

**Research Guidelines
for the
Master of Science in Nursing**

**Northern Michigan University
College of Professional Studies
Department of Nursing**

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Introduction

Research-based practice is a hallmark of professional nursing and is critical for quality, cost-effective health care. The primary goal of nursing research at all levels of nursing education (baccalaureate, master's, practice-focused doctoral programs, and research-focused doctoral programs) is to strengthen the profession's contribution to enhancing the health and healthcare of individuals, families, populations and communities (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2006; International Council of Nurses [ICN], 1999). Master's level advanced practice nurses often bridge the gap between the production of knowledge and the clinical application of knowledge. Translational research and research utilization are integral parts of evidence-based practice. Master's level nurses should understand the importance of evidence-based practice and be able to facilitate evidence-based practice in their own clinical settings.

AACN published a Position Statement describing the expectations of nursing research at the master's level of nursing education:

Master's programs prepare nurses to evaluate research findings and to develop and implement evidence based practice guidelines. Their leadership skills enable them to form and lead teams within their agencies and professional groups. They identify practice and systems problems that require study, and they collaborate with scientists to initiate research (AACN Position Statement, 2006).

Therefore, a requirement for the Master of Science Degree in Nursing is the completion of a thesis, research practicum or scholarly project to prepare students to participate in research. The term "research project", in this document, will refer to any of the research options.

The purpose of this document is to provide students with information on the requirements for each option. Specifically discussed are:

- NE 587 requirements (Research Practicum/Scholarly Project)
- NE 599 requirements (Thesis)
- The processes necessary to meet the research requirements
- Student, research advisor and research committee (thesis option) responsibilities.
- Selection of a research advisor and committee members.
- Checklists and timetables.

Project Options

To complete the Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) degree, students have the option of completing 4 credits of NE 587 (Research Practicum/Scholarly Project) or 4 credits of NE 599 (Research Thesis). The option selected depends upon the areas of faculty expertise/interest and the interest and experience of the student. Students should choose the project in conjunction with their research advisor while in the process of completing NE 510, Nursing Research. This course provides the foundation for clarifying the focus and scope of proposed research projects. Students are also introduced to faculty who discuss their research interests. Students choose a research advisor based on mutual interests.

Each of the project options will provide data that demonstrates that the student thinks critically and can communicate effectively orally and in writing. To demonstrate these outcomes, the final written project must be complete, logical and clear. All written work must follow **APA Publication Manual (5th edition)** guidelines including requirements for grammar, punctuation, spelling and references.

The Difference between a Master's Thesis and a Scholarly Project

The master's thesis is an independent quantitative or qualitative research project that includes designing a study and implementing all aspects of the research process. The research may be either an original study or replication of an earlier study. The research process is used to answer an identified research question that will contribute to nursing knowledge. The finished product is written in the official "thesis" format. A thesis requires that a committee (chair and two members) direct the project.

The scholarly project is an evidence-based project that links research to practice. The emphasis is on the application, integration, and utilization of best evidence in clinical practice. A core activity of evidence-based practice is to search for and critically assess the evidence for its validity and usefulness (clinical applicability). The project culminates in a written scholarly paper with the development of a "product." The final form of the product may vary and will be determined by the project chair and student. For example, the "product" may be the development of a protocol or algorithm. A faculty advisor supervises and directs the project.

NE 587, Research Practicum/Scholarly Project

Description and Purpose

The purpose of the project is to synthesize skills attained in the graduate program of nursing in an activity that positively influences nursing practice, patient care, or contributes to nursing science. The project should be analytic in nature and grounded in theory and research. Emphasis is on the pragmatic aspects of applying the various research process elements in realistic ways. The goal is one of application, integration, and utilization of best evidence in clinical practice.

Objectives

Upon completion of the research practicum/scholarly project, the student will be able to:

1. Describe a research question or clinical problem and the significance of the problem to health care in general and to advanced practice nursing in particular.
2. Critically review the state of the science through a literature review.
3. Identify and describe a theoretical framework that is congruent with the proposed design/plan.
4. Undertake the chosen data analysis, evidence-based intervention plan or approved project.
5. Maintain ethical standards for the protection of human subjects.
6. Summarize and communicate the significance and limitations of the findings in a fair, accurate and consistent manner.
7. Make recommendations for future research or projects.

Research Advisor

The practicum/scholarly project requires the supervision of a chairperson to direct the project. Any nursing faculty member with graduate faculty status may guide a NE 587 project. Students begin the process of choosing their research advisor by reviewing faculty areas of expertise/interest. This information is usually provided in NE 510 Nursing Research. The Research Advisor's area of expertise should "match" the topic area of the project. The student must contact the faculty to determine their interest and availability. Once you have secured your research advisor and have obtained approval for the project, complete the **Scholarly Project / Practicum Declaration Form (Appendix A)** and submit the completed form to the MSN Secretary.

Types of projects include but are not limited to the following:

- Development of an innovative clinical program
- Evaluation of a clinical/teaching program
- Development of a clinical protocol or guideline that reflects best practice
- Evaluation or testing of a standardized protocol
- Development of a detailed teaching project
- Research utilization or change project
- Scholarly review of current knowledge about a particular issue of concern in practice
- Secondary analysis project

The final form of the project includes a written paper, an oral presentation and a “product.” The final form of the product may vary and will be determined by the project chair. Types of “product” may include but are not limited to the following:

- In-service
- Pamphlet/brochure
- Algorithm
- Clinical protocol/guideline
- Flow sheet
- Screening tool
- Policy
- Manuscript for publication
- Video
- Manual

Organization of the Project Paper

- Introduction- addresses the problem to be explored, the theoretical framework utilized, the significance of the project, and the purpose
- Review of the literature
- Methodology- includes the design of the project, evaluation processes, and the timeframe for implementation and evaluation
- Conclusion- summarizes the main points and conclusions regarding the evaluation of the project. It should also include recommendations and implications for nursing practice and potential strategies for future projects or research related to this identified problem
- References
- Appendices

Timeline and Method of Evaluation

The research practicum/scholarly project timeline is designed so the student completes the project as he/she progresses through coursework. The goal is that the project is completed at the same time course work is completed.

To register/enroll in NE 587, the student and faculty advisor complete the **Approval of Directed Study Form** available online at: http://www.nmu.edu/academic_affairs/pdf/directed_study_0215.pdf. The completed form is submitted to the MSN Secretary.

The timeline for completion of NE 587 is as follows:

Year 1: Winter Semester (1 credit)

- Student identifies his/her project chair
- Student identifies topic of interest
- Student successfully completes the introduction section of the project

Year 2: Fall Semester (1 credit)

- Student successfully completes the review of literature section of his/her scholarly project
- Student successfully completes the project methodology section of his/her scholarly project
- Student successfully obtains IRB approval, if appropriate. Human Subjects Research Review Committee (HSRRC) oversees all protocols involving the use of human subjects. Information regarding the process to apply for human subject's approval may be found at the College of Graduate Studies website http://www.nmu.edu/graduate_studies/ord.htm

Year 2: Summer (1 credit)

- Student completes the project
- Student completes the conclusion section of the paper
- Student submits the final, completed paper including the "product"
- This course can be finished over fall semester year three

Year 3: Winter Semester (1 credit)

- Student successfully presents the results of his/her scholarly project at a professional conference, a university-wide research day or a scholarly presentation within the school.

Grading

Each credit will be awarded either an S for satisfactory work or a U for unsatisfactory work. Students who do not complete the requirements at each of the evaluation points will receive a U grade and be required to complete additional credit(s) of NE 587.

GD 593 Graduate Degree Continuous Enrollment

Students who do not complete the project in 4 credits will need to enroll in GD 593 Graduate Degree Continuous Enrollment Credit. This allows the student to stay active, maintain library access, e-mail, and computer use throughout the university

Disposition of the Final Product

Following a satisfactory oral presentation, the student and research advisor work together to make any needed revisions/final corrections to the project. At this time the ***Verification of Completion of Graduate Projects (other than thesis) (Appendix B)*** is completed and forwarded to the Dean, College of Graduate Studies. The Verification form is available online at:

http://www.nmu.edu/graduate_studies/forms/verification_of_completion.doc

Departmental Copies of the Scholarly Project

Students are required to submit two original copies of their research project to the MSN secretary **no later than 30 calendar days prior to graduation**. One copy will be displayed in the department and the other copy is for your research advisor.

NE 599, Research Thesis

Description and Purpose

Research is a systematic and critical investigation of a problem for the purpose of producing new or confirming previous findings. The research process is used to answer an identified research question that will contribute to the nursing knowledge base. The purpose of the research thesis is to allow the student to demonstrate the ability to implement the research process and practice essential research skills.

Objectives

Upon completion of the thesis, the student will be able to:

1. Formulate a research question(s) which have significance to advance nursing practice.
2. Identify and/or develop sound operational definitions for the salient research concept.
3. Articulate appropriate theories from nursing and related fields from which the question is derived.
4. Present a critical discussion of the state of knowledge regarding the research concepts under investigation.
5. Choose, develop, describe and undertake a research design including sample selection, data collection and data analysis appropriate to the design.
6. Maintain ethical standards for the protection of human subjects.
7. Summarize and communicate the significance and limitations of the findings in a fair, accurate and consistent manner.
8. Make recommendations for future research.

Research Advisor and Committee Requirements

The thesis requires a chairperson and a committee to direct the project. The chairperson must be a doctorally prepared nursing faculty member. The committee consists of two additional faculty members that have graduate faculty status. With the approval of the department head, non-NMU or adjunct graduate faculty may serve as a member of the committee as long as they have been approved by the Academic Senate for graduate faculty status. Students begin the process of choosing their thesis chair by reviewing faculty areas of expertise/interest. This information is usually provided in NE 510 Nursing Research. The thesis chair's area of expertise should "match" the topic area of the project. The student contacts the faculty to determine their interest and availability. Once you have secured your thesis chair, committee members and have obtained approval for the project, complete the **Thesis Declaration Form (Appendix C)** and submit the completed form to the MSN Secretary.

Thesis Guidelines

The Office of Graduate Studies requires that the thesis meet specific requirements. Thesis requirements are delineated in *“The NMU Guide to the Preparation of Theses, 2006.”* It is available in printed form at the NMU Bookstore and is also available online at:

http://www.nmu.edu/graduate_studies/thesis/thesisguidebook06.pdf.

Final Product

The thesis has five chapters, references and appendices:

1. Introduction: the introduction includes a clearly identified problem, the significance of the problem, theoretical framework and the purpose which includes the who, what, where, when and how.
2. Literature Review: surveys scholarly articles, books, and other sources relevant to the topic. It is a compilation of the research that has been published on a topic. The literature review identifies and articulates the relationships between the literature and the research topic.
3. Methodology: this section addresses the design, research questions/hypotheses, sampling plan, measures, data collection procedures and proposed data analysis procedures.
4. Data Analysis: includes a description of the sample, the description of the data obtained with the measures and analysis of the research questions/hypotheses
5. Discussion/Conclusion: a summary and interpretation of finding, as well as identification of recommendations and implications of the project for nursing.
6. References
7. Appendices

Timelines and Evaluation Points

The thesis timeline is designed so the student completes the thesis as he/she progresses through coursework. The goal is that the thesis is completed at the same time course work is completed.

To register/enroll in NE 599, the student and thesis chair complete the **Registration for Thesis Credits** form available online at:

http://www.nmu.edu/academic_affairs/pdf/thesis_app_form_0806.pdf

The completed form is submitted to the MSN Secretary.

The timeline for completion of NE 599 is as follows:

- Year 1: Winter Semester (1 credit)
- Student identifies his/her project chair
 - Student identifies topic of interest
 - Student completes Chapter 1 of the paper.
- Year 2: Fall Semester (1 credit)
- Student completes the review of literature (Chapter 2)
 - Student must have the project methodology approved (Chapter 3).
 - Student must obtain IRB approval. Human Subjects Research Review Committee (HSRRC) oversees all protocols involving the use of human subjects. Information regarding the process to apply for human subject's approval is available online at the College of Graduate Studies website http://www.nmu.edu/graduate_studies/ord.htm
- Year 2: Summer Semester (1 credit)
- Student must defend their proposal and complete data collection and analysis.
 - Student completes Chapters 4 and 5 of their thesis.
 - This course can be finished over fall semester year three.
- Year 3: Winter Semester (1 credit)
- Student must present the results of the thesis.
 - All students are required to disseminate their findings through participation in a scholarly presentation. This may include a presentation at a professional conference, a university-wide research day or a scholarly presentation within the school.

