

## School of Social Work

### Guidelines for the MSW Thesis, Thesis Alternative, and Independent Study in Practicum

This handout summarizes the elements of the Master's Thesis (SOC W 700), Thesis Alternative (SOC W 600) and Independent Study in the Practicum (SOC W 600) options in the MSW program. Note that these options are not required for the MSW. We encourage you to work with your faculty adviser, the associate dean for research, or an adviser in Student Services as you begin planning any of the projects outlined below.

The following illustration summarizes each of the research options. Details of each follow.

	<b>SOC W 700</b>	<b>SOC W 600</b>	<b>SOC W 600</b>
	<b>Thesis</b>	<b>Thesis Alternative</b>	<b>Independent Study in the Practicum</b>
<u>SCOPE</u>	Must involve complete process of empirical research	May involve a narrower scope than a thesis	May involve a narrower scope than a thesis
<u>STANDARDS</u>	Must conform to Graduate School guidelines	Final written product for external review is required	No external review of final product
<u>CREDITS</u>	3 per quarter for 3 quarters	1 to 3 per quarter for 3 quarters	1 to 3 per quarter
<u>SUPERVISION</u>	Committee of 3 individuals	Committee of 3 individuals	1 faculty member
<u>LOCATION</u>	In practicum or elsewhere	In practicum or elsewhere	Must be in the practicum
<u>NOTES</u>	Thesis title printed on transcript		

**TIMELINE: Students should meet with their faculty adviser no later than winter quarter of their first year.**

## Social Work 700 - Master's Thesis

### Scope:

1. A thesis (SOC W 700) must involve empirical research focusing on issues of human service practice, social service organization, or social policy. A literature review is acceptable only if it can be viewed in the light of data collection and analysis of historical items.
2. A thesis must reflect the following four tasks.
  - a. Problem formulation. This includes review of the literature, concept exploration and development, and the specification of questions or hypotheses.
  - b. Development of a design. This includes selection of and rationale for type of design, sampling procedures, data-gathering methods, instruments, and measures. Instruments may be existing ones or developed for the study.
  - c. Data collection and coding. This includes gathering, collating, and coding data.
  - d. Data analysis (or re-analysis) and interpretation.
3. A formal written thesis, in compliance with the Graduate School's guidelines, is required (see below).
4. Upon completion of the thesis and acceptance by the Graduate School, the student will graduate with the title of the thesis added to the transcript.

Credits: 3 credits per quarter for 3 quarters. A total of 9 credits in SOC W 700 must be recorded; however, it is possible to register for fewer than or more than 3 quarters of SOC W 700.

### Approval

Procedure: See Attachment A, "Thesis Project." The faculty member who will chair the Supervisory Committee should sign this form before the student registers for SOC W 700. The form is then reviewed in the Dean's Office by the Associate Dean for Professional Degree Programs, the Associate Dean for Research, and the School's Human Subjects Coordinator.

Chronology: In most cases, the student files this form during registration period in the Spring Quarter of the first year in the MSW program. However, some students wait until the beginning of the second year.

### Guidelines for The Student:

The Graduate School's publication, Style and Policy Manual for Theses and Dissertations, specifies the University's standards. Copies of this document can be obtained in Student Services (Room 23-E) or the Graduate School offices in the UW Administration Building.

Role of  
Supervisory  
Committee  
Members:

A committee of three individuals supervises the thesis (see Attachment B).

Social Work 600 - Thesis Alternative or Independent Study/Research

SOC W 600 is used for two different purposes: a) the thesis alternative (described in this section), and b) an independent study conducted in the practicum setting (see the next section).

A) Thesis Alternative (SOC W 600)

Scope:

1. A thesis alternative (SOC W 600), in contrast to a thesis (SOC W 700), need not include all four tasks of a complete investigation (i.e., problem formulation, design, data collection, analysis and interpretation). Students conducting research under the SOC W 600 auspices might be actively involved in two or three of these steps.
2. Several students may collaborate in the thesis alternative.
3. The title of the research project will not appear on the student's transcript.

Credits: 1 to 3 credits per quarter for 3 quarters.

Approval

Procedure: See Attachment C. This form is available in Student Services. Review and approval are conducted in the Dean's Office by both the Associate Dean for Professional Degree Programs and the Associate Dean for Research.

Chronology: In most cases, the student files this form during registration period in the Spring Quarter of the first year in the MSW program. However, some students wait until the beginning of the second year.

