

M.A. THESIS INSTRUCTIONS



Conflict Resolution Institute

University of Denver
Denver, Colorado 80208

M.A. Thesis Instructions

Conflict Resolution Institute

University of Denver

Denver, Colorado 80208
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Useful Email Contact:

Conflict Resolution Assistant

mvanwyke@du.edu

Conflict Resolution Graduate Director

kfeste@du.edu

Useful Websites:

Graduate Studies

www.du.edu/grad/graduation_resources.html

IRB

www.du.edu/osp/irb.html

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The M.A. Thesis: Research

“The completion of a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation is usually the most difficult academic requirement a student will face during his or her term of graduate education. The process requires discipline, independent initiative, creative thinking, working with others, and the surmounting of self-doubt.”

Rudestam and Newton, *Surviving your Dissertation* p. ix.

Project Overview

Requirement. All candidates for the M.A. degree in Conflict Resolution are required to prepare a thesis--a manuscript between 60-100 pages in length.

Starting Point. Students are strongly urged to begin such work near the end of their first year of study. For a full-time student, this means: (1) selecting a topic; (2) outlining preliminary ideas about the research; (3) choosing an advisor; and (4) working out a tentative timetable for completing the thesis—research and writing—no later than the end of the third quarter of coursework. Definitely plan to work on the thesis during the Summer.

Purpose. The master’s thesis is designed to demonstrate a student’s ability to do an extended piece of research and analysis going considerably beyond the normal graduate seminar term paper. It is intended as an integrative experience that allows the student to bring together substantive knowledge and research skills acquired in courses. It is an independent effort and quite different from classroom activities and assignments. Deadlines are self-imposed.

Thesis Work. Preparing a master’s thesis is substantially different from completing a term paper assignment in a formal course. In that situation, the professor often assigns topics, the student prepare a relatively short analysis (20-30 pages), often based on secondary sources rather than originally gathered research material, and submits a manuscript at the end of the academic term. The professor reads the paper, evaluates it, and assigns a letter grade.

When working on a thesis, a student is normally involved in collecting original materials in the research process, and when writing up the report, submits several drafts before the final manuscript is found to be acceptable. Once the advisor gives preliminary approval, the manuscript is evaluated by two other members of the faculty, who form part of the oral defense committee. After the oral, after the final revisions on the thesis, a letter grade is assigned by the thesis advisor.

The thesis should be a rigorous, analytical, and completed piece of work, not a research design. It should normally include original research. The work represents the approximate equivalent of 5 quarter hours of graduate work, or roughly the time and effort required for course assignments—reading, writing, class time lectures and discussion—in a seminar. The exact scope is determined by the student and faculty supervisor.

Process. The thesis manuscript is written under the direction of a professor chosen by the student and evaluated by the professor with a letter grade. Grades are assigned to a thesis whether a student has registered for any thesis credit or not. The thesis advisor should be drawn from the Conflict Resolution faculty. In rare cases, if an alternative professor is more appropriate, approval from the Graduate Director is necessary. A thesis advisor, by University of Denver rules, must be a member of the permanent (tenure, or tenure-track) faculty. Instructors in University College are not eligible, although they may assist a student in the research process.

Normally, a student submits several drafts of a thesis before the final manuscript is accepted and graded. It is a different activity than preparing a term paper in a regular graduate seminar, where single submission is the basis for a grade. The process of thesis work—selecting a topic, deciding a research strategy, carrying out research, and writing up the results—usually takes *six months or more* from start to finish with concentrated work. While working on a thesis, it is important that the student and faculty advisor establish a specific time period that is considered reasonable for comments to be provided on a student’s work, with the understanding that this could be changed because of other responsibilities. When a student submits a thesis chapter or draft, professors normally will respond in 2-4 weeks. Similarly, it usually takes a student at least two weeks to make revisions. Usually students should not expect professors to examine their work in the summer unless they have confirmed this arrangement in advance.

Oral Defense. Once the faculty thesis supervisor gives preliminary acceptance to a thesis draft, the manuscript is distributed to the oral defense committee members, at least two weeks before the oral date, for their evaluation. All committee members read the thesis in advance of the oral defense.

