

Capstone Experience
Manual for Students in the
M.A. in Women's and Gender Studies

2015

Welcome to the Master's Program in Women's and Gender Studies.

The requirements for receiving a Master's Degree in Women and Gender Studies include a capstone experience selected from among the following:

Practicum

Thesis

Final Project

Students should decide which of these capstone experiences they wish to complete as early in their program as possible. It is preferable that you have decided by the end of your first semester in the program. This is because each of these ways of fulfilling the requirement for a capstone experience requires a number of steps, and these steps take time. Discuss your interests and concerns with your advisor and with professors you may wish to work with.

Regardless of which route you take, any credits you take will expire in six years. While there is a process to petition this timeline, please keep this timeline in mind when planning your capstone experience.

You can change your mind along the way, but you will need to pay for whatever credits you enroll in. For example, if you take three thesis credits but later decide to switch to a practicum or project, you can rewrite your program of study to reflect the change, but you will need to take the additional practicum or project credits required to finish the degree.

In this manual, we will explain each of the options listed above and provide a timeline and a set of guidelines for completing your chosen capstone experience. We hope that this will help you to decide which option best fits your interests and abilities, and enables you to complete the chosen project efficiently and well.

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The Practicum

What is a Practicum?

A practicum offers you the opportunity to explore your intellectual questions while gaining valuable work experience. You will be able to apply the knowledge you have gained during your Master's work in practical ways, as you perform 300 hours of volunteer work at your chosen site. The Women's and Gender Studies graduate coordinator will help you to seek out sites that will be most productive to your learning experience, and ones where your strengths will be most valuable. However, the ultimate responsibility for connecting with a site and setting up your volunteer work will be your own.

Why Do a Practicum?

The primary purpose for doing a practicum to gain work experience and critical knowledge that will deepen your understanding of the key issues and tenets of women's and gender studies. It is a wonderful opportunity to work with experienced mentors in meaningful fields outside of the academy.

Practicum Guidelines

Time Commitment: You must volunteer a minimum of 300 hours at a site approved by the Women's and Gender Studies graduate coordinator. Under certain circumstances you may be compensated for the work used to meet practicum requirements. However, consent of the graduate coordinator is required in advance of such an arrangement. Your responsibilities should be at the level of professional employees working at the site. In other words, you should not do clerical work unless professional employees at the site include those tasks as a regular part of their job.

Registration for the Practicum Credit Hours: Request that the on-site supervisor send the graduate coordinator a letter with the following information: (1) Agreement to accept you for practicum placement; (2) A general description of your anticipated duties; and (3) Your anticipated work schedule at the practicum site.

Upon receipt of the letter the graduate coordinator and program secretary will input permission into the computer system for your registration for the appropriate credit hours. You must take six hours of practicum credit, combining either WGST 686 [1], 687 [2], and 688 [3]; **OR** WGST 687 [2] and 689 [4] in any sequence without repeating any course number. Your grade will be an Incomplete in all six credit hours until your practicum hours are completed and your written work has been submitted.

Written Work (Electronic submissions preferred): Upon completion of the 300-hour commitment, you must submit to the graduate coordinator a typed copy of your journal and a 15-18 page critical reflection paper.

1. Time Log. You must maintain a TIME LOG of the days and hours you work on your practicum. Your on-site supervisor at the conclusion of your practicum experience must verify this time log.

2. **Journal.** Throughout the practicum you must keep a JOURNAL (daily or weekly) detailing the work you do on-site as well as your observations and feminist analysis of your experiences. Entries should reflect both a recounting of activities performed and your reflective connections between these experiences and the knowledge you gained in your studies in the Women's Studies Program. Each week, you will be expected to incorporate or to cite at least one theoretical text or method that you find applicable to that week's journal experiences.

3. **Critical Reflection Paper.** This paper should provide a summary of your practicum experience and substantial reflection on your experience by application of relevant feminist scholarship to your work experience subject area. This scholarship can be disciplinary or interdisciplinary in nature. Its guiding concepts, research methods, arguments, and theory must be directly related to your work experience subject area and representative of acceptable feminist scholarship in the field of Women's Studies. It must be written in a scholarly format, with the consistent use of a recommended scholarly style formats, also regarding the use of Internet resources (MLA style; Chicago style).

Expectations of On-Site Supervisors: We request that on-site supervisors be willing to notify the graduate coordinator of any difficulties students are having or causing at the placement site. We also ask that on-site supervisors do the following:

1. **Placement Letter.** Send an initial placement letter with the following information: (1) Agreement to accept you for practicum placement; (2) A general description of your anticipated duties; and (3) Your anticipated work schedule at the practicum site.

2. **Supervisor Evaluation Form.** The on-site supervisor sends, upon completion of your practicum, the completed evaluation form that assesses your performance.

Due Dates and Grading Procedure

1. **Grading Procedure.** The graduate coordinator grades practicum Portfolios, using the attached Practicum Criteria.

2. **Due Dates for Portfolio Submission.** (A) A draft of your critical reflection paper should be submitted 3 weeks prior to the final grading period in which you expect to receive a practicum grade. This gives the graduate coordinator and director ample time to review the draft and to provide editing suggestions. (B) Your entire portfolio must be submitted by the first day of the final grading period. This gives the graduate coordinator and director enough time to evaluate your portfolio.

Grading Criteria

The Practicum Portfolio is graded on a 100 point scale. The grading scale corresponds to the university scale. Electronic submission of portfolio items is preferred.

100 Total Possible Points (Points deleted for insufficient performance on specific items)

ON-SITE SUPERVISOR INPUT (30 Possible Points)

On-Site Supervisor Evaluation (15 possible points) (based on the completed form by your on-site supervisor of the quality of your service)

0	Unsatisfactory
5	Satisfactory
10	Good
15	Excellent

Time Log (15 possible points). The days and hours that you worked on your practicum (verified by your on-site supervisor evaluation at the conclusion of your practicum experience).

Journal (20 points). Your journal details the work you do on-site as well as your observations and analysis of your experiences. Entries should recount activities performed and your reflective connections between these experiences and the knowledge you gained in your studies in the Women's Studies Program. Each week, entries must also link this work to a relevant theoretical text or framework. If there is not sufficient information for daily journal entries, then you may make weekly entries. All written work must be typed for submission. Electronic submission is acceptable.

- Organization and presentation of journal ("Presentation" includes grammar, punctuation, typos, sentence construction errors)
- Appropriate daily or weekly recounting of activities
- Reflective connections between activities and academic Study

15-18 Page Critical Reflection Paper (50 points). Summary of your practicum experience and substantial reflection on your experience by application of relevant feminist scholarship to your work experience subject area. This scholarship can be disciplinary or interdisciplinary in nature. Its guiding concepts, research methods, arguments, and theory must be directly related to your work experience subject area and representative of acceptable feminist scholarship in the field of Women's Studies. It must be written in a scholarly format, with the consistent use of a recommended scholarly style formats, also regarding the use of internet resources. (MLA style; Chicago style)

Organization and presentation of paper (Identification of central question and thesis; Scholarly essay style with consistent use of selected style format) (4-5 points)

Use of acceptable feminist scholarly sources to support thesis (11-15 points)

Literature review of feminist scholarly sources that are relevant to your work experience subject area (Minimum bibliography: 10-15 sources) (15 points)

Substantial critical reflection on your work experience (13 points)

(Maximum Extra Credit, 10 points) ILLUSTRATIONS/EXHIBITS

Extra credit for written materials that represent your contribution to your on-site agency. Examples may include: grant proposals; course designs; prepared public lectures; newsletters; marketing materials; public communication distributions.

WOMEN'S and GENDER STUDIES DEPARTMENT
Eastern Michigan University
Supervisor Evaluation of the Practicum Student

Organization _____

Address _____

Site Supervisor Name _____ Date _____

Title _____

Phone _____ E-Mail _____

Student _____

Please rank the student as Not Acceptable, Below Average, Average, Very Good or Excellent in the following categories.

