

ACADIA UNIVERSITY



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

**Masters Degree Study Options**

**Thesis Route**

**Project Route**

**Course Route**

Revised Spring 2021

## **General Overview**

The School of Education offers three paths to achieving a 30-credit hour Masters Degree in Education.

The “***course only***” option involves taking 10 courses of 3 credit hours each amounting to 30 credit hours.

The “***project option***” involves including a 3-credit hour project as one of the 10 courses.

The “***thesis option***” involves a thesis course of 6 credit hours that becomes a component of the total 30 credit hour degree requirement. (in many cases this may replace one of the 3 credit hour electives in the program given that thesis course is 6 credit hours)

## **Distinguishing Project and Thesis Options**

**Projects** tend to have the following features:

- Function as 3 credit hour course within 30 credit hour program
- They allow students to work with a small supervisory committee (supervisor + reader)
- They allow students to work within flexible timelines with fewer formalities and deadlines.
- They often take on research questions where the emphasis is less on extending theory and more on practical applications for example Action Research.
- There is no formal public defense of the work. Course deliverables are negotiated between supervisor and student.
- They operate within the administrative structure of the School of Education meaning the formalities of Research and Graduate Studies policies and deadlines are not applied.

**Theses** tend to have the following features:

- Function as 6 credit hour course within 30 credit hour program
- Involve a committee including supervisor and internal reader **or** co-supervisors (no internal reader). In both cases, an external reviewer is chosen for the thesis.
- Thesis work often includes an intensive review of the literature with careful situation of the formal study in foundational theory. It can result in a range of outputs both practical and theoretical, yet the expectation is to add to the academic literature through a systematic approach to the research question.
- Students work closely with their supervisory team through regular meetings developing refined research questions, preparing ethics proposals, reviewing interim results and writing/editing of the thesis.
- The work is edited and reviewed by an external expert.
- The thesis is defended in a public presentation which includes, a thesis defense chairperson, supervisory team, School of Education representation and the external reviewer.
- There are deadlines set by the Acadia Division of Research and Graduate Studies for setting thesis review, invitation of externals, defense dates and completion deadlines for graduation (see: <https://gradstudies.acadiau.ca/home.html>)

Because it involves the most formalities, the details of the thesis option follows.

## Thesis Option Details

The following guidelines have been established by the School of Education (SOE) to assist graduate students who have opted to do a thesis (EDUC 5966). Students are reminded that it is their responsibility to consult documents which support their graduate work, including the academic calendar, for current information. (see:  
<https://registrar.acadiau.ca/AcademicCalendars.html>)

### The Process

The thesis counts as 6 credit hours in your 30-credit hour graduate program (Counseling Programs included extended credit hours). However, the experience of most students is that the work involved in doing a thesis is far greater than 6 credit hours of coursework. For that reason, perhaps the first step on the thesis journey is obtaining inner clarity regarding why you may wish to pursue this academic path, especially in a professional program that offers project and course route options. Students should feel free to explore the *idea* of a thesis with the Coordinator of Graduate Studies or with a faculty member in the SOE. Students should be aware that those who are considering a thesis need to enroll in Research Design (EDUC 5513), rather than Research Literacy (EDUC 50G3) which is intended for a course-based degree. In addition, students must complete an additional course to prepare them for undertaking research as appropriate; either Qualitative Research Methods (EDUC 5113) or Quantitative Research Methods (EDUC 5523).

