

SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
Revised Special Project Requirements and Guidelines
July 2011

POLICY

A Special Project has three parts, a proposal, a final product, and a final written report. This document provides detailed information about the development of the Special Project proposal. Students should confer with their Special Project committee (Special Project advisor and second reader) to obtain complete information about the committee's expectations for the final product and the final written report.

The special project advisor, the second reader, the department chairperson, and the Dean of Graduate Studies must approve the Special Project proposal prior to embarking on the work proposed. Each department/program may have requirements that exceed those in this document; however, they must be consistent with the School of Graduate Studies requirements. The student must also familiarize him/herself with *The School of Graduate Studies Guide to Formatting Your Thesis/Special Project Proposal, or Dissertation* (which is available at the School of Graduate Studies office or from its website: <http://www.southernct.edu/grad/>).

Upon completion of the proposed work, the student will submit the result of that work, the 'final product', and a final report about that product to his/her Special Project committee and to his/her department chair for review and approval. The Dean of the School of Graduate Studies will review the aforementioned approval documentation and provide the final approval, thus signifying that the student has successfully completed the Special Project.

ELIGIBILITY

A student who has completed fifteen (15) credits in his/her planned program and has the permission of his/her advisor may apply for the special project capstone experience if he/she:

- a. is a matriculated student and has received a letter of acceptance from the Dean of Graduate Studies.
- b. has a GPA of 3.0 or better for all courses taken in the planned program to date.
- c. has obtained a Special Project Advisor with the approval of the Graduate Program Director or Coordinator.

RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN OR VERTEBRATE ANIMAL SUBJECTS

By federal law, all research involving human participants or animal subjects requires prior ethical review and approval by an independent review committee. At Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU), the relevant committee for research involving human participants is the Institutional Review Board (IRB). No data or recruitment of participants may take place without IRB approval, and no vertebrate animal capture, purchase, or research use may take place without The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) approval. IACUC has jurisdiction over laboratory and field research involving all vertebrate animals.

Before beginning a research study, the student should consult with his or her advisor regarding the procedure for obtaining appropriate ethical review. Copies of the necessary forms and instructions for submission can be obtained from the School of Graduate Studies.

In cases where research involving human participants or animal subjects is being performed at another institution, approval also must be obtained from that institution's appropriate review committee(s). Copies of such approval should be attached to Southern's forms to expedite the review process.

INTEGRITY OF RESEARCH AND OTHER SCHOLARLY WORK

The School of Graduate Studies expects high standards of ethical behavior on the part of all persons involved in research and other scholarly work. Students are required to comply with the following School of Graduate Studies requirements about honesty and integrity in research, as in all scholarly activity. Students are reminded that areas of misconduct in scholarship include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. Falsification of data, which ranges from sheer fabrication through selective reporting, including the omission of data.
- b. Plagiarism, which involves taking and using as one's own, the writing and/or ideas of another and ranges from outright stealing to inadequate attribution.
- c. Violations of rules to protect patients, research subjects, and other persons and animals, which, while not fraudulent in the traditional sense, are unethical and undermine the integrity of the academic process.
- d. The use of commercial organizations or paid individuals to write all or part of the special project.
- e. Violations of the requirement for integrity of scholarship shall result in a failing grade for the special project and dismissal from the School of Graduate Studies.

NATURE OF THE SPECIAL PROJECT

Definition

The Special Project provides an opportunity for graduate students to complete an academically rigorous project that contributes in some meaningful way to the student's discipline and professional community. Students choose to complete a Special Project to demonstrate the ability to make independent use of and apply information and training, and to furnish objective evidence of their aptitude in their chosen field of study. A Special Project in the major field may be required at the discretion of the graduate program. A full-time member of the SCSU Graduate Faculty must direct the Special Project. The Special Project involves the integration and application of discipline-specific knowledge, concepts, theory and skills in the development and delivery of a tangible final product (deliverable) accompanied by a written final report describing the process and results of the product's development. Students must confer with their Special Project committee to obtain the parameters for their final written report.

Common Characteristics of the Special Project

First, a Special Project involves the creation of a tangible product that demonstrates your skill and knowledge in applying the training received in your field of study. It furthermore requires the writing of a final report that details and justifies the process used in the creation of the product. Examples of tangible products vary widely across disciplines. In education, an example of a tangible product may be a curriculum. In the fine arts, a product may be a work of art. In some disciplines, a Special Project may include a field experience or intervention. However, unless a product is developed as an outcome of the field experience/intervention, the completion of a field experience/intervention alone does not qualify as a Special Project. Whatever the discipline, the distinguishing feature of the special project is the development or creation of a product that may be used by a second party.

Second, a Special Project should make a contribution to your field. This requires you to have an in-depth understanding of some particular area of your discipline. In this regard, a Special Project represents the capstone activity of your graduate degree program.

Third, a Special Project represents an opportunity to work closely with one or more faculty members in your field. One characteristic of good graduate education is the opportunity for faculty and students to work together in a close relationship characterized by mentoring. While much of the content of any field can be taught in traditional classes, there is always some art to any discipline. These nuances are best

conveyed in the context of a close working relationship. Working on a Special Project, under the tutelage of faculty members, provides an opportunity for learning that is not typically found in other graduate school activities.

