

# **THESIS GUIDELINES**

**GRADUATE NURSING PROGRAM, MS(N)  
COLLEGE OF HEALTH & HUMAN SCIENCES  
SCHOOL OF NURSING  
WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY  
CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA**

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## **THESIS PROCEDURES**

MS(N) students are required to complete either a thesis or a research project in order to meet the program's research requirement and to be eligible for graduation. A thesis provides evidence that the graduate student has performed worthwhile research in his or her profession. In the School of Nursing, thesis research is expected to address a problem relevant to nursing. The procedures outlined below are intended to assist students in the preparation of a thesis that is consistent with the excellence in scholarship expected of a graduate of the Master of Science (Nursing) program.

A thesis may consist of the development of a research instrument, replication of another study with a different population, a new statistical analysis of an existing data set, or conducting a pilot study for a larger or more complex study to be conducted at a later time.

The product of the study is a formal, bound book or thesis bearing the student's name and the signatures of the faculty members on the thesis committee. It is permanently housed in the library as well as the School of Nursing, and is listed in various national and international abstract services. It is defended in traditional thesis defense. The student should obtain a copy of the WCU Graduate Thesis Guide: 7th Edition available at <http://www.wcu.edu/1169.asp>

### **1. Selection of Thesis Committee**

The thesis is conducted under the direction of a Thesis Committee, consisting of a Chair and two members. This committee helps the student ensure that the content, conduct, and form of the thesis are acceptable to the profession of nursing, the School of Nursing, and the Graduate School of the University. The student cannot graduate without the Committee's approval of the thesis. The student has the privilege - and the responsibility - for selecting a Committee relevant to his or her research needs.

#### **Thesis Committee Chair**

The student first selects the Chair of the Committee. The Chair must be a doctorally-prepared member of the faculty of the School of Nursing and on the Graduate Faculty of the University. The student will work most closely with the Chair; therefore, a personal as well as a professional "fit" is beneficial. The student's academic peers, academic advisor, or other faculty member may help guide the student to an appropriate person who might be willing to serve as Chair. A list of faculty research interests is posted on the MS(N) Homeplace and is given to each student in NSG 511 Research for Advanced Practice Nursing. The student will develop a Preliminary Thesis/Project Proposal (Appendix A) and take this to the first meeting with the potential chair of the committee.

In asking a faculty member to be a Thesis Committee Chair, it is helpful for the student to understand that, from the faculty point of view, the job of the Chair is intensely time consuming and requires considerable expertise in the area being researched. Therefore, faculty members may decline a request to serve on a committee because they cannot offer the student the time or the expertise that is needed.

The student works with the Chair in developing or refining a topic for the thesis. The nature of the thesis topic will help determine the composition of the remainder of the Thesis Committee. Once a student has selected a Project Chair, the student will meet with the chair to:

- a. Discuss and agree on the nature of the project or study
- b. Negotiate a timeline of activities to be completed
- c. Identify additional committee members the student might approach
- d. Outline role responsibilities for all committee members once full committee is formed. Appendix F of this document (Timeline) may be used for this purpose if desired.

### **Members (2) of Thesis Committee**

In consultation with the Chair, the student then selects the other two Committee members. Both must hold appointments on the Graduate Faculty of the University; at least one must be on the School of Nursing faculty. One member of the committee must be in the same professional discipline as the student's program track.

In some instances, the student's research topic requires the expertise of a professional who is not eligible for membership on the Thesis Committee. The student should feel free to seek consultation from such professionals as approved by the Thesis Chair. The Thesis Committee retains the official responsibility for judging the merit of the student's thesis and ensuring that it adheres to the requirements of the University.

### **2. Approval of Membership on Thesis Committee and Proposal by School of Nursing and Graduate School**

The student next develops an abstract to submit to the graduate school according to the WCU Graduate School *Guide to Preparing Graduate Theses, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed*, p. 3-4.

It is the student's responsibility to:

- Obtain all signatures on the appropriate approval forms (Preliminary Thesis/Project Proposal (Appendix A), Abstract Cover Sheet, Appendix B ) and on the Dissemination Activity Agreement (Appendix C).

