

**HILBERT COLLEGE
GRADUATE STUDIES**

PROJECT HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook has been created to assist the student who is completing a research project for his or her research requirement toward a graduate degree. Included are a description of the process and standards of quality. Graduate students take a number of core courses and research courses. The research project is intended to serve as evidence of the integration of the program experience and as such the topic and process will vary depending on a student's particular experiences. Students by virtue of their interests, their coursework and or professional work experience engage in the project process which involves research. This handbook serves as a guide to the student and faculty in navigating the project to completion.

Master's Final Project

The focus of the research for a master's project is generally more applied than that for a thesis, with the student often defining a problem and developing a solution for it. The project may be a scholarly undertaking that results in a tangible outcome. The project is accompanied by a paper written by the student that introduces, analyzes, and contextualizes the project, and demonstrates the student's familiarity with the relevant literature of the field.

Differences between a Master's Thesis and a Master's Project

Differences between a thesis and a project are generally related to the extent and focus of the research, the formatting of the finished written product, the requirement to give an oral defense of the work, and the final approval of the finished product.

A thesis is typically longer than a project and is a well-organized, thoroughly documented scholarly paper, detailing research purpose, methods, results, analyses, and conclusions. Research for a thesis may be more extensive than research for a project in terms of the amount required, but this varies with the individual and the discipline.

Master's Project at Hilbert College

A Master's Project is defined as a research project that is intended to reflect an area of interest from the core coursework and varies by the student's interest which often reflects his professional work experience.

Research projects may be seen as 1) format as seen here or 2) particular cross cutting strategies. In either case, it must reflect 3) good oral and written skills of communication.

1. The ability to integrate and apply principles, methods, and knowledge from preceding courses to address a specific issue. The *format* for addressing the problem could be:

- An analysis of the problem, including its nature and magnitude, possible causes and contributing factors, and prevention and intervention strategies.
- A grant proposal for exploring some dimension of the problem, such as causes, new prevention and intervention strategies, or evaluation of current strategies.
- Implementation of a program for addressing the problem. This could be conduct an evaluation study or implementation of a prevention or intervention strategy in a specific target population.
- A program evaluation proposal in which an evaluation mechanism is developed that addresses the problem.

2. The *particular core, cross-cutting, specific competencies each student uses will vary by project*, and the relevant competencies should be determined in consultation with the student's project mentor and be evident in the final written report. However, it is expected that the project will demonstrate that the student is able to do one or more of the following competencies as appropriate to the project:

- Apply principles of program planning, development, budgeting, implementation, management or evaluation to the project
- Appraise the impact of the structure and function of an organization and organizational and financial issues on the delivery of services.
- Develop, evaluate and enhance using evidence-based principles the impact of policies on improving the delivery of services.
- Utilize principles of strategic planning and marketing, as relevant to the project.
- Employ quality and performance improvement concepts to address organizational performance issues in the conduct of the project

- Scrutinize, uphold and address legal and ethical paradigms in the administration of organizations, service delivery, as relevant to the project.
- Engage in knowledge transfer and exchange by demonstrating collaborations, conducting communication, harnessing valuable resources, responding to capacity building needs and opportunities, engage outreach communities and stakeholders. This shift in strategy as well as new and enhanced partnerships spanning diverse audiences, settings and encourage cross-fertilization across sectors, professions, and academic disciplines and often culminates by sharing research evidence to best influence policy and practice. A host of mediums, including web social media tools, multimedia technologies, virtual platforms for group collaboration, and in-person meetings, consultations, and symposia.
- Capacity building efforts by actively promote a variety of platforms that stimulate open dialogue and new ideas, facilitate on-going training, mentorship and continuing education for new and experienced academic and community-based researchers, students and trainees, and community partners and practitioners. Specific initiatives include: organizing and conducting lecture series of experts from WNY, NYS, Canada and beyond.

3. Demonstrate effective written and oral skills for communicating with different audiences in the context of professional activities. This will be demonstrated by:

- Writing a logical, sound, evidence informed, organized and well-written paper, with acceptable English grammar, style and format
- A well-prepared oral presentation

Content and Organization of the Project Proposal

The project proposal is written in APA format with one-inch margins on all sides and a short title with page numbers in the upper right corner. Students who plan to bind the project proposal should leave a wider left margin (at least one and a half inches). The proposal may be written in future or past tense and expressed in the first or third person. The literature review is generally written in past tense, with the exception of theoretical literature, which is often written in the present tense.

One of the most important aspects of Projects is their flexibility in format and content. The following serves only as a guideline for the development and presentation of the Project. Students should seek guidance from their Project Mentor to determine the format that is required for their Project.