Once you are certain that you wish to pursue a thesis, the following steps will assist you in pursuing that goal:

1. The first step in the thesis process is to become familiar with the research endeavours and scholarly interests of faculty. Ideally, it is best to have your thesis supervised by someone who has expertise in your area of interest. Familiarizing yourself with the scholarly interests of faculty is most easily accomplished by visiting the SOE website at the following URL: <https://education.acadiau.ca/faculty-staff.html>
2. The SOE takes steps to help ensure that students have the appropriate preparation to undertake a thesis. All thesis students must complete two research courses. One of those courses must be Research Design (**Not** Research Literacy). Students must also have completed their second research course (Qualitative Research Methods or Quantitative Research Methods) prior to undertaking their research data collection.
3. Having reviewed the faculty research interests, students (normally during their Research Design course) should then approach the Graduate Coordinator ([graded@acadiau.ca](mailto:graded@acadiau.ca)) to request an initial search of the possible supervisor (or co-supervisory) availability. Students would necessarily have formulated a one-page overview of their research area of interest so as to share with potential supervisors (through the Graduate Coordinator) and judge overlap. Having spoken with potential supervisors, the Graduate Coordinator will then review with the student possible supervisory committees.

4. If the professor agrees to supervise the thesis, the faculty member and student should discuss who might best serve as an internal reader for the thesis. (*In the case there is a co-supervisor arrangement, an internal reader is not required.*) The internal reader (if necessary) will normally be another member of the SOE faculty who brings other expertise to the thesis topic or inquiry approach. Adjunct faculty members may fill the role of both internal reader or co-supervisor.
5. With the informal agreement of a supervisor and internal reader, the student must complete the *Request for Thesis Supervisor* form available here under Project and Thesis Forms: <https://education.acadiau.ca/m-ed-forms-and-resources.html>. The completed form should be submitted it to the Director of the SOE. If approved, the Director will send a confirmation letter to the student, copied to the supervisory committee members.
6. The supervisory committee and student should choose to hold an introductory meeting before the two research course requirements are completed. This should help to set timelines and discuss general research interests and direction. The expectation is that the Research Design course will help students to narrow their research focus but the committee may also see fit to assist with this process early on.
7. The thesis committee's first task will be to advise the student with regard to the development of a thesis proposal. This process would normally begin after the bulk of the research course requirements are completed. Writing a clear and comprehensive proposal is very important to the successful completion of a thesis. This document should provide a careful elaboration of the research purpose and/or questions, the literature and theoretical framework, the methodology and methods, the analytical strategies that will be employed in the thesis, and careful consideration of the ethical implications of the study (ethical requirements are elaborated in a subsequent section of this document). The latter will also include the development of any informed consent forms required for ethics approval.
8. . The student must not begin formal fieldwork until the supervisor and internal reader sign a *Thesis Proposal Acceptance Form* available here under Project and Thesis Forms: <https://education.acadiau.ca/m-ed-forms-and-resources.html> and the Research Ethics Board gives the student clearance to proceed.. The supervisor takes responsibility to place a copy of the proposal and the signed *Proposal Acceptance Form* in the student's file secured in the SOE main office.

*Note:* Completion of the *Thesis Proposal Acceptance Form* must precede an application to the Research Ethics Board.

9. Once the above process has taken place, the supervisor (or co-supervisors) will continue to advise the student throughout the thesis preparation process. All drafts of the thesis will be negotiated between the student and the supervisor(s). Typically, the internal reader (if required)advises the student as necessary, but will not generally be involved in the vetting various drafts of the thesis or its chapters. Once an approved completed draft of the thesis has been prepared, the supervisor provides a

copy to the internal reader for feedback. In the case of co-supervision arrangements, both supervisors should have reviewed and advised on the thesis draft.

### **Ethical Approval**

All research involving human participants must receive approval from the *Acadia Research Ethics Board*. This includes all research requiring the formal involvement of others in the data collection process, such as distributing questionnaires, conducting interviews and other research activities. Ethical approval is not required for theses which do not involve others as sources of data, such as conceptual studies.

The best way for students (and supervisors) to become familiar with ethics guidelines, the ethics approval process, and the forms required for ethics approval, is to visit the Research Ethics Board website at <https://reb.acadiau.ca/home.html>

### **Format and Style**

The SOE recommends that students use the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA)*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition for formatting their theses. Though the APA manual is primarily concerned with the form and style of papers submitted for publication in scholarly journals, its general recommendations regarding such things as reference lists, within-text formatting, and headings should be followed carefully for thesis completion.