Students must form their thesis committee consisting of *at least* three professors, where the majority must come from the Conflict Resolution faculty. The committee includes: (1) the thesis supervisor, (2) a thesis reader, (both drawn from the Conflict Resolution faculty), and (3) an “outside” chair (drawn from *non*-Conflict Resolution faculty only) at least eight weeks before an oral defense may be scheduled. The three professors are chosen by the student in consultation with the Graduate Director. This arrangement is officially established by a form available in the Conflict Resolution Office, which requires all committee member signatures and an oral defense date, which when complete, must be given to the Conflict Resolution office and also submitted to the DU Office of Graduate Studies

The oral defense usually runs about an hour. It is held in the Conflict Resolution office. The committee meets briefly immediately before and after the defense, without the student, to discuss the thesis merits and evaluate the defense performance. In the defense, the student describes thesis findings and contributions to the field. Professors ask questions about the research. At the end, the voting members of the committee (everyone except the outside chair) render a decision: Pass (thesis is accepted without revisions); Conditional Pass (thesis is accepted pending minor revisions); Fail (thesis is not accepted). In the case of failure, a student is given only one more chance (after the thesis revisions are met) for an oral defense.

Thesis Grade. Once a thesis is approved with all revisions, a letter grade and written evaluation of the work will be issued by the thesis supervisor and kept in the student's file. Grades are assigned whether or not a student registered for thesis credit. After that, the student prepares a final copy of the thesis.

Final Manuscript. The final copy of the thesis must be prepared according to the specific, detailed instructions of the University of Denver guidelines concerning type of paper, typing fonts, pagination, margins, title page form, table of contents, reference citation, and bibliography. All final copies of the M.A. thesis, a written evaluation and letter grade prepared by the faculty advisor, and the faculty advisor's signature on the approval page, must be submitted to the University of Denver Office of Graduate Studies *at least two weeks before* the end of the quarter that a student intends to graduate. The specific deadlines are listed on their website, and it is very important that students consult the timetable well in advance to be sure that deadlines can be met. There are no exceptions or extensions to these dates.

Credit. Students may register for thesis credit by enrolling in CRES 4995, Masters Thesis Research (1-5 quarter hours). You are allowed a maximum of 5 hours of registration for this purpose. You may take the 5 hours during one quarter, or register repeatedly over several quarters for fewer credits each time that add up to the 5 hours permitted. Registration in CRES 4995 each time requires a "Tutorial Record Form," which is available from the Conflict Resolution Office or the Registrar's office. Students are encouraged to sign up for such credit only while they are actually working on the thesis. Such study is arranged between professor and student. The course is considered "in-progress" until the final thesis is submitted and given a letter grade. This is different from an "Incomplete" and does not carry a specific time limit. No one is *required* to take thesis credit. Some students prefer to take additional courses instead of the 5 hours of thesis credit.

Research and Writing

1. How do I find a thesis topic?

Find a researchable problem. What is a problem? A general question to investigate and explain through original research; a question that does not have a simple "yes" or "no" answer. Usually a "why" question is appropriate: Why are some mediation sessions successful and others are not? A Policy-advocacy question is less appropriate: Why should we use ADR techniques to settle disputes? (You will not become engaged in original research efforts, but rely on secondary analysis, that is, what others say are good reasons for using ADR). A descriptive question is also insufficient: What negotiation strategies are used most often in family disputes? (You will not explain what accounts for their use). These are only general ideas to help to think in terms of researchable problems.

How to find a problem: (1) Keep a notebook with thesis ideas as they occur to you during your coursework. It has been suggested to write down 3 ideas per course, no matter how valid.

(2) Think about your course assignments and whether they could be enlarged and made into a viable thesis topic. (3) Consider your internship experience, your practical work: what might be addressed as a thesis topic within that environment? (4) Read the professional literature to discover the hot topics and debates. (5) Ask your professors. (6) Read or browse copies of completed M.A. theses in Conflict Resolution (The University of Denver copies are available in the Conflict Resolution Office).

