

California State University, Northridge  
Michael D. Eisner College of Education  
Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling

**STUDENT'S GUIDE  
FOR THE  
CULMINATING EXPERIENCE**

Fall 2003

California State University, Northridge (CSUN)  
Michael D. Eisner College of Education  
Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling (EPC)

## GUIDE FOR THE CULMINATING EXPERIENCE

### Table of Contents

Introduction and Overview	p. 1
Basic Definitions	p. 3
Required Paperwork	p. 4
Your Committee	p. 4
Department and University Procedures	p. 6
Graduate project	p. 7
Thesis	p.13
Comprehensive exams	p.18
Appendix	p. 21

### INTRODUCTION

The Guide for the Culminating Experience is designed to provide information and guidance for graduate students enrolled in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling at California State University, Northridge. The purpose of the guide is to direct students toward the smooth and successful completion of their culminating experience, and to assist in students' timely graduation and entrance into their chosen profession. Department and university procedures for the three options offered by the EPC Department for the culminating experience are described below.

### OVERVIEW

It is never too early to begin thinking about, and planning for, your culminating experience. Some students seem to know just what they want to do from the very first day of the program, whereas others take a longer, more reflective path to determine exactly what they will do for the culmination of their master's degree. More typically, students get ideas and clues about the types of activity they would like to pursue, and a specific topic or project with which they would like to become involved, through participation in courses and/or fieldwork experiences in their program. Is there a topic that piqued your interest in a class discussion? Was there a chapter you read in a text, or perhaps a journal article, that struck a chord for you? Perhaps you wrote a paper for a class and the topic turned out to be quite an intriguing one for you. These are the kind of self-signals for which you should be on the lookout. When you find something that seems particularly interesting to you - catch it! Write it down!

Who knows, maybe that will become the basis of one of your comprehensive exam questions, or the springboard for your graduate project, or the problem you will investigate for your thesis research.

## **BASIC DEFINITIONS**

### ***What is a culminating experience?***

The culminating experience is a generic term referring to the final academic experience in your master's program. In the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling, the culminating experience is one of three choices: it can be a comprehensive examination, a project, or a thesis.

### ***What is a graduate project?***

A graduate project involves the design of a product, such as a curriculum, a workshop, a guidebook, a video, or a unique approach to a particular therapeutic method or teaching model. The candidate provides a rationale for the product based on a comprehensive review of the research and consultation with experts in the field. The project must contribute something new and/or significant to the field, and it must be based on a review of the research and/or a needs assessment.

### ***What is a thesis?***

A thesis involves the design and implementation of empirical research. Students design an original study, obtain and/or develop data collection tools, organize and implement data collection, input and analyze the data, and write the results and conclusions of the study based on the data.

### ***What is a comprehensive examination?***

Comprehensive examinations ("Comps") are comprised of ten questions, the answers to which are prepared like term papers. Broad concepts are researched, explored, and analyzed within the context of answering specific questions. Three questions are chosen and administered to the student during a three-hour examination several weeks before the end of the fall and spring semesters.

### ***When should I begin my culminating experience?***

As mentioned, it's never too early to begin thinking about and planning your culminating project. Officially, students should plan to enroll in comprehensive exam EPC 697 during the last semester of their program; or in the thesis or graduate project EPC 698 in the last two semesters of their program. If additional time is needed to complete the thesis or graduate project, students may enroll in EPC 699 for the following semester. Students may complete their thesis or graduate project in the summer semester only with the agreement of their chair and committee members.

## **REQUIRED PAPERWORK**

The thesis study or graduate project typically takes at least two (2) semesters to complete. Paperwork declaring the intent to complete the thesis study or graduate project should be completed one (1) year prior to the anticipated date of completion (e.g., submit paperwork in the fall of 2003 for completion of the thesis by the end of fall semester, 2004). Counseling students should enlist committee members during the spring semester in which they are registered for "B" practicum and hand in paperwork to the department office during that same semester, if the student plans to graduate by the end of the following spring semester. For EPC M.A. students, when the student has completed about 50% of required program units, then the student should submit paperwork to the department office during that same semester, if the student plans to graduate by the end of the following spring semester. Once students have selected a chairperson and committee member(s), they must complete the following paperwork.

- Students choosing the thesis or graduate project option must obtain a Thesis/Graduate Project Planning Form (NCR form), complete the top portion, write the title of their thesis/project on the title line, have their committee members sign it, and then give it to the EPC graduate secretary, who will then have the Graduate Coordinator sign the form, and forward it to the Graduate Studies Office. A sample copy of this form is in the appendix, but the required NCR form should be obtained from the EPC department office or Graduate Studies (UNIV 277), because the form is in triplicate.
- Students choosing comprehensive exams as their culminating activity must obtain a Comprehensive Exam card from the EPC graduate secretary. The student needs to have the comprehensive exam committee chair and reader provide signatures on the card, which the student will then return to the graduate secretary.

