

**School Psychology Program
University of Wisconsin – Whitewater**

Specialist Project Guidelines

**UW-Whitewater School Psychology Program
The Specialist Project
Trajectory to Completion**

Objectives:

- Provide students with an in-depth understanding in a specialized area of school psychology
- Encourage the production of applied research or creative program development in service to the profession
- Foster a close working collaboration between faculty and students

Trajectory to Completion:

Year I: Semester I

1. Students are introduced to the Project requirements in Psych 715 –Research Methods and Program Assessment.
2. Students are advised to review the list below, which provides examples of research interests of faculty as well as projects previously completed by students. Given these options, students indicate their preferences of general topic areas.
3. Students are assigned a Preliminary Project Advisor from the School Psychology faculty based on their stated preferences.
4. Students arrange a meeting with their assigned advisor to discuss project options consistent with their interests.
5. Students research the literature and identify a gap within the literature and a question to be answered that their research will answer.
6. Students develop methodology skills in Psych 715 and write a research proposal to address their research question.
7. Students identify topic area and discuss their proposal at the Midyear review.

Possible Topic Areas of Research:

- Children in Foster Care: What are the needs of children in foster care in the schools and how do we meet them most effectively?
- Dropout Prevention: How can schools better support students' persistence? How can students' sense of school belonging be increased?
- Effective Disciplinary Practices: How effective are corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion in changing student behavior?
- Immigration: What challenges do students and families who immigrate face and how do we best mediate them?
- Math Skill Deficits: What contributes to students' math skill deficits and how can these deficits be prevented or remedied?
- Reading Skill Deficits: What contributes to students' reading skills deficits and how can these deficits be prevented or remedied (e.g., phonemic awareness, reading fluency, reading comprehension)?
- Sexual Minority Youth: What are teachers' experiences working with LGBTQ youth? How can they be supported in the work that they do?
- Social Skills Deficits: What contributes to students' deficits in social skills and how can these deficits be prevented or remedied?

- Spelling Skill Deficits: What contributes to students' spelling skill deficits and how can these deficits be prevented or remedied?
- Students At-Risk for Disruptive Problem Behaviors: What is the nature of effective school-based behavioral supports?
- Students with Severe and Pervasive Mental Health Concerns: What are the implications for academic and social/emotional support?
- Written Expression Skill Deficits: What contributes to students' written expression skill deficits and how can these deficits be prevented or remedied?

Semester II

8. Students extend their literature review.
9. Students meet with their specialist project supervisors and discuss proposed project as well as feasibility of completing the project within the practicum site.
10. Review IRB protocol requirements.
11. Students include a one-page description of proposed project in their May Entrance Portfolio that outlines the Specialist Project and substantiates their knowledge and skill in that area necessary to successfully complete the proposed project.

Summer

12. Prepare IRB protocol for submission.

Year II: Semester I

13. Students enroll in Psych-797 Specialist Project Research (1 cr.) under the supervision of their Specialist Project Advisor.
14. Students who desire financial support for project make application to the Graduate School.
15. Students present first draft of extended literature review demonstrating knowledge of topic area to faculty advisor.
16. Students submit IRB protocol for university approval.
17. Students begin data collection upon approval from IRB.
18. Students meet regularly with their Specialist Project Adviser to receive support.

Semester II

19. Students enroll in Psych-797 Specialist Project Research (1 cr.) under the supervision of their Specialist Project Advisor.
20. Students continue meeting with project advisor who helps guide the research.
21. Students present posters describing their findings at Spring WSPA.
22. Draft of completed project sent to advisor for revisions.
23. Students present completed, bound copy of Specialist Project at May portfolio review.

Students begin enrollment in PSYCH 797: Specialist Project Research for one credit, after having completed their specialist project proposal as part of PSYCH 715: Research and Program Evaluation in School Psychology. With the permission of their specialist project supervisor, students may begin enrolling in PSYCH 797 as early as spring semester of their first year if they intend to actively work on their project. All students will enroll in PSYCH 797 for one credit each semester beginning in the Fall semester of their Practicum year.

Specialist Project Organizational Content:

Front Matter

- Title Page
- Signature Page
- Acknowledgements
- Abstract

Introduction

- Statement of the Problem
- Background Review of Literature and Statement of Need
- Purpose of the Study
- Research Questions/Hypotheses

Method

- Participants
- Materials
- Procedure

Results

Discussion

- Limitations of the Study
- Directions for Future Research
- Implications for Practice

Conclusion

References

Tables

Figures

Appendices

Style: All Projects will conform strictly to the most recent *Publication Manual* of the American Psychological Association for text, references, tables, and figures. Font should be Times or Time New Roman, 12 pt. Text should be double spaced with one inch margins all around. Finished Project must be professionally bound with an adhesive binding and black cardboard stock covers on and printed on high quality, white paper. Spiral binding is not allowed. One copy goes to Program.