Choose a problem: something that interests you about which you could develop a passion, or long term focus, something where you have some previous knowledge and the right skills to examine the issue. Why is this problem important? Develop more specific questions out of the general one in your focus; for example, How does the background of mediators determine their effectiveness in different settings? How do different mediation strategies influence sessions outcomes?

Describe the problem: Write a few paragraphs outlining the problem, why you find it interesting, and how you might do research on it. Meet with professors to discuss your idea and get feedback. Based on these conversations, secure an advisor, don't look back, look ahead to the next step. There is no perfect topic, don't waste a lot of time agonizing over which to choose.

Write one page on the Thesis Idea. Outline the problem and questions you want to study. Discuss idea with several professors to find out where your interests mesh and how to reshape your ideas. Then choose your advisor.

1. How do I select a thesis advisor?

You are responsible for selecting an advisor to supervise thesis research work. Normally, the advisor will be drawn from the core faculty in the Conflict Resolution program. (The full group is listed in the Student Handbook and also on the Website.) An alternative professor may be selected, although it is necessary to contact the Graduate Program Director for approval before making this decision. A thesis advisor must be a member of the permanent (tenure, or tenure-track) faculty at the University of Denver. Instructors in University College are not eligible, although they may assist a student in the research process.

2. How do I prepare a thesis proposal?

Survey the literature on your topic for answers: it is essential to study the work that exists concerning the problem you choose and on the questions you seek to address in your thesis work. Browse professional journals, starting with the most recent editions first. You will learn how to read introductory and conclusion sections to discover what has been learned. Check the references and notes to go backwards in building a base. In this search, focus on: what do different theories say that help explain the answers to your questions? What research results explains the answers to your questions? What conventional wisdom provides various answers to

the problem and questions you have raised? What do most people think are the main explanations? Ask your professor what journals to canvas, books to read etc.

Summarize the Problem and the Answers: How have your questions been addressed in theories, in previous research, and in conventional beliefs? Are the answers consistent? We now know for certain that mediator effectiveness is entirely due to certain extroverted personality types. You need to refine your project to be sure to do something new. Are the answers inconsistent? We don't know which personality types are more effective for mediator success—some research says extroverts, who are more trusting and practice principle-based strategies, others say extroverts who are less trusting and practice a combination of principle, interest, and rights-based strategies. A perfect setting for a thesis, since your project will contribute knowledge to the issue. Are the answers non-existent? We don't know what or how personality type connects to mediator effectiveness. Another perfect setting for a thesis. It is unlikely you will uncover an entirely original problem to study. More often, your questions will fall in general categories of knowledgeable building for Conflict Resolution.

Design your Research Strategy: What needs to be done to find answers to your questions? What process can be conducted to do so? What process is practical, respectable and manageable? How will you do it? What contextual setting will you look at? Important note: If you are using human subjects, you will need to apply to the IRB (institutional review board) at the University. For current updates go to: www.du.edu/osp/irb.html for the application form and procedures. Various research strategies are included in this document.

Write 3-5 pages on the thesis proposal: describe the topic and problem, how it has been addressed by others, what you plan to do to study it. Discuss with your advisor, revise as needed, get final approval. Prepare the IRB application.

3. How do I make a schedule to complete the thesis?

Decide how much time will be needed for each part of the research work, what deadlines to set, when you will be able to begin the work. Note: work steadily; research requires constant attention and thinking, not just isolated blocks of time. (It's very difficult to complete a thesis if you can only work on it during the weekends—everyone who has tried to do this agrees.) Creating a research plan makes everything easier. Work out a mutually agreeable schedule for submitting your work to your advisor and keep to it. It may be useful to think of it as a binding contract. Show it to family and friends and ask them to help you stay on it. When you hit snags or get bogged down, don't avoid your advisor (a common problem!). There is no need to be ashamed for lack of progress, difficulty with writing, etc. The faculty want to help you through the process, so seek out aid when you need it.

The process of thesis work—selecting a topic, deciding a research strategy, carrying out research, and writing up the results—is largely up to you. You will be working more independently and with self-imposed deadlines to finish the task. This process, beginning at the moment serious dedication and work on the thesis commences until final acceptance of the thesis manuscript, commonly takes *six months or more* from start to finish. It is a project requiring full attention and intensive thinking.

During the entire period, it is important that you and your faculty advisor establish a specific time period that is considered reasonable for comments to be provided on your submitted work, with the understanding that this could be changed because of other responsibilities. (Note: Usually students should not expect professors to examine their work in the summer unless they have confirmed this arrangement in advance.)

Time is taken up in the “turn-around” space by both student and professor who have multiple priorities to juggle in work life. It is not unusual for a student to wait several weeks to receive feedback after submitting a manuscript draft. And, it is typical for the student to take several weeks to make revisions to the manuscript in response to feedback. Some professors may offer a two-week turn around time, others need a month.

4. How do I conduct thesis research?

Collect the necessary information for your problem, analyze the material (relating your research gathering to the existing literature on the subject, write up the report in a rough, first draft. Follow this form: read-write-read-write. Completing a research project is an iterative process that entails moving back and forth. You don't have to read everything before you begin writing. Better to start putting things on paper early in the process, so you have something to work from in revising. This helps you focus and identify your direction. Some things to remember: you will have to make compromises on information gathering (the world is not perfect), your analysis will not be as pure or definitive as you might like, but show mixed, even confusing features. Your conclusions won't be as clear cut as you wished, probably more complicated.

Write up a rough draft of the thesis manuscript, usually 50-60 pages, and submit it to your advisor.

5. How do I transform my thesis draft into a final polished acceptable manuscript?

Give thought to overall organization, chapter or main section descriptions, where the emphasis should be placed altogether. Study carefully the feedback from your advisor, and revise accordingly. Remember that careful, clear writing is important in a thesis, so copy-edit your work.

Write up manuscript revisions and submit the new draft (usually longer, better, more detailed than the initial draft) and submit it to your advisor. This process may have several iterations until your advisor approves the manuscript and gives the go-ahead for the oral defense.

6. How do I select a strategy for my research and analysis?

At the moment, policy impact, evaluation, and assessment, dominate research and thinking in the Conflict Resolution field. The key questions seem to be what works and why? Either a qualitative and/or quantitative approach to data gathering and information analysis is suitable for any of the following four example models. Each one is appropriate for the M.A. thesis. Of course, alternative strategies also exist.

A. Exploring an Abstract Theory

An intellectual exercise to sharpen abilities to think carefully about theory with great depth and greater precision. Example: Fisher and Ury, “principled bargaining” (the win-win approach). Possible thesis chapters:

1. Introduction: how did principled bargaining develop? What is gained or lost by this approach to understand Conflict Resolution? Is the development desirable or not? Why? Why was it introduced recently?
2. Description of principled bargaining: what are the main assumptions, how are they applied, what are the central propositions—how applied? What is claimed for this theory?
3. Spillover into other Conflict Resolution Theories: what approaches have incorporated the Fisher-Ury framework? How does it fit into their structure? (literature review)
4. Evaluation of principled bargaining: its contributions, its shortcomings.
5. Conclusion

B. Applying a Theory to a Current Policy Debate (deductive)

How does Fisher and Ury principled bargaining fit into policy conflicts about land use, about school reform, about terrorism issues, about domestic violence? (Selected substantive context refers to unfinished debates without any reconciliation or end.) Possible thesis chapters:

1. Introduction: How might principled bargaining be applied to context X?
2. Description of the abstract theoretical Framework, Principled Bargaining
3. Description of the Substantive Policy debate, literature review
4. Applying the theory to the Policy debate
5. Conclusion: an evaluation and critical assessment

C. Evaluating a Theory using a Historical Case Study (deductive)

How does Fisher and Ury principled bargaining fit into conflict resolution outcomes in particular case disputes about land use, school reform, a terrorism problem, domestic violence? (Selected substantive context refers to case with reconciliation or another end.) Possible thesis chapters:

1. Introduction – What does Fisher and Ury principled bargaining tell us about the concluded agreement or alternate end to a dispute?
2. Summary of the relevant theory, literature review
3. Description of the case study
4. Application of Principled Bargaining to the Case Study Lessons learned.

