions made in the report.
- Review and Analysis. A review of the related literature, documents, research studies and trends in the student service topic area that you have selected with an view towards how this body of evidence builds to ways that current practice may be improved. For a historical project you may be documenting a how a program area may have been practiced and its implications for how that history now contributes to how student services are practiced today.
- Results/Recommendations for Improvement. The overriding concern when writing the results section is to provide sufficient and convincing evidence. Remember that assertions must be backed up with empirical data in this approach, and the works of others must be appropriately cited. The bottom line is this: It's about evidence, supporting documentation, and understanding and building on the works of others.
  - You will need to find an appropriate balance between description and Interpretation in the literature in order to write a useful and convincing results section.
 

Regardless of the specific format of your results section, you must always provide data (i.e., descriptions, quotes, data from multiple sources, and so forth) that back up your assertions.
  - Effective ways to organize the results section are organizing the content around the research questions.
  - It can also be very helpful to use diagrams, matrices, tables, figures, etc. to help communicate your ideas in a qualitative research report.
- Discussion. You should state your overall conclusions and offer additional interpretations in this section of the report. Even if your research is exploratory, it is important to fit your findings back into the relevant research literature. You may also make suggestions for future research here.

- References

### ***Final Project Presentation and Grading***

The student will present the final results of the project during his or her last term of study in the program. The final paper will receive a pass/fail grade. Assessment will be conducted by faculty of the MASSA program. Each student will provide an Executive Summary/Abstract of the case study on an appropriate online forum. Other students will have an opportunity to ask questions or provide comments on the executive summary. The final project / presentation will be assessed by the instructor on a pass/fail basis based upon the following criteria:

1. The presentation of a well-defined administrative practice that is suitable for an analysis.
2. Clarity of the written work
3. Evidence of an understanding of a student service area

### **FDU's Academic Integrity Policy**

Students enrolled at Fairleigh Dickinson University are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty. Students have the responsibility to each other to make known the existence of academic dishonesty to their course instructor, and then, if necessary, the department chair, or the academic dean of their College. Course instructors have the added responsibility to state in advance in their syllabi any special policies and procedures concerning examinations and other academic exercises specific to their courses. Students should request this information if not distributed by the instructor.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not necessarily limited to, the following:

1. *Cheating*—Giving or receiving unauthorized assistance in any academic exercise or examination. Using or attempting to use any unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in an examination or academic exercise.
2. *Plagiarism*—Representing the ideas or language of others as one's own. A more complete description is listed below in the section titled "Plagiarism Described."
3. *Falsification*—Falsifying or inventing any information, data, or citation in an academic exercise.
4. *Multiple Submission*—Submitting substantial portions of any academic exercise more than once for credit without the prior authorization and approval of the current instructor.
5. *Complicity*—Facilitating any of the above actions or performing work that another student then presents as his or her assignments.

6. *Interference*—Interfering with the ability of a student to perform his or her assignments.

***Plagiarism Described\****

As defined by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, plagiarism “occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source.” (“Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices.” <<http://www.wpacouncil.org/positions/WPAplagiarism.pdf>>)

Plagiarism can occur in the following ways:\*\*

- Using text from another source (e.g. websites, books, journals, newspapers, etc.) without documenting the source;
- Using direct quotation from a text without quotation marks, even if the source has been cited correctly;
- Paraphrasing or summarizing the ideas or text of another work without documenting the source;
- Substituting a word or phrase for the original while maintaining the original sentence structure or intent of the passage;
- Using graphics, visual imagery, video or audio without permission of the author or acknowledgment of the source;
- Translating text from one language to another without citing the original work;
- Obtaining packaged information, foreign language translation or a completed paper from an online source and submitting it as one’s own work without acknowledgment of the source; and
- Presenting the work of another student as one’s own.

Fairleigh Dickinson students are responsible for authenticating any assignment submitted to an instructor should the instructor request it. Students must be able to produce proof that the assignment they submit is actually their own work. Therefore, students must engage in a verifiable work process on all assignments:

- Keeping copies of all drafts of work;
- Making photocopies of research materials (including downloads from websites);
- Writing summaries of research materials;
- Keeping Writing Center receipts;
- Keeping logs or journals of their work on assignments and papers; and
- Saving drafts or versions of assignments under individual file names on a computer, external drive or other source.

In addition to requiring students to authenticate their work, Fairleigh Dickinson University instructors may employ various other means of ascertaining authenticity—such as using search engines to detect plagiarism, using external plagiarism detection services, creating quizzes based on student work, and requiring students to explain their work and/or process orally. The inability to authenticate work is sufficient grounds for a charge of plagiarism.



If subsequent evidence of plagiarism should be found after a grade has already been assigned, instructors have the right to lower the grade and/or apply one of the sanctions listed below.

**Sanctions:** Any student violating academic integrity will, for the first offense, receive one or a combination of the following penalties imposed by the faculty member:

1. *No credit (0) or Failure* for the academic exercise.
2. *Reduced grade* for the course.
3. *Failure* in the course.
4. Recommendation for *Academic Probation* to the dean of the college in which the student is registered.

The instructor shall file a notice of the penalty in the student's file maintained in the campus Office of Enrollment Services.

In cases of interference and complicity, whether or not the student is registered in the affected course, the incident and penalty shall be recorded in the student's file maintained in the campus Office of Enrollment Services.

For a subsequent violation of academic integrity, a student will be subject to any combination of the above sanctions, and, after due review by the academic dean according to the procedure below, one of the following:

1. *Suspension* from the University for one year. Readmission will be contingent upon the approval of the academic dean.
2. *Dismissal* from the University.
3. *Dismissal from the University identified on the student's academic transcript* as a result of a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy.

### **Procedure:**

When a faculty member believes that a student has violated the Academic Integrity Policy, the faculty member shall discuss the incident with the student as soon as possible. If after the conference, the faculty member determines that an act of academic dishonesty has occurred, the faculty member may impose the appropriate sanctions. Within five days of the faculty member's action, the faculty member shall notify his or her department chair/school director in writing of the circumstances of the violation and the imposed sanctions. Within five days the academic department/school shall notify the student via certified mail/return receipt of the sanctions and the appeals' procedures. Copies of the notice shall be sent to the chair of the department or director of the school of the student's major, the dean of the college in which the

course is offered and the campus Office of Enrollment Services. The student may appeal the instructor's decision as outlined below. Upon completion of the appeals process, the dean shall notify the student of the final disposition of the matter and the sanctions to be imposed, if any, via certified mail with copies to the faculty member, the department chair/school director and the campus director of enrollment services.

### **Appeals Process:**

A student who is charged with violating the Academic Integrity Policy by an instructor may appeal in writing to the chair of the department or the director of the school in which the alleged incident took place. The letter must state the specific grounds for the appeal. The student must submit a written appeal to the department chair or school director within 14 days of the receipt of the notification of the imposed sanctions. Failure to make an appeal within this 14-day period shall constitute a waiver of the appeal right. Within 10 working days of the receipt of the student's appeal, the chair/director will review the circumstances of the alleged violation with the student and the instructor and recommend upholding, modifying, or dismissing the sanctions imposed by the instructor. The chair/director, within five working days, shall notify the student in writing via certified mail of the outcome, with copies to the instructor, the chair/director of the student's major, the academic dean of the college in which the course is taught and the campus director of enrollment services. If it is determined that a violation of academic integrity did not occur, the student's final grade in the course cannot be based on the assumption of such violation. If the differences between the instructor and the student are not resolved by this review, the student may appeal the outcome to the dean of the college in which the course is offered.

Within 10 working days of the department chair/school director's notification, the student may submit a written appeal to the dean of the college in which the alleged dishonesty took place. The letter must state the specific grounds for the appeal. Upon receipt of the student's appeal, the dean shall provide the faculty member and his or her chair/director with a copy of the student's appeal. Within 10 working days the dean shall convene a five-person hearing committee consisting of a faculty member at large from the college in which the course is offered, the dean or his or her designee, the campus dean of students or his or her designee, a faculty member from the department or school of the student's major, and a student, selected by the campus dean of students, from the college in which the alleged dishonesty took place. The hearing will be chaired by the college dean or his or her designee. The role of the appeals committee is to review the record of the matter and determine whether a finding of academic dishonesty is founded and whether a sanction is consistent with the terms of this policy. The committee shall base its decision upon a review of the record but may meet with the student and the faculty member to secure additional information to help it in making a determination about the merits of the appeal. The committee can uphold, modify or dismiss the sanction imposed by the instructor. The college dean shall notify the student of the committee's decision within five working days of the hearing. For a second offense of academic dishonesty, the academic dean can suspend or dismiss the student as indicated above.

For a sanction of suspension or dismissal imposed by the academic dean, the student may file a written appeal to the University Provost/Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs within

10 working days of receiving the notification of the dean's decision. The University Provost, or his or her designee, shall review the case within 10 working days of the receipt of the appeal. The University Provost shall make the final decision, using any appropriate resource to assist in deciding the appeal. The University Provost shall then notify all parties in writing of his or her final decision within five working days of his or her decision.

FDU's Policy Reviewed: August 2011

Students who are found guilty of Academic Integrity issues will receive a failing grade on the Master Project and will be ineligible to graduate without completing the project.

**MASTER OF ARTS IN STUDENT SERVICES ADMINISTRATION**  
**Master Project Topic Change Request**

**Name**

**Date**

This form should be used only if you intend to change your topic from the one that you submitted in the Research Methods Class. In order to approve a change in your Master Project, it is necessary for you to respond to the following questions and submit this proposal to the MASSA/SAS office. The completed/approved form will be placed in your file as a substitute for the proposal submitted in the Research Methods Class.

Proposed Project Title:

1. Check the option that best describes your project?

- Historical Research Analysis
- Review of Current Practice and Recommendations for Improvement
- Research Project

2. What is the issue, concern, situation, or opportunity this project will address? Why is it important to you or if applicable, your work unit?

3. What is the outcome you expect to achieve by addressing this issue, concern, situation, or opportunity? This question will assist you in establishing your hypothesis for this project.

4. What knowledge, theories, models, or principles do you plan to use in this project? This should include a minimal literature review and some information on what type of information/data you will include in the project.

5. Why do you think this information is applicable to your purpose?

This Master Project Proposal is:

Approved       Disapproved       Returned for Revision

Reason for disapproved or returned for revision:

Program Coordinator Signature \_\_\_\_\_