

Final Project Options

M.S. Social Responsibility

Students in the Social Responsibility Program have three options for their final project. You should choose a topic that addresses issues that are of importance to you and ideally one that leads to future work in a particular field. You should discuss your goals and future plans with your final project adviser as you develop your project. [Your final project adviser may or may not be the same person as your program adviser.] The final project is a culmination of graduate program work and should reflect what you have learned and ideally demonstrate some expertise that you can take into the workplace. Consider choosing a project that might be continued in future graduate work. It is expected that projects will reflect the goals of the Social Responsibility program and will address and support justice, peace, environmental integrity, diversity, etc. issues. It is also expected that students will develop applied, practical or activist outcomes or implications in their projects. Students should discuss their final project topic with faculty members to help determine whether their project would be best as a thesis, a starred paper, or a portfolio.

Copies of all theses and starred papers completed at St. Cloud State University are located in the Miller Center and available for students to read. Copies of theses and starred papers from the Social Responsibility program are also located in the HURL and SOC offices.

Students should contact the Husky bookstore to purchase “A Manual for the Preparation of Field Studies and Theses.” This affordable manual provides detailed information and instructions on the form and style used by St. Cloud State University. A copy of the manual along with additional requirements for the culminating project is also available for download from the School of Graduate Studies website at www.stcloudstate.edu/graduatestudies/current/project.asp.

Students will prepare a proposal for their project and will schedule a preliminary conference with their committee at least one semester prior to the final conference. The final conference is normally held during the last semester of the student’s program. The final project adviser, one other graduate faculty member from the SOC, HURL, or WS department, and one graduate faculty member from a related field (outside reader) comprise the faculty committee. The School of Graduate Studies website includes a list of graduate faculty members who have volunteered to serve as outside readers. Once the preliminary conference has been held and the student’s project approved, the paper will be prepared under the supervision of the final project adviser, in consultation with the faculty committee members. Students are able to take up to 6 credits of thesis; these credits can be divided across different semesters.

In keeping with University policy and federal regulations, some graduate research involving human subjects requires review by the SCSU Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB). Students who plan to involve human participants or their data in their theses should consult with their final project adviser to determine whether the activities are exempt from review. Definitions, guidelines, and application forms are available on the Sponsored Programs Web site at <http://www.stcloudstate.edu/osp> or in the Office of Sponsored Programs, 210 Administrative Services Building.

For assistance with the final formatting, students are encouraged to go to the Writing Center located in Riverview on campus. Contact information and services offered can be found on their website at <http://www.stcloudstate.edu/writeplace/>.

The preliminary and final conference meetings cannot be held during the same semester.

Plan A: Thesis

A thesis is a focused study of a research question or problem. A thesis may be explanatory and test hypotheses, or it may be descriptive, exploratory, or evaluatory. A thesis may involve original research (student gathers and analyzes data), action research, or a secondary analysis of an existing data set. A thesis may also use qualitative methods such as participant observation, qualitative content analysis, oral history, historical or comparative analysis, critical research, case studies, etc.

Each thesis adviser may have different style preferences. You should work closely with your final project adviser in determining topic, formatting, style, organization, etc. Your preliminary meeting with your committee should be a discussion of your project based on a draft of the first three chapters of your thesis.

The following is a generic version of the form/contents of a thesis (what to include and what order to place the material). Individual advisers may have specific and different expectations:

Abstract

A paragraph or two summarizing the important points of the thesis. This is written last but placed before the body of the thesis.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction: inform the reader about the general problem to be studied, stimulate reader's interest, logically lead to the purpose for project.
2. Problem statement: 1-3 sentences may be sufficient to state your problem; be brief and to the point.
3. Rationale for study: "So what?" Why spend your time doing this research? What is the importance, value of this work? To whom? How does this work relate to the field? How is your issue related to social responsibility, social justice, diversity, etc.? Does your project help to facilitate the understanding of different cultural, historical and social contexts? This section should be a continuation of the introduction or background for the study. Contradictory findings in previous research, gaps in knowledge, difficulties in measuring aspects of the concepts, need to test existing theories, and practical applications may be reasons for doing this research.
4. Hypotheses (if appropriate): what do you expect to find? Identify your independent, dependent and control variables if appropriate.
5. Definition of terms: define terms used in thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

(10-20 pages may be sufficient) A literature review is a review of research that is relevant to your project and helps you to shape your project. Include summaries of previous research, theories, and findings; when possible include summaries of classical works, landmark works, and most current research on this topic. The

literature review should be focused, include disputes, and a clear theoretical framework. The purpose of the literature review is to show the need for your project and your knowledge of what others have done. Use this information to develop your project. The readings from your literature review can help you to select the appropriate method and techniques, to identify reliable and valid measurement tools, to analyze your data and to identify ways to present your findings.

Your literature review should include:

1. Introduction, which gives the purpose of the review and the organization of the review.
2. Review of research, which should be organized around topics/themes, a timeline or some other logic.
3. Review of theoretical framework used in research.
4. Summary that identifies the important implications of the literature review for your study and demonstrates the need for your study.

The theoretical framework used to address the problem should be presented in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter is a detailed discussion of how you gathered your information and analyzed it.

1. state your research questions
2. type of analysis
3. assumptions
4. sample: how selected, why selected, where, cooperation rate and problems, issue of privacy, etc.
5. operational definitions of variables
6. data collection procedures (steps, data recording process, timing, problems, special instructions to participants, etc.)
7. limitations
8. ethical issues

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents your findings or results. Detailed descriptions of what you learned in a survey, interviews, etc. are organized to address your research question or test your hypotheses.

Findings are usually presented first. Another section of this chapter includes an interpretation and discussion of the results. Compare your results to what other researchers have found and what you discussed in the literature review. Compare your results to the literature reviewed earlier and to your theoretical framework. What are the implications for social responsibility and social justice? What recommendations can you make for socially responsible change? Include a discussion of limitations of your research along with suggestions for further research.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

Brief summary of your project

Major findings

Implications of your work

Recommendations for implementation, social justice, etc.

References (use ASA style guide)

Appendices: survey, cover letter, etc.

Plan B: Starred Paper

A Plan B paper can have a wide variety of formats, purposes, and outcomes. It is expected that the paper will include a research component but it will be less extensive than a thesis. The Plan B paper is significantly greater in quality and quantity than a standard graduate term paper and may use secondary research sources. Students are expected to include an applied, practical or activist component.

This paper might be a legislative policy paper, published paper resulting from a group research project, a practice paper done for an organization, a curriculum project, a grant proposal, proposed recommendations developed after exploring the need for a socially responsible change, a paper written for publication, etc. A literature review as well as a conceptual or theoretical framework is required. Literature in the SR program may include alternative, independent and nonprofit sources of information. A review of the literature may include information or practices from various nonprofit or activist organizations. It is expected that a starred paper will result in an outcome such as a new program proposal, revision of an existing program, recommendations for socially responsible change, etc. A Plan B project may also involve the development of a grant proposal or some other applied project.

After exploring some ideas for your project with your final project advisor you can expect to write a review of relevant literature to assess the viability of this project and develop an 8-10 page proposal (not including references) for submission to your committee. Your preliminary meeting with your committee should be a discussion of your project based on a literature review establishing the need for this project and a detailed discussion of what you will be doing and what your expected outcome is.

Each starred paper adviser may have different style preferences and you should work closely with your adviser in determining topic, formatting, style, organization, etc.

Plan C: Portfolio

Plan C portfolios require a significant professional project or a portfolio of projects, which may or may not be, prepared in conjunction with the student's coursework. A portfolio final paper should include a mission statement, goals of project, a plan of action, the documentation of action, and analysis and evaluation of the action. The mission statement and goals should be based on a review of the literature, theoretical or conceptual framework, and individual student learning goals.

After exploring some ideas for your project with your final project advisor you can expect to write a review of relevant literature to assess the need and viability of this project and develop at least an 8-10 page proposal (not including references) for submission to your committee. The proposal should be a deliberate plan that is consistent with the student's future career goals. Your preliminary meeting with your committee should be a discussion of your project based on a literature review establishing the need for this project and a detailed discussion of what you will be doing and expected outcomes.

The final paper will describe the project, how it was implemented, outcomes, and will also evaluate the project and process. The conclusion should evaluate the impact of the project(s), describe what was learned by the student in the process, and how this project contributed to social justice.

Each portfolio adviser may have different style preferences and you should work closely with your adviser in determining topic, formatting, style, organization, etc.

The final portfolio paper might include the following sections:

1. Introduction: mission statement; goals of project; who will benefit; learning objectives for student
2. Literature review
3. Description of project(s): implementation, who, what, where, when, how, etc.
4. Evaluation of project: implementation, were project goals met?
5. Student learning