After your thesis director and committee decide your abstract is complete, you should submit one copy with signed abstract cover sheet to the Graduate School *no later than **four weeks** prior to the end of the semester (refer to the Academic Calendar for specific deadlines)*. The *Abstract Cover Sheet* can be downloaded from the Graduate School website at <http://www.wcu.edu/1169.asp>

Your director will ensure that the abstract is officially submitted for approval and signed by your thesis director, all committee members, your department's graduate director, the head of your department, and the Dean of Graduate School and Research. You will be notified when your abstract has been approved and receive a signed copy for your records. You may only *register for thesis credit* for the following semester *AFTER* your abstract has been approved.

- Student ensures that the following persons have a copy of approvals:  
Thesis Committee Chair  
MS(N) Program Administrator (for student file)

### **3. Changes in Membership on Thesis Committee**

In some cases it is necessary or advisable for the student to select a different Chair or otherwise change the membership of the Committee. It is the student's responsibility to notify all members of any changes in Committee membership. If any changes are made in Committee membership, a new approval form for Membership on the Thesis Committee must be signed (by ALL members of the committee, not just the new member) and submitted as described above. The most current approval form serves as the official record. Changes in the composition of the Committee may involve delays because the new member(s) must orient themselves to the student's research, and their perspectives may differ from those of the former committee member(s). To avoid changes due to faculty resignation or retirement, the student is urged to complete the thesis in a timely manner. In some cases, the student may elect to change the Committee membership because of difficulties within the Committee; the student should carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of such a change, and choose the route that will be most beneficial for the completion of his or her degree requirements and professional goals.

### **4. Thesis Registration**

You may only *register for thesis credit* (NSG 699) for the following semester *AFTER* your proposal has been approved by the graduate school.

The student must enroll in 2 credits of NSG 699 the first term after approval by the graduate school and remain continuously enrolled for the course for a minimum of 3 credits and a maximum of 6 credits. Students who have not completed the Thesis after registering for the first 3 credits must continue to register for NSG 699 for one credit each succeeding semester. The student may not graduate until the thesis is complete, even if more than 3 credits have been taken. The chair will enter grades for NSG 699 as IP (in progress) until the project is completed, and then change grades to S/U. No I (incomplete) will be given for thesis work.

### **5. Development of Thesis Abstract**

In the abstract development stage, the student will work closely with the Chair. At this stage, the degree of involvement of the other Committee members may vary. The student, in consultation with the Committee Chair should clarify the roles of the Committee members early in the proposal development stage. A timeline agreement such as Appendix F can be extremely helpful at this stage.

Suggestions for writing the thesis abstract are provided in the Graduate Thesis Guide: 7th Edition. These guidelines may be modified by the student's Chair as appropriate for the student's topic. Therefore, the student should seek clarification from the Chair regarding the content and organization of the written abstract.

The School of Nursing requires that the format specified in the style manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. be used for presentation of tables and references.

The student's thesis abstract must be approved by all members of the Thesis Committee prior to submission to the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and before seeking formal approval to conduct the research in an outside agency (e.g., a hospital or other setting in which you plan to conduct the research). The method of obtaining Thesis Committee approval may vary from Committee to Committee. The student should ascertain from the Committee Chair the method to be used.

After all members of the Committee have had the opportunity to review and edit the abstract, the Chair will call a meeting of the full Committee. It is understood that the meeting will be scheduled AFTER the Committee has agreed in principle that the proposal meets their requirements.

After your thesis chair and committee decide your abstract is complete, you should submit a final copy to your chair *no later than four weeks prior to the end of the semester.*

You will also need a Thesis Abstract Form. This form can be downloaded from the Graduate School website at <http://www.wcu.edu/1169.asp>. Be sure you download the right form for your degree and type of thesis. Complete this form and put one copy on top of your abstract.

Your chair will ensure that the abstract is officially submitted for approval and signed by your thesis chair, all committee members, your School's graduate Administrator, the head of your School, and the Dean of Graduate School and Research.

You will be notified when your abstract has been approved and receive a signed copy for your records.

## **6. Protection of Human Subjects**

If the proposed study involves human or animal subjects, or the records of humans (e.g., medical charts, questionnaires, death records, computer databases for humans, etc.), the student must obtain the approval of the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If other agencies are involved, written approval by the IRB or designated official(s) of the involved agency/agencies (e.g., the hospital or other setting in which the research will be conducted) must also be obtained. While it is a good idea to seek informal approval from the agencies before you submit the final abstract to the Thesis Committee (so that you'll know whether it is feasible to conduct your research at the desired agency), you may NOT seek formal written approval from any agency until AFTER the Thesis Committee has approved the final thesis abstract. You may not seek University IRB approval until after Thesis Committee approval.

The guidelines and forms for the University IRB application are available from the WCU Office of Research or from their website located at <http://www.wcu.edu/6801.asp>. All forms, procedures and resources can be accessed from that page. Read and follow the instructions carefully. (Note that you should NOT submit your entire thesis proposal; follow the directions on the application.)

Note that ALL research involving human or animal subjects, including research that is "exempt" from full IRB review, must be approved by the IRB prior to collection of data. Human subjects, including pilot study subjects, may NOT be approached for the study before IRB approval is obtained. Plan appropriately for time. If several agencies in addition to the University's IRB are involved, the process can be very time-consuming. Each institution has its own rules and timelines regarding approval of research proposals. Approval is usually provided for one year. If data collection takes longer, the IRB application may need to be resubmitted.

## **7. Conduct of the Study**

The written abstract serves as the blueprint for conduct of the study. The student should keep the Thesis Committee Chair apprised of progress on the study. Since the proposal was the basis for approval of the study, all Committee members should be informed if the conduct of the study involves any changes from what was outlined in the proposal. If the changes are substantial, it may be necessary to notify the involved IRBs as well.

## **8. Development of the Final Thesis**

The final thesis must conform to the format of the WCU Graduate School. *Read Graduate Thesis Guide: 7th Edition Master's Thesis Guide before you begin writing your thesis.*

The Research Process Guidelines (Appendix E in this document) include suggestions for writing the final thesis. As with the proposal, these guidelines may be modified by the Thesis Committee Chair. However, the final thesis must adhere to the Graduate School *Guide to Preparing Graduate Theses* (available from the Graduate School). As discussed earlier, the official format for theses in the School of Nursing is APA style. The student is responsible for meeting all Graduate School deadlines as published in the Graduate School Catalog and Academic Calendar.

The student's thesis must be approved by all members of the Thesis Committee before the student can graduate. If committee members disagree or give conflicting advice, the Project Chair's decision is final. It is the student's responsibility to keep informed of deadlines for submission of paperwork relevant to graduation and to plan the time appropriately. *A general rule is that preparation of the thesis ALWAYS takes longer than anyone thinks it will.* In most cases, the Thesis Chair will have the major responsibility for advising the student in the preparation of the written thesis, and will review numerous drafts before the thesis is presented to other members of the Committee. The Chair generally will indicate to the student when the written product is ready for review by the other Committee members. If the other members have been kept informed of the status of the study, it is usual for them to require only one or two rounds of review. The student should allow approximately two weeks for each round of review. It is advisable to check the Committee members' schedules; sometimes a longer time period is required, particularly near the end of a semester, when faculty have numerous other obligations. Out-of-town travel by a Committee member will also prolong the review period. As with approval of the proposal, the method of indicating initial approval of the written thesis may vary from Committee to Committee. The student should ascertain from the Committee Chair the method to be used. In any case, in accordance with regulations of the Graduate School, an oral defense of the final thesis will be required.

In some cases, after all members of the Committee have had the opportunity to review and edit the thesis, the Chair will call a meeting of the full Committee. At this Committee meeting, the student may be asked to clarify any aspects that are still unclear. If substantial problems remain, the student will be asked to make the necessary revisions. If there are no remaining problems, the Committee members may indicate orally their intent to approve the thesis. If they indicate their intent to approve the thesis, the date and format of the oral defense will be established.

On some Committees in which all the Committee members have been working very closely with the student, the members may choose to forego a full Committee meeting prior to the oral defense. Instead, the Committee members may indicate through notes on the thesis draft that they intend to approve the final thesis (perhaps contingent upon certain changes). The student should retain a copy of such notes. If this less formal

method is used, the date and format of the oral defense will need to be established by phone, correspondence, or in person. In scheduling the date for the defense, students should bear in mind that the last several weeks of each semester are extremely busy times, and coordinating a meeting requires advance planning. The Thesis Chair will assist the student in scheduling the defense.

### **9. Oral Defense of Thesis**

The oral defense of the thesis is a presentation of the student's research, during which the student will be questioned about the conceptual framework, the methodology, the data analysis, the implications drawn from the results, and all other aspects of their research. The defense is scheduled AFTER the Committee members all have had an opportunity to review the completed thesis and have indicated that the thesis meets their approval. In some cases, with the consent of the student, the presentation may be opened to other interested persons. The Thesis Chair can provide guidance to the student in how to conduct the presentation. When the time, date, and format of the oral defense are established, the student may invite other faculty or students if desired. The Thesis Chair presides over the oral defense. After the student has successfully defended the thesis, the Thesis Approval must be signed and submitted to the Office of Dean of Graduate Study (see the sample Approval Page in the Graduate School Thesis Guide). The student is responsible for bringing the final thesis approval page (see Graduate School Guide to Preparing Graduate Theses, available from the Graduate School) to the defense and having this page signed in ink by all Committee members.

### **10. Copies of Thesis and Approval Pages**

At least four weeks before graduation, take a signed copy of the approval page (see *WCU Guide to Preparing Graduate Theses*), to the Graduate School office. Once you have defended successfully, your final, formatted thesis must be submitted electronically to the Graduate School via ProQuest/UMI at [www.etsadmin.com/wcu](http://www.etsadmin.com/wcu). When your final thesis is approved as above, the Dean of Graduate School and Research will sign your approval pages. Do NOT submit your thesis to the Graduate School until it is finished, defended, and formatted.

When you submit to Proquest you must purchase one bound hard copy for WCU's Hunter Library. You may order as many copies as you want for yourself. You can order and pay for the bound copies at the at the same time you submit the thesis

The student also should provide one copy of the final, signed thesis to each member of the Thesis Committee and to the student's program track coordinator. It is not necessary for these copies to be bound; paper or plastic covers (available at a photocopying store) are sufficient. An electronic copy of the thesis on CD should also be submitted to the Program Administrator.

**APPENDIX A**

**WCU SCHOOL OF NURSING**

**GRADUATE PROGRAM**

**Preliminary Thesis/Project Proposal**

**Proposal for MS(N) Project/Thesis:** List type of project/thesis (e.g. Integrative Lit Review)

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_, WCU MS(N) Program **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed Title: *Put title here*

Alternate Titles: *Put alternate titles here* (titles may vary for publication/conference venue)

**Para 1: Tells us what question you are asking or topic you are exploring, provides information on the focus of your project, and why it is important.**

This project/thesis will be a \_\_\_\_\_ (examples: comprehensive integrated literature review; original research findings; thesis; grant proposal) to provide evidence-based information on \_\_\_\_\_ . The focus will be on \_\_\_\_\_ . This aspect of \_\_\_\_\_ is important because/essential to \_\_\_\_\_ .

**Para 2: Summary of essential information related to the topic, drawn from the literature.**

*Should include any statistical data, epidemiology, etiology, prevention, natural history, interventions, outcomes that are already known as a basis for your project/thesis.*

**Para 3: What your research/thesis or grant work will provide to the community and readers of your published work. *For instance – summary of current recommendations (with levels of evidence), importance to the community, how this will help the reader or the reader’s practice.***

**Para 4: Identify journal(s) or conference(s) to which this paper will be submitted, or grant funding organizations. *(Optional but encouraged)***

**Student** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chair** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

This Proposal should be **NO MORE than ONE page.**

Submit signed original copy to MS(N) Program Administrator, one copy to Chair, and one copy to the appropriate track coordinator. Keep a copy for your own records.