5. Conclusion – theoretical evaluation, policy implications.

D. Empirical Thesis: A Case Study (inductive)

Examination of an institution, social movement, event, trend, policy broadly within the field of Conflict Resolution, for example the impact of school violence on peer mediation programs; the impact of conflict resolution training on domestic violence situations; the impact of peacekeeping missions in countries with recent civil war. Possible thesis chapters:

1. Introduction: context of the focused event, trend, case or whatever. Why important.
2. Literature Review: key issues and conclusions raised by others
3. Description of case study
4. Analysis and Assessment of case study materials
5. Conclusion – fit to literature, broad implications

Thesis Support

Student Support Group. When beginning work on a master's thesis, issues may arise that are frustrating or confusing and present emotional or psychological barriers inhibiting research and writing progress. Student-run support groups, whose members include everyone actively working on an M.A. thesis are useful for this purpose. A support group may help you to find ways to work effectively with your thesis supervisor, to understand and interpret feedback comments on your written drafts and deal effectively with criticism, to bounce back from blows to self-esteem (a frequent problem for many in this process!), managing and scheduling time effectively to move forward on thesis work, and meeting deadlines. Each year, a call for interest in a M.A. support groups is issued by the Conflict Resolution Program office.

Common Support Group Issues and Overcoming the barriers:

1. Working with your thesis supervisor and/or oral defense committee
 - Selecting a topic, advisor
 - Allowing time for feedback to drafts and inquires
2. Emotional Blocks
 - Understanding feedback/criticism
 - Blows to self-esteem
 - Dealing with frustration
3. Task Blocks
 - time management—when working on the thesis
 - time commitment—how much time devoted to work on the thesis
 - setting deadlines

Helpful Thesis Research References

Kjell Eric Rudestam and Ray R. Newton, *Surviving your Dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process*

Lawrence F. Locke, Waneed Wyrick Spirduso, Stephen J. Silverman, *Proposals That Work: A Guide for Planning Dissertations and Grant Proposals.*

The M.A. Thesis: IRB Application Guidelines

For current updates go to:

www.du.edu/osp/irb.html

The Oral Defense

Once your thesis is given preliminary approval by your advisor, the defense committee and date for the oral defense can be set. The candidate and the Advisor are responsible for nominating the members of the Oral Examination Committee.

The committee must be established at least 8 weeks before the date is set for the oral defense. To formalize your committee, fill out the “Schedule of Examination” form, available on the Graduate Studies website, and ask each member of your committee to sign it. Once signed, the form must be returned to the Conflict Resolution office. A copy will be sent to the Graduate Studies office.

The candidate’s Examination Committee conducts the oral examination of the thesis. The committee comprises a minimum of three and a maximum of five members. The candidate’s thesis advisor must be included as a voting member of the committee. At least one other voting member must be a full-time faculty member of the Conflict Resolution Institute. With prior approval from the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies, one member of the committee may be an adjunct faculty member, research professor, post-doctoral appointee, professor another institution, or another qualified person. All members of the Examination Committee must hold a doctoral degree.

If the minimum number of committee members is not present at the scheduled defense, the exam must be delayed unless appropriate substitutes, acceptable to the Graduate Studies Office, the student, and the advisor are authorized to serve on the Examination Committee.

Thesis Advisor

The candidate’s academic advisor usually serves as the thesis advisor and the oral examination advisor.

Committee Members

The Thesis Advisor and all members of the Oral Examination Committee must receive a copy of the candidate’s thesis at least two weeks prior to the scheduled examination.

Outside Chair

The Outside Chair represents the Office of Graduate Studies. He or she must be a tenured, full-time faculty member from a different program, department, or discipline than that of the candidate. The Outside Chair must hold a doctoral degree.