The appendix of this guide includes samples of the necessary forms and paperwork.

## **YOUR COMMITTEE**

### ***Selecting a chair***

For all three culminating experience options, the committee chairperson must be a full-time EPC faculty member, or a full-time faculty member from another university department who is currently teaching in the department. Ideally, the chair should be a faculty member in the student's program, or a faculty member with expertise about the subject that the student wishes to pursue for a culmination experience, and a person with whom the student is comfortable working. The student should make sure that the chair would be available throughout the course of the culminating experience. Students should provide their chair and committee members

accurate contact information and update any changes, such as phone numbers and email addresses. An example of a form that can be used to chronicle meetings with committee members, including topics discussed and activities to pursue, is provided in the Appendix.

### ***Understanding the purpose of the committee***

Your committee is your personal guide to starting, doing, and completing your culminating experience. All three options of the culminating experience utilize a committee. Comprehensive examination committees consist of a chair and one member/reader. Thesis and graduate project committees consist of a chair and two committee members.

### ***Enlisting committee members***

The purpose of your committee is to act as a personal guide to starting, doing, and completing your culminating experience. All three options of the culminating experience utilize a committee. Comprehensive examination committees consist of a chair and one member/reader. Thesis and graduate project committees consist of a chair and two committee members.

For students completing a thesis study or graduate project, one (1) committee member must be a full-time faculty member in the EPC department, or a full-time faculty member in another university department who is currently teaching in the department. With the approval of the committee chair, the other committee member may be a part-time faculty member in EPC, a full-time faculty member in another department, or a practitioner in the student's field of study. The practitioner must have earned at least a master's degree in a relative field of study. Practitioners are required to submit their resumé for approval; the resumé should be attached to the program planning form. To serve as committee members, no documentation is needed for full-time faculty from other departments at CSUN or for part-time members of the EPC faculty to serve as committee members.

Students completing comprehensive examinations need one (1) committee member, in addition to the committee chair. This member may be a full-time faculty member in the department, a full-time faculty member in another university department who is currently teaching in the department, or a part-time faculty member in EPC.

### ***Working with your committee***

The student should ask the chairperson and committee members about the logistics of the involvement of committee members. Some committee members prefer to see all drafts and be involved throughout the process, whereas other members may give early input in terms of conceptualizing the project or research design and then prefer to see only the final drafts. Students should have committee members clarify their preference at the onset of their work together. Students are advised to work closely with their chairs from the very beginning and throughout the entire length of the culminating experience. For example, it would be inadvisable for students to do most of the work of a culminating activity on their own and then "bring

it" to a faculty member in hopes that the person would "sign on" as committee chairperson. The culminating experience is intended to be a process during which the committee and student work closely throughout. Written notes of what is discussed and agreed upon in committee meetings are very helpful in keeping the chair, committee members, and student on track with timely completion of work. Procedures such as summarizing a committee meeting and then promptly providing copies of the notes to the committee can prove very helpful. Another logistical procedure a student, chair, and committee members should discuss and agree upon is the amount of time that the student must allow for the chair and committee members to read submitted written material. For example, how many days does the chair need in order to review materials for your next meeting? When the final draft is completed, how much time will committee members need before submitting their suggestions? These important procedural considerations should be clearly delineated at the onset of the culmination experience process and updated as needed.

### ***Developing timelines***

Timelines help both students and faculty members stay focused and purposeful in relation to the timely completion of the culmination experience. Timelines help the student understand the sequence of activities, map out a schedule, and inform committee members when to anticipate incoming drafts of chapters to read. Several sample timelines are provided in the appendix; students should consult with their chair to modify and/or periodically review their timeline.

### ***Writing successfully***

Some committee members and chairs will provide editing, formatting, spelling correction, and/or grammatical advice for students, whereas other chairs prefer to focus their attention on the content, not the structure, of student work. Students are advised to discuss this aspect of their culminating experience with their committee chair. Sources for editing and formatting are available from both university and community sources. It is the student's responsibility to persist with the writing and revision process until the final document is satisfactory to the chair and each committee member.

## **DEPARTMENT AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES**

### ***EPC Department Procedures***

You must register for each semester in which you are working on your culminating activity. From the EPC department office, you should obtain a copy of the Thesis/Graduate Project Timeline (printed on pink paper), which lists critical department and university deadlines for comps, thesis, and graduate projects. Since the dates differ each semester, it is crucial that students obtain this timeline at the beginning of the each semester. It is the student's responsibility to be knowledgeable of, and to meet, these deadlines. There are no exceptions to university deadlines.