APPENDIX B

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL  
SAMPLE THESIS / THESIS-EXHIBITION ABSTRACT FOR MASTER'S DEGREE  
(Sample Only – Use the online form from the Graduate School and print it out for correct formatting  
– AVAILABLE at <http://www.wcu.edu/1169.asp> )

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL  
DISSERTATION ABSTRACT  
FOR DOCTORAL DEGREE

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Department/Program: \_\_\_\_\_

Degree: \_\_\_\_\_

Tentative Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Dissertation Committee Members:

Director _____	Signature _____
Member _____	Signature _____
Member _____	Signature _____
Member _____	Signature _____
Member _____	Signature _____

APPROVED:

Scott E. Higgins, Ed.D. Dean of Graduate School and Research _____	Signature _____	Date _____
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STUDENT APPROVAL:

*I agree to the above information and hereby grant Western Carolina University a limited, non-exclusive, royalty-free license to reproduce my dissertation, in whole or in part, in electronic form or paper form and make available to the general public at no charge.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
GRADUATION CANDIDATE                      DATE

Please attach one copy of the Dissertation Abstract to this form.

**APPENDIX C  
WCU SCHOOL OF NURSING  
GRADUATE PROGRAM**

**DISSEMINATION ACTIVITY AGREEMENT**

As a requirement for successful completion of a thesis/project, I agree that I will submit for an approved dissemination activity prior to graduation from the MS(N) program.

Authors on the article/presentation will be:

1. Student Investigator (if more than one student, in agreed-upon order as follows):  
(first student author) \_\_\_\_\_  
(second student author) \_\_\_\_\_
2. Committee Chair,
3. other Committee members (in alphabetical order).

If the dissemination activity submission is not accepted, the committee chair and committee member(s) may submit the project results as an article or presentation and, although authorship is to be shared equally, first authorship will be assigned to the individual who primarily prepares the manuscript for subsequent publication or presentation. The contact author for the dissemination activity will be the committee chair. No investigator shall impede the publication or presentation of results without due reason and justification. Planned use of research findings/results in future publications or projects must be discussed among investigators/members before graduation of student investigators. It is understood that student members will maintain current contact information with the committee chair and MS(N) program. **A letter of agreement will be developed and signed by all committee members prior to the student member(s) graduation.**

(signed) \_\_\_\_\_ Date  
Graduate Nursing Student (A)

(print name) \_\_\_\_\_

(signed) \_\_\_\_\_ Date  
Graduate Nursing Student (B)(if applicable)

(print name) \_\_\_\_\_

(signed) \_\_\_\_\_ (signed) \_\_\_\_\_  
Thesis/Project Chair Date Committee Member (faculty) date

(print name) \_\_\_\_\_ (print name) \_\_\_\_\_

(signed) \_\_\_\_\_ (signed) \_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Member (faculty) Date Committee Member (faculty) Date

(print name) \_\_\_\_\_ (print name) \_\_\_\_\_

Submit signed original copy to the Associate Director of Graduate Nursing Programs, and one copy to Chair and each committee member. Keep a copy for your own records.

**APPENDIX D**  
**WCU SCHOOL OF NURSING**  
**GRADUATE PROGRAM**  
**THESIS FORMAT**

(NOTE: PAGE LENGTHS ARE MERELY SUGGESTIONS PROVIDED IN RESPONSE TO STUDENT REQUESTS.)

CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR STUDY

1. Introduction (1 to 1 1/2 pages)
  - a. Briefly introduces reader to problem area
  - b. Describes scope or significance of problem
  - c. Reflects broad-based review of literature
  - d. Presents a "state of the art" (or science) synopsis of literature
  - e. Demonstrates synthesis of ideas
  - f. Presents appropriate documentation
  - g. Demonstrates gaps in knowledge, shortcoming in previous research, or unmet need that your study should help remedy
  - h. Last paragraph logically leads to problem statement
  
2. Problem Statement or Purpose Statement (1 sentence to 1 paragraph)
  - a. Derived logically from introductory statements
  - b. Explicitly stated in interrogative or declarative form
  - c. Researchable
  - d. Properly delimited
  - e. Congruent with research question(s) and/or hypothesis(es)
  
3. Justification of Study (1/2 to 1 page)
  - a. Summarizes rationale for proposed study
  - b. Describes potential benefits/uses of information gained from proposed study (e.g. save lives, increase comfort, provide more effective learning method, reduce costs, reduce complications, etc.)
  - c. Overall, convinces reader that proposed study is worthwhile (i.e., benefits described are explicit to proposed study)
  
4. Theoretical Framework, Conceptual Framework, or Scientific Rationale (Choose one, not all three) (1 to 3 pages)
  - a. Identifies and documents theory and theorist(s); concept(s) or model(s); or scientific base
  - b. Briefly defines and describes theory, concept(s) or model(s); or scientific base
  - c. Reflects synthesis; not just a series of definitions or descriptions of studies

- d. Describes relevance of selected framework to problem statement
  - e. Congruent with problem statement and hypothesis, i.e., appropriate for this study
  - f. Does not include discussion of similar, rival, or overlapping frameworks (save them for long literature review, if necessary)
  - g. Is a synopsis of the framework (as your introduction is a synopsis of the literature review); may be expanded in the long literature review if appropriate
- NOTE: A more complete description of your theoretical or conceptual framework, or scientific rationale may appear in Chapter II.

5. Assumptions (1/2 page)

- a. Stated explicitly (may be in a numbered list)
- b. Appropriately based (i.e., theory, research, or universal truth)
- c. Relevant to proposed study
- d. If based on the work of others, documentation is provided
- e. Valid within context of proposed study.

6. Research Question(s) and/or Hypothesis(es) (1 sentence each)

- a. Stated explicitly in appropriate form
- b. Derived from problem statement
- c. Testable (i.e., variables are measurable)
- d. If null hypothesis used, the alternate hypothesis also stated.

7. Definition of Terms (length will vary with studies)

- a. Defines key terms in problem statement, research question(s), and/or hypothesis(es)
- b. Identifies independent and dependent variable(s)
- c. Lists appropriate conceptual definitions
- d. Lists appropriate, explicit operational definitions that enable others to replicate measurements of variables.

**NOTE:** This section may fit better in methodology section (Research Design or Instruments); check with your chair. Just be sure you do include it in the proposal.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Your master's thesis should include a comprehensive review and evaluation of the literature on your topic at this point in time. The review of literature included in the thesis proposal should be updated and revised based on an ongoing review of the literature done while completing the thesis. The review of literature expands on the introduction and includes review of prior work in the field and discussion of all concepts pertinent to the theoretical or conceptual framework, or scientific rationale.

Because the content and format of a literature review vary widely, depending on the type and purpose of the study - and the purpose for which you're writing the literature review - we are not providing an outline for this section. Instead, we strongly urge you to read Chapter 3, Review of the Literature, in Tornquist, E. (1999), *From Proposal to*

*Publication*, Menlo Park, CA: Addison Wesley. This chapter is an invaluable guide for organizing and writing your literature review. After you have read it, we suggest that you outline your writing plan (either in writing or verbally) for your Thesis Chair, and ask for his/her suggestions.

Another text that may be helpful to you is Galvan, J.L. (2004). *Writing Literature Reviews*, Glendale, CA: Pyrezak Publishing. This text discusses the issues related to writing comprehensive literature reviews in the behavioral sciences.

**IMPORTANT!** The literature review is an integrated synthesis of prior work and theoretical concepts, not an annotated bibliography. It should tell a story. It is a logical progression of ideas that build up to the need for your study; it's not just a collection of facts and figures (even though it does include them).

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY (length depends on complexity of study.

Uncomplicated methodology usually requires 4 to 5 pages)

1. Research Design (paragraph)
  - a. Identifies selected design
  - b. Describes design, specific to this research project
  - c. Described design is compatible with named design (i.e., it fits what you call it)
  - d. Justifies selection of design
  - e. Design is compatible with problem statement, research question(s) and hypothesis(es)
2. Setting (paragraph)
  - a. Describes time period
  - b. Describes location - overall geographic area and type of particular institution, unit, etc. (Do not identify individuals or institutions)
  - c. Describes other physical conditions relevant to study
  - d. Acknowledges limitations of setting - possible sources and directions of bias (non-representativeness)
3. Population and Sample (paragraph)
  - a. Identifies and describes target population and sampling frame
  - b. Names and describes sampling technique
  - c. Identifies sample and lists criteria for selection
  - d. Lists and justifies sample size
  - e. Describes limitations of sample--possible sources and directions of bias (non-representativeness)
4. Protection of Human Subjects (one or two paragraphs)
  - a. Describes procedures to be used for obtaining informed consent
  - b. Procedures are in accordance with components of informed consent (see examples on IRB webpage.)
  - c. Describes procedures for obtaining University approval (include date and IRB approval number)
  - d. Describes procedures for obtaining other agency approvals (include date and IRB approval number)

5. Instrument(s) (length varies)
  - a. Describes each instrument (include copy in Appendix) and tells how it measures the variables (operational definitions may need to be included here, if not previously included)
  - b. Describes what is known regarding validity and reliability of each instrument
  - c. Describes your proposed method of establishing validity and reliability, if applicable
  - d. Instruments are congruent with problem statement, research questions, hypotheses, and variables
  - e. Presents evidence of compliance with copyright laws (e.g., cites letter requesting permission to use instruments, with copy in your Appendix)
6. Data Collection and Field Procedures (Length varies)
  - a. Congruent with study purpose, research design, sampling, and instruments
  - b. Describes proposed pilot study, if applicable
  - c. Describes intervention, if applicable
  - d. Describes step by step how data will be obtained, in sufficient detail to enable others to replicate the study.
  - e. Final thesis describes data collection problems that actually occurred with might affect quality of data. (You will not know these when writing the proposal. However, you may wish to describe steps being taken to avoid data collection problems encountered in previous research in your field.)
7. Data Analysis (1-2 paragraphs)
  - a. Describes graphic and tabular presentations to be used; sample dummy tables may be included.
  - b. Lists descriptive statistics to be used to describe major variables
  - c. Lists inferential statistics (statistical tests) for testing each hypothesis
  - d. Statistics are appropriate for data
  - e. Justifies choice of statistics
8. Limitations (1-2 paragraphs)
  - a. States limitations of research design on ability to draw conclusions from this project (internal validity)
  - b. States limitations of sample and setting on ability to generalize from this project (external validity)
  - c. Statements indicate how/why the validity may be compromised
  - d. Limitations are not aspects that are within researcher's ability to correct (if they are, correct them!)

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

1. Sample Characteristics
  - a. Lists final sample size
  - b. Lists number of nonresponses, withdrawals, and losses, and the reasons for these (if more than 1 group, give the figures for each group)
  - c. Presents appropriate descriptive statistics for demographic characteristics in table (if more than 1 group, give information for each group also)
  - d. Narrative (text) provides logical flow of information and highlights

- important points; does not merely repeat what is in tables but refers reader to tables for detailed information
- e. If small sample, presents information in numbers as well as (or instead of) percents or proportions
2. Major Findings
- a. Narrative (text) provides logical flow of information and refers reader to tables for detailed information
  - b. Uses graphics if needed to highlight dramatic points
  - c. Tables and figures must be understandable without reference to text
  - d. Presents appropriate descriptive statistics for major variables of interest (includes differences between groups, if applicable)
  - e. Presents results of hypothesis testing (includes name and value of statistical test and p-value)
  - f. Presents results of secondary analyses and anecdotal data, if any
  - g. Does not include opinions or references to other studies
- NOTE:** If you do not present data in you Results section, you can not discuss it in your Discussion section.

#### CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

1. Overall, answers the question, "So what?" - Why are the findings important?
2. Includes brief summary of major findings
3. Interprets the meaning of the findings in view of the literature research and/or theory); problems within your study; your insights, observations, or opinions
4. Generalizes appropriately
5. Discusses implications of limitations
6. Discusses implications for future research
7. Discusses implications for theory, if any
8. Discusses implications for practice
9. Implications are based on this study, not knowledge available before the study was done
10. Does not discuss any results that were not presented earlier
11. Appropriately documents references to work of others

#### REFERENCES\*

1. Includes only those references cited in text
2. Includes all those cited in text
3. References are in appropriate format

#### APPENDICES FOR PROPOSAL\* (give each a letter, in accordance with the order in which they appear in text)

1. Subject informed consent letter(s)
2. Agency forms/letters
3. Instruments
4. Documents pertaining to permission to use or adapt instruments
5. Other material too lengthy or detailed to include in the body of the thesis

## **APPENDIX E**

### **WCU SCHOOL OF NURSING**

#### **GRADUATE PROGRAM**

#### **Research Process Guidelines**

##### Use of these Guidelines

These guidelines are intended to help you develop a master's thesis that includes all the components of good research. If you include all the information suggested in the guidelines, you should have the necessary documentation to produce any future report you may need from your research project, e.g., a research article, a research presentation, or a review article. Nevertheless, you should bear in mind that some of the items in these guidelines are included for pedagogical reasons; a thesis is partly an academic exercise which must convince your Thesis Committee that you know what you're talking about. When you write for publication, you'll omit some explanations and justifications that are expected of you as a student.

##### Usual Process for Research Approval

These guidelines are structured to help you go through the research writing and approval process as expediently as possible. The process usually goes like this:

1. Approval of abstract
  - a. Work with Thesis Chair to develop your abstract. Multiple drafts usually are necessary.
  - b. With Thesis Chair's approval, distribute your abstract to your Committee and schedule a meeting of your Committee to defend your abstract. (Some Committees also may hold an additional preliminary meeting earlier in the proposal development process.)
2. After Thesis Committee approval, submit the required forms for IRB approval and official approval from other agencies involved (e.g., the agency in which you will collect data) to the University IRB.
3. While you're waiting for your Committee, IRB and agency approvals, spend your time writing your first three chapters.
4. After obtaining agency approval(s), conduct the pilot and/or major study. If you must make any changes in your data collection and analysis procedures after your abstract has been approved, discuss the changes with your Committee Chair, document the changes, and incorporate them into your paper. If changes are substantial, you must notify the IRB and other agencies.
5. After Committee feedback, you may need to re-write parts of your literature review. With permission of your Committee, you may be allowed to do this while you're collecting and analyzing data.
6. After you've analyzed and interpreted your data, write your last two chapters and submit to Thesis Chair for approval. Multiple drafts usually are necessary.

7. With your Thesis Chair's approval, distribute your thesis to your committee and schedule a meeting for defense of the thesis. Committee members must receive your thesis in adequate time for thoughtful review; the amount of time required may vary among Committee members. Bring your Approval Page to the defense and be sure all committee members sign in ink.
8. Some revisions of the thesis may be required following the defense. With Thesis Chair's approval, submit the revised final thesis to the Graduate School.
9. Follow WCU and School of Nursing rules and regulations for deadlines and other official procedures to make sure you graduate on schedule.

#### Suggested Format for Papers

Papers must be neatly typed, double spaced, and formatted according to the APA Style Manual. Your thesis must also conform to the WCU Guide for the Preparation of Theses, available from the Office of the Graduate School.

#### **IMPORTANT!**

Remember, a research paper must communicate. The reader cannot be expected to have to ask for clarification. Be explicit. Do not assume that a necessary concept is already understood by the reader; a research proposal may be read by someone who is not an expert in your field.

#### Strongly Recommended Reference:

Tornquist, E. (1999) From Proposal to Publication. Menlo Park, CA: Addison Wesley.

**APPENDIX F  
WCU SCHOOL OF NURSING  
GRADUATE PROGRAM**

**THESIS TIMELINE AGREEMENT (OPTIONAL)**

**COMMITTEE INFORMATION**

STUDENT \_\_\_\_\_ 92# \_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT \_\_\_\_\_ 92# \_\_\_\_\_

We agree to work steadily toward completion of the project according to the following timeline. See Appendix E of this document for process tasks to guide the timeline.

<u>Task</u>	<u>Target Date</u>
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