

Thesis

PSYC 700

Sample Syllabus

Basic Course Information:

PSYC 700 Thesis is a learning experience that covers at least two semesters for a total of six credit hours. You and I will arrange a weekly meeting to take place in my office, Johnston 211. It is **your** responsibility to keep me and the other members of your committee informed of the scope, plan and progress of your project. You need to have the permission of the program director in order to participate in this course.

“Writing is not what the writer does after the thinking is done; writing is thinking.”
-D. Murray

Recommended Readings: ***Note: textbooks required by individual professors may differ from this list*

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Cone, J. D., & Foster, S. L. (2006). *Dissertations and theses from start to finish: Psychology and related fields* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Galvan, J. L. (2004). *Writing literature reviews: A guide for students of the social and behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Glendale, CA: Pyczak Publishing.

Heppner, P. P., & Heppner, M. J. (2004). *Writing and publishing your thesis, dissertation, and research: A guide for students in the helping professions*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Thomson.

Purpose:

The purpose of the Thesis experience is to provide you with an opportunity to undertake an intensive, in-depth work of scholarship. The final product is an original contribution to the counseling profession. The title of your Thesis will appear on your transcript. In contrast to the Ed.S. Research Project, the Thesis involves at least two full semesters of concentrated scholarly work. The Thesis is a comprehensive undertaking involving the systematic collection of information, analysis of quantitative or qualitative data, and completion of a detailed report of findings, conclusions and recommendations. Students who select the Thesis option may be considering applying to doctorate programs. Copies of the final report will be bound and included in the JMU Carrier Library permanent collection.

Objectives, Knowledge and Skills Outcomes

The objectives of this preparation course are to help you:

- understand the importance of research in advancing the counseling profession;
- be familiar with research methods, such as qualitative, quantitative, single-case designs, action research, and outcome-based research;
- understand statistical methods used in conducting research and program evaluation;
- know and use APA Style appropriately;
- understand the applications of needs assessment, program evaluation, and using findings to modify programs;
- adhere to ethical standards for research;
- follow culturally relevant strategies for interpreting research results;
- be familiar with the JMU Graduate College Format Guidelines;
- appreciate the use of research to inform evidence-based practice; and
- improve your technical writing skills.

Format:

Our meetings are your opportunity to discuss your ideas for a thesis, shape your plan of action, share your work in progress, discuss your results, edit drafts of your manuscript, and develop your final report. Between meetings, we will keep in contact through email, telephone, fax, and the postal service. I have provided information regarding numbers and addresses on the first page of this syllabus.

Grading:

Your performance in this course is graded as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. I will base my evaluation on the following criteria:

- **Comprehensiveness.** The thesis report must be a thorough consideration of the topic that you have selected. For example, your review of the literature must be complete. No matter what type of thesis you complete, you must present a comprehensive examination of the pertinent professional publications.
- **Relevance.** You must relate the thesis to the profession in significant ways. For example, you may discuss the implications of your results for the practice of counseling.
- **Originality.** You must offer a contribution to the counseling literature that is based on your own ideas and work. Your thesis must be more than a summary of the thoughts and efforts of others – it must have the distinction of presenting your individual notions and views.
- **Quality of writing.** Your thesis must be grammatically correct, clear, and well-written.
- **Organization.** The presentation of your thesis must be well-organized and coherent.

- **Achievement of goals.** The most fundamental criterion is the extent to which you are successful in accomplishing what you set out to do in your proposal.

As always, if you have specific needs that are addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and require course materials in alternative formats, please notify me immediately. I will make any reasonable effort to accommodate to your special needs. Of course, I expect you to abide by the JMU Honor Code, which is in the Catalog. Check with me if you have any questions regarding this matter.

Types of Theses:

A wide variety of studies and projects are acceptable for your thesis, as long as you demonstrate relevance to the field of counseling. While the thesis must include a review of the relevant professional literature and a discussion of the implications your results for counseling, it can include such methods as quantitative, qualitative, single-case, action, process, and outcome research. The thesis typically involves data collection and statistical analysis to answer a particular research question. If you use human subjects, you must submit a proposal for approval to the Institutional Review Board on the Use of Human Subjects in Research.

Proposal

As part of your comprehensive examination, which you typically take the semester after you have completed your practicum, you submit a proposal for an Ed.S. Research Project or Thesis. If you choose the Thesis option, your proposal must be more complete and detailed. In 6-10 pages, you should describe the topic area, provide a concise overview of the literature you will review, and state the specific purpose of your thesis. We expect that you provide an organized, clear and well-written description of what you plan to accomplish. Your proposal must show promise of making a positive and original addition to the counseling literature that is based on your own ideas and work.

Take care in crafting a readable document that follows APA style. You should propose a clear timeline identifying your target dates for achieving the major tasks, such as literature review, data collection, first draft, final committee meeting, and submission of the finished report.

Committee

In addition to a brief proposal, your comprehensive examination materials must also include a completed approval form naming your Thesis chair and two committee members. The form is available at <http://www.jmu.edu/cgop/current/thesisdissertation.shtml>.

As your PSYC 700 instructor, I will be the committee chair. The two readers must be members of the JMU graduate faculty, and at least one of them must be a member of the Counseling Programs. You may elect to have an additional reader if this person has expertise relevant to your research project.

Typically, you will have two meetings with the entire committee – one at the beginning of the

first semester and another during the second semester at least a week before the final report is due to The Graduate School. The purpose of the first meeting is to consider your thesis proposal for approval. The purpose of the second is to consider your final thesis for approval.

Final Thesis:

The format for the final report should follow the guidelines presented in the *JMU TGS Thesis and Dissertation Manual*, which is available online at <http://www.jmu.edu/grad/08-09Manual.pdf> and the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Follow the guidelines **carefully** and check with TGS before the deadline for a tentative approval of your report format.

Journal:

I invite you to keep a journal of your intellectual journey as you complete your thesis. The journal is a place where you can make your thinking visible and where you can work out connections in your own words. It may serve as a reservoir of ideas, the place where you face and answer your own questions. The journal is an on-going written conversation with yourself. You can use your journal to react to, reflect on, and tie together all your learning experiences: the readings you encounter, the information you collect, and the observations you make.

You can get much more out of keeping a journal if you do more than merely summarize your experience. For example, consider what is particularly interesting, meaningful, unusual, or even puzzling about the research you are doing. I suggest that you date your entries and write regularly, at least two or three times a week.

I encourage you to use your journal to explore your thoughts, sort through your feelings, recollect memories, and develop ideas. You can use a variety of strategies--questioning, synthesizing, speculating, and brainstorming.

Oral Presentation:

Once you have completed the thesis, you will arrange to offer an oral presentation on your thesis. If you are an intern, you may offer a presentation based on your thesis at the SpringSymposium. You may decide to submit a proposal based on your thesis to a professional conference, such as Virginia Counselors Association's annual meeting.

Registration:

You submit a written proposal for a thesis to me **before** you receive an override to preregister for the course. If you do not complete the thesis in time, you must register for PSYC 699 Thesis Continuance. Keep in mind that continuance hours do **not** count towards graduation requirements.

Hints:

I have compiled a few suggestions from other students who have successfully completed their thesis.

- **Make a time-line.** Develop a time-line for completing portions of your thesis. A time-line can help you stay on track with this long-term project.
- **Be punctual.** Keep track of important dates and deadlines. Be sure to have materials to committee members so that they will have adequate time to read them before meeting.
- **Organize your material.** Organize your references on 3 x 5 cards or on a database program. This strategy will be an enormous help when you later assemble your reference section. Nothing is more annoying than tracking down a missing reference when a deadline is hanging over you.
- **Take responsibility.** Remember that the chair's job is to guide you through the thesis with feedback and suggestions. You have the responsibility to arrange committee meetings, give drafts to committee members, and deliver the final manuscripts to the Graduate Office.
- **Use your committee resources.** Your chair should be satisfied before you give the formal proposal to other committee members. However, in some cases, it may make good sense to work closely with a member who has a specific expertise.
- **Proofread your work.** It is fine to use spell check and grammar programs, but do not rely on them to catch every error. Be sure to proofread your drafts carefully before giving them to your chair.
- **Back up your work.** Unless you want to experience the ultimate graduate student nightmare, make it a habit of regularly backing up your work. Accidents do happen, so keep backup disks and additional hard copies of your drafts in a safe, fireproof place.