### ***Summer Enrollment***

Students cannot begin their culminating experience in the summer. Students may complete a graduate project or thesis in the summer semester only with the agreement, in advance, of their chair and committee members; most faculty do not work with students on culminating activities during the summer.

### ***Credential and Licensure Requirements***

Students who plan to apply for a state credential or license including the Pupil Personnel Service credential for school counselors and school psychologists, and licensure from the State of California Board of Behavioral Science for marriage and family therapists –, should be aware that a transcript indicating an uncompleted culminating experience may cause delays in obtaining the desired credential or internship approval. Students are advised to obtain further information from the coordinators of their specific program option about possible delays resulting from an "I" – Incomplete – on their transcript.

### ***Original work***

Students are required to do individual projects and theses, unless under exceptional circumstances and only with the approval of the students' committee chair, committee members, and department chair. If two students pursue a similar topic, it must be clear that the "products" of the project, or the hypotheses of the research, are separate and unique, ensuring that each person's graduate project or thesis is indeed original.

Students, who may currently be involved in a "joint" project and began the project prior to June 2003, may complete it as arranged with their chair. However, students who start projects/theses after the Spring 2003 semester must abide by the new EPC department policy regarding original work.

### ***University Procedures***

The Office of Graduate Studies (OGS) at CSUN is responsible for implementing university policies regarding graduate student classification, formal programs, culminating experiences, diplomas. This office publishes information on all graduate programs and assists individual departments in updating information on graduate degree programs. The Graduate Studies division encompasses the Graduate Studies Committee and Graduate Evaluation Services. The website for Graduate Studies, Research and International Programs is:

<http://www.csun.edu/graduatestudies/research.htm>

Students should obtain the Guidelines for Preparation booklet available in the EPC department office and online at the Graduate Studies website. Students are required to meet the formatting guidelines of both the university and of the EPC department, which adheres to the guidelines of the American Psychological Association.

## **Human Subjects**

All planned research involving human subjects must receive approval from the CSUN Advisory Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects prior to commencing the thesis and/or project study. All students and faculty conducting research that involves the participation of humans or animals must complete a protocol form and submit it to the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects. Official protocol forms, as well as copies of federal guidelines for both human and animal-related research, are available from a link of the website of the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects.

The Human Subjects Committee meets once a month and requires that all paperwork is submitted at least two (2) weeks prior to the meeting time. Approvals from participating schools or organizations (such as school principals or program directors) must be obtained on letterhead prior to submitting a completed proposal. Methodology must be specific and clearly written, so that the Human Subjects Committee can approve the research in a timely fashion. Human Subjects forms can be downloaded from:

<http://www.csun.edu/graduatestudies/1Research/Documents/human.pdf>

## **Final Appointments**

When you are nearly finished with the thesis or graduate project, you will need to make an appointment with the Office of Graduate Studies to have your thesis/project format approved. The appointment should occur near the end of the semester in which the thesis is submitted. Deadlines for this appointment are usually posted on the department bulletin board.

## **Resources**

The following recommended books are sources of valuable information and guidance for preparing and completing, your culminating experience.

American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*(5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Cone, J. D., & Foster, S. L. (1995). *Dissertations and theses from start to finish: Psychology and related fields*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E.(2001). *Practical research: Planning and design* (7th ed.). New York: Merrill/Prentice Hall.

Frankel, J. R., Wallen, E. I., & Sawin, N. E. (1999). *Visual statistics*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

## **THE GRADUATE PROJECT**

### ***What is a graduate project?***

In a graduate project, the candidate provides a rationale for a specific *product* that is based on a comprehensive review of the research and consultation with

experts in the field. This product takes a wide variety of forms, such as a curriculum, a workshop or program, a guidebook, a video, or a unique approach to a particular therapeutic method or teaching model. The project must: (1) relate directly to the candidate's program; (2) contribute something new and/or significant to the field, and (3) be based on a review of the research and, if appropriate, a needs assessment.

***What is the difference between a thesis and a graduate project?***

In a thesis, the candidate designs a research study, collects and analyzes the data, and discusses the results. In other words, the candidate conducts an empirical study of an issue. For further details, please see the thesis section of this guide.

***How is a graduate project structured?***

Below is a typical outline for a graduate project completed by an EPC student.