Fourth, a Special Project is more personal in nature. A Special Project is an exercise in self-discipline. Completing a Special Project requires sustained initiative and focus. The choice of topic and faculty advisor(s) is largely yours, within any guidelines that may have been developed by your department. Indeed, faculty will generally look to you to be the initiator of your Special Project work.

To recap, a Special Project provides an opportunity for graduate students to complete an academically rigorous project that contributes in some meaningful way to the student's discipline and professional community. The Special Project involves the integration and application of discipline-specific knowledge, concepts, theory and skills in the development of a tangible product (deliverable) accompanied by a written final report describing the process and results of the product's development. Students choose to complete a Special Project to demonstrate the ability to make independent use of and apply information and training, and to furnish objective evidence of their aptitude in their chosen field of study. The distinguishing feature of the Special Project is the development or creation of a Product that may be used by a second party.

PRE-PROPOSAL ACTIVITIES

The pre-proposal procedures are as follows.

The student must obtain a Special Project advisor (a full-time member of the graduate faculty) through the procedures that are in effect in the student's department. For example, the Special Project advisor, in some departments, may be the instructor for the course in which the Special Project proposal is developed. In other departments, Special Project advisors are designated for individual students, or may be part of a Special Project committee. The Special Project advisor and second reader must have experience in the topic chosen for the Special Project. It is important at this stage to have a clear understanding with your Special Project advisor and second reader about how much time they are willing to give to your Special Project, and how and when contact and/or communication will be made. The second reader may be chosen from the SCSU faculty, an outside agency or another accredited university. The specific qualifications to serve as a second reader are established and approved by the student's department.

TYPES OF SPECIAL PROJECTS

Before beginning work on the Special Project itself, each student must prepare a Special Project proposal that is approved by the Special Project committee, the department chairperson, and then by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies. A Special Project proposal is, essentially, a written action plan of what you intend to do (your topic) and how you intend to do it (your methodology). There are six types of Projects that may be completed: (1) public service, (2) educational, (3) technological, (4) multimedia, (5) fine arts, and (6) entrepreneurial.

Whichever of the six Special Projects you undertake, you must also contact your Special Project advisor to familiarize yourself with any additional guidelines that may exist in your program of study. Nonetheless, here are some general guidelines for each of the six types of Special Projects.

A **Public Service Special Project** generally involves field work, intervention/planning and development, and/or policy development. As noted earlier, unless product development is an outcome of the field experience, the mere completion of a field experience would not qualify as a Special Project. You will need to work closely with your Special Project advisor in order to outline a process and protocol consistent with the ethical, professional and/or scholarly foundations of your discipline. If a host or outside agency is involved, your proposal must likewise be consistent with the needs and expectations of

this agency. The resources needed, and your time commitment and schedule thereof, must also be carefully considered.

An **Educational Special Project** usually consists of development of curriculum, student-based exercises, or computer software or other tools of a specifically educational purpose. You must provide pedagogical justification for the materials you intend to develop within a discipline specific knowledge base:

A **Technological Special Project** may include the development of computer programs and/or software for a general, non-educational specific nature, or the development of scientific tools of measure. You will need to plan out adequate time to fully test the product you develop, and correct any unanticipated problems or weaknesses.

A **Multimedia Special Project** characteristically involves the creation of a web site on a specific topic within your discipline, or a film or video that documents an experience, social phenomenon, or inquiry that is relevant to your field. You must verify competence in the medium(s) used to carry out such an endeavor in a timely manner.

A **Fine Arts Special Project** typically involves the creation of an object of visual art, or a musical or theatrical performance piece. Your timeline must include not only execution of the object or performance piece but adequate time for feedback and possible improvements before the project is deemed finalized.

An **Entrepreneurial Special Project** usually involves idea generation, feasibility study, and development and implementation of an entrepreneurial/business plan.

ELEMENTS OF THE SPECIAL PROJECT PROPOSAL

All studies begin with a statement of the title of the proposed research followed by a description of purpose: Given your knowledge and training in your field of study, what is the tangible product that you are proposing, and why? Next, you must address the question of need (pertinence): How is your proposed study a contribution to the field? This question is often best answered by first providing a selective review of the related literature, research and/or description of previous relevant artifacts in your field and then showing how your work will fill a gap, demonstrate innovation, or, in other ways, clarify, extend or apply the work of others.

A Special Project Proposal must contain the following:

- a. **Title Page** – See an example in *The School of Graduate Studies Guide to Formatting your Thesis, Special Project Proposal, or Dissertation*
- b. **Introduction and overview** – A brief introduction and overview of the Special Project.
- c. **Host Agency** – If relevant, the role to be played by the host agency in the Special Project, as well as description of the agency, preceptor, and intended population.
- d. **Significance and Relevance** – Justifies the importance of the Special Project to the author's program of study, discipline, and their professional development.
- e. **Review of Literature** – A critical, analytical summary and synthesis of the current knowledge of a topic. The extensiveness of the literature review is determined by individual departmental requirements.
- f. **Research Methods or Plans for Conducting the Project** – Includes goals and objectives, timeline, and other elements related to the process.