Abstract

Write a concise overview of the project proposal including the purpose, conceptual framework, methods, audience/participants and product. Although this comes first when the proposal is completed, it is actually written last. (120 words)

Chapter 1

1. Introduction: Provide a concise overview of the topic/problem you plan to address. The introduction should capture the reader's interest and attention.
2. Statement of problem and/or statement of the purpose: Clearly describe the problem you propose to address and/or the purpose you intend to accomplish. You may choose to identify the nature or focus of the project (discovery, experimentation, description, illustration, or documentation). If indicated, specify your audience.
3. Significance and justification: Describe the need your project specifically fills, in terms of clients, students, educators, practitioners, insurers, the profession, etc. Give a rationale to support spending your time and energy on this topic, issue, endeavor or problem.
4. Research Questions/Hypothesis: A hypothesis is a specific prediction or expected outcome of the study, stated positively or in the null form. The prediction is related to the problem in question. A research question is stated in question form and seeks to identify characteristics of variables or relationships between variables.
5. Theoretical/conceptual framework: Define and describe a relevant conceptual framework on which the project is based. Explain how the framework relates to the project and, if necessary, how it is relevant to the discipline. This framework provides an orienting lens through which to view the problem/purpose and the results/product.
6. Definition of terms: Define terms associated with your title, audience, research question, product or methods. Include words that are newly coined, words unique to this project, esoteric terminology, foreign words or phrases, and terms that have more than one interpretation.

7. Assumptions: Explain concepts you take to be true for the purposes of your project such as assumptions you are making about participants, your methods or your conceptual framework.

8. Limitations: Describe the practical and conceptual aspects of the project over which there is little or no control. Limitations have bearing, but do not necessarily preclude you from doing the project. However, you must tell the readers that you are aware of them and how they might impact on results.

Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

1. Introduction: Include areas of the literature you reviewed and excluded, including your rationale and an orienting overview of the section.

2. Write, in the form of an essay, a comprehensive, critical review of the literature pertinent to the topics your project addresses. Use topic titles and subtitles to guide and orient the reader. Address trends, gaps, results of previous research, historical context and the impact of the problem.

3. Include a review of the literature supporting your choice of methods/procedures, including data collection and analysis if relevant. For example, if you plan to give a presentation to a specific audience, research the effectiveness of this method for your purposes, and review literature about the planning and delivery of the type of presentation you propose to give.

4. Summary of the literature review: What is the state of affairs, knowledge, understanding, or approach, regarding the area(s) described in your literature review?

Chapter 3 - Methods/Procedures

1. Introduction: Provide a brief overview of the content of the section.

2. Setting: Describe the setting for data collection or the setting(s) in which you plan to conduct the actual project. For example, you may be conducting a workshop at a conference or offering a web site on the Internet. Explain your rationale for choosing the setting.

3. Population and Sample/Participants: As appropriate, describe the population from which the sample is derived, and describe the sample and sampling methods. Alternatively, describe the persons who will participate in your research or in carrying out your project. Explain your reason for selecting the sample or participants.

4. Methods/Procedures: If you are collecting and analyzing data, clearly describe the specific quantitative or qualitative methods you plan to use to collect data and to analyze it. Otherwise, sequentially describe the specific methods or procedures proposed for carrying out the project. Explain how these methods or procedures will be effective in carrying out your project.

5. Human Subjects Protection: Explain how human subjects will be protected in the recruitment and research process. Refer the reader to appendices for copies of the IRB approval letter and informed consent form. If there are no human subjects, state such and reference the appendix containing the IRB approval letter. (Refer to the IRB Manual.)
6. Tools: Thoroughly describe any tools used and include surveys, interview guides, educational materials or other tools in the appendix.
7. Summary

Chapter 4 - Results/Product/Outcome (choose one) In the instance of a grant proposal, the grant proposal itself is the product. (NOT IN PROPSAL CHAPTER 4 IN FINAL PRODUCT ONLY)

1. Describe the final product(s) you will have after carrying out the project.
2. Describe the audience or intended recipients of the project.
3. Explain how you plan to document evidence of the existence of your project and where this information can be found.

References

Include a complete and comprehensive reference section in APA format (use most current version). The reference list should include only those citations that appear in the proposal manuscript.

Appendices

1. Provide appendix divider pages for each appendix. The divider page must list the sequential letter designation and title of the appended material. The appendices must be placed according to the order in which each appendix is first mentioned in the text of the proposal.
2. Include request and approval letters, IRB approval letter, consent forms, scripts, handouts, questionnaires, evaluation forms, interview guides, author's guide from a specific journal – in other words, any/all documentation related to the project.