APA guidelines can be found here:

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/apa\\_style/apa\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/apa\\_changes\\_7th\\_edition.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/apa_changes_7th_edition.html)

Check with the Office of Research and Graduate Studies regarding acceptable formats for the thesis (see: <https://gradstudies.acadiau.ca/home.html>)

### **The Thesis Defense**

Acadia University requires that all theses are defended in an oral manner in a public forum. The Division of Research and Graduate Studies advertises all thesis defenses. Theses defenses are open to anyone who wishes to attend.

Until such time as the student has completed the thesis and is ready to defend it, the process normally has involved only three people: the student, the supervisor, and the internal reader. The defense itself, however, adds a minimum of three more people to the process: a defense Chair (normally the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, or designate), an external reader, and the Director of the SOE, or designate.

Details for getting ready for a defense are available on the website identified at <http://gradstudies.acadiau.ca/PresentationPrepareThesis.html> but a few pertinent details are provided below:

- Students who intend to graduate at a particular convocation must **apply to graduate**. Please note the deadlines for graduation as they appear in the current Graduate Calendar. Students can graduate in the fall if they meet requirements by late September but convocation only occurs in the spring semester.

- The Office of Research and Graduate Studies offers guidelines for scheduling oral defenses in preparation for Convocation. Students intending to graduate at fall graduation must book their oral defense no later than the second week of August. Students intending to graduate at spring graduation must book their oral defense no later than the second or third week in March. **The form that must be completed to request an oral defense is available at the website above.**

**Note:** *Students who graduate in the fall, though meeting all rights and privileges of a master's degree, can attend and accept their degree at the Spring Convocation.*

- Students must submit the appropriate number of copies of their thesis to Research and Graduate Studies four weeks prior to their oral defense.
- The Dean of Research and Graduate Studies or designate chairs the oral defense. A thesis defense normally proceeds in the following manner: (a) the Chair introduces the candidate and the members of the examining committee, and asks the candidate to give an oral presentation of her or his research, lasting not longer than 20 minutes; (b) the questioning usually proceeds in the following order: external examiner → internal examiner → Director (or representative) of the SOE → supervisor → Chair; (c) at the discretion of the Chair, the committee can have as many rounds of questioning as necessary; (d) once the committee has finished questioning the candidate, members of the audience are invited to ask questions; (e) once all questions have been asked, the members of the audience and the candidate are asked to leave the room while the committee deliberates.
- Once defended successfully, there are deadlines by which any changes must be made and submitted to Research and Graduate Studies. Please note the deadlines as they appear in the current Academic Calendar (see:  
<https://registrar.acadiau.ca/AcademicCalendars.html>)

## **Project Option Details**

The SOE established the following guidelines to assist graduate students who have opted to do a research project (EDUC 5713).

### **The Process**

The project aims to acquaint students with the skills required for the preparation of an applied research project. The project counts as 3 credit hours in your 30-credit hour graduate program (extended hours in Counselling program). Students should feel free to explore the *idea* of a project with the Coordinator of Graduate Studies or with a faculty member in the SOE. The general procedures for undertaking a project are similar to those for thesis students, but with some notable differences. These are outlined below.

1. For the first step in the project process, students need to become familiar with the research endeavors and scholarly interests of faculty. Ideally, the project should be supervised by someone who has expertise in your area of interest. Familiarize yourself with the scholarly interests of faculty by visiting the SOE website at the following URL: <https://education.acadiau.ca/faculty-staff.html>
2. Students who wish to pursue a project under the supervision of a particular faculty member should speak informally with that individual to determine whether he or she is interested and/or available as a supervisor. If students are unable to determine which faculty member might be the best match for their project interests, they should contact the Coordinator of Graduate Studies.
3. If the professor agrees to supervise the project, the faculty member and student should discuss who might best serve as a reader for the project. This will normally be another faculty member of the SOE who brings other expertise to the project topic or inquiry approach. The reader may also be an adjunct faculty member (see: <https://education.acadiau.ca/faculty-staff.html>)
4. With the informal agreement of a supervisor and internal reader, the student must complete the *Request for Project Supervisor* form available here under Project and Thesis Forms: <https://education.acadiau.ca/m-ed-forms-and-resources.html>. This is then submitted to the Director of the SOE for approval. If approved, a letter will be sent to the student, copied to the supervisor and the internal reader.
5. The committee's first task will be to advise the student with regard to the development of a project proposal. The proposal should include evidence of familiarity with the relevant literature, a description of how the project will be done, and careful consideration of the ethical implications of the study (ethical requirements are elaborated in a subsequent section of this document). The latter will also include the development of any informed consent forms.

