

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE  
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Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling

GUIDE FOR  
THE CULMINATING EXPERIENCE

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## INTRODUCTION

This guide for the Culminating Experience is designed to provide information and guidance for graduate students enrolled in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling at California State University, Northridge. The purpose of the guide is to direct students toward the smooth and successful completion of their culminating experience, and to assist in students' timely graduation and entrance into their chosen profession. Department and university procedures for the three options offered by the EPC Department for the culminating experience are described below.<sup>1</sup>

## OVERVIEW

It is never too early to begin thinking about, and planning for, your culminating experience. Some students seem to know just what they want to do from the very first day of the program, whereas others take a longer, more reflective path to determine exactly what they will do for the culmination of their master's degree. More typically, students get ideas and clues about the types of activity they would like to pursue, and a specific topic or project with which they would like to become involved, through participation in courses and/or fieldwork experiences in their program. Is there a topic that piqued your interest in a class discussion? Was there a chapter you read in a text, or perhaps a journal article, that struck a chord for you? Perhaps you wrote a paper for a class and the topic turned out to be quite an intriguing one for you. These are the kind of self-signals for which you should be on the lookout. When you find something that seems particularly interesting to you - catch it! Write it down!

Who knows, maybe that will become the basis of one of your comprehensive exam questions, or the springboard for your graduate project, or the problem you will investigate for your thesis research.

## BASIC DEFINITIONS

### ***What is a culminating experience?***

The culminating experience is a generic term referring to the final academic experience in your master's program. In the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling, the culminating experience is one of three choices: it can be a comprehensive examination, a project, or a thesis.

### ***What is a graduate project?***

A graduate project involves the design of a product, such as a curriculum, a workshop, a guidebook, a video, or a unique approach to a particular therapeutic method or teaching model. The candidate provides a rationale for the product based on a comprehensive review of the research and consultation with experts in the field. The project must contribute something new and/or significant to the field, and it must be based on a review of the research and/or a needs assessment. Typically, theses have five chapters as described in depth below.

### ***What is a thesis?***

A thesis involves the design and implementation of empirical research. Students design an original study, obtain and/or develop data collection tools, organize and implement data collection, input and analyze the data, and write the results and conclusions of the study based on the data. Typically, theses have five chapters as described in depth below.

### ***What is a comprehensive examination?***

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<sup>1</sup> The College Counseling/Student Services program option has an additional option for the culminating activity. See your program coordinator for additional information.

Comprehensive examinations (“Comps”) are comprised of ten questions, the answers to which are prepared like term papers. Broad concepts are researched, explored, and analyzed within the context of answering specific questions. From the ten questions above, three questions are chosen and administered to the student during a three-hour examination on a Friday several weeks before the end of the fall and spring semesters. Students who do not pass may be given an oral exam. Students who do not pass a second time will not be allowed to complete their master’s degree per CSU regulation. Students must be enrolled in EPC 697 (Comprehensive Exam) in the semester they take the exam. Those students who enroll, but do not take the exam that term must complete a late drop form and have it signed and filed before the end of the term to avoid receiving a No Credit grade.

***When should I begin my culminating experience?***

It is never too early to begin thinking about and planning your culminating activity. Officially, students enroll in the comprehensive exam course (EPC 697) during the last semester of their program; or in the thesis or graduate project course (EPC 698C) in the last two semesters of their program.

If additional time is needed to complete the thesis or graduate project, students are to enroll in EPC 696 for the following semester. Students may complete their thesis or graduate project in the summer term *only* with the agreement of their chair and committee members. This is typically allowed for students who are completing the final draft of their culminating project or thesis during that period. Students must be enrolled in the final term of their graduate program. To qualify for the enrollment in XEDU 098 (Extended Learning), the students must have completed drafts of all five chapters of their thesis or project. Students opting for the Comp. Exam option will not be permitted to enroll in XEDU 098, but must, instead be enrolled in EPC 697.

**REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION**

At the latest, students should apply for graduate by the second week in the term in which they intend to graduate. The appropriate form may be submitted to Admissions and Records with the required fee.

The thesis study or graduate project typically takes at least two (2) semesters to complete. The thesis or graduate project paperwork is now submitted online through the Electronic Thesis and Dissertation webpage. You may find the electronic page at <http://etd.csun.edu/>. The form declaring the intent to complete the thesis study or graduate project should be completed one (1) year prior to the anticipated date of completion (i.e., submit paperwork in the fall for completion of the thesis by the end of fall semester the following year). Counseling students should enlist committee members during the spring semester in which they are registered for “B” practicum and, if the student plans to graduate by the end of the following spring semester. For EPC M.A. students, when the student has completed about 50% of required program units, the student should then identify their committee. Once students have selected a chairperson and committee member(s), they should complete the electronic form.

Students choosing the thesis or graduate project option must submit their Thesis/Graduate Project Planning Electronic Form by the dates posted on the Graduate Studies website.