The role of the Outside Chair is to provide a broader perspective within the examination process. He or she is responsible for making certain that the examination is conducted in a professional manner and that the student has a fair opportunity to defend his or her thesis. The Outside Chair is expected to provide opportunities for each voting member of the Examination Committee to participate in the examination and to assure that the examination is of high quality while remaining within the proper limits of inquiry.

The Outside Chair is expected to read the dissertation prior to the examination and to participate in the examination as his/her academic expertise permits, but the chair does not vote on the recommendation of the committee.

What to Expect in an Oral Defense

A defense is usually 1 to 1½ hours. During this time the student describes thesis findings and the research contributions and the professors ask questions about the project. At the beginning, the faculty meets without the student to discuss the merits and shortcomings of the work. At the end, the committee members render a decision, again while the student has left the room. There are three outcomes: Pass (thesis is accepted without revisions, or very minor ones); Conditional Pass (thesis is accepted pending serious revisions); or Fail (thesis is not accepted). In the case of conditional pass and failure, a student should discuss with the committee and advisor what additional work is required, which would have to be resubmitted and approved. The committee will decide whether a second oral is needed in the case of a conditional pass. Failing the oral defense requires rewriting the thesis and defending it at another formal oral defense exam. There is no opportunity for a third try in this process. The determination of the ultimate acceptability or approval of the thesis occurs at the end of the oral examination.

Thesis Approval and Grade

Once a thesis is approved with all revisions, a letter grade and written evaluation of the work will be issued by the thesis supervisor. Grades are assigned whether or not a student has registered for thesis credit. At this point, not before, the student prepares a final copy of the thesis according to the guidelines of the University of Denver and submits it to the Office of Graduate Studies.

Manuscript Specifications

For updated information go to
www.du.edu/grad/graduation_resources.html

M.A. Thesis Graduation Requirements

Submit the final approved manuscript and copies to the Office of Graduate Studies.

Complete the binding order form. Graduate Studies will send the manuscripts to the library for binding. The bound copies will be returned to the Conflict Resolution Office. Please note that certain fees are due when you present your thesis to Graduate Studies.

Titles of Completed M.A. Theses in Conflict Resolution

Copies are Available in the Conflict Resolution Program Office

- Anderson, Kari. *Cross-Community Outreach Youth Programs: A Case Study of Northern Ireland*. 2003. 78 pp. Advisor: Karen Feste.
- Baykun, Elyte. *The Effects of Integrating Tracks 1 and 2 Diplomacy in Negotiations Between Arabs and Israelis*. 2002. 98 pp. Advisor: Karen Feste.
- Chapuis, Robin. *A Cross-Cultural Approach to Conflict Resolution: A Comparison of Harmonious Conflict Resolution Methodologies*. 2002. 120 pp. Advisor: Marty Thibau .
- Erisman Valeta, Gail. *Promoting Hope in a Conflict Context*. 2001. 79pp. Advisor: Carl Larson
- Gassman, Michele. *Beyond Sectarianism in Northern Ireland: Women's Coalition in the Peace Process*. 2001. 100 pp. Advisor: Tim Sisk.
- Kalin, Richard. *Relationship Between Mediator Style and Success*. 2000. 61 pp. Advisor: Carl Larson.
- Littrell-Miller, Crystal. *Comparative Cross-Population Analysis of Victim Participation in Victim-Offender Mediation*. 2002. 61 pp. Advisors: Karen Feste, Tom Cavanagh.
- Lopez, Lisa. *Understanding Conflict in Non-Profit Organizations: A Network Theory Approach*. 2003. 72 pp. Advisor: Karen Feste.
- May, Thomas. *Use of Sport in the Field of Conflict Resolution*. 2005. Advisor: Tim Sisk.
- Mayne, Maureen. *Challenges & Contradictions of the National Identity Reconciliation Process*. 2005. Advisor: Tamra Pearson d'Estr_e.
- Meier, Jennifer. *The Role of Religious Texts in the Middle East Conflict*. 2003. 73 pp. Advisor: Karen Feste.
- Meyer, Susan. *"Unofficial" Diplomacy in International Conflict Resolution*. 1999. 62 pp. Advisor: Karen Feste.
- Mills, D. Christian. *Manager-Subordinate Conflict Style Congruence and Workplace Satisfaction*. 2002. 65 pp. Advisor: Karen Feste.
- Owskiak, Andrew. *Staying Alive: The Application of an Agenda for Peace on UN Operations in Cyprus and Kosovo*. 2005. 146 pp. Advisor: Karen Feste.

