Completing a Master's Degree

Any student earning a master’s degree must contact the Graduate Coordinator the semester prior to graduation. After receiving clearance from the Graduate Coordinator, students will apply online to graduate with their master’s on the Graduate School website.

Note: Beginning Fall 2014, all EDP doctoral students who were admitted to their doctoral program without a master’s in the field must complete an en-route master’s before they receive their doctoral degree.

Not all students will complete a master’s report or thesis; however, for those who do, the following information should serve as a good guide.

On this page:

- Steps to Completing the Master’s Report/Thesis
- Writing Master’s Reports and Theses
- En-route Master’s Report

Steps to Completing the Master’s Report/Thesis

Be sure to view the Graduate School’s information on Master’s Report / Theses.

Registration

For Master’s Report: you must enroll in EDP 398R Master’s Report while you are working on the master’s report and using faculty time, and you must be enrolled in it during the semester in which the degree is awarded. Thus, if you are working on your master’s report during the spring, but do not complete it until the summer, you cannot graduate unless you enroll in EDP 398R Master’s Report in the summer session.

For Master’s Thesis: If you are completing a master’s thesis, you must register for a minimum of two semesters of thesis hours. The first semester is EDP 698A Thesis and the second semester is EDP 698B Thesis (these courses count as three hours each). After completion of EDP 698A, you must enroll for EDP 698B while you are working on the master’s thesis and using faculty time, and you must be enrolled in EDP 698B during the semester in which the degree is awarded. Thus, if you are enrolled in 698B and working on your master’s thesis during the spring, but do not complete it until the summer, you cannot graduate unless you are enrolled again in EDP 698B during the summer session.

Selecting a Topic

Typically, the topic will focus on some important educational psychology theory, or address a critical issue in the practice of educational psychology. Sources of topics may include the following: ideas, theory, and research encountered in courses and readings; current research conducted by a faculty member; problems and issues arising during a practicum; past experiences reconceptualized; emerging or ongoing areas of interest discussed in journals, other scholarly publications, or professional meetings.

Selecting Faculty Advisers

You will need two faculty advisers (e.g., a supervisor and a reader, or co-supervisors) for your report or thesis, at least one of which must be in your area of specialization. One of the readers, who will be your primary adviser/supervisor for the report, must be a member of the GSC in the Department. It is important students consult with both committee members early in the process regarding each member’s expectations, and to ensure meeting the Graduate School deadlines for graduation.

Writing your Report/Thesis

The Department requires APA formatting for your report/thesis. APA style guidelines can be found in local campus bookstores, or at the APA website. The format instructions on the OGS website do not necessarily reflect APA format requirements, so you will need to take extra care in preparing your report/thesis. EDP students use APA style for headings, references, and citations of their dissertations. Everything else will be according to the Graduate School template. The Graduate School provides templates for reports and theses, which include the requirements for that office’s formatting for the rest of the document. A specific page length is not required; however, between 30 and 70 pages is typical.

Writing Master’s Reports and Theses

In universities across the United States, it is common to make the following distinctions (Cone & Foster, 1999):

- Dissertation: Original empirical research completed to fulfill the requirements for a doctorate degree.
- Thesis: Empirical research conducted to fulfill the requirements for a master’s degree.
- Report: An extended discussion of a subject in writing to fulfill the requirements for a master’s degree.

A thesis is very similar to a dissertation in process and product with the key difference residing in the extent of each and expectations the faculty have for each. The dissertation process is an examination of your competence to function as an autonomous researcher, and the final product provides an original and significant contribution to the knowledge base.
A thesis should also contribute to the knowledge base; however, thesis requirements place less emphasis on originality, and candidates are expected to receive more guidance and supervision. Whereas these would likely be unacceptable as dissertation topics, a thesis may be any of the following: a replication of an existing study; a pilot study for a subsequent dissertation; the validation of an existing measure with a particular sample; a small program evaluation.

Both the dissertation and the thesis should have the following sections: Introduction (and rationale for the study), Literature Review, Methods, Results, Discussion, and References.

- **Introduction, Statement of the Problem, and Rationale for the Study.** This section should provide an overview, laying out the big picture and indicating its importance. The specific focus of the thesis should be identified and rationale presented for the study. The introduction often ends with a short paragraph that describes what each upcoming section will cover.

- **Review of the Literature.** The review should include general and up-to-date research laying the groundwork for the study. In most cases, pertinent theory or conceptualizations of the topic should be included. Depending on the nature of the topic, this review may include theoretical articles, published reviews on the topic, and/or empirical studies. Your critical evaluation of the literature is also important.

- **Method.** This section should describe in detail the methodological approach you have taken for your study, your participants, procedure, measures (if relevant), and data analysis plan.

- **Results (or Findings).** This section should report on the results of your analysis of your data. Often it is useful to use your research questions as a way to organize your report of your results. A recommendation for how to report results is to find a current article that has used the same methodological approach (even if the study is not in the area of the thesis project). Advice on the ways of reporting results is available from many sources including a wonderful little book by Greg Hancock and Ralph Mueller called *The Reviewer’s Guide to Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences*. There’s a similar guide for qualitative research by Trainor and Graue called, *Reviewing Qualitative Research in the Social Sciences*.

- **Discussion.** The discussion is the section in which you explain your findings, connect them to the earlier description of the literature from your review, and acknowledge limitations of the study.

The report is an extended review and discussion of a topic relevant to the applicant’s field of study. If completing the report in conjunction with the M.Ed. degree, the report will be on an applied topic and should include the following sections: Introduction and Statement of the Problem, Review of the Literature, and Application to Practice (in your program area).

Reports have at least the following three sections (though the specific wording need not be used in chapter headings):

- **Introduction and Statement of the Problem.** This section should provide an overview, laying out the big picture and indicating its importance. The specific focus of the report should also be identified and related to the general area of inquiry, along with the plan or organization of the report.

- **Review of the Literature.** The review should include general and up-to-date research addressing the topic of the report. In most cases, pertinent theory or conceptualizations of the topic should also be described. Depending on the nature of the topic, this review may include theoretical articles, published reviews on the topic, and/or empirical studies. Your critical evaluation of the literature is also important.

- **Applications to Practice.** This section should present an integration of theory/research and practice in your specialization. If the topic is drawn primarily from the literature outside your specialization, special attention should be paid to exploring and evaluating implications of the topic your specialization.

**En-route Master’s Report**

*Special information* for students preparing an en-route master’s report.