THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Department of Educational Studies

MEd Graduating Papers and MA Theses

(Updated February 2016)

Like other departments in the Faculty of Education, the Department of Educational Studies offers two different masters degrees, the Master of Education (MEd) and the Master of Arts (MA). In some MEd programs, students complete with a graduating paper (EDST 590, Graduating Paper) rather than entirely through course work or with a capstone course; the MA requires completion with a thesis. Students often ask what distinguishes a graduating paper from a thesis. Answers can vary widely depending on who is responding to the question. Understandably, this is frustrating to students who rightfully expect some consistency in how graduating papers and theses are thought about in the department and what criteria students are expected to meet when they prepare these important documents. The information below is intended to clarify how graduating papers and theses are regarded within Educational Studies and the process involved in completing each.

MEd Graduating Papers
Content and focus. There is a great deal of latitude in what graduating papers address, what approaches are used, and how they are organized. Unlike MA theses, graduating papers are not regarded as training in research, but they are considered scholarly treatments of important topics or issues that often make connections to practice. Papers can, for example, be detailed critical analyses of literature, explorations of educational problems and proposals for addressing them, applications of theories or concepts to new or unusual circumstances, critical analyses of policies or programs, and proposals for innovative programs. Papers usually involve the analysis of existing data or source materials (e.g., policy or curriculum texts) rather than the collection of original data. However, MEd students may, with the approval of their supervisors and clearance from UBC's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (see below), collect and analyze original data (interviews, surveys, etc.).

Graduating papers are typically presented in print form, but it is possible, with the approval of the supervisor and second reader, to produce a paper that is unconventional. Examples include computer applications (software), video productions, performance scripts, and similar products. The page length is typically 30-50 pages.

Supervision and proposals. Most students prepare their graduating paper toward the end of their program. Whenever students begin work on their papers, they should enroll in EDST 590, Graduating Paper, and maintain registration until the paper is completed. The paper carries three credits in the MEd program and is marked Pass/Fail. Once you have a reasonably clear idea of the topic or issue you wish to address in the paper, you should discuss it with one or more faculty members who may be interested in supervising your work. One of these people may be your advisor but you can ask any qualified member of the department's faculty to supervise your paper.

Once a faculty member agrees to supervise your paper, you should prepare a brief proposal in which you describe the purpose of the paper, the general approach you will take, the literature or other source materials you will use and the planned organization of the paper (a draft Table of Contents). Your

supervisor will review this proposal and indicate what changes, if any, he or she expects you to make before it is approved.

Most graduating papers do not involve original data collection. However, if your paper involves collecting original data from people via surveys, interviews, or observations you will also be required to prepare and submit a Behavioural Human Ethics Application. This request is reviewed by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (commonly referred to as BREB), which must issue a certificate of approval before any data can be collected. The review normally takes 4-6 weeks. The procedure and forms for submitting this request can be obtained from the Office of Research Services, https://ethics.research.ubc.ca/

Second readers. All graduating papers must be approved and signed by your supervisor and a second qualified faculty member. Selecting the second reader is done in consultation with your supervisor. Depending on the preferences of the supervisor, the second reader may be involved as early as the approval of the paper proposal or as late as when the paper is in near final form.

Criteria for assessment. Graduating papers are assessed using criteria that are typical in university graduate programs including how well the stated purpose of the paper is achieved, clarity of writing and organization, depth and quality of analysis, and use of source materials.

Structure. Graduating papers must contain the following elements: a title page in the same format as the library requires for theses; a Table of Contents that contains the chapter/section titles, major headings and the page number of each; when appropriate, a List of Tables and a List of Figures; the body of the paper; References or Bibliography; and, when appropriate, appendices.

Acceptable styles: Most programs accept graduating papers that conform to one of two major styles: the *American Psychological Association (APA) Manual of Style* or the *Chicago Manual of Style*—also found in abbreviated form in Turabian*, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (latest editions for all). It is important to check with your supervisor about acceptable style because some specializations in the department encourage students to use other styles that are particular to those specializations.

Process. Students usually prepare drafts of chapters or sections of the graduating paper for review by their supervisor. These are revised until a complete draft of the paper is produced. This draft may be revised several times until the student, supervisor, and second reader are all satisfied that it meets expectations. When both the supervisor and second reader agree that the paper/project is satisfactory, they send the Pass/Fail standing to the Graduate Program Assistant.

cIRcle for depositing graduating papers. Students who complete their program with a graduating paper are not required, but may choose, to upload this to the GSS Award Collection of cIRcle: https://circle.ubc.ca/handle/2429/42591
1. As part of uploading a file to cIRcle, the student provides contact information for their graduating paper supervisor.
2. The supervisor then receives an automated email from cIRcle asking them to approve the student submission online.
3. The supervisor logs in to cIRcle and approves the submission (the automated email contains full instructions).
4. cIRcle staff receive automated notification of the supervisor's approval.

5. cIRcle staff add the record to cIRcle.

Full information and instructions are available from: http://circle.sites.olt.ubc.ca/gss-graduate-student-society-open-scholar-award/ and
http://wiki.ubc.ca/Library:Circle/Course_Instructor_Help_Guide_for_GSS_Award

MA Theses

Content and focus. MA theses are formal reports of research and add new knowledge and understanding. The content and organization of theses vary widely depending on the topics addressed and research approaches employed. A thesis demonstrates your ability to design, carry out and report on a research project in which you apply accepted methods of scholarship to a question or issue of concern. "Accepted methods of scholarship" should be interpreted quite broadly to include any and all empirical, analytical, interpretive, and critical approaches regarded as legitimate forms of scholarship in the area of study. Reviewing recently-completed theses by students in your area of specialization will give you a good idea of the range of research topics addressed, methods employed, reporting formats used, and effort required to complete a thesis. All MA theses are available digitally through the Koerner Library's cIRcle, UBC's institutional depository.