- Perkins, Hannah. *ADR in the Workplace: A Comparison of Mediation, Arbitration, and Ombudsmen Procedures*. 2001. 73 pp. Advisor: Karen Feste.
- Pozen, Steve. *Conflict Resolution or Conflict Suppression: The Role of the U.S. in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process*. 2004. 74 pp. Advisor: Tim Sisk.
- Saperstein, Allyson. *A Summary of the Girls Education Initiative in the Gambia, West Africa*. 2004. 94 pp. Advisor: David Levine.
- Schooley, Stephanie. *Environmental Justice and Conflict Transformation Through a Discourse-Based Model*. 2001. 171 pp. Advisor: Darren Hicks.
- Sisk, Andrea Smith. *Conflict and Corporate Culture: A Case Study of the Set-Up to Fail Syndrome*. 2000. 49 pp. Advisor: Roy Wood.
- Strousberg, Lisa. *Conflict Styles and How They Affect Divorce Mediation*. 2001. 49 pp. Advisor: Karen Feste.
- Welty, Elizabeth. *Sharing Wisdom: Cross Cultural Transferability of Conflict Management Training*. 2004. 128 pp. Advisor: Karen Feste.
- Whitehouse, Patricia. *Bullies and Victims: From Schoolyard to the Boardroom*. 2001. 207 pp. Advisor: Tim Sisk.

The M.A. Thesis: Manuscript Specifications

For updated information go to
www.du.edu/grad/graduation_resources.html

The M.A. Thesis: Graduation Requirements

Submit the final prepared manuscript and copies to the Office of Graduate Studies within these specifications:

Complete the binding order form (copy attached) It takes several months before bound copies of the thesis are ready. They will be returned to the Conflict Resolution Office.

Complete the Application for Graduation (copy attached)
Please note that certain fees are due when you present your thesis to the Graduate School.

DEADLINES:

**Deadlines for graduation and oral defense,*
together with all necessary forms, can be found at
www.du.edu/grad/graduation_resources.**

*Please disregard Graduate Studies' oral defense schedule date.
The oral defense schedule is due to the Conflict Resolution office
eight (8) weeks prior to the date of the oral defense.

Thesis Research References

Kjell Eric Rudestam and Ray R. Newton, *Surviving your Dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process*.

Lawrence F. Locke, Waneed Wyrick Spirduso, Stephen J. Silverman, *Proposals That Work: A Guide for Planning Dissertations and Grant Proposals*.

Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers* (latest edition).

Thesis Informational Sessions*

Fall or early Winter Quarter

IRB Presentation
for all students

Fall or early Winter Quarter

M.A. Thesis: Support Group
intended for 2nd year students and beyond

*Each of these meetings will be announced in an email message.

Research and Writing

Develop a Thesis Idea. Find a researchable problem. What is a problem? A general question to investigate and explain through original research; a question that does not have a simple “yes” or “no” answer. Usually a “why” question is appropriate: Why are some mediation sessions successful and others are not? A Policy-advocacy question is less appropriate: Why should we use ADR techniques to settle disputes? (You will not become engaged in original research efforts, but rely on secondary analysis.) A descriptive question is insufficient: What negotiation strategies are used most often in family disputes? (You will not explain what accounts for their use.) These are only general ideas to help to think in terms of researchable problems.

How to find a problem: Keep a notebook with thesis ideas as they occur to you during your coursework. It has been suggested to write down 3 ideas per course, no matter how valid. Read the professional literature to discover the hot topics and debates; ask your professors.

Choose a problem: something that interests you about which you could develop a passion, or long term focus, something where you have some previous knowledge and the right skills to examine the issue. Why is this problem important? Develop more specific questions out of the general one in your focus. For example: How does the background of mediators determine their effectiveness in different settings? How do different mediation strategies influence sessions outcomes?

