MA CAPSTONE PROJECT

COURSEWORK

Students will complete seven (7) courses.

FULL DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

An individual research project is designed to gauge the student’s ability to critically analyze, synthesize, and integrate the knowledge acquired in coursework and other learning experiences and apply these in a scholarly fashion in an original capstone paper. It will make a unique contribution to the overall body of literature in the discipline of gerontology. The project must be on a relevant topic in gerontology, where the student must apply related theories, substantive materials and research methodologies to develop a critical evaluation of the literature; the design of a research proposal; the development of an evaluation framework; or a policy analysis. The capstone paper will successfully synthesize the cross-disciplinary teaching in the program and yield a high quality substantive report that has the potential to become the foundation for future research, and in some cases may be published in peer reviewed journals.

The project will demonstrate the student’s ability to do a combination of the following:

- succinctly define a relevant issue or problem in the multi-disciplinary field of gerontology
- propose a theoretical framework that would enhance the scholarship of the discipline.
- analyze this issue within the context of the gerontology discipline and/or aging-related policy in Canada or globally;
- critically review the research literature and theoretical orientations relevant to the topic;
- develop a persuasive, evidence based argument;
- systematically describe how the review/analysis was conducted;
- synthesize and integrate knowledge about the discipline in a substantive manner identifying gaps in the literature;
- propose a research study using SSHRC or CIHR guidelines, including an extended literature review;
- develop an evaluation framework to study the process and/or outcomes of an aging-related program or service.

The project should be approximately 60 pages in length and must conform to the format of APA style guide.

Supervisory Committee, Evaluation and Approval:

The project is a mentored preparation of a scholarly capstone paper that is successfully presented before a faculty committee comprised of the senior supervisor and a second committee member. Typically the second committee member is another SFU faculty member, but arrangements can be made to have committee members from other universities or from outside of the university, if deemed appropriate by the graduate chair and senior supervisor. A project proposal must be presented to the committee before it is fully developed. No formal defence required.
Time Limit for Completion:

Students are expected to complete their Masters degree within 9 semesters or 3 years. A 1 semester extension is available in which to defend the thesis. Further extensions may be available under extenuating circumstances and at the discretion of the Department's Graduate Program Committee.

COMPLETION OPTIONS:

The capstone project will demonstrate the student’s ability to do a combination of the following, depending on the type of project (see details of the four options A-D):

- succinctly define a relevant issue or problem in the multi-disciplinary field of gerontology
- propose a theoretical framework that would enhance the scholarship of the discipline.
- analyze this issue within the context of the gerontology discipline and/or aging-related policy in Canada or globally;
- critically review the research literature and theoretical orientations relevant to the topic;
- develop a persuasive, evidence based argument;
- systematically describe how the review/analysis was conducted;
- synthesize and integrate knowledge about the discipline in a substantive manner identifying gaps in the literature;
- propose a research study using SSHRC or CIHR guidelines, including an extended literature review;
- develop an evaluation framework to study the process and/or outcomes of an aging-related program or service.

The completed capstone project should be approximately 60 pages in length (including appended instruments, such as a questionnaire or interview guide), and must conform to the format of APA style guide. Proposals for the project are typically 5-7 pages in length, developed under the supervision of their committee.

There are four options for the capstone project:

- Systematic and critical synthesis of research and/or theoretical literature on a focused topic in gerontology
- Research grant proposal including extended literature review, research methods and outcome
- Evaluation framework proposal of a program for older adults
- Critical analysis of policy in an area related to aging and older adults

Description of the four options:

A. **Systematic and critical synthesis of research and/or theoretical literature on a focused topic in gerontology**

A research literature review is a systematic, explicit and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars and practitioners (Fink, 2010). In order to be reproducible and transparent, syntheses should be conducted using an
appropriate recognized synthesis methodology. (Grimshaw, 2010). Supervisors will work with the student to ensure the scope of the synthesis is both sufficient and manageable. In this capstone project option, you would be expected to a combination of the following:

- Succinctly define a relevant issue or problem in the multi-disciplinary field of gerontology, or consult with a knowledge user (public-sector or community-based organization involved in policy-making, program development and/service provision) to identify an issue of importance to them in the field.
- Scope out the nature of the sources from which you will select articles for inclusion in your review (mostly qualitative/quantitative/mixed)
- Select a review methodology appropriate to the evidence and purpose of the review.
- Select a theoretical framework that is appropriate to the methodology, your topic, and the purpose of the review.
- Using the selected methodology and theoretical framework, determine your inclusion/exclusion criteria, data extraction methods and analytical strategies and apply these to the identified literature.
- A clear description of the synthesis methodology and the procedures used should be included in the final write-up.
- Syntheses for knowledge support: Synthesize and integrate knowledge in the topic area and identify theoretical and substantive gaps in the literature; Develop a research agenda with directions for future research; Develop a summary table to include highlights of your review of key literature items.
- Syntheses for decision support: engage decision-making audience (knowledge user(s)) in the development of the research question and synthesis protocol; engage knowledge users in the interpretation and/or contextualization of the synthesis results; develop context-specific recommendations.
- Refine/Develop a theoretical framework based on the synthesis of the literature reviewed (e.g. to enhance scholarship in the field or to inform decision-making by a knowledge-user)

Resource:

B. Research grant proposal including extended literature review, research methods and outcome

"Grantsmanship is the art of acquiring peer-reviewed research funding." Writing effective grant proposals to secure peer-reviewed research funding is a valuable skill in academia, government organizations, community-based entities and professional associations. Granstmanship skills include: making a convincing case for a research focus/question, clearly and concisely articulating what is currently known in that research area, developing a coherent research plan that appropriately addresses the research problem, identifying the outcomes/implications of the research project. In this capstone option, the key expectation is to develop a conceptually grounded, methodologically appropriate and logistically feasible research study for which you would seek external funding. Specific steps will include:
Identify an appropriate program of funding opportunity offered by major federal research funding agencies, such as Social Science Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR), etc.

Carefully review the relevant grant program guidelines and instructions for developing the grant proposal.

Develop an appropriate and sound research plan (quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods).

Develop a research proposal that fits the particular grant program’s goals and priorities.

Develop a budget for the grant proposal according to guidelines.

In addition to the proposal itself, develop an extended literature review and synthesis in the topic area.

Resource:
http://www.sfu.ca/ors/writing.html
http://med.ubc.ca/research/gad/grant-writing-support/grantsmanship/
http://www.ssrc.org/workspace/images/crm/new_publication_3/%7B7a9cb4f4-815f-de11-bd80-001cc477ec70%7D.pdf

C. Evaluation framework proposal of a program for older adults

“Evaluation is to make an explicit judgment about the worth of all or part of a program by collecting evidence to determine if acceptable standards have been met” - Case, Andrews, and Werner (1988). Evaluation involves identifying purposes and audiences, creating appropriate designs, and interpreting data about a program, project, or policy. There are two principal types of program evaluation: 1) process evaluation - to determine program coverage, accountability, and efficiencies; and 2) outcome or impact evaluation – to determine whether a program has its desired effect on specific outcomes (Windsor, Clark, Boyd, & Goodman, 2004). Most evaluations employ multi-methods in order to assess the degree to which a program is efficient and effective. This involves systematically gathering and analyzing evidence about the processes and impacts of a program.

Patton (2002) describes three primary uses of evaluation: a) to judge merit or worth of program (“summative evaluation”), b) to improve programs (“formative evaluation”), or c) to generate knowledge. Students may also conduct a meta-evaluation or meta-analysis of completed published evaluations of a similar type of program in order to fulfill this requirement. In this capstone project option, you are expected to develop an evaluation framework to study the process and/or outcomes of an aging-related program or service. Program evaluation results can allow program leaders to be more effective in improving programs, fine-tune the program for increasing its efficacy, making decisions about the future of programs, and identifying relationships between their activities and the outcomes of their work. The steps to consider for this capstone option may include:

- Identify the purpose of the evaluation
- A review of pertinent literature (theoretical, conceptual, research-oriented)
- Identify the various steps in the evaluation plan. These may include: review of program goals, identification of stakeholders, description and rationale for all data-collection methods, creation of data-collection instruments, data collection, analysis of data, preparation of reports for stakeholders.
- Develop an evaluation plan that addresses the primary purpose identified at the outset.
Students are expected to take GERO 802 or an equivalent course to learn the specifics of evaluation research.

Resource:

D. Critical analysis of policy in an area related to aging and older adults

Policy analysis generally refers to applied social and scientific research to design, implement, and/or evaluate existing policies, programs and other courses of action adopted or contemplated by governmental and non-governmental organizations. Policy analysis entails critical examination of the intended and unintended consequences of a policy. This is an important component in effective policy generation and implementation. This capstone project option could include the following activities:

- Identify a public policy area impacting older adults that would be appropriate for critical analysis
- Develop a theoretical approach and analytic framework for analysis
- Identify the level(s) of jurisdictions (e.g., local government, provincial, federal, international) to be included in this analysis
- Compare countries, provinces or other jurisdictions with differences in the selected policy domain in order to assess its effect.
- Identify the evaluation criteria linked with the analytic framework
- Critically analyze the selected policy and present findings based on the evaluation criteria.


General resources on writing: