

## MASTERS RESEARCH PROJECT POLICY

### The Masters Project Requirement

All MSW students are required to complete a Masters Project involving the production of an original piece of scholarly work. Students may choose either a Research Project (RP) or a Personal Practice Model project (PPM). The choice of one of these two projects is made in SW 8441 *Advanced Practice with Individuals, Families, and Small Groups* and/or SW 8103 *Project Seminar I*. The choice is made in consultation with the student's Academic Advisor. The study process for those choosing the PPM path begins in SW 8441 where the student is required to accomplish the first stage of the PPM project through a systematic self-study of their uniqueness as a social work practitioner. Students choosing the RP path are also required to complete the same assignment. Students in both paths are required to take SW 8102 *Advanced Research*,<sup>1</sup> SW 8103 *Project Seminar I* and SW 8104 *Project Seminar II*. Students in both paths develop a research proposal in *Project Seminar I*. Those who have chosen the PPM path do not carry out their research proposals while those in the RP path implement their proposals in an actual research project which culminates in a written report. Students in both paths further develop their respective projects in *Project Seminar II*. All students select a Masters Project Primary Reader and a Second Reader who must approve their final projects. All students are involved in a final oral examination at which they present their projects.

### The Research Project Path

Students in the RP path are encouraged to conduct projects that are agency-based or are relevant to the needs of community agencies. A variety of research projects can serve as the basis for the RP paper. Projects responding to agency or community needs, such as program evaluations, needs assessments, single subject designs, surveys, analyses of secondary data, can all be appropriate as a basis for the RP paper. Projects can be qualitative and/or quantitative in nature. Projects must represent sound research practices on dimensions such as problem formulation, conceptualization, operationalization, sampling, general design, measurement, ethics and gender, and cultural sensitivity.

In the completion of the research project, students must demonstrate familiarity with the tools of research and scholarship. They must provide evidence of ability to work independently, as well as the ability to present the results of their investigation effectively. Projects shall demonstrate an ability to conduct both library research and research which is useful to human service agencies directly. The written research report must meet specified criteria for content and format.

Projects shall contain:

- a clear statement of the problem or thesis.
- a review of the appropriate literature.
- conceptualization, not simply description.
- evidence of original thinking.
- evidence of research techniques used to collect data on relevant research questions.
- evidence of the application of study findings to the profession of social work, and the human services field, both in theory and practice.

---

<sup>1</sup> Students in the 51 Credit Program are also required to take SW 8101 *Introduction to Research* as part of the total research

The paper should follow the outline presented in the *Masters Research Project Handbook* for the research path and should generally adhere to the guidelines presented in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. The project must be typed double-spaced and must include footnotes and references. The quality of writing should be appropriate to that of a Masters level social worker.

The Masters Project Primary Reader of the research report must give final approval at three points in the process of completing the project. The Primary Reader must approve: 1) the research proposal, 2) the research paper as being ready to present at the student's final oral examination, and 3) the final research paper. The student works almost exclusively with the Primary Reader in completing the project, except, as the Second Reader is involved as described below.

A Second Reader, who is the other social work faculty member serving on the final oral examination committee, must also approve the proposal and project at the same three points as the Primary Reader. While the Primary Reader works with the student on an ongoing basis during the entire research project, the Second Reader reviews the project only after the Primary Reader is ready to sign off on the proposal or paper at the particular point in the process. The student may consult more extensively with the Second Reader if it is agreeable to both of them.

Both members of the final examination committee should have a copy of the research project that has received preliminary approval two weeks prior to the final examination. The research project is discussed in the final examination in addition to the student's understanding and use of the advanced generalist model.

### **The Personal Practice Models Path**

The purpose of the personal practice model learning experience is to help students identify, describe, evaluate and further develop their own unique approach to social work practice. One's personal practice model is a composite of their natural helping skills, professional/scientific bodies of knowledge used in practice, behavioral and practice theories utilized, guiding philosophy, values and ethics and patterned practice behaviors. It also involves cognitive, affective and behavioral components of the individual's personality.

Guidance for doing this project is provided by the PPM manual, *Identifying, Evaluating and Developing Personal Practice Models*, by the instructor for SW 8441 and by the student's Masters Project Primary Reader and Second Reader. Much of the work in doing the PPM project involves self-examination. There is, however, a research-oriented aspect involving an extensive literature review of various aspects of the PPM and relating of the findings of this review to the individual's professional self-examination. An agency-related aspect of the PPM project involves the student's acquisition of input from interviews agency staff concerning their views and utilization of evidence-based practice and a systematic evaluation of this input relative to the student's own views of this approach to practice. This will involve interviewing a minimum of three practitioners in the student's chosen field of practice or area of special interest. One required area will pertain to the criteria that practitioner's use in making practice decisions. Aspects of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies are utilized in accomplishing this agency-related aspect of the PPM.

The student's PPM will have a general orientation to a selected field of social work practice, e.g. child welfare, mental health, medical social work, or a special practice interest.

In the completion of the PPM project, students must clearly demonstrate:<sup>2</sup>

a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the concept of personal practice models.

a clear understanding of and ability to effectively describe the nature of their own unique PPM.

an ability to effectively discuss the results of a comprehensive literature review pertaining to selected aspects of their PPM.

evidence of cultural competence and considerations of human diversity in the identification, evaluation and further development of the PPM.

an ability to effectively discuss evidence-based practice as reflected in their PPM, the professional literature and from the results of interviews with practitioners/supervisors.

an ability to derive reasonable practice and career implication from the nature of their PPM.

utilization of relevant tools of scholarship and research methodologies in the production of their PPM paper.

evidence of original thinking.

evidence of ability to work independently.

The Masters Project Primary Reader of the PPM paper must give final approval at three points in the process of completing the project. The Primary Reader must approve: 1) the quality of the first stage of the PPM which was completed in SW 8441 and a written plan to address the requirements of the PPM path, 2) the PPM project as being ready to present at the student's final oral examination, 3) the final paper. A Second Reader, who is the other social work faculty member serving on the final oral examination committee, must approve: 1) the student's PPM project plan, 2) the project as ready to present at the final oral examination and 3) the final project. While the Primary Reader works with the student on an ongoing basis during the entire Masters Paper process, the Second Reader reviews the paper after the Primary Reader is ready to sign off on the paper at a particular point in the process. The student may consult more extensively with the Second Reader if it is agreeable to both.

The project should follow the outline to be found in the PPM manual appendix and should generally adhere to the guidelines presented in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. The project must be typed double-spaced and must include footnotes and references. The quality of writing should be appropriate to that of a Masters level social worker.

Both members of the final exam committee should have a copy of the Masters Project that has received preliminary approval two weeks prior to the final examination. The Masters Project is discussed in the final examination in addition to the student's understanding and use in practice of the advanced generalist model.

Detailed guidance for the PPM project can be found in the manual, *Identifying, Evaluating and Developing Personal Practice Models*.

---

<sup>2</sup> Detailed criteria for the evaluation of the PPM project can be found in the PPM manual appendix.