

PSYC 800: EDS RESEARCH PROJECT (THESIS)

Purpose

The School Psychology Program at James Madison is committed to practice which is empirically grounded. To meet that goal, the program in school psychology trains individuals who are knowledgeable of and versed in current best practices and who are well prepared to assimilate new developments in the field as informed consumers of the research literature. In addition, there is an expectation that JMU-trained school psychologists will be contributors to the research literature as principal investigators and collaborators or as evaluators of programs and services.

The Ed.S project is an integral part of the student's curriculum. In it students are able to investigate an area of interest in depth and to develop, analyze, and present new data relevant to that area. The project is also an opportunity for students, under the guidance of a research mentor and a committee of faculty and professional colleagues, to learn about the conventions and requirements of research, including the use of appropriate design and analytic tools and various forms of professional communication of research findings. At the end of the thesis and the three methods courses leading to it (PSYC 605, 606, and 609) students should be prepared to be independent researchers.

Research not only has the potential to shape the future of the profession but can be professionally helpful to the individual researcher. Professional advancement in some areas is contingent upon research experience; grants and contracts often are awarded to those with prior research activity; individuals who aspire to further graduate education will find admissions and financial support easier to obtain with documented research experience.

Types of Research Projects

Students may undertake any type of research project normally found in school psychology journals, including surveys, program evaluations, test development and validation studies, and experiments, including small "N" and case control clinical studies. With the prior permission of his or her committee, a student may complete a comprehensive critical review of the literature, comparable in scope to reviews published as journal articles or as book chapters. The project, which will be referred hereafter as the "thesis," whether it takes the form of a journal article or an extended study, must relate to the practice of school psychology, but students are encouraged to push the conventional boundaries of the field.

Students are also encouraged to work collaboratively with faculty and other students. Students may decide to work with faculty in areas in which they have developed research programs. Students may decide to work with fellow graduate

students. Collaboration often allows projects to expand in scope without requiring students to undertake very large projects individually.

Committee Composition

During the first semester of the second year, students are expected to attend brown bag lunches at which faculty present their research, in order to become familiar with faculty interests and expertise. By the second semester of the students' second year, they will select a Chairperson for their committee. The Chairperson must be a core member of the school psychology faculty, as listed in the current *School Psychology Student Handbook*. In consultation with the committee Chairperson, the students will select two additional JMU faculty for the committee. One of these two faculty must also be a member of the School Psychology faculty, and one may be from any division of the University. Committees often are made up of three core school psychology faculty. All members of the committee must be members of the graduate faculty.

Students are advised to select faculty for their committee who **1)** have expertise and interest in the area of their research; **2)** are familiar with the student; and **3)** work well with one another. Students should have a general idea of the nature of their project prior to selecting their committee.

Written Proposal and Defense

Working with their committee Chairperson and other faculty, including the PSYC 609 instructor, students will develop a written proposal of a research project they intend to undertake. The proposal will include **1)** a statement of the problem; **2)** a review of relevant literature; **3)** a proposed methodology; and **4)** a proposed analysis. Students will defend their proposal to their committee in a formal meeting. Students who work closely with their Chairperson in developing their proposal will normally encounter few changes during the proposal defense. Committees, however, provide guidance on the project and often require some changes to the original plan. In many cases, the committee will expect simplification or limitations of the thesis. At the proposal defense, the student will receive guidance and approval from the committee about the nature of the final report. Guidelines about the final project report and an evaluation form are attached.

Oral Defense of the Thesis

Upon completion of the final Ed.S thesis project, the student will schedule an oral defense with her/his committee with the approval of the committee chair. Committee members require a week's time to review the project before the oral defense. This defense begins with a brief (10-15 minute) presentation by the student of the goals, methods, findings, and implications of the study. Faculty then examine the student

about each of these areas. At the end of the defense, students are given written feedback about their presentation and ability to field questions and are given written information about revisions of the paper that are necessary. Rarely are modifications of the EdS thesis not required.

Professional Presentation

All EdS candidates must present at the annual Psychology Graduate Student Symposium in the Spring semester. Typically, this presentation is based on the student's thesis. Working with their committee chairperson, students should present the results of their thesis professionally, as a poster, paper, or workshop at a state, regional, or national convention, or as a paper in a journal or newsletter. The companion document to this paper, "The Ed.S Thesis Guide" provides more complete guidelines regarding preparation of the project.

Deadlines

It is expected that students will develop a research proposal in the context of PSYC 609 (Applied Research Methods) during the Spring semester of their second year. Students should be sufficiently prepared to defend a research proposal to their committee before the end of April of that year. Students must complete their proposal defense prior to December 1 of the first semester of internship. Students who fail to meet this deadline will receive an "I" in their internship course for that semester. Prior to the defense meeting, students *must* complete the CGOP Committee Approval Form available online.

Prior to undertaking any research with human subjects, students *must* secure permission of the **James Madison University Institutional Review Board (IRB)** and the IRB or other designated body or individual in a school system where research will be undertaken, in compliance with current federal and state law. Students should consult with their Chairperson as to whether to approach the IRBs prior to or after their Proposal Defense.

Copies of the research proposal and final Ed.S thesis must be received by committee members at least seven calendar days prior to the defense meetings. Students must determine whether faculty require paper copies of the documents or can receive them electronically. Students should distribute copies to committee members only after the Chairperson has given her/his approval of the document. In order for the Chairperson to give approval, he or she must have access to the document well in advance of the seven day period prior to the defense. Keeping your Chairperson informed of progress with progressive drafts is highly advised.

Students should complete and defend their thesis by May 1st of their internship

year and **must defend it prior to July 1 if they intend to graduate in summer**. This deadline provides time for students to make revisions to their final product (which are usually necessary) before submitting their title and signature pages to the College of Graduate and Outreach Programs (CGOP). Students must submit the final revisions of their thesis to the CGOP in accordance to the deadline published in the current *Graduate Catalog*. Students who fail to meet this deadline will be required to register for Ed.S Project Continuance in the Fall semester. Paperwork toward certification cannot be initiated until the final copy of the thesis is received by the CGOP.