**Sample Contents of a Graduate Project**

**Chapter One - Introduction**

1. Introduction

The purpose of this section is to provide a context that supports the rationale for the proposed project. For example, let's say that you are going to develop a series of parenting workshops for Spanish-speaking parents, your introduction would include information such as 1) statistics showing how many Hispanic parents live in Los Angeles (or other geographic areas; 2) statistical indicators of the need for parenting workshops for this particular population, such as attendance rates of Spanish speakers in parenting workshops, family violence or abuse rates, needs assessment data, etc.; 3) availability of parenting workshops for Spanish speakers, etc. The introduction is intended to lead the reader into an understanding that there is a specific need, or problem, that needs to be addressed.

2. Statement of Need/Problem

This section states what is needed and why. If we use the above example of parenting workshops, this section would point out that there is a lack of effective workshops for Spanish-speaking parents due to language and cultural differences. Be sure to state credible reasons and/or cite literature to support the statement of need.

3. Purpose of Graduate Project

This is the most important section of the project. Everything -- the research you survey, your creative process in developing the project, the project itself -- should be connected to and a result of your identified purpose. This section

states succinctly your purpose in creating this graduate project, for example, "The purpose of this project is to develop a workshop that meets the needs of Spanish-speaking parents in the San Fernando Valley." This section should also include a brief description of the proposed project.

#### 4. Terminology

This section provides definitions of critical terms. These definitions should be based on scholarly research and other scholarly work. The sources should be cited using APA format. When scholars define a term in different ways, include a brief discussion of the different perspectives and indicate which definition will be adopted in the project and why.

#### 5. Bridge to Next Section

The final section of the first chapter provides a bridge to the review of the research and the remainder of the graduate project. Provide a paragraph or two indicating how the graduate project is organized.

### **Chapter Two - Literature Review**

#### 1. Introduction

The purpose of the literature review is to explore research on issues that are relevant to the proposed project. Briefly list and preview the critical issues in the order in which they will be discussed in the review. The subheadings of the subsequent sections of the review should reflect the critical issues.

#### 2. Review of the Research

Review the research on each issue. In this process, you should:

- a. Use the most recent version of the APA style manual for formatting the prose and citing sources.
- b. In addition to discussing the major findings of relevant studies, the student should cite pertinent information about how the study was conducted. Include number of participants in the study, the characteristics of participants, and what kinds of instruments and methods were used (e.g., not the specific names of tests or other instruments, but whether they were interviewed, responded to questionnaires, tested, observed, etc.). The synopsis should also mention any major weaknesses in the study design.

#### 3. Synthesis of Literature Review

Synthesize major findings of the research related to your proposed project. Discuss such questions as, does the research:

- a. Support the development of the proposed project?
- b. Indicate how the project should be structured and implemented?
- c. Include evaluations of products that are similar to the proposed project? If so, how does the proposed project differ from, or improve upon, existing similar products or projects?

## **Chapter Three – Project Audience and Implementation Factors**

### 1. Introduction

Indicate that this graduate project presents a product or project that, according to the research, is needed. Briefly delineate the organization of the chapter.

### 2. Development of Project

Describe your process (or method) in developing the project. How was the project developed (e.g., how was the parenting workshop designed)? What steps did you take from initially deciding you wanted to develop a particular project to its final creation?

### 3. Intended Audience

Identify the target population for the product or project. Describe the relevant demographics of the intended group (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity or race, language proficiency, etc.). Also describe any relevant conditions (e.g., clients who have been sexually abused, gay or lesbian couples, persons of a specific ethnicity, persons in a specific career or decision-point in their lives). If relevant, discuss the group or type of person for whom the project would be inappropriate.

### 4. Personal Qualifications

Describe the qualifications of the professionals who will provide the service (e.g. conduct a workshop or therapy session) or use the product. Detail the training and experiences that the leader or provider must have (e.g. licensed psychologist, licensed therapist, school counselor, career counselor, credentialed teacher, parent trainer, etc.) Describe other important skills needed, in addition to professional training, licenses, and degrees, such as proficiency in a language other than English.

### 5. Environment and Equipment

Describe the attributes of the physical space in which the product or process is to be used or take place (e.g., a quiet room) or special equipment needed (e.g., a sand tray),

6. Project Outline

Provide an outline of the content, activities, and procedures that comprise the proposed project.

### **Chapter Four – Product**

Chapter Four consists of a fully developed product. For example, a fully developed curriculum, handbook, workshop, or video. What you place here is the culmination of your own unique process. Enjoy it and don't be afraid to stretch and take some risks.

### **Chapter Five – Conclusion**

1. Summary

Summarize the preceding four chapters, starting with the purpose of the project. You may use this summary as your abstract, although some students prefer to write an elaborated summary here.

2. Evaluation

Some chairs may want you to evaluate your project. This could be accomplished in a variety of ways. You could assemble a panel of three or more experts in the field to examine and evaluate the project. You could also conduct an evaluation study in which you collect data showing the project's effectiveness. The later option is rare, however.

In the next two sections, you have the opportunity to write from your own voice. Reflect on what you have learned. You now know more than anyone else about this project -- it is time to show it and to shine.

3. Discussion or Conclusion

Discuss your project and the results of your evaluation. Did you make changes in your project or product based upon the comments of the experts? Why or why not? Draw conclusions from your work. For example, based upon your knowledge of the field, you may conclude that designing a workshop for Latino parents differs from designing a workshop for English speaking parents in the following ways.

#### 4. Future Work/Research

Identify what work needs to be done in the future. How are you going to use your project? For example, you may want to do one of the following:

- Teach parent workshops throughout Los Angeles and discuss how you would interest parents in attending such workshops.
- Design an evaluation instrument for participant feedback, so you can really fine-tune the workshop.
- Conduct an outcome study on the effectiveness of the workshop (i.e., do the participants become better parents than those who have not participated in such a workshop?).
- Further develop the curriculum and publish it.
- Determine if your workshop design could be used with parents who speak languages other than Spanish.
- Identify research questions, through your literature review, that need to be answered and discuss how you would answer these questions.

### **THESIS**

#### ***What is a thesis?***

A thesis involves the design and implementation of empirical research by the student. The student will design the study, obtain and/or develop data collection tools, set up and follow-through on the data collection process, process and analyze the data, and write the results and conclusions of the study based on the data. One thesis option is a comprehensive review of the research. In this case, the student formulates a research question that can be addressed through an extensive review of the research.

#### ***What is the difference between a thesis and a graduate project?***

A graduate project involves the design of a product, such as a curriculum, workshop, or video. For further details, see the *Graduate Project* section of this Guide.

#### ***How is a thesis structured?***

Below is a typical outline for a thesis completed by an EPC student.

## Sample Contents of a Thesis

### Chapter One – Introduction

#### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this section is to provide a context that is supporting the rationale for the proposed study. For example, let's say that you want to examine the nature and quality of the preparation of school counselors in regard to their cultural competencies. The introduction should provide such information as:

- a. The percentage of students from various ethnic and racial groups served by school counselors in a particular geographic region;
- b. The ethnic and racial groups represented by school counselors;
- c. Indicators showing whether there is a need to improve the ability of school counselors to meet the needs of culturally and racially diverse students.

The introduction is supposed to lead the reader into understanding or concluding that this is an issue that needs to be formally studied.

#### 2. Statement of the Problem

This section provides a clear statement of the research problem and why it needs to be addressed. A statement of the problem and research question, based on the example previously mentioned, might indicate that the current population of school counselors does not meet the needs of certain ethnic/racial groups. Another example: It is unknown whether school counselors are meeting the needs of culturally/racially diverse students/populations, and therefore needs to be investigated. The statement of the problem should lead the reader into the next section, in which the research question(s) and hypotheses are addressed.

#### 3. Purpose of the Study/Hypothesis statement

This section clearly states that the purpose of the thesis is to examine a specific research question and to test certain hypotheses (in the case of a quantitative study) or to explore certain themes related to the hypotheses (in the case of a qualitative study). A very brief description of the proposed study should also be provided.

4. Significance of the Study

This section discusses the contributions to the field that this study is intended to provide and why it is important to conduct the study.

5. Terminology

This section provides definitions of critical terms. These definitions should be based on scholarly research and other scholarly work. The sources should be cited using APA format. When scholars define a term in different ways, include a brief discussion of the different perspectives and indicate which definition will be adopted in the project and why.

6. Bridge to the Review of the Research and remainder of thesis.

The student provides a paragraph or two indicating how the thesis is organized and provides a bridging statement to chapter two.

## **Chapter Two – Literature Review**

1. Introduction

The purpose of the review of the research is to explore research on the issues that are relevant to the proposed project. Briefly list and preview the critical issues, in the order in which they will be discussed in the review. The subheadings of the subsequent sections of the review should reflect the critical issues.

2. Review of the Research on Issues that are Relevant to the Study.

As the student reviews the research on each issue, she/he should:

- a. Use the most recent version of APA style for formatting prose and citations. The student should obtain the latest edition of the APA style manual.
- b. In addition to discussing the major findings of the studies, the student should also include pertinent information about how each study was conducted, such as the number of subjects, relevant characteristics of the subjects, types of instruments and/or methods used (e.g., not necessarily the specific names of the tests or instruments, but whether they were interviewed, responded to questionnaires, tested, observed, etc.). The synopsis should also mention any major weaknesses in the study design.