Students choosing comprehensive exams as their culminating activity must obtain a Comprehensive Examination Committee Member Form from the EPC graduate secretary in ED 1218. The student needs to have the comprehensive exam committee chair and reader provide signatures on the form, which the student will then return to the graduate secretary. Once the form is completed, students should obtain a Comprehensive Exam Registration card the semester they plan to take the exam.

The appendix of this guide includes samples of the necessary forms and paperwork.

## **YOUR COMMITTEE**

### ***Selecting a chair***

For all three culminating experience options, the committee chairperson must be a full-time EPC faculty member. Ideally, the chair should be a faculty member in the student's program, or a faculty member with expertise about the subject that the student wishes to pursue for a culmination experience, and a person with whom the student is comfortable working. The student should make sure that the chair would be available throughout the planned course of the culminating experience. Students should provide their chair and committee members accurate contact information and update any changes, such as phone numbers and email addresses. An example of a form that can be used to chronicle meetings with committee members, including topics discussed and activities to pursue, is provided in the Appendix.

### ***Understanding the purpose of the committee***

Your committee is your personal guide to starting, doing, and completing your culminating experience. All options of the culminating experience utilize a committee. Comprehensive examination committees consist of a chair and one member/reader. Thesis and graduate project committees consist of a chair and two committee members. It is expected that students keep their committee members up-to-date on their progress in their culminating experience on a regular basis.

### ***Enlisting committee members***

For students completing a thesis study or graduate project, one (1) of the other two committee members must be a full- or part-time faculty member in the EPC department. With the approval of the committee chair, the other committee member may be a part-time faculty member in EPC, a full-time faculty member in another department, or a practitioner in the student's field of study. The practitioner must have earned at least a master's degree in a relevant field of study. Practitioners are required to submit their electronic résumé for approval via ETD. To serve as committee members, no additional documentation is needed for full-time faculty from other departments at CSUN or for part-time members of the EPC faculty to serve as committee members.

Students completing comprehensive examinations need one (1) committee member, in addition to the committee chair. This member may be a full-time faculty member in the department, a full-time faculty member in another university department who is currently teaching in the department, or a part-time faculty member in EPC.

### ***Working with your committee***

The student should ask the chairperson and committee members about the logistics of the involvement of committee members. Some committee members prefer to see all drafts and be involved throughout the process, whereas other members may give early input in terms of conceptualizing the project or research design and then prefer to see only the final drafts. Students should have committee members clarify their preference at the onset of their work together. Students are advised to work closely with their chairs from the very beginning and throughout the entire length of the culminating experience. For example, it would be inadvisable for students to do most of the work of a culminating activity on their own and then share that completed work with their chair in hopes that the person would "sign on" as committee chairperson. The culminating experience is intended to be a process during which the committee and student work closely throughout.

Taking written notes of what is discussed and agreed upon in committee meetings is very helpful in keeping the chair, committee members and the student on track with timely completion of the work. Procedures such as summarizing a committee meeting and then promptly providing copies of the notes to the committee (via e-mail or otherwise) can prove very helpful. Another logistical procedure

a student, chair, and committee members should discuss and agree upon is the amount of time that the student must allow for the chair and committee members to read submitted written material. For example, how long does the chair need in order to review materials before your next meeting? When the final draft is completed, how much time will committee members need before submitting their suggestions? These important procedural considerations should be clearly delineated at the onset of the culmination experience process and updated as needed.

### ***Developing timelines***

Timelines help both students and faculty members stay focused and purposeful in relation to the timely completion of the culmination experience. Timelines help the student understand the sequence of activities, map out a schedule, and inform committee members when to anticipate incoming drafts of chapters to read. Several sample timelines are provided in the appendix; students should consult with their chair to modify and/or periodically review their timeline.

### ***Writing successfully***

Some committee members and chairs will provide editing, formatting, spelling correction, and/or grammatical advice for students, whereas other chairs prefer to focus their attention on the content, not the structure, of student work. Students are advised to discuss this aspect of their culminating experience with their committee chair. Sources for editing and formatting are available from both university and community sources. It is the student's responsibility to persist with the writing and revision process until the final document is satisfactory to the chair and each committee member.

## **DEPARTMENT AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES**

### ***EPC Department Procedures***

If you have chosen to complete a thesis or project you may enroll in EPC 698C (3 units) two times for 1 or 2 semesters). If you have chosen to complete a comprehensive exam you may only enroll in EPC 697 for one (1) semester. From the EPC department office, you should obtain a copy of the Thesis/Graduate Project Timeline (printed on pink paper) or the EPC webpage, which lists critical department and university deadlines for comps, thesis, and graduate projects. Since the dates differ each semester, it is crucial that students obtain this timeline at the beginning of the semester he or she plans to complete their culminating experience. It is the student's responsibility to be knowledgeable of, and to meet, these deadlines. There are no exceptions to university deadlines.