*Note:* All research with human subjects, whether thesis or project must have prior approval from the Acadia University Research Ethics Board.

6. The project proposal should be completed as soon as possible after the appointment of the committee. The student must not begin formal fieldwork until the supervisor and internal reader sign a *Proposal Acceptance Form* under Project and Thesis Forms here: <https://education.acadiau.ca/m-ed-forms-and-resources.html>, and the Research Ethics Board gives the student clearance to proceed. The supervisor takes responsibility to place a copy of the proposal and the signed *Proposal Acceptance Form* in the student's file at the School of Education.
7. Once the above process has taken place, the supervisor will continue to advise the student throughout the project preparation process. All drafts of the project will be negotiated between the student and the supervisor. Typically, the internal reader advises the student as required, but will not generally be involved in the vetting various drafts of the project. Once an approved completed draft of the project has been prepared, the supervisor provides a copy to the internal reader for feedback.
8. Once the project is completed, it will be submitted to the supervisor and the reader for approval. If approved, a Project Approval Form (Appendix 1) will be signed by the supervisor and internal reader, and it, along with a coil-bound copy of the project, will be submitted to the Main Office.

### **Ethical Approval**

All research involving human participants must receive approval from the *Acadia Research Ethics Board*. This includes all research requiring the formal involvement of others in the data collection process, such as distributing questionnaires, conducting interviews and other research activities. Ethical approval is not required for projects which do not involve others such as sources of historical data or conceptual studies.

The best way for students (and supervisors) to become familiar with ethics guidelines, the ethics approval process, and the forms required for ethics approval, is to visit the Research Ethics Board website at <https://reb.acadiau.ca/home.html>

### **Format and Style**

The SOE recommends that students use the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA)*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition for formatting their projects. Though the APA manual is primarily concerned with the form and style of papers submitted for publication in scholarly journals, its general recommendations regarding such things as reference lists, within-text formatting, and headings should be followed carefully for project completion. APA guidelines can be found here:

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/apa\\_style/apa\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/apa\\_changes\\_7th\\_edition.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/apa_changes_7th_edition.html)

Given the variation in project types, the format of the project will be determined in consultation with the supervisor.

**Project Exemplars** (this list is representative but not exhaustive or limiting)

- *Action research* to study an educational or counseling context in an effort to understand and improve a system. It may include such things as surveys, interviews and focus groups.
- *Workshop*. A report establishing the need for a workshop and describing the theoretical underpinnings of the approach taken, plus plans and materials for the workshop itself. This should include exit surveys/feedback to establish some level of impact.
- *Educational software*. A report establishing the need for the software and describing the theoretical underpinnings of the approach taken, plus the software itself.
- *Resources to support teaching*. A report establishing the need for the resources and describing the theoretical underpinnings of the approach taken, plus the resources themselves. Possibilities include equipment, written works, a website, multimedia and/or hypertextual materials.
- *A performance that contributes to education*. A report describing the need the performance addresses and the theoretical underpinnings of the approach taken, plus a recording of the performance itself.
- *Artwork that contributes to education*. A report describing the need the artwork addresses and the theoretical underpinnings of the approach taken, plus the artwork itself or a high quality reproduction.
- *An internship*. A report describing the goals of the internship and literature relevant to the experience, as well as a summary of the internship in a way that makes a useful contribution to the educational community.

