

MPA 898 Master's Research Project

The Master's Research Project is an extended piece of research and policy analysis on a topic related to the themes of courses offered within the School of Policy Studies.

Whether the MRP is the right choice for a particular candidate depends on whether the candidate has a desire to undertake a sustained and independent intellectual project. Full-time students must also consider whether they will be able to plan the basis of the Project while meeting ongoing coursework demands; and can safeguard the necessary time for thinking and writing during the winter and spring-summer terms.

The MRP is worth two half-course credits. Full-time students, who must normally complete the program within 12 months of initial registration, will normally use MPA 898 to replace one half-course in each of the Winter and Spring Terms. Part-time students who use MPA 898 in place of their final two optional courses will normally complete the MRP by the end of Year 3 in the program.

Contents

- 1. Faculty Roles**
- 2. Permission to undertake an MRP**
- 3. Statement of Interest**
- 4. Ethics Approval**
- 5. Project Proposal**
- 6. The MRP Document**
- 7. Evaluation**
- 8. Target dates for Full-time MPA students**
- 9. Target dates for Professional MPA Students**

1. Faculty Roles

The **Master's Project Coordinator** is normally the MPA Program Director. S/he provides advice on Project requirements, and can offer initial assistance in defining topics and finding supervisors. The Coordinator's principal role is to ensure the integrity of the process. The MPA Program Assistant maintains the files.

The **Project Supervisor** plays the most important role because s/he provides advice on the definition of a topic, the development of a research plan, and how to find research materials and develop and organize evidence. Supervisors read drafts of the Project and provide advice on revisions. Project proposals and the MRP itself must be approved by the Supervisor in writing (email is acceptable) before the documents can be submitted to the MRP Coordinator.

Project Supervisors may be chosen from among faculty members of the School of Policy Studies and other Departments at Queen's University. Professional MPA students are occasionally permitted to work with a Supervisor situated outside a university, if s/he is familiar with the norms of graduate-level research. In such cases the MRP Coordinator may designate a member of the School as a co-supervisor. All Supervisors must be familiar with the requirements of graduate-level research.

Candidates and Supervisors should consult the School of Graduate Studies and Research Calendar at <http://www.queensu.ca/calendars/sgsr/> and its document “Guidelines on the Roles and Responsibilities in Graduate Supervision” at <http://www.queensu.ca/sgps/supervision.shtml>.

The **Second Reader** is a member of the faculty of the School of Policy Studies designated by the Coordinator, normally after the MRP has been approved by the Supervisor. The role of the Second Reader is to ensure that the MRP meets the standards of the School and the University.

2. Permission to Undertake an MRP

Registration in MPA 898 is only permitted on the basis of an approved Statement of Interest, and continued registration is only permitted with an approved Proposal.

- Full time students who have not registered in MPA 898 in the Winter Term will not be permitted to complete an MRP. Students whose Proposal has not been approved by the end of the Winter term will not be permitted to continue their registration in MPA 898 in the Spring Term.
- Part-time students may register in MPA 898 as early as the fall of their second year and no later than the fall of their third year.
- Students who withdraw from MPA 898 may be permitted by the MPA Program Director to submit a term paper based on their work to date, under the course credit 897 Directed Reading, that will be marked by the Supervisor for one course credit.

3. Statement of Interest

The Statement is brief, comprising: a description of the proposed topic, a statement about why the topic is important both practically and theoretically, a sketch of the proposed research approach, and an indication of the major sources of information. It is not intended to be a major burden for the candidate, but, rather, an indication of a serious interest and of the candidate’s capacity to execute a complex research project. It should be possible to complete the Statement of Interest in one page. The preliminary task of finding a focus should not be underestimated, however. The Proposed Supervisor must have confidence that the necessary resources exist or can be compiled, and that the project itself represents an appropriate and clearly focused intellectual challenge.

The statement must identify the proposed supervisor. Where the proposed Supervisor is not a member of the Queen's faculty, a copy of their Curriculum Vitae must be attached to the Statement of Interest. The Statement of Interest signed by you and your Supervisor must be submitted to the MRP Coordinator.