- g. **Ethics Governing the Project** – Describes a commitment to academic integrity and adherence to general ethical standards of research, including applicable codes of professional ethics.
- h. **Author’s Qualifications** – Establishes the author’s credentials and capacity (knowledge, skills and access to resources) to complete the special project.
- i. **Human Subjects (IRB) or Vertebrate Animal Subjects (IACUC) Protection**– Includes approval letter from appropriate ethics board, if applicable.
- j. **References** – Those sources cited within the proposal.
- k. **Appendices** – Includes all required supportive documentation if appropriate.

In addition to substance, the Special Project proposal will be evaluated, by the Special Project committee, on writing style and format which includes correct grammar, proper spelling, and consistency of chapter headings, subheadings, footnotes, endnotes, references, and bibliography. Attention to such details as writing the proposal in the future tense is imperative.

The student also must select a recognized academic style manual that will be used in writing the Special Project proposal. The style manual selected must be identified at the time of submission of the Special Project proposal. Any Special Project proposal that does not identify and follow a recognized academic style manual as well as *The School of Graduate Studies Guide to Formatting Your Thesis, Special Project Proposal, or Dissertation* will be returned for correction. Students may use a professional academic copy editor to review their proposals to ensure that they are grammatically correct, free of typographical errors, adhere to the chosen style manual and to *The School of Graduate Studies Guide to Formatting Your Thesis, Special Project Proposal, or Dissertation*.

SUBMISSION AND APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL PROJECT PROPOSAL

Upon completion of the proposal, the student submits the proposal to his/her committee and department chairperson. If, after reviewing the Special Project proposal, the Special Project advisor, the second reader, and the department chairperson, approve of the proposal, they will sign the *Special Project Proposal Signature Sheet* (which is located at the end of this document or from the School of Graduate Studies website: <http://www.southernct.edu/grad/>). The signatures of the Special Project advisor, second reader and department chairperson signify that the proposal meets the requirements set forth in this document, in the selected style manual and in *The School of Graduate Studies Guide to Formatting Your Thesis, Special Project Proposal, or Dissertation*. The student will then submit the *Signature Sheet* to the School of Graduate Studies for review and final approval.

The Dean of the School of Graduate Studies will review the Signature Sheet and provide the final approval. The School of Graduate Studies will retain the original copy of the *Signature Sheet* and send a copy to the student and to his/her Special Project Advisor. Upon receipt of this document, the student may commence work on his/her Special Project.

COMPLETION, SUBMISSION, AND APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL PROJECT FINAL PRODUCT/REPORT

The student should work closely with the Special Project advisor to complete the Special Project. Upon completion of the proposed work, the student will submit the result of that work, the ‘product’, and the written final report to his/her special project committee and to his/her department chairperson for review and approval. They will sign the *Special Project Completion Sheet* (which is located at the end of this document or from the School of Graduate Studies website: <http://www.southernct.edu/grad/>). The Dean of the School of Graduate Studies will review the aforementioned approval documentation and provide the final approval, thus signifying that the student has successfully completed the Special Project.

**Southern Connecticut State University
School of Graduate Studies
Special Project Proposal Signature Sheet
[Form must be typed]**

Name: _____ Banner I.D.: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Program: _____ Number of Credits Completed: _____

Name of Special Project Advisor: _____

Name of Second Reader: _____

Title of Special Project: _____

Anticipated date of completion of Special Project Report: _____

The standard style manual to be used in writing Special Project Report: _____

Student's Statement: I recognize that once my committee, department chair, and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies approve my Special Project proposal, I am expected to complete the scholarly work described in the proposal in accordance with department and School of Graduate Studies requirements. I have consulted with my advisor regarding the procedure for obtaining appropriate ethical review and IRB or IACUC approval of my research. If my research involves human participants, I have attached a copy of my IRB approval or exemption letter. If my research involves vertebrate animal use, I have attached a copy of my IACUC approval.

Student's Signature

Date

Advisor/Reader/Chairperson Statement: I have reviewed the enclosed Special Project Proposal and find it meets the standards of the discipline and the department for a Special Project Proposal.

Signature of Special Project Advisor

Date

Signature of Second Reader

Date

Signature of Department Chairperson

Date

Signature of Graduate Dean

Date

**Southern Connecticut State University
School of Graduate Studies
Special Project Completion Signature Sheet
[Form must be typed]**

Name: _____ Banner I.D.: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Program: _____ Number of Credits Completed: _____

Name of Special Project Advisor: _____

Name of Second Reader: _____

Title of Special Project: _____

Date of completion of Special Project: _____

Advisor/Reader/Chairperson Statement: I have reviewed the Special Project final product and final report and find they meet the standards of the discipline and the department for a Special Project.

Signature of Special Project Advisor

Date

Signature of Second Reader

Date

Signature of Department Chairperson

Date

Signature of Graduate Dean

Date