

ACADIA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

GRADUATE STUDY OPTIONS

THESIS ROUTE

PROJECT ROUTE

COURSE ROUTE

Revised Spring 2018

THESIS ROUTE

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 graduate calendar, for current information.

The Process

The thesis counts as 6 credit hours in your 30-credit hour graduate program (51-credit hour for students in the Counselling program). 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 enrol 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 (EDUC 5113) or Educational Statistics (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.acadiu.ca/contact.html>
2. The SOE takes steps to help ensure that students have the appropriate preparation to undertake a thesis. Accordingly, students need to have completed at least 9 credit hours of graduate work with excellent grades prior to initiating formal discussion of a thesis with a faculty member. One of those courses must be Research Design. Students must also have completed their second research course (Qualitative Research or Educational Statistics) prior to undertaking their research.
3. Students who wish to pursue a thesis 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 thesis interests, they should contact the Coordinator of Graduate Studies.
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. This will normally be another member of the SOE faculty who brings other expertise to the

thesis topic or inquiry approach. Adjunct faculty members may also fill this role. (for a list of adjunct faculty members see: <https://education.acadiau.ca/contact.html>)

5. With the informal agreement of a supervisor and internal reader, the student must complete the *Request for Thesis Supervisor* form available at <http://education.acadiau.ca/forms-resources/articles/med-students.html> and submit it to the Director of the SOE. If approved, the Director will send a letter to the student, copied to the supervisor and the internal reader.
6. The thesis committee's first task will be to advise the student with regard to the development of a thesis proposal. 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 an informed consent form.
7. The 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* (see Appendix 1 below), 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 *Proposal Acceptance Form* must precede an application to the Research Ethics Board.

8. Once the above process has taken place, the supervisor 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. Typically, the internal reader advises the student as required, 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.

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)*, 6th edition for formatting their theses. This format is required for all theses completed in the Counselling Program. 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.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/> Check with with the Office of Research and Graduate Studies regarding acceptable formats for the thesis.

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 defences. These 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 defences in preparation for Convocation. Students intending to graduate at fall graduation must book their oral defence no later than the second week of August. Students intending to graduate at spring graduation must book their oral defence 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 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 Graduate Calendar.

PROJECT ROUTE

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 (48-credit hour for students in the 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. 1. For the first step in the project process, students need to become familiar with the research endeavours 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/contact.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.
4. With the informal agreement of a supervisor and internal reader, the student must complete the *Request for Project Supervisor* form available from the SOE main office. 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 an informed consent form.

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 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* (Appendix 1), 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 placed in the student's file.
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 2) 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 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)*, 6th edition for formatting their projects. This format is required for all projects completed in the Counselling Program. 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.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

Given the variation in project types, the format of the project will be determined in consultation with the supervisor. If a text presentation is appropriate, the project will likely be the same length as a submission to a scholarly journal in education (about 7000-8000 words, 35 pages).

Project Examples (This list is not exhaustive.)

- *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.
- *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 ROUTE

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., 48 credit hours for Counselling students and 30 credit hours for all other degree programs. 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. 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).

APPENDIX 1

**Thesis Supervisor Form
Thesis Proposal Acceptance Form**

ACADIA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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

ACADIA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

M. ED. THESIS ROUTE

Proposal Acceptance Form

The thesis proposal titled

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**

ACADIA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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.

Name of supervisor: Supervisor's signature Date

Name of internal reader Internal reader's signature Date

ACADIA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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