Describe the problem: Write a few paragraphs (1 page max) outlining the problem, why you find it interesting, and how you might do research on it. Meet with professors to discuss your idea and get feedback. Based on these conversations, secure an advisor, don't look back, look ahead to the next step. There is no perfect topic, don't waste a lot of time agonizing over which to choose.

FIRST WRITING (1 p.)

The Thesis Idea

Outline the problem and questions you want to study.

Discuss idea with several professors; choose your advisor

Prepare a Thesis Proposal. Survey the Field for Answers. It is essential to survey the literature that exists concerning the problem you choose and on the questions you seek to address in your thesis work. Browse professional journals, starting with the most recent editions

first. You will learn how to read introductory and conclusion sections to discover what has been learned. Check the references and notes to go backwards in building a base. In this search, focus on: what do different theories say that help explain the answers to your questions? What research results explain the answers to your questions? What conventional wisdom provides various answers to the problem and questions you have raised? What do most people think are the main explanations? Ask your professor what journals to canvas, books to read etc.

Summarize the Problem and the Answers. How have your questions been addressed in theories, in previous research, and in conventional beliefs? Are the answers consistent? We now know for certain that mediator effectiveness is entirely due to certain extroverted personality types. You need to refine your project to be sure to do something new. Are the answers inconsistent? We don't know which personality types are more effective for mediator success—some research says extroverts, who are more trusting and practice principle-based strategies, others say extroverts who are less trusting and practice a combination of principle, interest, and rights-based strategies. A perfect setting for a thesis, since your project will contribute knowledge to the issue. Are the answers non-existent? We don't know what or how personality type connects to mediator effectiveness. Another perfect setting for a thesis.

It is unlikely you will uncover an entirely original problem to study. More often, your questions will fall in general categories of knowledgeable-building for Conflict Resolution.

Design your Research Strategy. What needs to be done to find answers to your questions? What process can be conducted to do so? What process is practical, respectable and manageable? How will you do it? What contextual setting will you look at?

SECOND WRITING (3-5 pp.) Write up your problem, how it has been addressed by
The Thesis Proposal others, what you plan to do to study it. Discuss with
your advisor, revise as needed, get final approval.

Make a Schedule. Decide how much time will be needed for each part of the research work, what deadlines to set, when you will be able to begin the work. Note: work steadily; research requires constant attention and thinking, not just isolated blocks of time. Creating a research plan makes everything easier.

Work out a mutually agreeable schedule for submitting your work to your advisor and keep to it. It may be useful to think of it as a binding contract. Show it to family and friends and ask them to help you stay on it. When you hit snags or get bogged down, don't avoid your advisor (a common problem!). There is no need to be ashamed for lack of progress, difficulty with writing, etc. The faculty wants to help you through the process, so seek out aid when you need it.

Conduct Thesis Research. Collect the necessary information for your problem, analyze the material (relating your research gathering to the existing literature on the subject, write up the

report in a rough, first draft. Follow this format: read-write-read-write. Completing a research project is an iterative process that entails moving back and forth. You don't have to read everything before you begin writing. Better to start putting things on paper early in the process, so you have something to work from in revising. This helps you focus and identify your direction.

Some things to remember: you will have to make compromises on information gathering (the world is not perfect), your analysis will not be as pure or definitive as you might like, but show mixed, even confusing features. Your conclusions won't be as clear-cut as you wished, probably more complicated.

THIRD WRITING: (50-60 pp.)
Thesis Manuscript: Rough Draft

Polish the Thesis Manuscript. Give thought to overall organization, chapter or main section descriptions, where the emphasis should be placed altogether. Study carefully the feedback from your advisor, and revise accordingly. Remember that careful, clear writing is important in a thesis, so copy-edit your work.

FOURTH, FIFTH, SIXTH (etc.) WRITING: 60 pp. or more)
Thesis Manuscript: Revised Drafts until Advisor approval

IRB Application Guidelines

For current updates go to:

www.du.edu/osp/irb.html