### ***Summer Enrollment***

Students may not begin their culminating experience in the summer. Students may complete a graduate project or thesis in the summer semester only with the agreement, in advance, of their chair and committee members; most faculty do not work with students on culminating activities during the summer.

### ***Credential and Licensure Requirements***

Students who plan to apply for a state credential or license including the Pupil Personnel Service credential for school counselors and school psychologists, and/or licensure from the State of California Board of Behavioral Sciences should be aware that a transcript indicating an uncompleted culminating experience may cause delays in obtaining the desired credential or internship approval. Students are advised to obtain further information from the coordinators of their specific program option about possible delays resulting from an "I" – Incomplete – on their transcript.

### ***Original work***

Students are expected to submit only work that is written by them and to follow all of the accepted procedures for academic integrity for the university. Plagiarizing of another's work is grounds for removal from the graduate program. Quotations should be marked and properly cited. Please see the

university policy on plagiarism at  
<<http://www.collegesource.org/displayinfo/catalink.asp>>

### **University Procedures**

The Office of Graduate Studies (OGS) at CSUN is responsible for implementing university policies regarding graduate student classification, formal programs, culminating experiences, diplomas. This office publishes information on all graduate programs and assists individual departments in updating information on graduate degree programs. The website for Research and Graduate Studies is:  
<http://www.csun.edu/graduatestudies>

Students should obtain the *Guidelines for Preparation* booklet available online ([http://www.csun.edu/graduatestudies/graduatestudies/documents/Graduate Student Info Booklet.pdf](http://www.csun.edu/graduatestudies/graduatestudies/documents/Graduate_Student_Info_Booklet.pdf)) or in the Research and Graduate Studies office (University Hall 270). Students are required to meet the formatting guidelines of both the university and of the EPC department, which adheres to the guidelines of the American Psych. Association. Deadlines and forms are posted at this site

### **Human Subjects**

All planned research involving human subjects must receive approval from the CSUN Advisory Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects *prior to commencing* the thesis and/or project study. Any projects involving human subjects must have the approval of the Institutional Research Board (IRB). Please view and prepare the relevant IRB forms at the Human Subjects website on the Research and Graduate Studies website, consult with your chair, and submit the forms to Grad Studies as soon as possible if this applies. You may not collect any data until your thesis study has been approved. See (<http://www.csun.edu/grip/research/humanresearch>), for the forms and other information.

The Human Subjects Committee meets once a month and requires that all paperwork is submitted at least two (2) weeks prior to the meeting time. Approvals from participating schools or organizations (such as school principals or program directors) must be obtained on letterhead prior to submitting a completed proposal. Methodology must be specific and clearly written, so that the Human Subjects Committee can approve the research in a timely fashion. Human Subjects forms can be downloaded from: <http://www.csun.edu/graduatestudies/1Research/Documents/human.pdf>

### **Bound Copies of Theses**

Graduate Studies no longer requires hard copies of student theses or projects, only electronic versions; the process is all completed electronically with specific hard deadline dates for each semester. Please refer to the EPC Department's Thesis/ Graduate Project Guidelines or the Graduate Studies website for deadlines. Graduate Studies has a list of sources for binding if you wish to do so.

### **Resources**

The following recommended books are sources of valuable information and guidance for preparing and completing, your culminating experience.

- American Psychological Association. (2009). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Cone, J. D., & Foster, S. L. (1995). *Dissertations and theses from start to finish: Psychology and related fields*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2009). *Practical research: Planning and design* (9th ed.). New York: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Frankel, J. R., Wallen, E. I., & Sawin, N. E. (1999). *Visual statistics*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

## THE GRADUATE PROJECT

### ***What is a graduate project?***

In a graduate project, the candidate provides a rationale for a specific *product* that is based on a comprehensive review of the research and consultation with experts in the field. This product takes a wide variety of forms, such as a curriculum, a workshop or program, a guidebook, a video, or a unique approach to a particular therapeutic method or teaching model. The project must: (1) relate directly to the candidate's program; (2) contribute something new and/or significant to the field, and (3) be based on a review of the research and, if appropriate, a needs assessment.

### ***What is the difference between a thesis and a graduate project?***

In a thesis, the candidate designs a research study, collects and analyzes the data, and discusses the results. In other words, the candidate conducts an empirical study of an issue. For further details, please see the thesis section of this guide.

### ***How is a graduate project structured?***

Below is a typical outline for a project completed by an EPC student.

## Sample Outline for a Graduate Project

### Chapter One – Introduction to the Project

*Introduction* – The purpose of this section of Chapter One is to provide a context that supports the rationale for the proposed project. For example, let's say that you are going to develop a series of parenting workshops for Spanish-speaking parents, your introduction would include information such as 1) statistics showing how many Hispanic parents live in Los Angeles (or other geographic areas; 2) statistical indicators of the need for parenting workshops for this particular population, such as attendance rates of Spanish speakers in parenting workshops, family violence or abuse rates, needs assessment data, etc.; 3) availability of parenting workshops for Spanish speakers, etc. The introduction is intended to lead the reader into an understanding that there is a specific need, or problem, that needs to be addressed. There is no heading to this section.

