

## I - The Project

**Note: GRN 598, (6 hours) will be considered a full-time course for financial aid and other purposes.**

The culminating experience in the Master of Science in Applied Gerontology degree program is **GRN 598: Final Project in Gerontology**. The final project may take the form of scholarly research or an applied project that is of interest to professionals in the aging workforce. The student will design a final master's degree project in consultation with a committee that includes two members of the gerontology program faculty and one professional drawn from the world of business, government, and/or non-profit organizations that serve older adult clients. In many instances, the professional will have been involved with the student's practicum experience. For example, a student may design a research study to investigate the impact of natural disasters on the psychosocial well-being of older adults in consultation with county emergency management personnel. In all cases, the final project will include at least the following sections:

- 1) Statement of the problem
  - a) Rationale for study
  - b) Explain why this study should be of interest to gerontologists
- 2) Relevant Literature Review
  - a) Theories in gerontology
  - b) Previous research on this issue
- 3) Study methods
  - a) Detailed description of IRB approval
  - b) Detailed study design, including sampling procedures and methods of data analysis (Both qualitative and quantitative analyses are acceptable as is a study analyzing the impact of a particular social policy on older adults)
  - c) Discussion of feasibility
- 4) Results
- 5) Implications
  - a) Meaning of research findings
  - b) Discussion of findings in relation to existing literature
- 6) Discussion of limitations and suggestions for further research

Some students will select a final project based on a topic or idea discovered in an earlier gerontology course. Many students will begin collecting data for their projects while enrolled in their GRN 590 (Gerontology Practicum).

The required length of the final project should be determined to a large extent by the nature of the topic itself as well as matters of focus, format, and relevant disciplinary conventions. In most instances, students will find they need two semesters to complete their master's projects. Since GRN 598 carries six hours of credit, as do thesis courses in other Master's programs, as a "general rule of thumb," the amount of time invested in researching and drafting the final project should be equivalent. With this in mind, final projects should range from 40 to 140 pages including tables, appendices, and references.

## II - Getting Started

Minimally, you must have completed the 21 hour core requirements in gerontology in order to sign up for GRN 598. Most students will also have completed their nine hours in gerontology elective courses. Some students may register for GRN 598 concurrently with their second gerontology practicum. The course is intended to be the final course taken in the master of science program. Enrollment in GRN 598 alone is considered a full-time commitment for financial aid purposes thereby enabling students to concentrate exclusively on the final project during their final semester. You may, of course, discover a final project topic early on during your course of study and thus may lay the primary groundwork for your final project before you have completed 21 hours in the program. Such an early commitment, however, may require you to revise your work as you gain more knowledge of gerontology.

**Registration** -- Registration for GRN 598 is done through SeaNet when registration is open for the relevant semester or summer session. Most students will receive a grade of "I" in the semester in which they enroll as in most instances, it will take two semesters to complete the project. To remove the "Incomplete" and complete the final project, you will register, through the Graduate School Office, in GRC 600, a final project continuation course. GRC 600 will not be available for registration through SeaNet-you must contact the Graduate School Office to register for this course. GRC 600 meets the graduate school requirement of continuous enrollment. The course will be charged at the rate consistent with one credit hour of extension in-state or out-of-state tuition and fees. Continuous Registration hours do not count towards GRN degree requirements but are considered as enrolled hours (full time) for financial aid purposes. **Students may enroll in the GRC 600 course three times without special permission. For the fourth time (and beyond), students must have the special permission of the graduate school.**

### III - Final Project Committee

Once you have identified a potential final project topic, you will need to form a final project committee, consisting of a two members of the gerontology graduate faculty and a professional in the gerontology work force. Ideally, your final project director will have knowledge of or research expertise in the area of your proposed topic. The other academic member of your committee will provide relevant editing and suggestions regarding research literature, focus, format, supporting development, logical argument, organization, etc. The work force professional will provide input with regard to service concerns and applications. You and your project director will determine the exact nature of your working arrangement with your committee.