Literature Review Checklist

Length

There is no prescribed length, but you want to demonstrate that you have fully and thoroughly investigated your topic. Look at the literature reviews for most journal articles. They are as brief as they can be in order to both provide a context for the study and save page space (and thus publishing costs). As a rule, yours will be longer than a typical journal article (since you are not worried about saving space) but not so long that you lose the focus. Think 7-10 pages.

Make an outline for yourself of the studies that you want to cite and place them in a **logical order**, such as earliest to most recent, or by subject heading (e.g., a project that involves an academic intervention for reading might start out with a brief review of the literature regarding how children acquire reading skill, then how reading skill is assessed, then move to a review of research supported interventions).

Prior to submitting your first draft of your extended literature review, make sure you've attended to the following:

- ✓ There is ONE space between sentences.
- ✓ The review is organized into **logical and sequential sections with headings** and is not one long recitation of poorly connected citations. Use the following as a guide:

First Level Heading (Centered, bold and not Italicized)

Second Level Heading (Left justified, Not bold, Italicized, and Capitalized)

Third level heading (Indented, not bold, italicized, but not capitalized)

- ✓ Each paragraph has a key or topic sentence, and the content of that paragraph links directly to that key sentence or is removed to a different paragraph.
- ✓ Others' work that has a publication date BEFORE the date you are writing your review (which will be all of them) is cited in the past tense: "Johnson (2002) *found*... Smith (2005) *concluded*..., Martinez (1999) *suggested*... Lin's (2001) research *indicated*..." DO NOT use the present tense: "Jackson (2006) suggests that..."
- ✓ Similar findings are grouped. "Numerous studies (e.g., Jones, 2001; Marks, 1999, 2001; Redd, 2000) have concluded..." This saves space and avoids repetition.
- ✓ Each citation is relevant to the paragraph subject and contributes substantially to the objective of the paragraph. If not, leave it out. This is not an exercise in amassing as many citations as possible.
- ✓ In-text citations are in the correct form as defined in your APA *Publication Manual*. Check them carefully. Don't guess!
- ✓ Each reference in the **Reference** section is in the correct form as defined in your APA *Publication Manual*, and there is a matching in-text citation for each reference.

- ✓ You should be able to produce a paper copy of EACH reference upon request. Citing a source that you have not personally read is tantamount to cheating and will subject you to disciplinary procedure.
- ✓ Let your advisor help you along the way. Ask questions! That is what they are here for. If you are confused... Contact your advisor, BUT...
- ✓ Do not submit a manuscript for your advisor to fix (e.g., "*Here's my first draft. I know it's rough but...*") Your advisor's job is NOT to do your work for you but to help you to do your best. NEVER submit something you know to be less than your BEST.

Content Guidelines for the Specialist Project

Abstract

The abstract summarizes the entire project. It should include a statement of the purpose or objective of your project, a description of the participants, a brief statement of what the participants did, and a summary of important findings. This is the LAST thing that you write. Wait until everything else is written before attempting the abstract.

Introduction

The introduction is typically not identified by a specific heading but is the first section of the manuscript. The introduction usually contains a statement of the problem (Why is this a problem of importance?), a description of the project's background (Why did you conduct this research?) and a statement of purpose (What is it that your study was about?). The background typically highlights the connection between your study and others' previously published work. Where does it fit in the overall field? Be sure to include in the introduction a clear statement of your hypotheses and how you intended to address them. Throughout the introduction you should use citations from the research literature to support your study. The following are suggested topics that are usually covered in the Introduction and deserve individual headings:

Statement of the Problem. You should succinctly state the problem that your project is going to address. You should also present relevant information about why this is an important problem.

Background Review of the Literature and Statement of Need. You should present relevant literature that supports the need for your project. Research articles, books, educational and government statistics are just a few sources that should be used here. (See Literature Review Guidelines, above)

Purpose of the Project. Based on the above background information, explain the purpose of the study. Explain what you hope the study will accomplish and why you chose to do this particular study. This should be supported with citations and specific information related to the study.

Research Questions/Hypotheses. Given the background above, you carefully state the hypotheses that will be tested in your project.