In deciding whether to approve the Statement, the MRP Coordinator will consider whether the Supervisor is appropriate, and whether the topic is likely to result in a manageable project that can be completed within a reasonable time.

4. Ethics approval

Candidates, the Supervisor and the Coordinator need to consider whether Projects involving human subjects require university Ethics review. Queen’s ethics procedures follow the Federal government’s requirements in the “Tri-council Statement”—see <http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/guidelines.htm>.

At Queen's there are two ethics Boards: The Health Sciences Ethics Board, and the General Ethics Review Board (GREB). Applications to the university GREB go through the unit GREB in the School of Policy Studies—current members are listed on the School's website. See http://www.queensu.ca/sps/about_school_of_policy_studies/committee2005.htm.

The requirement for ethics approval should not be seen as a burden but, rather, as evidence of respect in the research community for the welfare of persons. Ethics approval is obtained before work proceeds, which may require an application to be prepared before the Proposal is approved.

5. Project Proposal

The Proposal is a detailed plan for the Project. The Proposal should be designed and refined with the advice of your Supervisor. The Proposal should be no more than seven double-spaced pages.

The Proposal includes the following elements:

1. A title page with the title of the project, your name and contact information, and the name and contact information for the Supervisor.
2. An abstract of 200 words setting out the purpose of the project and the major reason the topic is important.
3. A description of the principal issues to be examined and the scope and nature of the research, including the framework (or theory, if possible) you will use to organize your investigation and argument.
4. A clear description of primary and secondary sources. This should include an initial bibliography of books, journal articles, and other published sources such as government documents. It may also describe other sources of evidence and description, such as proposed interviews, secondary analysis of existing statistics, consolidation of trend data, or other sources of evidence depending on the character of your project.
5. Where appropriate, the Proposal will indicate whether an ethics review is necessary.
6. A timetable for completion of the project. The student should identify major tasks in an appropriate sequence. First and subsequent drafts should be noted, and time allowed for their assessment by the Supervisor.

The Project Proposal signed by the candidate and the Supervisor will be submitted to the MRP Coordinator for approval. In rare cases, the Coordinator may wish to see the Project Proposal strengthened, but s/he will mostly be concerned with the timetable, and whether there is a need for ethics review.

6. The MRP Document

The MRP should be approximately 50-60 pages in length, including footnotes and bibliography. It must not exceed 80 pages (appendices excluded). Graduate School rules on font and spacing should be followed. In cases where the potential for scholarly publication is envisaged, the Supervisor and the MRP Coordinator may agree in advance on a different length. While a table of contents and abstract should be included, it is not necessary to include a vitae, or acknowledgements.

The MRP should generally begin with an introductory section that contains each of the following elements:

- a discussion of the importance of the particular problem,
- a presentation of any framework or theory that guides or otherwise illuminates the analysis, and any other information about the approach taken,
- a summary of the literature and research available to date on the substantive problem, and the policy tools being used in this area (if appropriate), and,
- a short description of the major components of the forthcoming discussion.

Note: If it is appropriate the literature review can comprise a self-standing chapter.

The structure of the substantive chapters will be determined by the nature of the project. The paper concludes with a recapitulation of the major points and discoveries. Policy recommendations can be part of the conclusion. Appendices can be used as necessary but must not become a substitute for analysis or argument

It should be possible for a non-specialist to understand why the problem is important, its scope, the scope of the investigation, the payoff from the use of any framework or theory, and generally to assess the argument presented in the Project. The document's tone should be fair-minded, judicious and not pedantic..

The student should be alert to the Graduate School's policies on fair and accurate acknowledgement of the work of other scholars. Notes must be consistent within an appropriate academic style. The bibliography should contain only works mentioned in the paper.

Where it is appropriate, evidence that ethics approval has been obtained must be attached.

A paper copy of the MRP must be provided for the second reader.

When all approvals have been attained, one final, "fair copy" of the paper is submitted to the MRP Coordinator, after correcting any typographical errors and making changes agreed by both readers. The final manuscript must be double-spaced on 8"X 11" paper. The margins will be one-inch all around, and the font size should be 12. Some form of binding is desirable as the School of Policy Studies will retain a copy of your completed Project document for five years, as part of your student file.

7. Evaluation

The MRP will be marked on a pass/fail basis by two readers: the Supervisor and a member of the faculty of the School of Policy Studies.

In accordance with Graduate School regulations, "the research must be of high scholarly standard" and the project "should demonstrate that the candidate is capable of original and independent work". This demonstration can take different forms in different fields. A project using primary sources clearly satisfies this requirement. One based on secondary sources only may do so if an original argument or approach is developed. A project which simply reviews and systematizes existing literature will not. The MRP is not a "mini-thesis." It should take on a smaller-scale question or case study of more limited scope, and it cannot devote the same space to a literature review, or theoretical framework.

The Second Reader may pass the MRP as it is, or pass it, subject to minor revisions. Alternatively, the Second Reader may raise substantial concerns. If the Second Reader approves the project, or approves the project, subject to minor revisions to the argument and/or

the drafting, the Supervisor will advise the student on the necessary steps and will inform the Coordinator in writing when the final draft is satisfactory.

If the Second Reader does not approve the Project and brings substantial concerns to bear, the Coordinator, in consultation with the Second Reader and the Supervisor, will decide the scope and nature of any revisions that the student may be allowed to complete to achieve the pass standard. Mechanisms for handling differences in opinion and appeals are described in the Graduate Faculty Guidelines.

8. Target dates for Full-time MPA students

* MPA Students are encouraged to submit project documents ahead of these dates.

October – Attend an MRP information session, hosted by the MRP Project Coordinator.

November – Find a Supervisor. The Supervisor may well be someone with whom you are working in a Fall term course, or with whom you expect to work in the Winter Term.

15 January - Submit a Statement of Interest signed by you and your Supervisor to the MRP Coordinator. This document must be approved before the last date for course changes in the Winter term.

15 March - Submit the Project Proposal to your Supervisor. Subsequently, a signed copy will be submitted to the MRP Coordinator for approval.

15 April – If the Project Proposal has not been accepted by this date, you will be required to withdraw from MPA 898.

15 July - This is the normal deadline to submit the final version of the Project to the Supervisor. If you cannot meet this date, you should request permission from the MPA Program Director for an extension.

15 August – Last date to submit the final document for review by the Second Reader to graduate in the Fall. (Note: If the second reader raises serious concerns about the MRP, a student may not have sufficient time to make the necessary revisions in time for the fall convocation and may be required to pay additional tuition fees.)

15 September Deadline for submission of approved text.

9. Target dates for Professional MPA Students:

* PMPA Students are encouraged to submit project documents ahead of these dates.

Year 1

Late Fall/Early Winter Term - The MRP Project Coordinator will hold an information session for interested students. You should find a Supervisor. You may seek assistance from the MRP Coordinator and/or other faculty in the School, as appropriate.

15 May - Submit a Statement of Interest signed by you and your Supervisor to the MRP Coordinator.

Year 2

15 September - Submit your project proposal signed by you and your Supervisor to the MRP Coordinator.

15 July -

- If your proposal has not been approved, and your research is not well underway, you should consider registering for two more regular courses in order to complete your degree.

Year 3

15 February/15 July - These are the normal deadlines to submit the final version of the Project to the Supervisor.

15 March/15 August- Final deadlines to submit the final document for review by the Second Reader to graduate in the Fall/Spring.

15 April/15 September - Deadline for submission of approved text.

Note: Students must maintain their registration in the program until they complete all degree requirements. Under the general regulations of the School of Graduate Studies and Research, all requirements for a Master's degree program must be completed within five years from the time of initial registration in the program (Section 9.1). In rare circumstances, the Graduate School may approve a request for an extension submitted through the MPA Program Director.

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