Note: Once you have formalized the makeup of the final project committee by the submission of the final project proposal with its signed title sheet, you cannot change the project director or reader(s) without the approval of the GRN Program Director.

### IV - Final Project Proposal

Once you have formed your committee, you will need to complete a final project proposal, and, in most instances, this will include completion of forms required for review by the UNC Wilmington Institutional Review Board Committee (IRB) (<http://www.uncw.edu/orssp/conduct-human.html>). In your proposal, you should address the following:

1. an explanation of your topic and why it should be of interest to gerontologists
2. a preliminary annotated bibliography
3. a brief discussion of relevant theory and proposed methods
4. an assessment of the feasibility with regard to resources needed to complete your project
5. a timeline to ensure the completion of the project

In preparing your proposal, you should feel free to consult with your final project director in drafting your proposal, particularly regarding feasibility and project management and a calendar of deadlines.

Once your committee has approved your proposal, they will need to sign off on it. The last page of your proposal should include the names of all committee members and a signature line and date for each. You will then submit your proposal to the GRN program director for final approval. All approved proposals are stored in student files in the gerontology program office.

If the subject of a final project is changed, or if the make-up of the final project committee is changed, a new project proposal, appropriately signed by your committee, reflecting the new subject or membership must be submitted to the GRN Program Director for approval.

Final project proposals shall be submitted to the project director (and the GRN program director) no later than the 4<sup>th</sup> week in the semester in which you register for GRN 598.

### VI - Final Project Defense

#### **Approval:**

In essence, there are two requirements for completion of your final project, a written document and an oral defense. The written document must be completed, reviewed, and approved before you can move on to the oral defense.

Once your final project committee members agree that you are ready to defend your final project, you must submit a review copy, **complete with a signed title page**, of your final project to the director of the GRN Program. This review copy must be submitted **no later than two weeks before close-of-business (COB) on the last day of classes** in the semester in which you plan to graduate. This copy will be checked to ensure that you have followed the guidelines of the graduate school for formatting theses. Assuming you have followed the guidelines, you will then defend your final project.

#### **The Room:**

It is your job to remind your project director to schedule a room for your oral defense. Each request must specify the type of room desired, e.g., seminar, classroom, or a computer-equipped "smart" room. When a room has been assigned, the HAHS Program Assistant will notify you and your committee and then post the time, place and title of your final project

defense on the GRN/HAS program web-site. In addition, an email to GRN faculty, relevant professionals, gerontology students, and alumni will be sent announcing and inviting them to the final project defense.

### **The Defense:**

The formal academic defense is a tradition dating back to the medieval European university when doctoral candidates were required "to defend" their dissertations and/or their knowledge in a chosen area of specialization before an assembled review board. The final project defense format follows:

1. the project director's introduction of the candidate for the MS in Applied Gerontology degree
2. the candidate's presentation of his or her final project (generally, no longer than thirty minutes in length), during which the candidate should provide an overview of the project (background information, the nature and significance of the topic, methodology, general line of development, important discoveries/conclusions) and may choose to read directly from various sections of the final project
3. the candidate's responses to questions raised by the final project committee
4. the candidate's responses to questions raised by members of the audience
5. adjournment of the committee to determine whether the defense is "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory"
6. notification of the candidate of the committee's decision
7. the committee signs the three "binding" copies

As the defending student, you must:

- Bring 3 copies of your properly formatted final project to the defense on cotton paper suitable for binding. See Section VII "Binding Copies" below for details concerning the paper.
- Have your title pages signed by your committee members (i.e., director and reader(s)) at the defense, but after being notified of the committee's decision.
- Submit these 3 signed copies to the director of the GRN Program no later than the close of business on the last day of classes in the semester in which you plan to graduate.
- **Submission of the three copies for binding and archival in Randall Library is mandatory. If you do not submit these copies, you will not graduate until you have submitted them.**

On average, final project defenses "run" between 45 to 60 minutes. Since a student shall not be allowed to defend a final project without the committee's approval, the committee's decision, as a matter of course, should be a unanimous "pass" (thereby mitigating a good deal of stress that might otherwise attach to the defense process). Following your defense, your project director shall notify the GRN Program Director of the committee's decision within two business days.

For fall and spring semesters, the last day in which a final project defense can be offered will be the "Reading Day" for that semester. Final project defenses are open to family, friends, GRN students, and the community.

Although your final project defense is an important milestone in the completion of the GRN capstone experience, you should keep the final project itself in the forefront of your priorities. If your project is acceptable, you will have no problem defending it.

## **VII - Final Copies**

### **Official Copies:**

There are four "official" final copies. They are the:

- **Review Copy (1):**
  - The review copy need not meet the more stringent paper requirements of the copies that will be submitted for binding, but must include a title page signed by the committee.
  - In its content, the review copy must be very close to the smooth and final version (only very minor grammatical or structural changes pending) of your final project.
  - When submitted to the GRN Program Director for review, it must meet the formatting requirements of the graduate school.
  - Once approved by the GRN Program Director with all required corrections and revisions made, the review copy will be the "master" copy for the binding copies.
- **Binding Copies (3):**
  - Once the review copy has been approved by the GRN Program Director and all corrections have been made, you must print three copies of the "master" copy of your final project on white, 8.5 x 11",

20 or 24 lb., 100% cotton bond paper. This paper is available in office supply stores and in the Campus Bookstore. Printing costs will be borne by the student. While you may prefer to engage the services of a commercial printing agency, many students have found Campus Printing Services a convenient and economical option.

- If not signed at the time of your final project defense, arrange for your committee members to sign off on your title pages (black ink required).
- Submit the three binding copies of your final project to the GRN Program Director, who will then make the necessary binding arrangements. Once your three copies are returned from the bindery, two copies will be archived in Randall Library and one copy will be maintained in the GRN program office.. Randall Library will cover any binding expenses.
- Binding copies must be delivered to the GRN Program Director by close of business on the last day of classes in the semester in which you plan to graduate.

### **Personal Copies:**

Personal bound copies of your final project may be ordered using "The HF Group's" website at <http://www.thesisondemand.com/>. Several binding options are offered including the format used for all "official" UNCW binding. This website assumes that you will be able to forward an Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) file to the company. If this is not the case, you should contact the company using the below provided contact information and obtain instructions as to how to proceed. If you are providing a printed copy, you need not use 20 or 24 lb., 100% cotton bond paper as is required for official copies, nor would you need to secure your committee members' signatures on your title pages, the official format for which could be modified accordingly.

The HF Group  
PO Box 640  
Browns Summit, NC 27214  
Tel: 800.444.7534  
Fax: 336.931.0711

**NOTE:** This will be a personal binding request paid for by the requesting student. Do **not** have the bound copy forwarded to Randall Library. The bound copy should be sent to your personal address or, if so desired, to the Graduate Liberal Studies program for later delivery.

### **Other Considerations:**

If you receive an incomplete for GRN 598 and foresee or encounter complications the following semester that would prevent the completion of your final project, you should contact your academic advisor and arrange a leave of absence. Should you take a leave of absence, you will need to complete a form available in the graduate school office in order to identify the semester you plan to return. Upon return, you would need to sign up for GRC 600 in that semester to reinstate your active enrollment status.

A final reminder that starting with your original semester of matriculation, you have five years, including any accrued leave of absence, to complete degree requirements, including the successful completion and defense of your final project. When extenuating circumstances warrant and extension is requested, the degree time limit may be extended to six years.

Official graduate school policy related to continuing enrollment, leave of absence, and degree time limits is covered in the Graduate Catalogue.