RD 809 SPECIALTY RESEARCH PROJECT

REVIEWED: JUNE 2025

COURSE DESCRIPTION

An advanced study of an issue or topic that is significant in light of the student's anticipated ministry or vocation and his or her major of study. The SRP is intended to be highly practical in its orientation. Hence, students will be expected to show how this project relates directly to their ministry or vocational context.

Prerequisite: The equivalent of one year of full-time studies, completion of any required research course, and the consent of the student's Program Coordinator.

COURSE OUTLINE

I. **Selection of a topic.** A Specialty Research Project usually begins with a ministry/professional problem or opportunity. The purpose of the paper is to undertake top quality research leading to a practical response to the problem or opportunity. Before submitting the official 5-7-page proposal the student should consult with their program coordinator about potential topics.

II. **Submission of an SRP proposal.** The first step in writing an SRP is submitting a written proposal to the appropriate program coordinator for approval. The proposal should include a careful definition of the nature of the problem to be explored. This includes clear articulation of the following: the objectives you hope to accomplish through the research, the methodology to be utilized to accomplish those objectives, an explanation of the value of this project to the ministry situation, a proposed outline, and an initial bibliography. In the development of the proposal, researchers should ask the following questions:

    a. What is the pressing issue, need or problem to solve?

    b. Why is this a pressing need/issue/problem in its context and why is it important enough to research?

    c. Who would agree with the researcher that this is a key problem (as clarified in the literature and in context)?

    d. What type of research design and approach will be used?

    e. What outcomes are intended?

    f. How will the outcomes be used to bring about a significant impact toward closing the problem/need gap?

III.   **Registration of an SRP.** Upon approval of the proposal by their program coordinator and the Dean of the Seminary, the student must fill out and submit the SRP Request Form to the Academic Services office. For graduating students, proposals are due no later than **November 1** prior to the year of graduation. If research will involve the use of human subjects by interviewing or any other means, the proposal must also receive approval of the Research Ethics Board. Students should work with their Program Coordinator to ensure that the proposal is submitted to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board within the required time frames. **Please note:** MAMFT students will only use secondary data for SRP research and will not involve human subjects.

IV.   **Submission of an SRP for grading.** Once the proposal has been approved, the student will proceed independently to produce the SRP, completing all research and writing required. The student submits a completed paper to the SRP supervisor (most often their program coordinator) for review and grading. The SRP should be 40-60 pages in length when completed. If the supervisor feels the project is inadequate, he or she may return the SRP to the student for further revisions before final grading.

ORGANIZING THE SRP

In an SRP the student will investigate the topic from theoretical perspectives leading to a practical response. This will entail a thorough study of the biblical and theological/theoretical dimensions of the topic, as well as a review of the relevant literature. The research may, but will not necessarily, include surveys and interviews. This forms the framework for the practical response. The practical response may find expression in many different forms, including such things as a ministry philosophy, a strategic plan, a manual, or a series of training sessions. The overriding principle is that the practical response must be appropriate to the nature of the ministry issue being addressed.

A typical SRP will be laid out under headings such as these (note that this is only a sample outline that may be altered to suit your project):

I.   BEGINNING MATERIALS
   a.   Title page
   b.   Abstract
   c.   Table of Contents, including table of figures, illustrations, and appendices

II.   INTRODUCTION OF THE PROJECT
   a.   Statement and Relevance of the Problem
   b.   Objectives
   c.   Assumptions and Limitations
   d.   Research Methodology

III.   LITERATURE REVIEW
   a.   Theological/biblical/church history literature
   b.   Other sources of literature relevant to the topic

   See Appendix A for more help with literature reviews.

IV.   PROJECT NARRATIVE

   The project narrative is where you tackle the research problem according to the defined methodology, such as using surveys or interviews, to generate information essential to a proposed plan of action. Or you may develop the implications of the research to a ministry or vocational problem. In this section, the student needs to move from the theoretical toward the practical.

V.   CONCLUSIONS AND EVALUATIONS

VI.   ENDING MATERIALS
   a.   Reference list
   b.   Appendices

DUE DATES

Students will have a maximum of one year to complete the SRP from the point of approval of the project. However, for graduating students it must be completed by **March 1** of the year of graduation.

APPENDIX A: DESCRIPTION OF A LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of a literature review is to present a representative sample of the essential findings of relevant studies and theories, not merely a list of everything ever written on the subject. The literature review is not a compilation of facts and feelings, but a coherent, systematic argument that leads to the description of a proposed study.

There should be no mystery about the direction in which you are going. You need to explicitly state at the outset the goal of the paper and the structure of the evolving argument. By the end of the literature review, the reader should be able to conclude that, "Yes, of course, this is the exact study that needs to be done at this time to move knowledge in this field a little further along."

You will continually need to decide what assertions it is reasonable to assume the reader accepts as common understanding, and what claims require data as support. Keep in mind that there is no need to reinvent the wheel; it is perfectly permissible to draw upon the thoughtful arguments of others and incorporate them into your own research project. Incorporating the arguments of others is very much in keeping with our understanding of the incremental, cumulative process that characterizes the development of knowledge.

A common mistake among students who perform literature reviews is to attempt to report everything written on the subject. A useful literature review needs to be selective, and the majority of source material you read will not make it directly into the literature review. That does not mean that it was not necessary to read all those journal articles and books; they provide the expertise required to write the literature review. Remember, the purpose of a literature review is to build an argument, not a library.

Another common mistake among many students who perform literature reviews is the overuse of quotations. Restrict the use of quotes to those that have particular impact, or that are stated in a unique way that is difficult to recapture. All direct quotes should have an introductory or explanatory phrase before the quote. Also, direct quotes should not begin or end a paragraph. Rather than quoting sources, it is preferred that you restate the concepts in your own words, and then credit the source.

One of the most challenging tasks in writing a formal research paper is to remember always to reference. Not to reference is to plagiarize!! Each statement that you use from another person's work must be referenced to credit the other person. If you do not reference, you have plagiarized someone's words or ideas. It is better to err on the side of caution and over-reference when writing a formal paper.

When quoting or referring to other works MAMFT and MALM students are to use the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines.