Alternative to the Comprehensive Exam
The Research Publication Option

This option will be in lieu of taking the Comprehensive Exam. The goal of this option is to tie the student’s culminating experience in with the School’s Evidence Based Practice Model to the analysis and dissemination of research information.

This approach will be modeled after the professional publication process. The end outcome will be a research driven publication written by the student which will be reviewed and found as “acceptable” by 2 of 3 Review Board Members.

The student will identify a faculty member who has agreed to serve as Mentor. The Mentor will have the same role as a thesis chair. When the Mentor is satisfied with the publication and deems it ready for review, the Mentor will select 3 Review Board Members from the tenure/tenure-track faculty based upon research expertise within the University, although 2 of 3 shall be from Social Work. The 3 reviews will be returned to the Mentor who will work with the student to incorporate changes ad revisions based upon reviewer feedback. If revisions are required, the student will resubmit for a second review with the Review Board. This review will be blind to the student and mentor. The mentor will assist the student to incorporate feedback from the Review Board.

Students will be expected to have earned a 90% or higher in both SW 690 and SW 610 to be eligible for the option. Students will be given a packet that includes sample journal requirements, sample journal feedback, journal review criteria and examples of acceptance rates.

In order to adhere to the recommended Timeline below, students are strongly encouraged to conduct either a meta-analysis or a secondary data analysis. Original data collection will be considered only under unique circumstances and considered individually.

CONCEPT PAPER PACKET

Students will complete a concept paper describing the proposed study as early as possible in their program. For full-time students this paper would typically be completed in the second semester of the first year. Part-time students would submit the paper prior to the start of their full-time year. Advanced standing students should aim to complete the paper early in the first semester.

The Concept Paper Packet will include:

1. A Cover Sheet that declares this option as a requested choice.
2. A 5-10 page literature review (reviewing all substantive literature published in the last years on the topic including peer-reviewed journal articles and key seminal pieces that are historically relevant).
3. A specific Research Question that is a natural conclusion of the literature reviewed.
4. An identified dataset that will be utilized for analyses to answer the Research Question.
5. A general data analysis plan.
6. A Mentor identified with signature.
7. A list of at least 3 target journals that will be potentially used for the submission.

It is suggested that this packet include the IRB format.

Once the Mentor has approved the Concept Paper Packet, a copy will submitted to the Associate Director.

Students are strongly encouraged to request an advisory review of the concept packet by the Research Committee. The Chair of the Research Committee will select three faculty members to evaluate the packet. The results of the evaluation are advisory. However, students are encouraged to incorporate the feedback from the reviewers as they prepare their manuscript.

**TIMELINE**

The following are general guidelines and timeline based on a two-year program of study. Students following a one, three or four year program of study should adjust the timeline accordingly.

Students are encouraged to enroll in SWORK 797 Research (in lieu of SW791 for their Advanced Research requirement or in lieu of one of their two elective requirements). The enrollment may be done as an Independent Study and the specific time of enrollment should be determined in conjunction with the guidelines below and the Mentor’s judgment. The Mentor will fulfill the requirements with the student for the SW797 course, but the Associate Director will be the instructor of record.

**Fall, 1st year**, students will be introduced to the Research Publication Option in SW690. In that class they will also learn how to critically review research literature and will be introduced to the topic of secondary data analysis. The critical literature review in this class might be geared toward developing a research question for this option.

**Spring, 1st year**, students will take SW610. In this class they will learn how to identify variables, create and use datasets and learn basic statistics -- all needed to help develop and answer a research question.

**Summer After 1st Year**: During the intervening summer, students will be expected to identify a possible mentor and put together their Concept Paper Packet. With the concurrence of the mentor, this is a good time to submit the packet to the Research Committee for an advisory review.

**Fall, 2nd year**: Students will use this semester to clean their data, create new variables, conduct data analyses, create tables of data as per journal guidelines, and begin writing.
**Spring, 2nd year:** A full draft of the manuscript will be completed. The Mentor will approve the manuscript by early March if the student wishes to ensure that he/she remains on track for spring graduation. Once the Mentor’s approval is secured, a Review Board made up of three tenure/tenure-track faculty members will be given 2 weeks to conduct a blind review of the student’s work. Should revisions be necessary, the student will have one month or until May 1st to make revisions and resubmit to the Review Board for a second review to ensure that he/she remains on track for spring graduation.

A student must receive a rating of “acceptable” by 2 of the 3 Members in order to pass the comprehensive examination using this option.

A student may change to the regular Comprehensive Exam Option at any time until they have chosen to submit the paper for a second review. After they decide to submit a second draft to the Review Board, they may not “opt out” of the Research Publication Option.

Not following the Timeline may result in a delayed graduation date.

A form will be created for the Mentor to fill out and return to the Associate Director. This form will include: the Mentor’s name, student’s name, title of the paper, a copy of the signature page from the 3 reviewers indicating the acceptability of the paper and the passing of the student. Lastly, a copy of the final paper will be submitted with this form and signatures.

**AUTHORSHIP**

The student will be first author on a publication resulting from this Option. The Mentor will be second author. Others may be part of the authorship if they are Investigators of the project’s resultant dataset. If the student discontinues working on the paper for three months after graduation, the Mentor may have the option of moving the paper forward toward publication and taking lead authorship. Authorship shall be discussed at the beginning of this project. An authorship form, as the one used for thesis work, should be filled out and signed by student and Mentor.

Note: Each completed student project under this alternative or the thesis alternative will count as one toward the six needed for 3 WTU release contingent upon available resources.