### 3. Synthesis of the Review of the Research.

This section synthesizes the major findings of the research as it relates to the proposed study. Does the research you have just reviewed:

- a. Support the development of the proposed thesis?
- b. Indicate how your study should be designed and/or implemented?
- c. Identify other studies that are similar to the proposed study? If so, how would the proposed study differ from or improve upon existing similar studies?

## **Chapter Three - Methods**

### 1. Introduction

Present the research design for the proposed study, restate the hypotheses and research question(s), and briefly delineate the organization of this chapter.

### 2. Sample

Describe the sample population of the study, including a description of how many participated (you may want to talk about the number of surveys sent out versus the response rate, for example), all other relevant descriptors (typically including age, ethnicity, gender, psychological condition, etc.), how participants were selected (random, intact group, etc.), and if they were grouped in any way.

### 3. Instruments

All instruments, tools or methods used to gather data must be described here, including the psychometric characteristics of the tests (e.g., validity and reliability indicators), how the tool was developed, or how the instrument will be designed or piloted. If a qualitative technique is to be used, such as interviews, observations or videotaping, what protocols will be applied? What kinds of information regarding procedures, ethics, and confidentiality are participants and/or others given?

### 4. Research Design

Describe the research design. If the study is an experimental or quasi-experimental study, what research design will be used? What are the comparison groups? How does the design address each of the hypotheses? If it is a qualitative study, what research design will be used? What methods will be used to establish reliability and validity (e.g., triangulation)?

## 5. Procedures

The student should provide an outline of all procedures involved in the proposed research. Describe the logistics and the timeline for this study. How/when the participants will be contacted and/or selected. When the data will be collected, processed, and analyzed?

## **Chapter Four – Results**

### 1. Introduction

Reiterate the hypotheses and research question(s). Describe the organization of the chapter, which, in effect, is how the data will be discussed.

### 2. Sample

Describe the sample, i.e., number and relevant characteristics of subjects. If the number or characteristics of the subjects are substantially different from those you had planned to use, indicate this difference and explain why this happened. For example, if you sent out 100 surveys to 50 men and 50 women, but only received 50 surveys from 40 men and 10 women, state this and provide some plausible explanation as to why this might have occurred.

### 3. Results for each hypothesis

Restate each hypothesis. Discuss how each was tested, by describing the method of analysis. Discuss whether or not the results support the hypothesis. Do not inject your opinion or explanation of the results – that commentary should be provided in a subsequent section.

### 4. Synthesis

Discuss your findings as a whole and synthesize the results. What were your major findings? How many of the hypotheses were validated? Were there any contradictory results, or any unexpected or confusing results? Overall, what conclusion(s) can you draw from the data regarding the research question?

## **Chapter Five – Discussion and Conclusion**

### 1. Summary

Summarize the preceding four chapters, starting with the purpose of the thesis. State findings from the data you collected and analyzed. You may use

this summary as your abstract, although some students prefer to write an elaborated summary.

## 2. Discussion

Discuss the results in light of the review of the research and your own research findings. In this section you may inject your opinions as supported by the data and/or review of the research. Point out new findings that are supported by your data and findings that contradict or expand upon existing research studies. Discuss and address limitations of the study. Overall, what conclusion(s) can you reach from your research?

## 3. Future Research

Identify future research indicated by your thesis study, and point to new avenues of needed further research.

## **Appendix**

Each appendix should be listed A, B, C.... Include the original of your approved Human Subjects Protocol, as well as other items, such as survey instrument, raw data, participants' verbatim comments.

## **COMPREHENSIVE EXAM**

### **What are comprehensive exams?**

The comprehensive examination should provide a vehicle for you to correlate previously isolated or unrelated material, tie together significant learning, and/or present new ideas and directions. The questions should go beyond typical course examination questions.

Composing clear and unambiguous questions is a fine art and tests the ability to think and communicate clearly. The questions should challenge you and invite feedback from your chair and committee. Good questions can allow for a new synthesis, or a discovery that principles applicable to one situation are, in fact, applicable to others not previously considered, or a way for you to support clear, logical statements. They should stimulate conceptual thinking processes more than a mere recitation of factual information. Questions involving opportunities for such thinking operations as comparing, contrasting, hypothesizing, applying principles to new situations, criticizing, interpreting, deriving meaning from personal experiences, determining the difference between assumption and fact, and applying theory to practice seem to be more interesting and challenging for student and committee.

### Comprehensive Examination Process

1. The comprehensive examination of each student is supervised by a Comprehensive Examination Committee (CEC), consisting of two department faculty members, one of whom serves as the Committee Chair.
2. Each student is responsible for obtaining consent from faculty members to serve on his/her CEC. Consent is verified by faculty signatures on the Comprehensive Card. The completed card must be returned to the department office (ED 1218) no later than the end of the second week of the semester in which the student intends to take the exam.
3. Students must be registered in EPC 696, 697 or 699C during the semester(s) in which they are preparing for the comprehensive examination. EPC 696 (with department-assigned instructor) and/or EPC 699C (with the Committee Chair) are often enrolled in first, followed by enrollment in EPC 697 during the semester in which the examination is taken.
4. Students are eligible to attempt the examination during the semester in which all other course work on their Formal Program Form and other requirements for the degree have been completed. In addition, a Graduate Evaluation (OGS 14) must have been approved by Graduate Evaluation Services.
5. Fifteen (15) questions are submitted by the student to the Committee Chair.
  - a. Five must be related to core content in educational psychology and counseling (e.g., human development, evaluation and/or assessment, motivation, learning theories, counseling theories, individual and group differences, and research methods). Clearly designate which of the questions are your core questions
  - b. The remaining ten questions should reflect the specialization area of the student, i.e., early childhood education, career counseling, college counseling/student services, school counseling, school psychology or marriage and family therapy.
6. The student and the committee chair select ten (10) questions from the list of 15. Three must be related to core content in educational psychology and counseling; seven must reflect the student's area of specialization.
7. Students are required to prepare ten papers, each responding to one of the ten questions. Requirements for the papers should be discussed with the Committee Chair.

8. As soon as you prepare your responses to a question, submit copies to your chairperson and committee member for feedback. Don't wait until the last moment and submit all ten answers at once. Include your name and phone number with each of your answers. Be sure to use American Psychological Association format (current edition).
9. The ten questions must be filed by the student in the EPC department office by four weeks before the exam with copies to committee members. Changes to the questions cannot be made after this date. The copy of your ten questions should be submitted to the Graduate Secretary with a cover sheet that includes your name, phone number, and chairperson of your comprehensive committee. Clearly identify the seven questions reflecting the student's area of specialization and the three core content questions.
10. The comprehensive examination will be given on a Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon approximately one month before the end of the semester. The location and date will be available from the EPC Graduate Secretary at the beginning of each semester.
11. The examination consists of three questions selected by the Committee Chair from the ten questions submitted to the department office.
  - a. One of the questions will be chosen from the three core questions;
  - b. The remaining two questions will be chosen from the seven specialization questions;
  - d. Students will **not** be informed as to which questions are selected prior to the examination.
12. At the examination site, paper will be provided; students may bring their own pens or pencils. Computers may not be used, except in special circumstances, as approved by the Thesis/Comps Coordinator.
13. The Comprehensive Examination Committee will evaluate student performance as Passing or Not Passing. The Committee Chair will notify the student of the results. At the discretion of the CEC, a student may be scheduled for an interview following the written examination.

## APPENDIX

1. Thesis/project Planning Form
2. Sample prospectus for graduate project
3. Sample prospectus for thesis
4. Sample Timelines for Graduate project/Thesis
5. Additional forms, samples, and important guidelines
6. Sample Committee meeting form

### 1. Thesis/project Planning Form

Download this form at: [www.csun.edu/graduatestudies](http://www.csun.edu/graduatestudies)

Students are urged to become very familiar with CSUN's Office of Graduate Studies, which is easily accessible via the website, [www.csun.edu/graduatestudies](http://www.csun.edu/graduatestudies). The Office of Graduate Studies is responsible for implementing University policies on graduate student classification, formal programs, culminating experiences, diplomas, advisement for incoming students, probationary and disqualified students, and Interdisciplinary majors. The Graduate Studies Division encompasses the Graduate Studies Committee and Graduate Evaluation Services. It is also responsible for Graduate Student Support Programs, Equity-based programs, and CSU System Recruitment and Support Programs.

### 2. Sample PROSPECTUS for graduate project

A prospectus is a rough outline of what the thesis or project will look. It may include a brief introduction and hypothesis, literature review, proposed methodology and anticipated results. It should also include a proposed timeline. The prospectus is useful for meeting with prospective committee chairs or members. For a graduate project, also include in your prospectus:

1. Goal of the proposed Graduate Project
2. Describe the topic of your graduate project
3. Discuss the need for the proposed project, and cite several key references in describing the need for your project.
4. Audience - Describe for whom is the project intended. In other words, who do you intent to actually utilize your project?
5. Final product – Provide an overview of the final product you are proposing. For example, "I will develop a curriculum guide for marriage and family therapists to use when working with a family that has young children who have a difficult time sitting still in sessions with the family".

