General Guidelines for Graduate Level Thesis for MMU M.S. in Counseling Program

- APA Publication Guide (6th ed.) – All formatting for the body of paper, tables, figures and references should follow this style.
- Different types of research that may be conducted:
  - The study may be a replication with extension or with a different (with proper acknowledgement) of a published study;
  - The study may involve developing a test or survey with field-testing;
  - The scope of the study may be a pilot study; or
  - Studies whose results are primarily useable in a single setting would be acceptable.

Requirements of the Thesis Proposal:

- introductory chapter (introduction; problem statement; rationale, purpose, and significance of study; and research questions, objectives or hypotheses);
- a second chapter reviewing and analyzing the literature (review of literature and relevant research; critical analysis of literature and research; and summary);
- and a final chapter outlining the proposed study (research design; subject selection; methodology; and recommended data analysis) or providing a summary and discussion (conclusions, implications, recommendations and directions for further research).

Example Thesis Outline and Content Guidelines

(each subheading in example outline is to explain what should be mentioned in your paper, these are not necessarily subheadings that need to be within the paper)

- Title Page
- Copyright Page
- Signature Page
- Abstract: One paragraph summary, a maximum of 150 words, of your thesis that includes research questions or purpose of project, theoretical rationale, methodology (type of data collected and kind of analysis or evaluation carried out), findings, and conclusions.
- Dedication (optional)
- Acknowledgements (optional)
- Table of Contents
- List of Figures (if any)
- List of Tables (if any)
Chapter I

Introduction

Introduction (do not use a heading for this section)

1. Describe the current state of the problem or issue or topic
2. Provide information that helps the reader understand the context for your research problem

Statement of the Problem

1. Discuss the importance of the study. Present the background or history of the problem
2. Identify the general "problem" that your research addresses

Purpose of the Research

1. Identify the specific purpose of the research study
2. Explain what you intend to accomplish with your study
3. This section should transition from the problem statement to the research questions

Research Question(s)

1. State the specific research question(s) (and hypothesis if applicable)
2. The question or project should logically flow from the problem or issue and purpose you have described in the previous sections

Limitations

1. Describe those things over which you have no control that may bias or skew the results

Assumptions

1. State beliefs/underpinnings for your work that are not tested in your study operational definition of terms
2. List working definitions/quotes/paraphrases from an expert for important technical terms. Include a citation for every definition

Implications

1. Describe the possible significance of the outcome(s) of your study (on the immediate setting and more broadly)
Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction (no heading)

1. Briefly re-state the problem, purpose of study and research question(s)

Overview of Literature Review

1. Summarize the information presented in the rest of the chapter

Theoretical Rationale

1. Present theoretical framework(s) that provide reasons for doing the study

Review of Related Research

1. Present a carefully organized account of empirical research relevant to your study
2. Can be organized by topic/construct, chronologically, general to specific
3. Include reasons why studies are relevant, either throughout the section or in a summary paragraph

Conclusions

1. Highlight the most important ideas/research presented in the chapter and relate to your study

Chapter III

Method

Introduction (no heading)

1. Briefly re-state the problem, purpose of study and research question(s)

Setting

1. Describe where the study took place (do not use actual names of schools, etc.)

Participants

1. Describe the population from which the sample is gathered
2. State how participants/sample were selected
3. Describe the participants, give demographic and other important information
   a. (e.g., gender, age range and median, ethnicity, race, SES, etc.)

Design

1. State type of study: qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods
2. State specific research design (case study, quasi-experimental, etc.)
3. If appropriate, describe variables

Measurements/Instruments

1. Describe tests, measurements or instruments used to gather data
2. Give sample items either in this chapter (if brief) or an Appendix
3. If using an existing test, include in-text citation (and reference) and include information on validity and reliability
4. If using a researcher-created instrument, describe how it was created, piloted and tested for validity and reliability

Procedure

1. Describe steps taken to carry out the research project as a whole

Data Collection

1. Describe specifically how data were collected (how was questionnaire distributed, test administered, interviews carried out, etc.)

Data Analysis

1. For quantitative study, state the statistical analysis carried out (include name of test, p-level, etc.)

2. For qualitative study, specifically describe how data were analyzed (constant comparison, data reduction, coding, etc.)

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction (no heading)

1. Briefly re-state the problem, purpose of study and research question(s) Briefly restate research design and how the results were analyzed

Results (use as many headings/subheadings as needed)

1. For quantitative study:
   a. Present descriptive statistics and/or raw data first (put extensive raw data in an Appendix, or omit)

   b. Present inferential statistics, if applicable

   c. Include the “n” (number of participants), degrees of freedom, and p-value for any statistic that is calculated (t-value, chi-square, r, etc).

   d. Use tables and graphs; any information presented in a table, figure or graph should also be described in the text as well
e. After giving each quantitative/statistical result, re-state result in terms of how it answers your research question

*Note: Do not interpret or discuss the results in this chapter; simply state them clearly.

2. For qualitative study:
   a. Qualitative results are usually presented as themes or patterns, supported with verbatim segments of raw data (interviews, video transcripts, etc.)
   b. Each qualitative method has its own way of presenting results; consult with your chair and look at similar research studies for guidance
   c. A certain amount of interpretation of qualitative results is acceptable, but should only apply to the actual data (no implications, generalizations, etc.)

Chapter V

Conclusion

Introduction (no heading)

1. Summarize the purpose of the study and restate the research questions
2. Summarize your research methods

Major Findings (use as many headings/subheadings as necessary)

1. Describe, interpret and evaluate major findings of the research
2. For any surprising findings, indicate possible reasons for the result
3. Reasons may have to do with all aspects of your design, procedure, nature of participants/respondents, and the nature of the selected measurements

Organize your discussion using a logical outline that fits the way you organized your introduction, specifically in relation to each hypothesis

For each main finding:

1. Indicate the possible reasons why you did or did not find the pattern in your data that you had hypothesized or expected
2. Assess the meaning of your results through evaluation and interpretation
3. Compare each main finding with the trends you found in the literature. If your finding is different, explain what may account for that difference (e.g., between the method and results of your study and those of another)
4. Explain the limitations of your study (e.g., factors affecting internal validity and external validity). Limitations may include factors related to your method and sample, such as cultural/ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, applicability, and length of time.
Implications and Recommendations

1. Include the implications, recommendations and applications of your findings for your site, schools and/or the field of counseling, in general

Future Research

1. Suggest future research to extend, improve upon, or replicate your findings

Conclusions.

1. Draw conclusions from your results that relate directly to your hypotheses
2. Determine the significance of your study and how you addressed the problem raised in the introduction
3. Support the conclusions by making connections with studies in the review of the literature
4. Address what knowledge your study contributes to the field. Be sure that any generalizations are sound and justified

References

1. List only references cited in the document, and be sure that every source cited in the document has an entry in References

Appendices

1. Include important material used in the study such as data collection tools or intervention materials (if relevant)