Guidelines for Students Writing a Publishable Article

1. The article should be based on a specific project that has been proposed, approved by a committee of two faculty members, and carried out in accordance with the approved project proposal.
2. The article format must follow the guidelines required by the journal/publisher to which the student intends to submit. Consequently, the student may have to adjust the APA style used in the proposal manuscript. The student must include the guidelines for publication in the appendix of the project proposal.

3. The project mentor may require the student to submit the article to successfully meet the requirements of the project. In this case, the student must provide the project director with evidence of submission, such as a return receipt from a carrier such as the United States Post Office or FedEx.

Project Guidance

Students should discuss their project focus or idea with the graduate faculty and others to determine the extent to which the project is meaningful and feasible. The project mentor directs the project and guides the choice of a second committee member, who must be a graduate faculty member from the graduate programs at Hilbert College. Second committee members should possess interest or expertise in the topic area and/or methods. The second member must be available for consultation as necessary or desired, read and evaluate the project proposal and make suggestions for improvement to the project mentor and the student.

As a program the faculty members have decided to ALLOW two or more students to work together on a research project. Students may assist one another and may critique each other as proposals are developing, however, each student must demonstrate significant contribution to the design and implementation of research project.

The project mentor leads the student through the entire project process. The project mentor works with the student, in the context of the coursework, to refine the aim of the project and ground it in a conceptual framework, to identify appropriate bodies of literature for review, to develop relevant and reasonable methods and/or a plan of action, and to define the project outcome/product. The project mentor guides the student in seeking out appropriate resources, articulates and reinforces standards for writing and organizing the proposal, and reviews and approves all drafts of the project proposal. The project mentor advises students about the protection of human subjects and prepares them for application to the Hilbert College IRB.

The project mentor determines when the student's project proposal is suitable for defense. If there is a content advisor the project mentor will confer with that person in making the decision regarding the proposal defense. The project mentor and second committee member hold a defense of the project proposal with the student. The student and both committee members must sign **the Approval of Graduate Research Proposal Form**. The project mentor will supervise the student in making alterations agreed upon in the defense and guide the student in making application to the Hilbert College Institutional Review Board.

The project mentor is responsible for making certain that students follow through on the project as described and defended in the approved project proposal. In the case of students who have not yet defended their project proposal, the project mentor will assist students in reaching defense as soon as is

feasible. The project director will monitor student progress, help solve problems that arise, and provide support and direction as needed. Students must report to their project mentor any limitations or problems that arise in carrying out the project that affect protection of human subjects or alter the final product.

Students are required to present their product/results in the context of the research poster presentation during the Capstone Course. Oral defense of the final project is not required; however, students should invite their second committee member to their poster presentation. Following presentation, the student and committee members must sign the **Approval of Graduate Research Form**. If the project director and second committee member cannot resolve any disagreement regarding approval of the project proposal, the dispute should be presented to the Dean of Graduate Studies for resolution.

Guidelines for All Hilbert Graduate Students

1. Select a committee of two graduate faculty members: one from your department (project mentor) and one from either your department or outside the department.
2. Develop a fully referenced, defensible proposal according to the College standards of quality and department guidelines, using APA style. (See Content and organization of the Project Proposal)
3. Defend the project proposal to the committee and make any necessary alterations to the proposal, as agreed upon at the time of defense by the committee and the student.
4. Submit an appropriate Hilbert College IRB application.
5. Begin work on the project only after receiving full approval from IRB.
6. Complete/carry out the project according to the methods/procedures articulated in the defended proposal and to the satisfaction of the project mentor (and others as relevant).
7. Publicly present the final product in a relevant format (poster presentation night).
8. Provide written documentation of the project in accordance with the defended proposal (publishable paper, grant applications, program evaluation document, or other forms approved by project mentor).

Assessment of the Project

The project mentor and a second committee member will assess the quality of the project (proposal and product). At a minimum, students must meet the standards of quality established by the College in order for the project (proposal and product) to be accepted.

The following criteria will be used as standards of quality by which the project is reviewed in order to be accepted:

- (a) The problem or topic under study is stated definitively.
- (b) The theoretical basis for the project is identified and its relationship to the conceptual or theoretical base of the project is documented.
- (c) The topic is researchable.
- (d) The feasibility of the project is substantiated.
- (e) The methodology of the project is sound and justified in relation to the research topic.
- (f) The analysis of the literature is appropriate, meaningful, and relevant to the research topic and methods.
- (g) As applicable, sites available for conducting the project are identified and appropriate.
- (h) If human subjects or participants are utilized, the availability of sufficient subjects is identified, and all human rights considerations are fully considered.
- (i) The project is well-written, organized, and conceptually sound.
- (j) The project is mechanically correct and consistent with APA, as approved by the proposal and project mentor.