Supervision and proposals. MA students usually begin work on their thesis proposals when they have completed most required courses. Whenever students begin work on their proposals they should enroll in EDST 599, Master's Thesis, and maintain registration until the thesis is completed. The thesis carries 6 credits, and is graded. Once you have a reasonably clear idea of the area or question you wish to research, you should discuss it with your supervisor. You should also discuss with your supervisor who should be invited to serve as additional member(s) of your research supervisory committee.

MA supervisory committees consist of a minimum of two faculty members who are members of the Faculty of Graduate Studies: either one supervisor and at least one member, or two co-supervisors (with possibly an additional member). The supervisor or at least one of the co-supervisors should be a faculty member in EDST. All members may be from EDST, but committees often include members from other departments. All members of the committee must approve your research proposal. In some cases an early draft of the proposal is prepared prior to or during the formation of the committee. Some students use this draft as a discussion paper with faculty who they are considering inviting to serve on their committee. Faculty have different expectations about how detailed a proposal should be, so you should discuss this early on with your research supervisor.

Proposals can range in length from a few pages to several chapters of the thesis and often are revised several times before they are approved. In general, thesis proposals include an introductory section that states the purpose of the research, provides a context for the study and makes a convincing argument that the study is worth doing (addresses the "so what?" question); a section that critically reviews prior research done in the area and relevant theoretical and conceptual work; and a section that describes how the research will be carried out including a description of methods and procedures that convinces the committee that you have the knowledge and skills necessary to complete the study. Proposals should also include a rough timetable for carrying out the study and writing the thesis.

Once the proposal is considered acceptable by the committee, all members of the committee will sign the proposal cover sheet (see an example under the "Policies and Forms" section of the EDST website. Your supervisor will then have a copy of the approved proposal placed in your file and will notify the Graduate Program Assistant that your proposal has been approved. It is the responsibility of your

supervisor and committee members to insure that the scope and complexity of the research project are within the usual expectations for MA-level study. On occasion a student will propose a project that is too ambitious for a MA thesis (sometimes even too ambitious for a PhD thesis). In these cases the supervisor and committee may insist that the proposal be revised until it reflects the work expected of an MA student.

If your thesis involves collecting information from people via surveys, interviews or observations, you will also be required to prepare and submit a Behavioural Human Ethics Application. This request is reviewed by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (commonly referred to as BREB), which must issue a certificate of approval before any data can be collected. The review normally takes 4-6 weeks. The procedure and forms for submitting this request can be obtained from the Office of Research Services, https://ethics.research.ubc.ca/.

Criteria for assessment. MA theses are assessed using criteria that are applied to the kind of research study that you carry out. To approve a thesis, your committee must be convinced that you have adequately demonstrated your ability to design and carry out a respectable research study and to describe the process and outcomes of that study in a clear, complete and cogent fashion.

Structure. Theses must contain the following elements: a signature/title page in the format prescribed by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (G+PS) (https://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/dissertation-thesis-preparation) an abstract of no more than 350 words; a Table of Contents; when appropriate, a List of Tables and List of Figures, an acknowledgement (if you wish), the body of the thesis; References or Bibliography, and, when appropriate, appendices. Because theses are submitted to the cIRcle repository, there are strict production requirements that must be met before they are accepted by the library. Follow the instructions provided by G+PS and you will save yourself a lot of grief.

Acceptable styles: Most supervisors accept theses that conform to one of two major styles: the *American Psychological Association (APA) Manual of Style* or the *Chicago Manual of Style*—also found in abbreviated form in Turabian*, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (latest editions for all). It is important to check with your supervisor about acceptable style because some specializations in the department encourage students to use other styles that are particular to those specializations.

Process. Once the research proposal is approved by the committee, the student proceeds to carry out the research consulting with the research supervisor and committee members when needed. Students usually prepare drafts of chapters for review by their supervisor and committee. These are revised until a complete draft of the thesis is produced. This draft may be revised several times until the student, supervisor and committee members are all satisfied that it meets expectations. Typically, MA theses should range between 80 to 120 pages. Once approved by the committee one of two things happens. If the student is in a program that requires a defence (oral examination) of the thesis, this is scheduled and the student presents the research at a public meeting and answers questions posed by committee members and a faculty member external to the committee. This "outside reader" may be, but does not have to be, from another department at UBC. Audience members are also invited to ask questions at the defence.

The student is responsible for depositing the approved thesis with G+PS before the published deadline for completing all program requirements (see the University Calendar). Guidelines provided by G+PS regarding format and paper quality must be observed. Students are advised to carefully review these

requirements well before the date of submission to G+PS. As of November 2007, students can submit their final dissertation to G+PS electronically. The student must also complete a series of forms which are downloadable from the G+PS website. As of November 30, 2007, students are no longer required to submit a copy of their thesis to EDST for binding. Instead, students should submit to the Graduate Programs Assistant a copy of the front page and abstract of the final version of the thesis plus a copy of the approval form (signed by the members of the examining committee) as well as a copy to cIRcle following the instructions below.

cIRcle for depositing theses. Students who complete their program with an MA Thesis have to upload it to cIRcle following the instructions provided by G+PS: https://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/final-dissertation-thesis-submission/circle-instructions