*Statement of Need/Problem* – This section states what is needed and why. If we use the above example of parenting workshops, this section would point out that there is a lack of effective workshops for Spanish-speaking parents due to language and cultural differences. Be sure to state credible reasons and/or cite literature to support the statement of need.

*Purpose of Graduate Project* – This is the most important section of the project. Everything – the research you survey, your creative process in developing the project, the project itself – should be connected to and a result of your identified purpose. This section states succinctly your purpose in creating this graduate project, for example, "The purpose of this project is to develop a workshop that meets the needs of Spanish-speaking parents in the San Fernando Valley." This section should also include a brief description of the proposed project.

*Terminology* – This section provides definitions of critical terms. These definitions should be based on scholarly research and other scholarly work. The sources should be cited using APA format. When scholars define a term in different ways, include a brief discussion of the different perspectives and indicate which definition will be adopted in the project and why.

*Transition to Next Chapter* – The final section of the first chapter provides a bridge to the review of the research and the remainder of the graduate project. Provide a paragraph or two indicating how the graduate project is organized.

## Chapter Two - Literature Review

*Introduction* – The purpose of the literature review is to explore research on issues that are relevant to the proposed project. Briefly list and preview the critical issues in the order in which they will be discussed in the review. The subheadings of the subsequent sections of the review should reflect the critical issues.

*Review of the Research* – Review the research on each issue. In this process, you should:

- a. Use the most recent version of the APA style manual for formatting the prose and citing sources.
- b. In addition to discussing the major findings of relevant studies, the student should cite pertinent information about how the study was conducted. Include number of participants in the study, the characteristics of participants, and what kinds of instruments and methods were used (e.g., not the specific names of tests or other instruments, but whether they were interviewed, responded to questionnaires, tested, observed, etc.). The synopsis should also mention any major weaknesses in the study design.

*Synthesis of Literature Review* – Synthesize major findings of the research related to your proposed project. Discuss such questions as, does the research:

- a. Support the development of the proposed project?
- b. Indicate how the project should be structured and implemented?
- c. Include evaluations of products that are similar to the proposed project? If so, how does the proposed project differ from, or improve upon, existing similar products or projects?

## Chapter Three – Project Audience and Implementation Factors

*Introduction* – Indicate that this graduate project presents a product or project that, according to the research, is needed. Briefly delineate the organization of the chapter.

*Development of Project* – Describe your process (or method) in developing the project. How was the project developed (e.g., how was the parenting workshop designed)? What steps did you take from initially deciding you wanted to develop a particular project to its final creation?

*Intended Audience* – Identify the target population for the product or project. Describe the relevant demographics of the intended group (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity or race, language proficiency, etc.). Also describe any relevant conditions (e.g., clients who have been sexually abused, gay or lesbian couples, persons of a specific ethnicity, persons in a specific career or decision-point in their lives). If relevant, discuss the group or type of person for whom the project would be inappropriate.

*Personal Qualifications* – Describe the qualifications of the professionals who will provide the service (e.g. conduct a workshop or therapy session) or use the product. Detail the training and experiences that the leader or provider must have (e.g. licensed psychologist, licensed therapist, school counselor, career counselor, credentialed teacher, parent trainer, etc.) Describe other important skills needed, in addition to professional training, licenses, and degrees, such as proficiency in a language other than English.

*Environment and Equipment* – Describe the attributes of the physical space in which the product or process is to be used or take place (e.g., a quiet room) or special equipment needed (e.g., a sand tray).

*Project Outline* – Provide an outline of the content, activities, and procedures that comprise the proposed project.

## Chapter Four – Conclusion

*Summary* – Summarize the preceding chapters, starting with the purpose of the project. You may use this summary as your abstract, although some students prefer to write an elaborated summary here.

*Evaluation* – Some chairs will want you to evaluate your project. This could be accomplished in a variety of ways. You could assemble a panel of three or more experts in the field to examine and evaluate the project. Typically students would develop a measure to assess the effectiveness of their project based upon the experts' evaluation of the project or program. You could also conduct an evaluation study in which you collect data showing the project's effectiveness. The latter option is rare, however. In the next two sections, you have the opportunity to write from your own voice. Reflect on what you have learned. You now know more than anyone else about this project -- it is time to show it and to shine.

*Discussion or Conclusion* – Discuss your project and the results of your evaluation. Did you make changes in your project or product based upon the comments of the experts? Why or why not? Draw conclusions from your work. For example, based upon your knowledge of the field, you may conclude that designing a workshop for Latino parents differs from designing a workshop for English speaking parents in the following ways.

*Future Work/Research* – Identify what work needs to be done in the future. How are you going to use your project? For example, using the example above, you may want to do one of the following:

- Teach parent workshops throughout Los Angeles and discuss how you would interest parents in attending such workshops. Design an evaluation instrument for participant feedback, so you can really fine-tune the workshop.
- Conduct an outcome study on the effectiveness of the workshop (i.e., do the participants become better parents than those who have not participated in such a workshop?)
- Further develop the curriculum and publish it.
- Determine if your workshop design could be used with parents who speak languages other than Spanish.
- Identify research questions throughout your literature review that need to be answered and discuss how you would answer these questions.

## APPENDIX – Product

The *Appendix* consists of the fully developed project. Some examples include a fully developed curriculum, handbook, workshop, or video. What is to be included here is the culmination of your own research-based, creative process. You still need to stay within the approved margins of the document, but you may use photographs, outlines, and other non-APA formatted content.

**Whether a thesis or a project, you will submit one PDF document – that will include all front pages, chapters, and appendices – via the ETD website BOTH after you have a complete draft and after your committee has approved your final document.**

Be sure to communicate with your committee to ensure that each member receives draft copy (or copies) as he or she prefers. Maintain communication with your committee throughout the process. Plan in advance so that there are no surprises!

A grade will be assigned for EPC 698C (for each enrollment) at the end of the term you complete your culminating thesis/project. If it is not, please contact your chair and the EPC department.

## THESIS

### ***What is a thesis?***

A thesis involves the design and implementation of empirical research by the student. The student will design the study, obtain and/or develop data collection tools, set up and follow-through on the data collection process, process and analyze the data, and write the results and conclusions of the study based on the data. One thesis option is a comprehensive review of the research. In this case, the student formulates a research question that can be addressed through an extensive review of the research.

### ***What is the difference between a thesis and a graduate project?***

A graduate project involves the design of a product, such as a curriculum, workshop, or video. For further details, see the *Graduate Project* section of this Guide. Theses typically involve the development and completion of original research by the student.

### ***How is a thesis structured?***

Below is a typical outline for a thesis completed by an EPC student.

## **Sample Outline of a Thesis**

### **Chapter One – Introduction**

*Introduction* – The purpose of this section is to provide a context that is supporting the rationale for the proposed study. For example, let's say that you want to examine the nature and quality of the preparation of school counselors in regard to their cultural competencies. The introduction should provide such information as:

- a. The percentage of students from various ethnic and racial groups served by school counselors in a particular geographic region;
- b. The ethnic and racial groups represented by school counselors;
- c. Indicators showing whether there is a need to improve the ability of school counselors to meet the needs of culturally and racially diverse students.

The introduction is supposed to lead the reader into understanding or concluding that this is an issue that needs to be formally studied.

*Statement of the Problem* – This section provides a clear statement of the research problem and why it needs to be addressed. A statement of the problem and research question, based on the example previously mentioned, might indicate that the current population of school counselors does not meet the needs of certain ethnic/racial groups. Another example: It is unknown whether school counselors are meeting the needs of culturally/racially diverse students/populations, and therefore needs to be investigated. The statement of the problem should lead the reader into the next section, in which the research question(s) and hypotheses are addressed.

*Purpose of the Study/Hypothesis statement* – This section clearly states that the purpose of the thesis is to examine a specific research question and to test certain hypotheses (in the case of a quantitative study) or to explore certain themes related to the hypotheses (in the case of a qualitative study). A very brief description of the proposed study should also be provided.

*Significance of the Study* – This section discusses the contributions to the field that this study is intended to provide and why it is important to conduct the study.

*Terminology* – This section provides definitions of critical terms. These definitions should be based on scholarly research and other scholarly work. The sources should be cited using APA format. When scholars define a term in different ways, include a brief discussion of the different perspectives and indicate which definition will be adopted in the project and why.

*Bridge to the Next Chapter* – The student provides a paragraph or two indicating how the thesis is organized and provides a bridging statement to Chapter Two.

## **Chapter Two – Literature Review**

*Introduction* – The purpose of the review of the research is to explore research on the issues that are relevant to the proposed project. Briefly list and preview the critical issues, in the order in which they will be discussed in the review. The subheadings of the subsequent sections of the review should reflect the critical issues.

*Review of the Research on Issues that are Relevant to the Study* – As the student reviews the research on each issue, she/he should:

- a. Use the most recent version of APA style for formatting prose and citations. The student should obtain the latest edition of the APA style manual.
- b. In addition to discussing the major findings of the studies, the student should also include pertinent information about how each study was conducted, such as the number of subjects, relevant characteristics of the subjects, types of instruments and/or methods used (e.g., not necessarily the specific names of the tests or instruments, but whether they were interviewed, responded to questionnaires, tested, observed, etc.). The synopsis should also mention any major weaknesses in the study design.

*Synthesis of the Review of the Research*. This section synthesizes the major findings of the research as it relates to the proposed study. Discuss how the research you have just reviewed:

- a. Supports the development of the proposed thesis
- b. Indicates how your study should be designed and/or implemented and identifies other studies that are similar to the proposed study.
- c. Explains how the proposed study differs from or improves upon existing similar studies.

