

**Alternative to the Comprehensive Exam  
The Research Publication Option  
(Adopted on November 20, 2016; Revised February 23, 2023)**

## **I. OVERVIEW**

The publication option is an alternative to the Comprehensive Exam and the traditional thesis. The goal of this option is to tie the student's culminating experience in with the School's emphasis on evidence-based practice by analyzing and disseminating research information. The publication option does not require any less work than preparing for the comprehensive exam or undertaking the traditional thesis. **Students should have earned a grade of B+ or higher in both SWORK 690 and SWORK 610 to be a suitable candidate for this option.** Some exceptions can be made at the discretion of faculty. However, grades of B- or lower in research courses will not be accepted.

The end outcome of the research publication option will be a high-quality research-driven manuscript written by the student which will be reviewed and found as "acceptable" by Committee members. This expectation is a higher bar for reaching "acceptable" than a thesis which is completed without the expectancy of publication in a peer reviewed journal. This option will teach students who are interested in this endeavor how to conduct research and communicate its results clearly and concisely, and aims to increase submission of student research to peer-reviewed journals.

**Except in limited cases, all human subjects research requires university IRB review. Research activities should not begin without approval, whether it is faculty or student research. Even if you think the research is exempt, very low risk, or involves de-identified data, we are finding the best approach is to assume you need IRB approval. Please visit the [IRB website](#), and call the IRB office for guidance at [619-594-6622](tel:619-594-6622) or email them at [irb@sdsu.edu](mailto:irb@sdsu.edu).**

## **II. COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

The student will identify a Tenured/Tenure Track (T/TT) School of Social Work (SSW) faculty member to serve as Chair (similar to a thesis Chair). Two other Committee members will be identified by the Chair to serve on the Committee and to provide a review of the final manuscript. The Committee is to be composed of two T/TT faculty members or, at the Chair's discretion, one member can be a lecturer, content expert, or research scientist from another university or institution, etc. The three Committee members will be referred to as 'The Committee' throughout the remainder of this document.

## **III. CONCEPT PAPER PACKET**

As with the traditional thesis, the Chair will work closely with the student on all aspects of the research publication option. As one of the first steps, the student will develop a

Concept Paper in consultation with their Chair, which describes the research idea, questions, and methodology in enough detail for the Chair to provide meaningful input.

Once the Chair has approved the Concept Paper Packet, the Chair will pass on the packet to the other two Committee members for input and approval. The Committee will give feedback to the student (via the Chair) regarding the concept and approach, and the Chair will take primary responsibility to work with the student to incorporate any needed changes. Once input and approvals from all Committee members are obtained, the student may proceed with the research.

Students will complete a Concept Paper and Packet describing the proposed study as early as possible in their program. This packet would typically be completed in the last semester of the Foundation Year or the first semester of the Advanced/Specialized year, or the summer between the two semesters (see suggested Timeline below). Advanced standing students should aim to have their concept paper and packet approved during their Fall semester (See Appendix A).

The Concept Paper Packet will include:

1. A Cover Sheet that declares this option as the student's requested choice.
2. An identified Chair, with her/his signature on the Cover Sheet.
3. A 5-10 page literature review (reviewing substantive literature published in the last few years on the topic including peer-reviewed journal articles and key seminal pieces that are historically relevant).
4. A specific Research Question or hypothesis that is a natural conclusion of the literature reviewed.
5. A description of methodology including the proposed sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis plan. Students conducting secondary data analysis should include a description of the dataset they are using which should include a brief description of the dataset's sampling approach, data collection procedures, date of data collection, primary variables, etc.
6. A data analysis plan with sufficient level of detail for the Committee to give input.
7. A list of at least 3 target journals that will be potentially used for the submission.
8. Status of an IRB protocol approving the use of human subjects.

#### **IV. TIMELINE**

The following are general guidelines and timeline based on a two-year program of study. Students following a one, three, or four year program of study should adjust the timeline accordingly.

Students are encouraged to enroll in SWORK 797 Research (in lieu of SWORK 791 for their Advanced Research requirement or in lieu of one of their two elective requirements) in the Fall semester, and in SWORK 798 (3 units) in the Spring semester.

The enrollment may be done as an Independent Study and the specific time of enrollment should be determined in conjunction with the guidelines below and the Chair's judgment. The Chair will fulfill the requirements with the student for the SWORK 797 course and will inform the Associate Director of the fulfillment of all the requirements by the end of the semester, and the grade (CR/NC) can be submitted.

A suggested broad timeline for students in the two-year MSW program is given below, but the student and Chair should discuss a realistic and specific timeline (A timeline for the ASP students can be seen in Appendix A).

**Fall, 1<sup>st</sup> year:** Students will be introduced to the Research Publication Option in the student orientation and in SWORK 690. In SWORK 690, they will also learn how to critically review research literature and will be introduced to the topic of secondary data analysis. Assignments in this class can be geared toward developing a research question for the research publication option.

**Spring, 1<sup>st</sup> year:** Students will take SWORK 610. In this class they will learn how to identify variables, create and use datasets, and learn basic statistics -- all needed to help develop and answer a research question.

**Summer After 1<sup>st</sup> Year:** During the intervening summer, students will be expected to identify a possible Chair, and working closely with the Chair, put together their Concept Paper Packet. Once the Chair is satisfied with the Concept Paper Packet, she/he will submit the packet to the other two Committee members.