### 3. Sample PROSPECTUS for Thesis

A prospectus is a rough outline of what the thesis or project will look like. It may include a brief introduction and hypothesis, literature review, proposed methodology and anticipated results. It should also include a proposed timeline. The prospectus is useful for meeting with prospective committee chairs or members. A prospectus for a thesis should include:

1. Statement of the problem you want to investigate.
2. Purpose of the research
3. Significance of the problem

Explain why this problem is worthy of concern. Describe the need for this research, citing one or two key references.

4. Method

In as much detail as possible, describe how you propose to carry out this research. For example, "I teach at a public high school in LAUSD. When I told the principal at my school he has told me that he would support my giving surveys to the students at the school asking them questions about academics, such as about their study habits. We talked about giving students the surveys in their homerooms during the first week after they come back from winter break in January".

### 4. Sample Timeline for completion of thesis and graduate project

All master's theses and graduate projects take a minimum of two semesters to complete. Below is an example timeline for this process. **Note that this is only an example. You must check with your chairperson to configure your own personalized timeline. Each chairperson has his or her own preferred style and you must follow the process they indicate.** The example timeline, however, provides a general idea of what the process is like.

August 27	Enroll in EPC 698 with chairperson. Get chairperson's ticket number from EPC office.
September 1	Obtain graduate project/thesis form from EPC Office. Get signatures from your chairperson and two committee members. Register for EPC 698 by obtaining the restricted ticket number from the EPC office.
September 15	Form with committee signatures is due (check School Calendar in Schedule of Classes for exact dates).
September 12	Meet with chair to share materials for review of literature research you may have accomplished via their suggestion during the summer. Also discuss planning how, when and

where chapter drafts will be submitted and how and when feedback will be received. Develop your personalized

timeline for reviewing the literature, collecting and analyzing data {thesis} and all preparations for graduate project.

October 4	Submit draft of Chapter One to chair and committee members. Prepare Protocol for Human Subjects if appropriate {thesis}. Approval can take up to two months prior to conducting the research). Submit Protocol to Chair.
November 1	Integrate feedback of Chapter one from chair/committee. Begin writing chapter Two.
December	Meet as needed for chapter two. Finalize all plans for data collection {thesis}.
January 28	Submit draft of Chapter Two to committee.
February	Begin data collection {thesis} Data collection must not occur until Human Subjects approval has been granted. Be certain that the committee has completely approved the research protocol.
February 15	Integrate feedback from chair/committee. Begin Chapter Three.
March 1	Submit draft for Chapter Three to committee.
March 12	Integrate feedback from chair/committee. Prepare Chapters Four and Five. Complete data collection, and begin data analysis {thesis}.
April 3	Submit draft of Chapters Four and/or Five to Chair.
April 10	Obtain feedback from committee on Chapter Four and Five
April 25	Provide final draft of thesis to committee
May 1	Obtain final feedback from committee, make changes and resubmit to the committee for a final review.

May 7	Obtain signatures of completion from committee members
May 10	Submit thesis to Graduate Studies for checking format
May 15	Deadline for filing thesis with Graduate Studies

**Would you like a head start on your thesis/graduate project?** A recommended, optional strategy is to add the following at the beginning of your proposed timeline:

**One semester prior to enrollment in Culminating Experience EPC 698C**, for example, during the prior Spring semester, develop several questions of scholarly merit and significance to you and develop a prospectus, and offer it to potential chair or committee members. Identify chair and committee members and make a plan for summer reading.

**The Summer prior to enrollment in Culminating Experience EPC 698C**, Gather materials for the literature review. Read and outline according to the specifications of your identified committee chairperson.

## **5. Additional forms, samples, and important guidelines**

On the website for CSUN's Graduate Studies Office, there is an entire sample of a thesis/graduate project. Many students find this sample extremely valuable as a guide. Additional information, forms, and guidelines on the Graduate Studies website include:

- Guidelines for Preparation of Theses, Graduate projects, and Artistic Abstracts. *This document provides vital information regarding the format of the graduate project and thesis. Students must strictly adhere to these university guidelines.*
- Application for masters' degree and diploma
- Deadlines for thesis/graduate project binding
- Research and sponsored projects policies and forms
- Human Subjects form and policies
- Information on CSUN's annual student research competition and symposium

5. Sample Committee meeting form

**REPORT OF THESIS/GRADUATE PROJECT MEETING**

Student name \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting date \_\_\_\_\_

Thesis/graduate project title \_\_\_\_\_

Discussion topic(s) of meeting

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Action Plan

For next meeting I will:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Our next meeting is scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_

Complete this form and return to your Chairperson within 3 days after each meeting.