## **Chapter Three- Methods**

*Introduction* – Present the research design for the proposed study, restate the hypotheses and research question(s), and briefly delineate the organization of this chapter.

*Sample* – Describe the sample population of the study, including a description of how many participated (you may want to talk about the number of surveys sent out versus the response rate, for example), all other relevant descriptors (typically including age, ethnicity, gender, psychological condition, etc.), how participants were selected (random, intact group, etc.), and if they were grouped in any way.

*Instruments* – All instruments, tools or methods used to gather data must be described here, including the psychometric characteristics of the tests (e.g., validity and reliability indicators), how the tool was developed, or how the instrument will be designed or piloted. If a qualitative technique is to be used, such as interviews, observations or videotaping, what protocols were applied? What kinds of information regarding procedures, ethics, and confidentiality were participants and/or others given?

*Research Design* – Describe the research design. If the study is an experimental or quasi-experimental study, what research design will be used? What are the comparison groups? How does the design address each of the hypotheses? If it is a qualitative study, what research design will be used? What methods will be used to establish reliability and validity (e.g., triangulation)?

*Procedures* – The student should provide an outline of all procedures involved in the proposed research. Describe the logistics and the timeline for this study. How/when the participants will be contacted and/or selected. When the data will be collected, processed, and analyzed?

## Chapter Four – Results

*Introduction* – Reiterate the hypotheses and research question(s). Describe the organization of the chapter, which, in effect, is how the data will be discussed.

*Sample* – Describe the sample, i.e., number and relevant characteristics of subjects. If the number or characteristics of the subjects are substantially different from those you had planned to use, indicate this difference and explain why this happened. For example, if you sent out 100 surveys to 50 men and 50 women, but only received 50 surveys from 40 men and 10 women, state this and provide some plausible explanation as to why this might have occurred.

*Results for each hypothesis* – Restate each hypothesis. Discuss how each was tested, by describing the method of analysis. Discuss whether or not the results support the hypothesis. Do not inject your opinion or explanation of the results; commentary should be provided in a subsequent section.

*Synthesis* – Discuss your findings as a whole and synthesize the results. What were your major findings? How many of the hypotheses were validated? Were there any contradictory results, or any unexpected or confusing results? Overall, what conclusion(s) can you draw from the data regarding the research question?

## Chapter Five – Discussion and Conclusion

*Summary* – Summarize the preceding four chapters, starting with the purpose of the thesis. State findings from the data you collected and analyzed. You may use this summary as your abstract, although some students prefer to write an elaborated summary.

*Discussion* – Discuss the results in light of the review of the research and your own research findings. In this section you may inject your opinions as supported by the data and/or review of the research. Point out new findings that are supported by your data and findings that contradict or expand upon existing research studies. Discuss and address limitations of the study. Overall, what conclusion(s) can you reach from your research?

*Future Research* – Identify future research indicated by your thesis study, and point to new avenues of needed further research.

## Appendix

Each appendix should be listed A, B, C.... The Appendices should include the original of your approved Human Subjects Protocol as well as other items, such as survey instrument, raw data, and participants' verbatim comments as relevant.

**Whether a thesis or a project, you will submit one PDF document – that will include all front pages, chapters, and appendices – via the ETD website BOTH after you have a complete draft and after your committee has approved your final document.**

Be sure to communicate with your committee to ensure that each member receives draft copy (or copies) as he or she prefers. Maintain communication with your committee throughout the process. Plan in advance so that there are no surprises!

A grade will be assigned for EPC 698C (for each enrollment) at the end of the term you complete your culminating thesis/project. If it is not, please contact your chair and the EPC department.

## **COMPREHENSIVE EXAM**

### **What are comprehensive exams?**

The comprehensive examination should provide a vehicle for you to correlate previously isolated or unrelated material, tie together significant learning, and/or present new ideas and directions. The questions should be more complex and well-developed than typical course examination responses.

Composing clear and unambiguous questions is a fine art and tests the ability to think and communicate clearly. The questions should challenge you and invite feedback from your chair and committee. Good questions can allow for a new synthesis, or a discovery that principles applicable to one situation are, in fact, applicable to others not previously considered, or a way for you to support clear, logical statements. They should stimulate conceptual thinking processes more than a mere recitation of factual information. Questions involving opportunities for such thinking operations as comparing, contrasting, hypothesizing, applying principles to new situations, criticizing, interpreting, deriving meaning from personal experiences, determining the difference between assumption and fact, and applying theory to practice seem to be more interesting and challenging for student and committee. Applying Bloom's Taxonomy, these questions should be at higher levels in content.

### **Comprehensive Examination Process**

A Comprehensive Examination Committee (CEC), consisting of two department faculty members, one of whom serves as the Committee Chair, supervises the comprehensive examination of each student.

Each student is responsible for obtaining consent from faculty members to serve on his/her CEC. Faculty signatures on the Comprehensive Examination Committee Member Form verify consent. The completed card must be returned to the department office (ED 1218) no later than the end of the fourth week of the semester in which the student intends to take the exam.

