

MSW Project Guidelines

The MSW Project is generally an independent study, with the student working under the supervision of a faculty member. Topics will be negotiated with the supervising faculty member. Advanced level of critical review of the literature is expected. The MSW Project should integrate theory, where relevant. The expectation is that the MSW project should synthesize what is known about the topic, what needs to be known, and how your work will contribute to knowledge and add to the literature. The final MSW Project is a joint enterprise with your faculty supervisor. It should be considered a developing piece of academic work that will require editing throughout the process in consultation with the supervisor and/or the second reader. This means that the Project is not work that is handed in and graded, but rather, a developing document that will require multiple iterations and could be suitable to submit for publication (though publication is not required). A second reader will also review the project and provide feedback which may or may not require additional edits.

Formatting of the project should be:

APA 7th Edition or most current version available **MUST** be followed
Page Count: 25-45 pages not including references

Important Process Considerations:

- The supervisor will assist students in narrowing or focusing their topic, help identify strategies to access further relevant literature, and provide additional guidance as needed.
- The MSW Project is graded as Pass, or Fail according to the faculty supervisor and second reader. No letter grade is assigned.
- The MSW Project is NOT a thesis, and no original research is required, though some students may choose to do a small pilot study. Students are expected to demonstrate “mastery” of their focused topic area in completing this Project.
- Critical reflection and analysis throughout the MSW Project are expected.
- Students have up to 2 years to complete the MSW Program. The timeline of the Project must be negotiated and agreed to with the faculty supervisor and should be paced according to the student’s goals for completion and the supervisor’s expectations and supervisory availability.
- Students should anticipate up to a 2-week response time from the faculty supervisor when requesting a review of the project while it is in progress and up to a 3-week response time at the completion of the first full draft of the project. Students must also anticipate up to a 3-week response time for the second reader to review the project and provide constructive feedback.
- Students must anticipate a 2-month timeline from completion of a draft deemed suitable by the supervisor for the second reader to review and completion of all necessary revisions prior to receiving a pass/fail for the project.
- Timelines must be considered at the outset of the project to ensure students are supported to meet their goals.

- Students should be mindful that supervisors are not available on weekends and often have research responsibilities at the end of the teaching term. As such, negotiation of the timeline for review and completion of the project is important throughout the process.

Structure of MSW Project

The components of the MSW Project are listed below. There may be some variation based on the guidance of your faculty supervisor and second reader. All projects will follow the current edition of the APA Publication Manual.

Title page: APA title page

Abstract: An MSW Project is preceded by an abstract. The abstract will typically include a statement of the problem, a summary of the methodology, the main findings, and the conclusions. Abstracts should be no longer than 200 words.

Body of the Project

The MSW Project should be guided by a clear research question and should contribute to a gap in the existing knowledge on the topic of interest.

Introduction

Your introduction is a one- or two-page statement of your MSW Project topic of study. The purpose is to provide a clear, concise statement of your research problem within the field of social work. Typically, your research problem is stated broadly, in question form or as a statement of purpose. There may also be sub-questions, if applicable. Your introduction may include why there is a need for the research, including who will benefit. The Introduction also frames the context and adds further information to clarify the research problem.

Background

A literature review involves extensive reading in your chosen topic area. The literature review will focus on recent, relevant, and peer-reviewed journal articles typically over the past 5-7 years. In consultation with your supervisor, older sources may be used provided you establish their relevance to your research questions. For example, a project on attachment would inevitably include research from John Bowlby (1907-1990).

The goal is to establish and summarize the current state of knowledge with regard to your topic of inquiry and interest. It is not an argumentative essay. It is not supposed to make a point or prove one. The knowledge reviewed may be contradictory or in disagreement as a variety of perspectives and themes may be outlined. The thematic review is not a listing of what researchers found, nor is it an annotated

bibliography. You will be identifying the key findings of researchers in your field of interest. Also, you will be identifying theory that tries to “explain” the topic.

A literature review:

- Summarizes dominant themes (what is known) on a particular subject.
- Explores gaps in our knowledge on a particular subject.

The following questions may assist in guiding your background literature review:

- What are the core theoretical underpinnings that “explain” this topic?
- What are the research findings regarding this topic?
- Is there a debate in the literature on this topic? What are the key issues?
- What do social workers currently “know” about this topic?
- What are the gaps in our collective knowledge about this topic?
- What does the professional literature say about where the field needs to have MORE research so as to advance our knowledge?

Method

A description of the method or strategy used to develop and conduct the project must be included regardless of the type of project selected. For example, scoping review, systematic review, pilot qualitative or quantitative study, program evaluation, theoretical or conceptual project.

Results/Findings

If you are collecting or analyzing original data or completing a secondary analysis of data, you will require a section outlining results (quantitative), findings (qualitative), or summary/analysis/table of included studies (scoping or systematic review).

Discussion/Analysis

A clear section on analysis and the relevance of your findings in relation to the existing literature must be included.

Conclusions

The conclusions section sums up the research findings and answers the research question. It also goes further by discussing the implication for social work practice, policy or research, and recommendations for future research.

References

Reference entries must be prepared according to protocols outlined in the current edition of the APA Publication Manual.

Appendices

Appendices include materials and data that are not essential to the exposition of the work but are, nevertheless, relevant, such as manuals or pamphlets you developed as part of your project. Ethics and copyright permissions are also placed here.

Submission process:

- Submission to your supervisor through email.
- Ensure all references are crossed checked – those cited in project must be in reference list and reference list must include only those works cited in the body of the project.
- MS Word NOT a PDF.
- Once the second reader has signed off on your project and your supervisor gives final approval that your project is complete, a final PDF copy must be submitted to your supervisor AND the social work administrator and labelled:
Your last name_Short Project Title_year.pdf