### **Course Only Option**

Students may opt to complete their graduate degrees in the SOE by a course route option. This requires completion of the same number of credit hours as required for project and thesis route students, i.e., 30 credit hours for MEd programs except Counselling which requires extended hours. However, prior to choosing this option students should consider the following:

1. Those who plan to pursue doctoral studies are strongly advised to pursue the thesis route or project route. While choosing a course route towards a master's degree does not eliminate the possibility of doctoral studies at all universities, without a thesis experience, most institutions will require a qualifying research paper for application.
2. Those who are certified teachers in the Province of Nova Scotia may be affected by the decision to pursue a course route. This is elaborated below.

The Nova Scotia Department of Education requires teachers to complete **6 credit hours of research methods at the graduate level** IF they are pursuing the Advanced Teacher's Certificate 3 (TC 8). Prior to implementing a course route option, non-thesis students met this requirement by completing EDUC 5513 (Research Design) plus the 3 credit hours awarded for the project (EDUC 5713). Under the course route option, students are only required to do 3 credit hours of research methods to satisfy the requirements for the degree. For that reason, we have created a second research course, EDUC 5053 – Problems in Education, Research Literacy. However, not all course route students need to take this course, as described below.

Those for whom teacher certification is not an issue do not need to take a second research methods course. **(1)** This most obviously includes those who are in agency stream of counselling, i.e., those counselling students who are not school-based or have no intention of working in schools. **(2)** Those teachers who will not be seeking the highest level of certification do not need to take a second research course, although they may wish to take it so that the methods criterion will have been met should they seek this level of certification in the future. **(3)** Also, teachers who have already satisfied the 6 credit hours of research methods at the graduate level (perhaps in a previous graduate degree) do not need a second research course.

If there is any confusion regarding this, or any, certification issue, we strongly recommend that teachers contact the Teacher Certification Branch of the Department of Education (902-424-6620).

**NOTE: If the student does require 6-credit hours of research courses for certain certification upgrades, be warned that Research Design and Research Literacy are too similar in content to be considered different courses and the SOE will not approve taking both courses for credit. A student with Research Design should expect to complete Qualitative Research Methods or Quantitative Research Methods in order to make up the 6-credit hours in that situation. Research Literacy is a terminal course choice in that it cannot be combined with Qualitative Research Methods or Quantitative Research to make up the 6-credit hour requirement for either a thesis or certification requirements at the Nova Scotia Department of Education.**

**APPENDIX 1**

**Thesis Supervisor Form**  
**Thesis Proposal Acceptance Form**

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**Request for Thesis Supervisor**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Student ID# \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Program: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Program Entry: \_\_\_\_\_

Year you plan to graduate: \_\_\_\_\_ Circle one: Spring Fall

Please outline in 2-3 paragraphs an overview of the topic you wish to be the focus of your thesis.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Supervisor's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of internal reader \_\_\_\_\_ Internal reader's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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**M. ED. THESIS ROUTE**

Proposal Acceptance Form

The thesis proposal titled

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submitted by

---

to the committee of

---

Supervisor

---

Internal Reader

is accepted subject to minor changes  
as required in its preparation.

The ethical acceptability of this study  
has been considered and approved  
by the Committee, subject to the approval of the  
Research Ethics Board

Supervisor's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 2**

**Project Supervisor Form  
Project Approval Form**

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Request for Project Supervisor

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Acadia ID#\_\_\_\_\_

Program: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Program Entry: \_\_\_\_\_

Year you plan to graduate: \_\_\_\_\_  
Circle one: Spring Fall

Please outline in 2-3 paragraphs an overview of the topic you wish to be the focus of your project.

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Name of supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Supervisor's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Name of internal reader \_\_\_\_\_ Internal reader's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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**Project Approval Form**

This project by NAME OF STUDENT is accepted in its present form as satisfying the project requirements for the degree of Master of Education (\_\_\_\_\_).

The examining committee for the project was:

.....

\_\_\_\_\_, Supervisor

.....

\_\_\_\_\_, Reader

.....

Date