

## Guidelines for SOWK 499 Students

(adopted September 2010)

You are reading this because you are considering writing an honors project. To maximize the benefits of the process, the social work department has created guidelines for this three-semester process. There are two persistent challenges facing project writers.

First, honors project students are tempted to tackle too much. Focusing your project provides the opportunity for an in-depth analysis of your topic. Secondly, for most honors writers, this multi-chapter project can be intimidating. The need to write and submit for review multiple drafts may be a new, but necessary, experience. Writing initially without trying to edit is the best way to avoid the “blank page syndrome” and to capture your thoughts. Setting deadlines with your committee for drafts rather than waiting to complete your project in a final “big push” is more likely to lead to success. Following are some helpful guidelines.

### SOWK 499A (1 credit)

- Work with the department head prior to registering for SOWK 499A to determine your chair and two potential committee members. The faculty members on your committee must be familiar with the topic/issues being investigated by the student and agree to serve in this capacity. It is your responsibility to discuss your thesis ideas with potential faculty committee members and to request their participation on the committee.

The chair must be a member of the faculty of the Department of Social Work. Once the chair has been identified, seek that person’s advice regarding other potential committee members. Usually at least one committee member is chosen from the faculty of the Department of Social Work. The third member of the thesis committee can be any faculty member at JMU, including faculty from other departments.

- Meet with each of the members of your committee – beginning with your project chair – at least once during the first three weeks of the semester, as a group or individually if meeting jointly presents a scheduling problem.
- Submit your draft proposal to your entire committee no later than Tuesday of the sixth week of the semester
- Submit a detailed outline of the projected structure & content by Friday of the eighth week of the semester to all three committee members. Attach an expanded bibliography of at least 30 sources; at least 15 of those entries must be academic/referred journal articles.
- Submit a full draft of your literature review to your committee by Friday of the twelfth week of the semester. Attach a revised outline of the entire honors project.
- When you meet with your project chair to discuss this draft and your progress, you and/or your chair may choose to establish a drafting schedule for SOWK 499B appropriate to the structure and nature of your project.
- Submit your final proposal for signatures in advance of the Honors Program deadline.

### HONORS PROJECT PROPOSAL DOCUMENT

The Department of Social Work requires a more comprehensive draft than the proposal submitted to the Honors Committee. The **honors project proposal** should contain the following sections:

- **Abstract.** The title of the honors project must be followed by a one-paragraph (maximum 300 words) abstract that summarizes the research/project question, theoretical argument and/or hypothesis, research/project approach, and results.
- **Introduction.** This includes an introduction to your research/project area, the full literature review that will ultimately appear in the final honors project document, and a statement of your research question. The literature review is to demonstrate that the student has mastered the prevailing theories, and is familiar with how researchers measure, examine, or analyze the relevant concepts. A literature review is not a long string of direct quotations from various authors; rather the student must demonstrate her own understanding of this material by summarizing, analyzing, comparing, organizing, and critiquing this work in their own words. It is particularly important to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, insight, and utility of the current research on this topic. Are there gaps in the literature? Unresolved controversies? Poorly defines concepts? In short, a thorough literature review will not only describe but critically assess the current state of the literature.
- **Method.** This is the full method section that ultimately will be included in the final honors project document, although it is written in future tense in the proposal and past tense in the final document.

- **Analysis.** This is a brief statement describing how you will analyze. Your final document will present the results of the analysis, case studies, or application of the model.
- **Expected Results.** Describe what you expect to find.
- **Conclusions.** This is a brief statement of how the findings can be interpreted with respect to the literature reviewed earlier in the proposal, and how this information can be useful to others. This section summarizes the results of the analysis and discusses the implications of the findings. This section could include, if appropriate, suggestions for further research or policy recommendations.
- **References.** This is a complete reference list for all literature cited in the proposal. It must demonstrate a thorough review of the literature.
- **Appendices.** This section includes any materials that have been developed for the project (surveys, etc.) or descriptions of materials to be used (such as transcripts or descriptions of the content of audio or videotapes). A copy of the “informed consent document” to be used for human studies should also be included.
- **IRB Protocol.** Include the text of the protocol you will be submitting to the IRB.

High quality honors projects proposals result from a process where the honors project advisor reviews and edits multiple drafts of the document, so you should plan to complete several drafts of the honors project proposal as part of this process. Your goal is to prepare a high-quality document that will be presented to your honors project committee members for approval. Ideally, much of the text of the thesis proposal can be used when you write your final honors project during your final semester of the project. During this process, your honors project advisor will help you to decide whether your committee members should be consulted during the document development process and when your document is ready for their review. This review is usually completed near the start of the SOWK 499B semester.

Do not submit an IRB/IACUC protocol or begin collecting data until after your honors project proposal document is approved by your committee, unless approval to do so is granted by **all** members of your thesis committee.

- *Late submission of required work for the project committee will result in a late penalty to be determined by your project chair. The maximum late penalty is a half-letter grade deduction in the grade for SOWK 499A for each day work due is late. Unsatisfactory work in SOWK 499A would suggest that you should not continue your honors project.*

#### SOWK 499B (3 credits)

- By Friday of the first week of the semester, submit a revised outline of the entire project to your committee. If you are doing original research, note the IRB deadlines in your proposal. You may be asked to begin working on the IRB process during the previous semester.
- By Tuesday of the sixth week of the semester, submit a full draft of the first substantive chapter of your project.
- During the next two weeks, discuss your project with each of the members of your committee – beginning with your project chair. Your entire committee may prefer to meet with you jointly. Alternatively, one or both readers may prefer to discuss the outline and bibliography over the phone or in written form.
- Submit a full draft of your second substantive chapter to your committee by Friday of the twelfth week of the semester.
- When you meet with your project chair late in the semester to discuss this draft and your progress, you and/or your chair may choose to establish a drafting schedule for SOWK 499C appropriate to the structure and nature of your project.
- *Late submission of required work for project committee will result in a late penalty to be determined by your project chair. The maximum late penalty is a half-letter grade deduction in the grade for SOWK 499B for each day work due is late.*

Remember that high quality honors projects proposals result from an iterative process where the honors project advisor reviews and edits multiple drafts of the document, so you should plan to complete several drafts of the proposal as part of this process. Your goal is to prepare a high-quality document that will be presented to your committee for approval. All materials needed for the study should be identified or developed during this semester.

When your project chair feels that the proposal is ready for full committee review, make copies of the proposal and distribute them to members of the committee. *Do not further revise the document after you have distributed it to the committee members.* Schedule a meeting of the entire committee to discuss the project proposal and seek approval of the committee to continue the project.

Expect to discuss every aspect of your project plan with your committee at the meeting. Committee members often will want you to explain or elaborate on such questions as:

- What are the main issues being addressed?
- Why did you select these topics for investigation?
- What are your specific hypotheses/research questions?
- How are these hypotheses/research questions being addressed with your research design?
- How will your data be analyzed?
- What do you expect to find?
- What are the implications of your findings for our understanding of this topic area?

Expect your honors project committee to recommend revisions of your project plan. They may ask you to work with your project chair as you implement these revisions or they may ask you to meet with them again. Your goal is to develop the shared understanding among committee members and yourself that if you conduct the project as planned, and write a high-quality document that describes your good work, your committee will agree that you have successfully completed an honors project.

After you receive approval from your project committee, submit a protocol for review to the appropriate review body ([Institutional Review Board \(IRB\) on the Use of Human Subjects in Research](#)) for approval. Your protocol must be approved by the appropriate review body before data may be collected.

While waiting for approval from the appropriate review body, you can finalize development of materials needed for the study, practice techniques to be used in the study, and conduct planning activities. Once approval is received, you may begin collecting data.

#### SOWK 499C (2 credits)

- Draft and revise portions of your project every week during the first two months of this semester. As noted above, you may or may not be held to a specific timetable during this time period. Regardless, you need to keep writing on a regular basis!
- A full draft of your entire project is due to your committee no later than Tuesday of the sixth week of the semester. Your adviser may choose to set an earlier deadline.
- During weeks 7 and 8, discuss final revision plans for the project with each of the members of your committee – beginning with your committee chair. Your entire committee may prefer to meet with you jointly. Alternatively, one or both readers may prefer to discuss the draft over the phone or in written form.
- The final version of your project must be submitted to your committee seven (7) days prior to the deadline for submission to the Honors Program.
- *Late submission of required work for the project committee will result in a late penalty to be determined by your project chair. The maximum late penalty is a half-letter grade deduction in the grade for SOWK 499C for each day work due is late.*

Ideally, data collection should have begun during SOWK 499B and be complete by mid-semester of SOWK 499C. As soon as the data are available, complete your data analysis. Review your findings with your project chair and discuss the information to be included in the Results and Discussion sections of your project (which will replace the Expected Results and Implications sections that were included in your proposal). You also will need to make any required changes to the Introduction and Method sections (such as changing the method section to past tense), and you will need to add an abstract and other items specified in the *Senior Honors Project Handbook* available on the Honors Program web site (<http://www.jmu.edu/honorsprog/shp.shtml>). Note that MANY of the formatting requirements are NOT consistent with the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA) and you will need to adhere to the guidelines specified in the Honors Project Handbook. For all elements of the document not specifically addressed in the *Senior Honors Project Handbook*, you should use the most current version of the *APA Publication Manual*.

As is the case with project proposals, high-quality projects result from a process where the chair reviews and edits multiple draft documents, so you again should plan to complete several drafts of the document as part of this process. Consult with other members of your committee as recommended by your project chair, but do not submit drafts of your project to these other faculty until you are directed to do so by your project chair.

When your project chair thinks that the project is ready for full-committee review, make copies and distribute it to members of the committee. *Do not further revise the document after you have distributed it to the committee members.* Schedule a meeting of the entire committee (date to be determined by you and your chair). The purpose of the full-committee meeting ("project defense") is to allow the faculty to ask you questions regarding topics such as what you did, why you did it, what you found, and what it means, and to provide you feedback about the project and document.

It is not unusual, after this meeting, for students to be asked to complete additional work (such as additional data analysis or the addition or substantial modification of the project document) and resubmit, before the committee agrees that the project is successfully completed. You may be congratulated and told that you can successfully complete the project with a few changes.

**Submitting your Final Project.** The Honors Program requires an electronic submission of your project. Please refer to the Honors Program website for submission instructions where you will find a detailed explanation of how to "name" and submit the project, first to Honors, and then after approval from the Honors Program, to the library. A hard copy of the signature/title page with signatures is required by the Honors Program.

**Publication or Presentation of Project Findings.** You are encouraged to present your project findings at professional meetings, and to publish your findings in professional journals. Authorship for publication or presentation of project work must be determined on a case-by-case basis, consistent with the contributions made to the project by the project committee members. Students should share authorship on these presentations and publications with their collaborators. If the project was developed using these guidelines, authorship will include the committee chair and may also include the other members of the committee, depending upon their degree of involvement in the project. You can discuss this with your chair.

**Changes in Project Committee Membership.** If for any reason the members or chair of an Honors Project committee must be changed, students must request that change by resubmitting an application form and updated proposal to the Honors Program Office. The new proposal needs the signatures of the current Committee Chair (honors project advisor), all faculty currently serving on the committee (readers), the Social Work Department Head, and the Dean of CISAT (or Associate Dean) before it is submitted to the Honors Program. This documentation should include a brief statement regarding the reason for the change and an indication of whether the proposal or just the committee membership is being revised. When a thesis committee is reformulated, a note or e-mail from any faculty member who is no longer on that committee should be sent to the Honors Program Office indicating their agreement to no longer serve on the committee.