Students should typically be registered in EPC 696 or EPC 695WC (See advisor for input) during the semester(s) during which they are preparing for the comprehensive examination. The student must register in EPC 697 in the semester that he or she plans to take the Comprehensive Exam.

Students are eligible to attempt the examination during the semester in which all other course work on their Formal Program form and other requirements for the degree have been completed or are in progress including being fully Classified. In addition, the student should have applied for graduation in Admissions and Records.

Fifteen (15) questions are to be submitted by the student to the Committee Chair.

- a. Five must be related to core content in educational psychology and counseling (e.g., human development, evaluation and/or assessment, motivation, learning theories, counseling theories, individual and group differences, and research methods). Clearly designate which of the questions are your core questions
- b. The remaining ten questions should reflect the specialization area of the student, i.e., early childhood education, career counseling, college counseling/student services, school counseling, school psychology or marriage and family therapy.

The student and the committee chair select ten (10) questions from the list of fifteen questions. Three must be related to core content in educational psychology and counseling; seven must reflect the student's area of specialization.

Students are required to prepare ten papers, each responding to one of the ten questions. Requirements for the papers should be discussed with the Committee Chair.

As soon as you prepare (and edit) your response to a question submit copies to your chairperson and committee member for feedback. Don't wait until the last moment and submit all ten answers at once. Include your name and phone number with each of your answers. Be sure to use the current edition of the *American Psychological Association Publication Manual* format guidelines.

**The ten questions must be filed by the student in the EPC department office by four weeks before the exam with copies to committee members. Changes to the questions cannot be made after this date. The copy of your ten questions should be submitted to the Graduate Secretary with a cover sheet that includes your name, phone number, and chairperson of your comprehensive committee. Clearly identify the seven questions reflecting the student's area of specialization and the three core content questions.**

The comprehensive examination will be proctored on a **Friday morning** approximately two to four (2-4) weeks before the end of the semester. The location, time, and date will be available from the EPC Office at the beginning of each semester.

The examination will be comprised of three questions selected by the Committee Chair from the ten questions submitted to the department office.

- a. One of the questions will be chosen from the three core questions.
- b. The remaining two questions will be chosen from the seven specialization questions.
- c. Students will **not** be informed as to which questions are selected prior to the examination.

Students will respond to the three questions during the three hours allowed. No notes or access to the Internet or other media will be allowed.

At the examination site, **computers will be used** unless the student has approved alternative testing authorized by Disability Resources and Educational Services.

The Comprehensive Examination Committee will evaluate student performance as Passing or Not Passing. The Committee Chair will notify the student of the results. At the discretion of the CEC, a student may be scheduled for an interview following the written examination. Students who do not pass the Comprehensive Examination may re-take the examination one time in a subsequent semester. Students must be enrolled through regular enrollment in order to sit for the comprehensive examination.

You will be notified by your committee chair as to the status of your exam after both the reader and the chair have read the exam. A report will be filed by the department office staff when you have successfully passed your Comprehensive Examination and a grade for EPC 697 assigned at the end of the semester.

## **CULMINATING GUIDE: APPENDIX**

1. Thesis/project Planning Form
2. Sample prospectus for graduate project
3. Sample prospectus for thesis
4. Sample Timelines for Graduate project/Thesis
5. Additional forms, samples, and important guidelines
6. Sample Committee meeting form

### **1. Thesis/project Planning Electronic Form**

Download this form at: [www.csun.edu/graduatestudies](http://www.csun.edu/graduatestudies)

Students are urged to become very familiar with CSUN's Office of Graduate Studies, which is easily accessible via the website. The Office of Graduate Studies is responsible for implementing University policies on graduate student classification, formal programs, culminating experiences, diplomas, advisement for incoming students, probationary and disqualified students, and Interdisciplinary majors. The Graduate Studies Division encompasses the Graduate Studies Committee and Graduate Evaluation Services. It is also responsible for Graduate Student Support Programs, Equity-based programs, and CSU System Recruitment and Support Programs.

### **2. Sample PROSPECTUS for graduate project**

A prospectus is a rough outline of what the thesis or project will look. It may include a brief introduction and hypothesis, literature review, proposed methodology and anticipated results. It should also include a proposed timeline. The prospectus is useful for meeting with prospective committee chairs or members. For a graduate project, also include in your prospectus:

1. Goal of the proposed Graduate Project
2. Describe the topic of your graduate project
3. Discuss the need for the proposed project, and cite several key references in describing the need for your project.
4. Audience - Describe for whom is the project intended. In other words, who do you intent to actually utilize your project?
5. Final product – Provide an overview of the final product you are proposing. For example, “I will develop a curriculum guide for marriage and family therapists to use when working with a family that has young children who have a difficult time sitting still in sessions with the family.”