Guidelines for  
The Student:

While a written product is required, it need not meet the Graduate School's standards for a thesis. It is necessary, however, that the final written product (e.g., a scholarly paper, a policy analysis, an accountability report, a needs assessment, a grant proposal, or a presentation to a professional organization) be prepared for eventual submission for external review (e.g., a funding source, a professional journal, the Board of Directors of an agency, the United Way, etc.).

Role of  
Supervisory  
Committee  
Members:

A committee of three individuals supervises the thesis alternative (see Attachment B).

B) Independent Study or Research (SOC W 600)

Scope: Students intending to conduct a piece of research within the practicum setting may opt for this course designation. Unlike the thesis alternative, only one instructor supervises the independent study. Also, the final product need not be prepared for eventual external review.

Credits: Variable (1 to 3 credits per quarter).

Approval

Procedure: See Attachment D. This form is available in Student Services. Both the Associate Dean for Professional Degree Programs and the Associate Dean for Research conduct review and approval in the Dean's Office. The Practicum Instructor must indicate approval on this form.

Chronology: The student may enroll in SOC W 600 (Independent Study) during any academic quarter in which he/she is concurrently in a practicum placement.

Guidelines for the Student:

The student and the supervisory faculty member come to an agreement (as in any independent study) as to the nature of the work and the form of the ultimate product.

Role of Faculty

Sponsor: The faculty member who supervises the SOC W 600 (Independent Study) may wish to review Attachment B for general principles that may apply.

**SOC W 700 - THESIS PROJECT**

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The quarters in which this project will take place (no more than 3 credits per quarter for three quarters)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Note: Three committee members must be recruited for supervision of your project. Students are asked to consult with either the Associate Dean for Professional Degree Programs or the Associate Dean for Research concerning committee composition. Committee members can include social work faculty or qualified outside persons (e.g., faculty from other departments, field instructor, agency supervisor, etc.).

One of the committee members (a member of the Social Work faculty) must serve as the committee chairperson. This person's agreement to chair the committee should be obtained before registering for SOC W 700.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairperson \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) (Title) (Date)

Member \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) (Title) (Date)

Member \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) (Title) (Date)

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Director, MSW Program) (Date)

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Associate Dean for Research) (Date)

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Human Subjects Coordinator, School of Social Work) (Date)

After obtaining all signatures, return this form to Student Services.



**SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS  
FOR THESIS (SOC W 700) AND THESIS ALTERNATIVE (SOC W 600)  
PROJECTS**

This statement of responsibilities is based on existing standards for the thesis (SOC W 700) and the thesis alternative (SOC W 600) (see below). These standards were approved by the MSW Curriculum Committee during the 1993-94 academic year.

The following are recommended guidelines to be used by faculty in carrying out their responsibilities for committee supervisory work.

Responsibilities of the Chairperson

1. To obtain evidence of the capability of the student(s) to do research through a preliminary screening of a statement of intent and other documents (such as a class paper) that indicate capacity for research.
2. To make certain the student(s) and other committee members understand the standards for the thesis or the thesis alternative (see below) and other requirements for the final product, such as the Graduate School requirements for the thesis. Information on the latter can be obtained by contacting the Graduate School.
3. To help the student(s) select a committee and to coordinate and facilitate the work of that committee.
4. To help the student(s) develop a research proposal for submission to the supervisory committee for consideration. The research proposal will represent the specific contract between the student(s) and the committee.

A thesis (SOC W 700) must reflect the following four tasks. A thesis alternative (SOC W 600) may include only two or three (but no fewer) of these tasks (for example, when the course relates to a larger or ongoing project and the student is not involved in all phases):

- a. Problem formulation. This includes review of the literature, concept exploration and development, and the specification of questions and hypotheses.
- b. Development of a design. This includes selection of and rationale for type of design, sampling procedures, data-gathering methods, instruments, and measures. Instruments may be existing ones or developed for the study.
- c. Data collection and coding. This includes gathering, collating, and coding data.
- d. Data analysis (or re-analysis).
- e. Interpretation and application - implication for practice.

A proposal for a thesis must contain clear descriptions of the plans for accomplishment of these research tasks and human subjects review according to existing procedures.

A thesis alternative (SOC W 600), however, may be based on as few as two of these four research tasks, plus human subjects review according to existing procedures. A number of combinations of the four tasks are possible, but because of the sequential nature of the tasks, most studies will tend to take on one of the following compositions:

- a, b -- the development of a research proposal
- a, b, c -- the development of a research proposal and partial project implementation
- c, d -- project implementation
- a, d -- a secondary analysis of existing data
- a, b, c, d -- a full research investigation

A proposal for research should contain clear descriptions of the plans for accomplishment of the particular combination of research tasks, which will be implemented, plus human subjects review. Where the research is concerned only with implementation of previously designed research (as in the combination of task c and d), the proposal should include a statement summarizing the problem formulation and design tasks. Where the research is a secondary analysis of previously collected data, the proposal should contain a summary of the original problem formulation, design, and data-collection procedures as a framework for considering a newly proposed hypothesis which will be examined via the available data. Where the research involves more than one student, the proposal should include a clear description of how the students will deploy themselves to accomplish the particular combination of research tasks.

#### Responsibilities of Other Committee Members

1. Participation in committee work.
2. Availability for consultation with students at all stages of research planning and execution.
3. All members of the committee are equally responsible for the quality of the research.
4. Responsibility for human subjects review in accordance with existing procedures.

#### The Process of Committee Work

The committee as a group will meet as often as necessary, but a minimum set of meetings will be:

1. Beginning
  - a. An initial meeting with the student(s) to consider the research topic and to understand the requirements of committee work.
  - b. Upon notification by the chairperson to examine the research proposal:
    - (1) Copies of the proposal will be made available to committee members by the student(s) in advance of the meeting date (preferably 2 weeks).
    - (2) The committee members will critically review the proposal noting questions, concerns, and suggestions in writing. Prior to the meeting, the student(s) and the chairperson will be given a copy of the written reviews, so the student(s) will have time to examine the review statements, and so the chairperson can coordinate the meeting around the concerns of committee members.
    - (3) At the meeting of the committee, faculty will reach agreement about any defects in the proposal through a process of compromise and negotiation, and either approve it or have the student(s) revise the proposal to the point the committee can accept it.
2. Middle - The committee will meet at the request of the chairperson to review the progress of the student(s).
3. Completion - The student(s) should have a rough draft of the research report available for review of the committee.
  - a. The student(s) will ensure that each committee member receives a copy of the rough draft prior to the meeting of the committee (preferably 2 weeks).
  - b. Each committee member will examine the draft prior to the meeting and submit written comments to the chairperson and the student(s) at least several days prior to the meeting so (1) the student(s) can examine the comments and be ready to respond in the meeting; and (2) so the chairperson can coordinate the meeting around the concerns of the committee.
  - c. During the meeting to review the draft of the final product, faculty will reach consensus about what the student(s) needs to do for the final draft.
  - d. After the meeting, the chairpersons will prepare a written summary of the agreed-upon recommendations for the committee and submit it to all committee members and the student(s).
  - e. During the remainder of the third quarter, the student(s) will develop the final report of the research. Should any committee member have concerns about the final product, the chairperson will be notified and a meeting of the committee will be called for the purpose of reaching committee agreement.

**SOC W 600 - THESIS ALTERNATIVE**

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The quarters in which this project will take place (1 to 3 credits per quarter for three quarters)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Number of credits requested: \_\_\_\_\_.

Note: Three committee members must be recruited for supervision of your project. Students are asked to consult with either the Associate Dean for Professional Degree Programs or the Associate Dean for Research concerning committee composition. Committee members can include social work faculty or qualified outside persons (e.g., faculty from other departments, field instructor, agency supervisor, etc.).

One of the committee members (a member of the Social Work faculty) must serve as the committee chairperson. This person's agreement to chair the committee should be obtained before registering for SOC W 600.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairperson \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) (Title) (Date)

Member \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) (Title) (Date)

Member \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) (Title) (Date)

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Director, MSW Program) (Date)

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Associate Dean for Research) (Date)

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Human Subjects Coordinator, School of Social Work) (Date)

After obtaining the necessary signatures, return this form to Student Services.



**SOCIAL WORK 600 - INDEPENDENT STUDY OR RESEARCH**

SPECIAL PRACTICUM PROBLEMS

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

AGENCY \_\_\_\_\_ QUARTER \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER OF CREDITS REQUESTED \_\_\_\_\_ (1 to 3)

THE FIELD PROJECT:

A. Brief description of project (include purpose and method of study)

---

---

---

---

B. Resources needed in agency

---

---

Are resources available? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

C. Form of Final Report

---

---

---

D. Additional information regarding the project important to approval decision

---

---

APPROVALS:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director, MSW Program

\_\_\_\_\_  
Agency Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Practicum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student