



PSC 796 GUIDELINES

A Capstone to the MPA

1. Objective

To produce a final research project that demonstrates the graduate's capacity to do meaningful social science analysis.

2. Limitation

There exists a real need for advisors to recognize the diversity of career interests and learning objectives of CMU's MPA student body. With that awareness in mind, only the following requirements govern selection of the topic.

- a. It must be framed around an answerable research question.
- b. The investigation must be empirically based analysis.
- c. There must be a pragmatic, problem-solving focus to the research project.
- d. To the extent possible, conclusions should be interpreted to the broadest possible degree to integratively address various aspects of the student's course work. This integrative criterion will not apply to topic selection, generation of hypotheses, and determinations of methodology since we cannot expect all things of all research projects; i.e., organization theory, evaluation, policy analysis.
- e. The project is more than a term paper yet less than a master's thesis. As such, length depends on the student's ability to answer the research question successfully and make use of a comprehensive bibliography of previous knowledge in the analysis.

3. Scheduling

The student, after completing at least 21 credit hours toward the MPA, must follow the schedule below in order to complete the course in any given semester.

- a. File a one-page topic description with the specific advisor of choice by the third week of the semester. A 796 research project may be chaired by any department member. One MPA faculty must be on each committee. A copy must be on file with the MPA director as well or the student will be dropped from the course.

- b. Generate by the sixth week of the semester the following:
- literature review
 - hypotheses
 - operationalization of all relevant concepts

This must also be filed with the MPA director as well as the specific advisor. It will be at this point that the MPA director approves of the proposed design by signing off on the literature review and hypotheses.

- c. Select two additional faculty to complete the three member project committee by the seventh week of the semester. If the above points are not completed, work on the project will be terminated until the following semester. A written waiver may be granted by the MPA director in the event of specific and unforeseen short-term circumstances.
- d. Complete a draft of the data analysis work by no later than the beginning of week 14 of the semester. Committee members would have a minimum of two weeks to read before the defense date. This needs to be shared only with the three project committee members.
- e. Complete the conclusions and summary analysis by the end of finals week and orally defend—at a time agreed upon one week in advance by the committee—by the time that grades are due.
- f. The 796 paper would have a signature cover page, following the thesis formatting guidelines.
- g. Any deviation from these scheduling guidelines would require written approval by the MPA director to all committee members.