### **3. Sample PROSPECTUS for Thesis**

A prospectus is a rough outline of what the thesis or project will look like. It may include a brief introduction and hypothesis, literature review, proposed methodology and anticipated results. It should also include a proposed timeline. The prospectus is useful for meeting with prospective committee chairs or members. A prospectus for a thesis should include:

1. Statement of the problem you want to investigate.
2. Purpose of the research
3. Significance of the problem (Explain why this problem is worthy of concern. Describe the need for this research, citing one or two key references.)
4. Method

In as much detail as possible, describe how you propose to carry out this research. For example, “I teach at a public high school in LAUSD. When I spoke with the principal at my school, she told me that she would support my administering surveys to the students at the school asking them questions about academics, such as about their study habits. We talked about giving students the surveys in their homerooms during the first week after they come back from winter break in January”.

#### 4. Sample Timeline for completion of thesis and graduate project

All master's theses and graduate projects take a minimum of two semesters to complete. Below is an example timeline for this process. **Note that this is only an example. You must check with your chairperson to configure your own personalized timeline. Each chairperson has his or her own preferred style and you must follow the process they indicate.** The Sample Timeline, however, provides a general idea of what the process is like.

Sample Timeline for a Thesis (Note: Individual student's dates will vary)

*By August 27:* Enroll in EPC 698C. Obtain permission number from EPC office if necessary.

*September 1:* Obtain graduate project/thesis form from Graduate Studies website ([www.csun.edu/graduatestudies/](http://www.csun.edu/graduatestudies/)) Obtain electronic signatures from your chairperson and two committee members.

*September 15:* Meet with chair to share materials for review of literature research I accomplished via her suggestions over the summer. Also discuss planning how, when and where chapter drafts will be submitted and how and when feedback will be received. Develop my personalized timeline for reviewing the literature, collecting and analyzing data (if a thesis) and all preparations needed for graduate project.

*October 1:* Electronic form with committee signatures is due (check Calendar on Graduate Studies website for exact dates).

*October 4:* Submit draft of Chapter One to chair and committee members. Prepare Protocol for Human Subjects if relevant (i.e., if a thesis is being developed and if it will require data collection). [Note: Approval of Human Subject Protocols can take up to two months prior to conducting the research.] Submit Protocol to Chair.

*November 1:* Integrate feedback of Chapter one from chair/committee. Begin writing chapter Two.

*December 1:* Meet as needed for chapter two. Finalize all plans for data collection (if thesis).

*January 28:* Submit draft of Chapter Two to committee.

*February 1:* Begin data collection (for a thesis) Data collection must not occur until Human Subjects approval has been granted. Be certain that the committee has completely approved the research protocol.

*February 15:* Integrate feedback from chair/committee. Begin Chapter Three.

*March 1:* Submit draft for Chapter Three to committee.

*March 12:* Integrate feedback from chair/committee. Prepare Chapters Four and Five. Complete data collection, and begin data analysis {thesis}.

*April 3:* Submit draft of Chapters Four and/or Five to Chair.

*April 10:* Obtain feedback from committee on Chapter Four and Five.

*April 25:* Provide final draft of thesis to committee and submit electronically via ETD. Make revisions as per committee and graduate evaluator's input.

*May 1:* Obtain final feedback from committee, make changes and resubmit to the committee for a final review.

*May 7:* Obtain ink signatures (on 100% cotton paper) of completion from committee members.

*May 10:* Deadline for submitting thesis or graduate project (including signatures – electronic and hard copies) to Graduate Studies.

**Would you like a head start on your thesis/graduate project?** A recommended, optional strategy is to add the following at the beginning of your proposed timeline:

*One semester prior to enrollment in Culminating Experience EPC 698C, for example, during the prior spring semester, develop several questions of scholarly merit and significance to you and develop a prospectus, and offer it to potential chair or committee members. Identify chair and committee members and make a plan for summer reading.*

*The summer prior to enrollment in Culminating Experience EPC 698C, Gather materials for the literature review. Read and outline according to the specifications of your identified committee chairperson.*

### **Additional forms, samples, and important guidelines**

On the website for CSUN's Graduate Studies Office, there is an sample of how to format a thesis or graduate project. Many students find this sample extremely valuable as a guide. Additional information, forms, and guidelines on the Graduate Studies website include:

- *Guidelines for Preparation of Theses, Graduate Projects, and Artistic Abstracts.*  
This document provides vital information regarding the format of the graduate project and thesis. Students must strictly adhere to these university guidelines.
- Deadlines for thesis/graduate project submission.
- Research and sponsored projects policies and forms
- Human Subjects form and policies
- Information on CSUN's annual student research competition and symposium

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### *Sample Committee Meeting Form*

#### **REPORT OF THESIS/GRADUATE PROJECT MEETING**

Student name \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting date \_\_\_\_\_

Thesis/graduate project title \_\_\_\_\_

Discussion topic(s) of meeting

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Action Plan

For next meeting I will:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Our next meeting is scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_

Complete this form and return to your Chairperson within three days after each meeting.

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