Ability to accept criticism

Ability to communicate

Attendance

Cooperation with others

Dependability

Initiative

Quality of Work

Overall Performance

Is the student's time log accurate? Yes _____ No _____

Frequency of student/supervisor meetings: Biweekly _____ Weekly _____ Monthly _____

Was the student's project or work of immediate, long-term, general or no benefit to your organization?
(please circle the most appropriate description)

The Thesis

The requirements for completing a thesis are set out in the Graduate School's *Thesis Manual*. This manual is updated each year and is available online at http://www.emich.edu/graduate/students/thesis_capstone/. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the updated *Thesis Manual*. Much of the material below is taken directly from the manual, but not everything in the manual appears here.

What is a Thesis?

A thesis is the documentation of your original research or scholarship that serves as partial completion of graduation requirements for a master's degree. Typically, a thesis completes the tasks identified below.

- 1) Introduce a problem and explain its background.
- 2) Ask one or more research questions or state one or more hypotheses as appropriate.
- 3) State objectives of the research or project.
- 4) Explain what other scholars have written on the topic.
- 5) Design and describe a research method or project procedures; or explain the critical assumptions/methodology employed.
- 6) Collect and analyze data and explain findings or outcomes; or analyze the object (e.g., work of art or scholarly writing) of study and develop your argument; or develop innovative theoretical analysis.
- 7) Form conclusions and identify issues for further inquiry.

One of the greatest strengths of the Women's and Gender Studies program is its interdisciplinarity. But, what this means is that different students will take different methodological approaches to their theses. It is crucial that you understand the kind of approach you want to take in your thesis early enough to take the sorts of methodological courses that will enable you to complete your research in a scholarly manner.

Theses vary in length; however, 70-100 including works cited is common.

Why Write a Thesis?

The primary purpose for writing a thesis is to explain new knowledge or develop new understanding about a specific topic. It is a piece of scholarship your thesis supervisor and/or committee will help you craft, refine, and polish. It is a wonderful opportunity to work with experienced researchers and faculty mentors. The work is then shared around the world by way of the Internet through inclusion in EMU's Halle Library online repository and submission to ProQuest, where thesis abstracts are provided in electronic format.

Your thesis may serve many functions, such as:

- Adding to the body of knowledge in your discipline
- Providing a foundation for future research in your discipline
- Becoming the basis for presentation of your research at professional and academic conferences
- Being adapted for publication as an article or book
- Attracting interest from current or potential employers
- Supporting your application to another degree program.

The Thesis Process

The thesis is an extended research or critical document focusing on a specific issue or problem of importance to scholars. A master's thesis prepares you for further work in your field and serves as the basis for publications and presentations. It is useful (but not essential) for students planning to continue graduate studies towards a Ph.D.

The work for the thesis must be conducted under the ongoing supervision of a thesis committee, consisting of a thesis director and two readers.

The Graduate School provides a *Thesis Manual* to guide students embarking on this process. This manual also contains the four **forms** required during the thesis process:
<http://www.gradschool.emich.edu/downloads/downloads.html>

The following are some general procedures that all students who elect to do a thesis should follow:

1. Thesis Topic and Director

Begin thinking about the thesis early in your program: whether writing a thesis will be an appropriate option given your goals and interests, and what kinds of interests and outlooks might lead to a thesis project. Discuss your interests with one or more faculty members. Determine which faculty members might serve as your thesis director and reader(s). The committee may include a faculty member from another department whose expertise is relevant to the project. You should discuss this option with your thesis director. It is within any faculty member's discretion whether or not to direct a thesis or serve on a thesis committee.

Tips:

There are two important things to consider when choosing a thesis director:

- Does this person have expertise in the research field?
- Can this person provide me with the kind of mentoring I need to do a thesis?

It will be easier to get a director if you choose a topic that interests him or her.

Take the time to talk very specifically about the kind of guidance you feel you will need and ask your director about how s/he approaches directing a thesis. Make sure you are on the same page in terms of your expectations and needs.

Each project should have a director and at least two readers. At least half of the committee should be Women's and Gender Studies faculty or department members.

2. Proposal

Once you've decided on a topic, and your topic has been approved by the director of your thesis committee, you must write a draft of your **Thesis Proposal**, to which your director and committees will respond. The proposal should include a statement of the problem, your objectives and approach, and a working bibliography. Your director typically will work with you through at least a few drafts of the proposal before approving it by signing the **Thesis Proposal Approval form**, which then should be passed along for the other signatures required by the form. This form is available here and is included at the end of this section of the guidebook:
http://www.emich.edu/graduate/students/thesis_capstone/forms_thesis/2013masters_thesis_proposal_approval.pdf

If your thesis involves research on animals or human subjects, this is also the time when you need to develop and submit the **Permission to Conduct Research on Human or Animal Subjects form**. The form and information are available here:
http://www.ord.emich.edu/compliance/compliance_subdir/human.html

3. Registering for Thesis Credits

Once your thesis director and readers have signed your **Thesis Proposal Approval Form**, you should register for Thesis Credits. This can happen *only* after you have an approved thesis proposal.

4. Writing the Thesis

You should submit drafts of each section or chapter of the thesis to your director and other reader(s) for their comments and suggestions for revision. Usually, an entire manuscript can be submitted only after individual sections have been revised and approved.

No papers written to meet the requirements of another course may be included in your thesis in the same form in which they were written, although it is perfectly acceptable if ideas for your thesis grow from your previous work in the program.

If any part of your thesis results from a collaborative effort, you must describe your contribution precisely. Any collaborative efforts must be negotiated in advance and approved by your thesis director and reader(s).

If you make a major change in your thesis or abandon it completely, you must inform your director to find out if you must submit a new **Thesis Proposal Approval Form** to continue with the thesis option.

5. Submitting the Completed Thesis

NOTE: Make sure to check the University and Departmental deadlines for thesis submission and take them into consideration as you plan your thesis writing schedule with your director. If you plan to complete your thesis in the Summer semester, make sure your committee members will be available when you need them. Failure to meet deadlines can delay your graduation.

When you complete the final draft of your thesis, you will submit it to your thesis director and readers for review. You are responsible for the readiness of this draft—format, documentation, grammatical conventions, editing, and proofreading—and must consult the **Graduate School Thesis Manual**, which has very specific requirements for format.

When your director and readers feel the thesis is ready, they will sign the **Thesis Approval Form**. You will then submit the finished thesis and signed approval form to the Department Head to review and sign. Once you have received all the requisite signatures, you will submit a paper copy of the thesis to the Graduate School for review and final approval. Along with your thesis, you need to submit the following forms:

- **Document Approval Form**
- **Rights and Permission Form for Electronic Thesis, Dissertation, or Capstone Project**

Both are available here: http://www.emich.edu/graduate/students/thesis_capstone/forms.php

6. Deadlines

Particularly important are the dates for submission of the thesis for graduation. Because a thesis takes time to write and must be done in conjunction with your thesis committee, who need time to read it and provide feedback, it is best to select the term you wish to graduate, and work backward from that date. This will provide you with a timeline that you can use to organize your approach to your thesis.

Generally, deadlines for graduation dates are:

Graduation Date	Thesis due to Department Head	Thesis due to Graduate School
December	November 1	November 15
April	March 1	March 15
June	May 15	June 1

August	July 1	July 15
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8. Thesis Credit

Credit is granted after the thesis has been accepted by your thesis director, readers, Department Head, and the Graduate School. You may register only once for thesis credits, and no grade will be assigned (other than "I") until the project is completed and approved. This means you can take more than one semester between registering for and completing your thesis. When you submit your thesis, make sure to request that your thesis director submit a change of grade request.

9. Authority

The Graduate School is the final authority for setting manuscript guidelines for theses. Accordingly, you should become familiar with the **Thesis Manual** developed by the Graduate School and follow its procedures and format specifications.

Tips for the Writing Process:

- It helps to use a previous project/essay (perhaps something done for a course) in which you are still interested as a starting point for your thesis topic.
- Most students start out with a thesis topic that is much too broad in scope. Expect to refine your idea as you advance in the research and writing stages.
- Understand that you will be moving between research and writing. If you try to do all your research before you begin writing, it will be harder to get to the writing stage. Try getting started writing a little bit everyday.
- Be consistent and precise about keeping track of your sources throughout your writing process. It will save you LOTS of time at the end.
- See: <http://www.emich.edu/library/help/citing.php>
- Even if your director expects regular progress reports, sharing work regularly with a peer writing partner who can read and respond to your work can be a really helpful way to keep yourself motivated to write.
- Try to touch the thesis everyday. Make it a daily habit. Committing to doing even just an hour of work on it per day can get you done much faster than you think.
- One way of dealing with the fear of the blank page that leads us to procrastinate is to stop writing before you run out of things to say. Leave yourself a note of where you want to go next, and you will find it easier to get back into writing the next day.

- BUT! Sometimes the best thing you can do is to give yourself a break. If you are feeling burned out, rather than pretending to work and feeling guilty that you are not really being productive, give yourself an official vacation. Investing in your mental health means you can come back feeling refreshed, making you more productive in the end.
- Remember, the best thesis is a FINISHED thesis.

Summary

1. You must file your signed **Thesis Approval Form** before you are allowed to register for thesis credits.
2. Think about what you'd like to work on before you approach potential committee members.
3. Be familiar with the graduate school's timeline for completion and required forms.
4. Enjoy researching and writing!

Examples of past WGST theses:

MaryAnn Kozlowski, "Beyond "Real Life": Activism and Harassment in the Social Justice Blogosphere": <http://commons.emich.edu/theses/423/>

Erika Behrmann, "Investigating Trait Attribution through Gendered Avatar Play: An Analysis of The Sims 3": <http://commons.emich.edu/theses/372/>

WGST Master's Thesis Proposal Approval Form

Student Name: _____ Date of Meeting: _____

Program of Study ID# E _____

TENTATIVE TITLE OF PROPOSED PROJECT

COMMITTEE REPORT ON PROJECT PROPOSAL

After review of the justification, the committee certifies that:

☐ The proposal is satisfactory and the candidate may proceed.

☐ The proposed research does NOT involve the use of human or animal subjects

☐ The proposed research involves human subjects and will be sent to the College Human Subjects

Review Committee before data collection

☐ The proposed research involves animal subjects and will be sent to the Institutional Animal Care &

Use committee (IACUC)

☐ The proposed research involves invertebrates (animal subjects that do not require IACUC oversight)

☐ The proposal is not satisfactory and the following deficiencies must be corrected:

Description of deficiencies _____

SIGNATURES

Chair Name _____ Signature _____

Member Name _____ Signature _____

Member Name _____ Signature _____

Member Name _____ Signature _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF PROPOSAL APPROVAL

Date _____ Program Coordinator/Dept. Head _____

Signed original form remains in the student's departmental/program file.

The Final Project

What is a Final Project?

The final project provides an opportunity to explore avenues not available through the thesis or practicum. These projects should not be traditional research papers, nor should they be based on internships with local organizations. While not easy to exactly pinpoint, projects are frequently creative but can also provide students with the opportunity to explore forms of writing outside the scope of a thesis, such as policy papers or curriculum workbooks. Examples of past projects include theatrical scripts, novels, performance art, art installations, and videos. The work toward a project should be commensurate with the work put into researching and writing a thesis. *This is not a shorter version of a thesis with a smaller committee.*

All projects should include a 20 page written justification that explicitly connects the project to the theory and practice of Women's, Gender, and/or Queer Studies. This justification should explain why the student chose the particular project form and connect the project to a set of texts approved by the project's director and consultant(s). While a majority of the texts may be specific to the project form, for example discussions of performance art or filmmaking practice, some texts must address feminist theory and methods.

1. Project Topic and Director

Begin thinking about the project early in your program. Discuss your interests with one or more faculty members. Determine which faculty members might serve as your director and consultants. It is within any faculty member's discretion whether or not to direct or consult about a project.

Tips:

There are two important things to consider when choosing a project director:

- Does this person have expertise in the research field?
- Can this person provide me with the kind of mentoring I need to finish this project?

It will be easier to get a director if you choose a topic that interests her or him.

Take the time to talk very specifically about the kind of guidance you feel you will need and ask your director about how s/he approaches directing a project. Make sure you are on the same page in terms of your expectations and needs.

Each project should have a director and at least one consultant. At least half of the committee should be Women's and Gender Studies faculty or department members.

2. Proposal

Once you've decided on a topic, and your topic has been approved by the director of your committee, you must write a draft of your **Project Justification**, to which your director and consultants will respond. The proposal should include a statement of the problem, your objectives and approach, and a working bibliography. Your director typically will work with you through at least a few drafts of the proposal before approving it by signing the **Project Proposal Approval form**, which then should be passed along for the other signatures required by the form. Unlike the thesis, this form does not need to go to the graduate school. Instead, it will remain in the student's file in WGST.

If your project involves research on animals or human subjects, this is also the time when you need to develop and submit the **Permission to Conduct Research on Human or Animal Subjects form**. The form and information are available here: http://www.ord.emich.edu/compliance/compliance_subdir/human.html

3. Registering for Final Project Credits

Once your director has signed your **Project Proposal Approval Form**, you should register for Project Credits. This can happen *only* after you have an approved project justification.

4. Completing the Project

You should be in consistent contact with your committee and receive feedback as you prepare your project. This might mean having your committee read drafts or workshop aspects of a performance piece. Because the form of the project varies so widely, exactly what kind of feedback you'll need will also differ, making it particularly important to be in communication with your committee.

If you make a major change in your project or abandon it completely, you must inform your director to find out if you must submit a new **Project Proposal Approval Form**.

Tips for the Writing Process:

- It helps to use a previous project/essay (perhaps something done for a course) in which you are still interested as a starting point.
- Most students start out with a topic that is much too broad in scope. Expect to refine your idea as you advance in the research and writing stages.
- Understand that you will be moving between research and writing. If you try to do all your research before you begin writing, it will be harder to get to the writing stage. Try getting started writing a little bit everyday.
- Be consistent and precise about keeping track of your sources throughout your writing process. It will save you LOTS of time at the end.
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- BUT! Sometimes the best thing you can do is to give yourself a break. If you are feeling burned out, rather than pretending to work and feeling guilty that you are not really being productive,

give yourself an official vacation. Investing in your mental health means you can come back feeling refreshed, making you more productive in the end.

- Remember, the best project is a FINISHED project.

WGST Master's Project Proposal Approval Form

Student Name: _____ Date of Meeting: _____

Program of Study ID# E _____

TENTATIVE TITLE OF PROPOSED PROJECT

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☐ The proposal is satisfactory and the candidate may proceed.

☐ The proposed research does NOT involve the use of human or animal subjects

☐ The proposed research involves human subjects and will be sent to the College Human Subjects

Review Committee before data collection

☐ The proposed research involves animal subjects and will be sent to the Institutional Animal Care &

Use committee (IACUC)

☐ The proposed research involves invertebrates (animal subjects that do not require IACUC oversight)

☐ The proposal is not satisfactory and the following deficiencies must be corrected:

Description of deficiencies _____

SIGNATURES

Chair Name _____ Signature _____

Consultant Name _____ Signature _____

Consultant Name _____ Signature _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF PROPOSAL APPROVAL

Date _____ Program Coordinator/Dept. Head _____

Signed original form remains in the student's departmental/program file.