

Thesis Proposal Guidelines
Center for Justice and Peacebuilding (CJP)
Eastern Mennonite University (EMU)

The following guidelines are intended to assist you in preparing a proposal to do a master's thesis (in lieu of a practicum). Note that instead of a Practicum Advisor and a Practicum Supervisor, you will be required to identify two faculty members who can together serve as your "thesis advisors" as well as two to three additional faculty, one of whom may be external, who will serve as your thesis committee. The following description of the thesis option comes from CJP's "Practicum Packet."

CJP full-time residential students are able to petition the Academic Committee for an exception to the general rule that all students will do a Practicum. Students will be vetted based on their experience and the quality of their proposal. A maximum of 2 persons per year will be granted this thesis option. This option is normally available only for those students planning on doing their practicum/thesis in the spring of their second year, and for those that will be in residence. An exception to these guidelines will be considered for a student who has proven themselves to be both an excellent writer and a self-initiator. A student can make the case to write from a distance or on an alternate time table if they have:

- *Demonstrated capacity (at CJP) to complete complex research and writing projects in a timely manner.*
- *Adequate access to Internet and technology to support the process.*
- *Strong writing and editing skills so that there is limited or no need for writing support.*

Applicants for a thesis option should identify their area of focus by the end of their second semester, and should select seminar courses and electives in their third semester so that they are completing a robust literature review prior to the thesis semester. In addition to the required Research Methods course, they are encouraged to take an applied research course so they have experience managing and working on a significant research project.

Once granted permission to do a thesis in lieu of a practicum the student would:

- *Formally ask two professors to serve as their thesis advisors (the student should have preliminary conversations with faculty members to gauge their interest).*
- *Research and write a publishable master's level thesis (For example, 40-50 pages for 6 credits)*
- *Present the thesis (both a thesis defense and capstone to broader CJP and EMU community).*
- *Submit thesis to be bound and placed in the EMU library collection.*

The Thesis Coordinator will oversee the process and coordinate the thesis defense (see the "Guidelines for the Thesis Defense"). The Practicum Coordinator will oversee the scheduling and logistics of the capstone presentation and will also work with the student to have their thesis added to the library collection.

If you are interested in writing a thesis rather than completing a practicum, you will need to talk with your Academic Adviser about this option early in your studies at CJP. Your Academic Adviser will work with you to prepare a “Concept Note*” to be submitted to the Academic Committee regarding your interest in writing a thesis.

- Concept Note regarding intent to write a thesis submitted to the Academic Committee prior to its October meeting (or earlier if possible – even spring before). If approval is granted, the student will proceed to develop a research proposal to be approved by the thesis advisors.
- The student should also be pursuing practicum placement options in the event that they are not granted the option of pursuing a thesis – if they wait to do concept note until October!
- Full research proposal submitted to the thesis advisors for final approval and also need IRB approval before proceeding (deadline for submission depends on when student wants to begin)

*The Concept Note must include your proposed Topic, your Research Question or Purpose, a preliminary proposal regarding your Population and Research Methods, and a completed draft IRB application if needed (1-2 pages in length).

Concept note: please complete the following information and submit it to the Academic Program Coordinator to submit to the Academic Committee.

1. **Name:**
2. **Thesis Advisors:**
3. **Thesis Committee members:**
4. **Academic Advisor:**
5. **Proposed Topic:**
6. **Research Question or Purpose:**
7. **Preliminary Proposal regarding your Population and Research Methods:**
8. **What is your reason for desiring to do a thesis in lieu of a practicum?**
9. **Who do you see as the primary audience for your research, once published?**
10. **Where will you be conducting your research?**
11. **Credits for Thesis (6-9):**
12. **Semester registering for Thesis:**
13. **Beginning date:**
14. **Ending date:**

15. Will you be using human subjects in your research? Yes ____ No ____

16. If yes, have you received approval from the Institutional Review Board/IRB?

- a. Yes ____ No ____ (See <http://www.emu.edu/irb/> for more details and include a copy of your IRB application)

17. Additional Comments:

Once you have identified your thesis advisors, you will work with them to prepare a research proposal which will describe the topic you intend to study and demonstrate that you have begun to identify significant literature about your topic. You will be asked to prepare a 12 to 15 page research proposal that will include the following components.

1. Topic and Definitions of Key Terms

Briefly state the topic that you propose to research and indicate why this topic interests you. Give definitions of any terms in your topic that may not be immediately clear to the reader.

2. Literature Review

Provide a 5 to 10 page summary of the significant literature you have reviewed regarding the proposed topic. Indicate how your review of the literature informed your thinking about your topic, including a discussion of the gaps in the existing literature.

3. Research Question(s)/Purpose

In light of your interest in the topic and your review of the relevant literature, state your current research question(s).

4. Population and Selection Criteria

Indicate the individuals, groups or organizations that you propose to focus on to answer your research question(s). Indicate both the reason(s) that you chose this specific population, as well as the criteria you propose to select or sample members from this population.

5. Research Methods

Identify the process (method) that you will use to survey, interview, observe, or in other ways receive information from or about the selected members of your population. Address at least the following components:

- a. How you will approach the selected members of the population.
- b. How you will provide opportunities for potential participants to provide informed consent to their participation (if your population consists of human participants).
- c. What you will do with the data you gather (how it will be analyzed).
- d. Challenges you anticipate to recruiting participants or gathering and analyzing the data, including any ethical challenges that you envision while conducting the research.

6. Attachments

Attached to your final paper should be both a list of the “References” you cite in your Literature Review section, as well as a copy of the “Instrument” you will use for the final research, including “Informed Consent” language.