Grading

Each credit will be awarded either an S for satisfactory work or a U for unsatisfactory work. Students, who do not complete the requirements at each of the evaluation points, will receive a U grade and be required to complete an additional credit of NE 599.

Oral Defense

The oral defense is a formal presentation of the completed research project to the committee. The oral defense should be scheduled approximately 6 weeks prior to graduation. While the student determines, with their research advisor, how the meeting will be structured, the overall purpose is to provide an opportunity for students and committee members to discuss the research in terms of its scientific merit, its contribution to nursing knowledge and its implications for further research. Following the oral defense, the student will attend to any recommendations or requirements of the committee. Please bring several copies of the **signature approval form** to the meeting.

GD 593 Graduate Degree Continuous Enrollment

Students who do not complete the thesis in 4 credits will need to enroll in GD 593 Graduate Degree Continuous Enrollment Credit. This allows the student to stay active, maintain library access, e-mail, and computer use throughout the university

Disposition of Final Product

The thesis must be submitted in **two parts**; both parts are due **30 calendar days prior to graduation**. The student is responsible for making certain that the signature forms and electronic version of the thesis are submitted to the Graduate Studies Office before the deadline.

1. **Two paper copies** of the completed **Signature Approval Form** must be delivered to the Graduate Studies Office. This form is available online at: http://www.nmu.edu/graduate_studies/thesis/signatureapprovalform.pdf
2. The completed thesis must be **submitted electronically to UMI Dissertation Publishing** at <http://dissertations.umi.com/nmu/>. The website provides instructions for submitting electronically. The thesis must be converted from a Word document to a PDF format and must be in one file. Students are required to pay a fee of \$45.00. The \$45.00 fee is offset by the fact that students no longer need to submit two copies of their thesis on 100% rag bond paper to the Graduate Studies Office.

After the student has submitted his or her thesis electronically, the Dean of Graduate Studies will receive notification of the submission. **The Dean will NOT review any thesis until the signed Signature Approval Forms have been received in the Dean's Office.** The Dean will review the thesis, noting any changes that must be made prior to thesis acceptance.

Thesis Binding

Students are required to submit **two unbound copies** of their research project to the MSN secretary for binding **no later than 30 calendar days prior to graduation**. All work must be printed on **100% cotton bond white paper**. One copy will be displayed in the department and the other copy is for your research advisor. The department assumes the cost of binding the departmental copy. The student is responsible for the cost of binding the copy for the research advisor. Most students also order a copy for themselves.

Please Note: At the departmental level, binding does not occur each semester. The MSN secretary collects the completed projects and when an adequate number are obtained, sends them for binding. We must receive payment prior to binding. Make checks payable to NMU. The MSN secretary will notify the students when their bound thesis is ready for pick up. Please keep the department apprised of any address changes.

Sample Thesis Format Quantitative Research

Chapter 1—Introduction

- Statement of Problem and Significance
- Purpose of the Study
- Research Questions and/or Hypotheses
- Conceptual Framework
- Definitions of Terms
- Assumptions
- Summary

Chapter 2—Literature Review

- Literature regarding each of your variables
- Literature exploring the relationship between your variables
- Literature related to measures and methodology

Chapter 3—Methods

- Design
- Sampling Plan
- Protection of Human Subjects
- Procedures
 - Measures including reliability and validity
 - Data collection procedures
- Data Analysis Plan
- Limitations (in proposal only)
- Summary

Chapter 4—Results

- Description of sample
- Description of variables
- Analysis of research questions and/or hypotheses
- Summary

Chapter 5—Discussion

- Major findings about each research question/hypothesis
- Ancillary findings
- Conclusions
- Limitations (in final report only)
- Recommendations and implications for nursing practice, education, theory and research

References

Appendices

Sample Thesis Format Qualitative Research

Chapter 1—Introduction

- Statement of purpose
- Identification of Domains of Inquiry
- Research questions
- Operational definitions
- Theoretical Framework
 - Relationship of concepts to theoretical framework
 - Theoretical assumptions underlying study
- Potential significance for nursing (theory, research, practice, education)
- Summary

Chapter 2—Review of the Literature

- Related literature
- Summary

Chapter 3—Research methods

- Description of setting
- Entry into the field
- Selection criteria for sample
- Data collection strategies, sequence, tools
- Data analysis plan
- Criteria used to critique qualitative data
- Human subjects and Ethical Considerations
- Limitations (in proposal only)
- Summary

Chapter 4—Results

- Data analysis and findings related to each research question
- Will be dependent upon information identified in Chapter 3 (raw data—
descriptors, classification of phenomenon, patterns and themes)
- Discuss findings in relation to criteria for critique of qualitative research
- Additional findings (if any)
- Summary

Chapter 5—Conclusions

- Summarize major findings
- Limitations (in final paper only)
- Implications and recommendations for nursing practice, theory, education
and research

References

Appendices

Student Responsibilities

Students are responsible to:

- Enroll in NE 587/599 as appropriate per the schedule.
- Forward the completed **Declaration Form** with all the necessary signatures to the MSN secretary.
- Keep the research advisor informed of progress/non-progress in completing the project.
- Submit all drafts of proposal development and completed project to the research advisor for initial review.
- Submit drafts to committee members, where appropriate, after consulting with your research advisor.
- Incorporate all feedback from the research advisor/committee members in subsequent drafts.
- **Allow 10 working days for faculty to respond to drafts, revisions**, unless special arrangements have been made.
- **Obtain editorial assistance if the student has problems with grammar, punctuation, spelling and writing style.**
- Arrange for all committee meetings where applicable.
- Present a brief report of the status of the project at meetings and address questions from the research advisor and committee members.
- Bring the **signature approval form** to the oral defense meeting (thesis).
- Assure that all necessary forms are on file with the MSN secretary including the **declaration form, verification of completion of graduate project** (if practicum or scholarly project), and **approval notices from the IRB.**
- Assure that the **final IRB report** is filed with the appropriate agencies.

Research Advisor (Chairperson) Responsibilities

Research advisors are responsible to:

- Provide primary guidance to the student throughout proposal development, project completion and preparation for the final oral presentation/defense in consultation with other committee members, where applicable
- Assist in the selection of committee members, where applicable
- Determine when drafts of the proposal are ready for submission to committee members for their review
- Assure that all necessary forms are on file with the MSN secretary including: declaration form, verification of completion of graduate projects (if practicum or scholarly project), evaluation forms and approval notices from IRB
- Assure that the final IRB report to the appropriate committee/institution is on file prior to signing the signature page of the thesis or research practicum/scholarly project.

Committee Member Responsibilities

Committee members are responsible to:

- Provide guidance as requested by the student or chairperson, related to any aspect of the project
- Critically review the proposal and completed project
- Actively participate in committee meetings as the project proceeds.

Selection of a Research Advisor

As delineated in each course, the process of choosing a research advisor should begin by identifying faculties' area of interest and expertise. Matching the topic area increases the advisor's ability to assist in guiding the project. The student must contact the faculty member to determine his/her availability. Once there is a mutual agreement to work together, the student needs to complete the appropriate *Declaration Form* and submit the form to the MSN secretary.

If the student has chosen to complete a thesis, the next step is to identify two additional faculty who have the interest and availability to assist in the project. The chair should also provide input in the selection of committee members.

Checklist for NE 587

Winter Semester—Year 1

- _____ Register for 1 credit NE 587.
- _____ Select topic and project.
- _____ Select project advisor.
- _____ Complete the Declaration Form and submit to the MSN secretary.
- _____ Complete Chapter 1 - Introduction and submit to research advisor

Fall Semester—Year 2

- _____ Register for 1 credit NE 587.
- _____ Conduct a literature review (Chapter 2).
- _____ Develop the project methodology (Chapter 3).
- _____ Submit Chapters 2 and 3 to research advisor.
- _____ Submit proposal to IRB, if necessary, only after the research advisor has approved the project.

Summer Semester—Year 2 and Fall Semester—Year 3

- _____ Register for 1 credit NE 587.
- _____ Complete Chapter 4 - the conclusion of the project.
- _____ Submit the final paper and product to research advisor – all four chapters

Winter Semester—Year 3

- _____ Register for 1 credit NE 587.
- _____ Present the results of the project to an external body.
- _____ Submit the final IRB report to the appropriate committee/institution and a copy to the Nursing Department for filing.
- _____ Submit completed Verification of Completion of Graduate Projects (other than thesis).
- _____ Submit 2 original copies of the project to the MSN secretary no later than 30 days prior to graduation, one for departmental display and one for your research advisor.

Checklist of NE 599

Winter Semester—Year 1

- _____ Register for 1 credit NE 599.
- _____ Select topic and project.
- _____ Select project chair and two committee members.
- _____ Complete the Declaration Form and submit to the MSN secretary.
- _____ Complete Chapter 1—Introduction and submit to research advisor.

Fall Semester—Year 2

- _____ Register for 1 credit NE 599.
- _____ Conduct a literature review (Chapter 2).
- _____ Develop the project methodology (Chapter 3). Students must have project methodology approved by thesis chair.
- _____ Obtain approval from thesis chair to develop IRB Forms. Submit proposal to IRB **only after the research advisor has approved** the project.
- _____ Submit Chapters 2 and 3 to thesis chair.

Summer Semester—Year 2 and Fall Semester—Year 3

- _____ Register for 1 credit NE 599.
- _____ Complete data collection and analysis.
- _____ Complete chapters 4 and 5 and submit to thesis chair – all five chapters

Winter Semester—Year 3

- _____ Register for 1 credit NE 599
- _____ Schedule an oral defense with the committee members, only after receiving approval from the thesis chair. An oral defense should be scheduled approximately 6 weeks before graduation. Bring signature approval forms to the meeting.
- _____ Submit the final IRB report to the appropriate committee/institution and a copy to the Nursing Department for filing.
- _____ Present the results of the project to an external body.
- _____ Submit 2 paper copies of the completed signature approval page to Graduate Studies Office no later than 30 days prior to graduation.
- _____ Submit thesis electronically to <http://dissertatoin.umi.com/nmu/> 30 days prior to graduation.
- _____ Make changes recommended by the Dean of Graduate Studies.
- _____ Submit two original copies on 100% cotton bond paper to the MSN Secretary 30 days prior to graduation for binding. Copies for personal use may also be ordered.

Appendix A

**NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF NURSING**

SCHOLARLY PROJECT / PRACTICUM DECLARATION FORM

Student Name: _____

The proposed topic for the research practicum:

I agree to serve as chairperson:

Signature

Date

.....

Date Received in Graduate Office: _____

By: _____
Signature

Appendix B

Verification of Completion of Graduate Projects (Other than thesis)

This form may be obtained from:

http://www.nmu.edu/graduate_studies/faculty_students.htm

Instructions for this Form: YOU MUST save this form to your hard drive (click File>Save As...), then open it from the version saved on your computer. You should be able to fill it out electronically and then print it.

TO: DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES

FROM: The Department of

DATE:

RE: Candidates for the Masters Degree,

Required graduate level Papers (2)

Research Project

Insert name here of Insert Address here, a candidate for the

Click here to choose degree in the curriculum has filed an acceptable paper/project in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Master's degree.

The title of his/her project is

(If both papers are listed above, please number them (1) and (2))

Department Head signature

Date

Distribution: Graduate Office, Student, Adviser

Appendix C

**NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF NURSING**

THESIS DECLARATION FORM

Student Name:

The proposed topic of research:

I agree to serve as the chair of the thesis committee:

Signature

Date

I agree to serve as a member of this thesis committee: *(Two members other than chair required. If one of the committee members also serves in the capacity of co-chair, please indicate after name).*

Signature

Date

Signature

Date

.....

Date Received in Graduate Office: _____

By:

Signature