**Fall, 2<sup>nd</sup> year:** Students will enroll in SWORK 797\* and will use this semester to clean the data, create new variables, conduct data analyses, create tables of data as per journal guidelines, and begin writing. (\*For SWORK 797, please have your Chair email the Associate Director, confirming that they will serve as the Chair. Upon receipt of the confirmation email, the Associate Director will provide students with the necessary registration information.)

**Spring, 2<sup>nd</sup> year:** Students will enroll in SWORK 798\* (3 units) (Please follow the same instruction as above in SWORK 797 for registration). A full draft of the manuscript will be completed. The Chair will approve the manuscript by early March if the student aims to remain on track for spring graduation. Once the Chair's approval is secured, the other two Committee members will have at least two weeks to review the manuscript and make suggestions. **Appendix B presents a review form that should be used by Committee members to communicate their recommendations regarding approval, and provide feedback for the student.**

A student must receive a rating of "acceptable" by at least 2 of the 3 Committee members in order to pass this option.

Should revisions be necessary, the student will have two weeks or until April 15 to make revisions and resubmit the manuscript to the Committee for a second review to ensure that he/she remains on track for spring graduation.

The Associate Director must receive the final manuscript, the completed review form, and the form from the Chair of the Committee before May 1st so that the results can be reported to the Division of Graduate Affairs in time for spring graduation.

A student may change to the regular Comprehensive Exam Option at any time until they have chosen to submit the paper for a second review. After they decide to submit a second draft to the Committee, they may not “opt out” of the Research Publication Option.

Not following the Timeline may result in a delayed graduation date.

Please see Addendum for a timeline for Advanced Standing students.

## **V. AFTER APPROVAL OF THE MANUSCRIPT BY THE COMMITTEE**

After approval of the manuscript by the Committee, the Chair will create a form for the SSW Associate Director. This form will include: the Chair’s name, the other two Committee members’ names, the student’s name, title of the paper, a statement from the Chair that the Committee has found the manuscript to be acceptable, and a statement of passing of the student. Lastly a copy of the final paper will be submitted with this form for the SSW Associate Director’s records. The Associate Director must receive the final manuscript, the completed review form, and the form from the Chair of the Committee before May 1st so that the results can be reported to the Division of Graduate Affairs in time for spring graduation.

## **VI. AUTHORSHIP**

The student will be first author on a publication resulting from this Option. The Chair will be second author, and the two other Committee members may also be included. If the student discontinues working on the paper for three months after graduation, the Chair may have the option of moving the paper forward toward publication and taking lead authorship. Authorship shall be discussed at the beginning of this project, and if necessary an authorship form can be created and signed by the student and Chair.

## APPENDIX A

### Timeline for Advanced Standing Program (ASP) Students

**Summer, 1<sup>st</sup> Year:** Students will be introduced to the Research Publication Option in the student orientation. Students will take SWORK 610. In this class they will learn how to identify variables, create and use datasets, and learn basic statistics -- all needed to help develop and answer a research question. Students will be expected to identify a possible Chair and put together their Concept Paper Packet. With the concurrence of the Chair, this is a good time to submit the packet to the other two committee members.

**Fall, 1<sup>st</sup> Year:** Students will enroll in SWORK 797\* and will use this semester to clean the data, create new variables, conduct data analyses, create tables of data as per journal guidelines, and begin writing. (\*For SWORK 797, please have your Chair email the Associate Director, confirming that s/he serves as the Chair. Upon receipt of the confirmation email, the Associate Director will provide students with the necessary registration information.)

**Spring, 1<sup>st</sup> Year:** Students enroll in SWORK 798\* (3 units) (Please follow the same instruction as above in SWORK 797 for registration). A full draft of the manuscript will be completed. The Chair will approve the manuscript by early March if the student aims to remain on track for spring graduation. Once the Chair's approval is secured, the other two committee members will have at least two weeks to review the manuscript and make suggestions. **Appendix B presents a review form that should be used by Committee members to communicate their recommendations regarding approval, and provide feedback for the student.**

A student must receive a rating of "acceptable" by at least 2 of the 3 Committee members in order to pass this option.

Should revisions be necessary, the student will have two weeks or until April 15 to make revisions and resubmit the manuscript to the Committee for a second review to ensure that he/she remains on track for spring graduation.

The Associate Director must receive the final manuscript, the completed review form, and the form from the Chair of the Committee before May 1st so that the results can be reported to the Division of Graduate Affairs in time for spring graduation.

A student may change to the regular Comprehensive Exam Option at any time until they have chosen to submit the paper for a second review. After they decide to submit a second draft to the Committee, they may not "opt out" of the Research Publication Option.

Not following the Timeline may result in a delayed graduation date.

APPENDIX B

**School of Social Work Publication Option: Committee Review Form**

Manuscript Title:

Committee Member:

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Please review the manuscript in the areas listed below, complete the checklist, and make comments to the student.

	Yes	No	NA
1. Interest to field	_____	_____	_____
2. Inherent interest of the problem or topic	_____	_____	_____
2. Clarity of presentation	_____	_____	_____
3. Clear statement of purpose	_____	_____	_____
4. Appropriateness of research design (e.g. sample selection/size, survey instrument)	_____	_____	_____
5. Accuracy of data analysis	_____	_____	_____
6. Important results highlighted	_____	_____	_____
7. Adequate use of references	_____	_____	_____
8. Useful tables and figures	_____	_____	_____
9. Conclusions supported by findings in paper	_____	_____	_____

**YOUR RECOMMENDATION:**

\_\_\_\_ Acceptable as is.

\_\_\_\_ Revise and \_\_\_\_re-review OR \_\_\_\_do not re-review for reasons noted in comments to authors

**COMMENTS TO STUDENT**