Method

The method section should carefully and methodically discuss how the study was conducted and should provide a rationale for why you conducted the study in that way. A general guideline is that you should discuss your method in sufficient detail that another researcher could take your data and duplicate your results. One of the expectations of performing research is that someone in the future will do further research on this topic. Such a researcher should be able to use your methodology without having to consult any other source. If you are using statistical analyses, explain the statistical methods. What do they mean? How are they used? Why are they more applicable here than other similar methods? If you used a published intervention or published tests, these should be discussed in this section.

Results

This is a narrative presentation of your findings. This is where you present your statistics, tables, figures, etc. that show what the specific findings of your study are. Present them in detail. Remember that someone should be able to duplicate your study based solely on this document. This requires considerable description.

Discussion

This section should begin with a concise restatement of your study's purpose along with any needed background information. Now that you have presented the results in the previous section, discuss them in this section. What, specifically, do the results mean? How can they be interpreted? Can they be interpreted in multiple ways? What do the findings tell you about your hypothesis? Do not claim more for your results than the data really shows. Avoid speculation. Be certain to address the limitations of your study, for example, the population to which your findings may be limited. Also discuss what implications your findings have for practitioners in the field and directions for future research. What needs to be done and what does this study contribute to the field?

(Title page should follow this format)

The Effects of a Small Group Anger Management Intervention on Disciplinary Office Referrals
for a Group of Elementary School Boys

Lightner M. Whitmer, M.S.E.

Specialist Project Completed in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Education Specialist Degree

School Psychology Program
University of Wisconsin – Whitewater

May 20th, 200_

Advisor: (Name)

**Specialist Project Signature Page
UW Whitewater School Psychology Program**

Project Title:

Author:

ID #:

Advisor:

Date of Submission:

The above entitled Specialist Project is formally approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Education Specialist Degree.

Project Advisor

Date

Program Coordinator

Date

Project Advisor Roles and Responsibilities

Initial Meetings – Year 1

1. Brainstorm research ideas in proposed subject area.
 - a) Ideas must relate to the role and function of a school psychologist and provide an opportunity for the student to obtain specialized knowledge in a discrete area of the field. Consult with any school psychology faculty member if necessary.
 - b) Remember that this IRB is very sensitive to any involvement of minors in research, and individual informed parent consent will be required. This has an impact upon large scale surveys of students as well as direct intervention with classrooms or large N interventions. Surveys or other activities with adults (e.g., teachers, school psychologists, administrators, parents) require much less effort in this regard.
 - c) Single-subject designs are very acceptable – even encouraged in some quarters – completing smaller behavioral or academic interventions with 1-4 children in a well-designed study.

2. Begin literature search
 - a) Have the advisee start reviewing what work has been done in this area with an eye toward focusing their study. Have them discover what is known and what is not known in their area of interest.
 - b) Replication is, of course, very acceptable, so they can watch for this possibility.
 - c) Set a firm date for the advisee to return with the results of their initial review.

Ongoing Meetings – Year 1

3. Proposed Project Description
 - a) Students need to include in their May portfolio a one-page description of the proposed project that outlines the Specialist Project and substantiates their knowledge and skill in that area necessary to successfully complete the proposed project.

Summer – Year 1

4. Students complete Literature Review. See guidelines in this document.
5. Inform students of the limits of your availability. If possible, Project Advisors should remain available for at least email support.
6. Bring in consultants from the faculty as needed for guidance in unfamiliar research areas

Ongoing Meetings – Year 2

7. Encourage students to apply for Grad School funding in fall (up to \$750.00) for project support and/or dissemination at WSPA or NASP
8. Assist them with submitting their IRB protocol for approval.
9. Maintain a regular schedule of meetings with benchmark progress support- Keep them moving forward!
10. All students will continue to enroll for credit until their specialist project is complete and accepted as approved in bound form by their specialist project supervisor. Students who fail to complete their specialist project prior to internship must continue to enroll in PSYCH 797 for one credit per semester. Students who fail to do so, will be dropped from PSYCH 795:

Internship in School Psychology. Students who fail to complete their project at the conclusion of the spring semester will receive a grade of IP (in progress). The students will have one year from the time the grade was assigned to complete their project. The grade will be changed to an S (Satisfactory) when the project is completed within the year. If students fail to complete the specialist project within one year following the spring semester of their internship year, the grade turns into an F. The student would then need to re-enroll for specialist project credit to complete the project. At the completion of the project, the grade of F from the previous semester would be changed to the assigned grade for the current semester.)