

FLORIDA MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Research Methods and Senior Project (RM/SP) Workgroup
(formerly the "Senior Project Workgroup Meeting")

RECOMMENDATIONS

Contributors:

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GOAL

To standardize and improve both the instruction of Research Methods and Senior Project within the Department of Social Science, and the quality of the student experience and student work within the said courses.

INSTRUCTIONAL DIRECTIVES

Class Size

One of the most critical issues facing instructors of RM/SP is class size. Typically, there have been 25 to 30 students enrolled in the classes (and sometimes more), which makes it difficult to manage the amount of feedback and reviewing necessary to guide the students to the completion of a successful project.

Recommendations:

- *Research Methods (RM) shouldn't be any larger than 20 students. This adjustment was made for the Spring 2016 and Fall 2016*
- *In the future, Senior Project (SP) shouldn't be any larger than 15 students*

Update Rubric for Evaluating Senior Project Papers and Oral Presentation

As it currently stands, the rubric used to evaluate students for both of the written and oral presentations are weighed more in favor of quantitative research methods, effectively depriving students who employ qualitative methods of valuable points.

Recommendations:

- *Revise the rubric for evaluating SP papers and oral presentations*
- *Format into a spreadsheet to reduce the likelihood of human error in tabulation*

Tracking and Reporting Student Progress

Faculty members have expressed a need to ensure adherence to the SLOs for RM/SP, and to reduce plagiarism among the students. Tracking and reporting are a method of achieving this goal. To this end, faculty teaching RM will compile a list of student names, project titles, and corresponding faculty mentors that will be shared with the faculty instructing the SP courses for the following semester. Student work will also be forwarded, and all student work from both classes will be upload to www.turnitin.com to assist with weeding out plagiarized papers.

To improve the quality of the topics and research methods employed by the students, faculty agreed that the selection of faculty mentors will now take place by Week 3 for the RM course, instead of during SP when it has traditionally taken place.

In order to improve the overall function of the RM/SP model, the faculty need to actively participate in the mentoring process. We are asking that all faculty mentor a minimum of 3 students each semester, which entails a commitment to meet with each RM/SP mentee for at least 1 hour each week, preferably during the professor's predetermined office hours.

To better compartmentalize the student deliverables in RM, a checklist will be consistently employed. In order to pass the class, students must complete the items in the checklist. These items will form the basis of instruction in the SP class.

Recommendations:

- *Coordinate Communication between RM/SP Instructors*
 - *Debrief sessions at the end of the term between instructors for RM instructors for the current session and SP instructors for the forthcoming semester, including a case-by-case review of papers/projects.*
 - *Handing off the physical papers and posting of electronic copies of papers on the :/P drive*
 - *Create a master list of students, mentors, faculty, and project titles*
 - *Complied by King/Thompson*
 - *Kept by the Chairperson*
 - *Uploading the papers to www.turnitin.com*
- *Standardize Schedule for Research Methods*
 - *Selection of Topic – Deadline: Week 3*
 - *Selection of Faculty Mentors – Deadline: Week 4*
- *Standardize Student Deliverables*
 - *Upon completing the RM course, students will produce a Proposal that includes the following:*
 - *Introduction*
 - *Research Question*
 - *Annotated Bibliography, including references for at least 3 books and 7 peer-reviewed journal articles*
 - *Methodology, with survey instrument/guidelines (qualitative or quantitative), if necessary*
- *Expanding Pool of Faculty Mentors*

- *Each faculty member will mentor a minimum of 3 students enrolled in RM/SP. Students should meet with their faculty mentors for at least 1 hour each week, preferably during the professor's office hours.*

Final Presentation of the Senior Project

Currently, the delivery of the final paper and oral presentations vary greatly. Some students present one-on-one with a professor in their office, while others make formal presentations in a conference room in front of one or more professors and students. The timing of the presentations also range very widely, with a large number taking place the last week of class or the very last week of the semester. It is not uncommon for students to introduce themselves to an instructor and make their presentation on the same day or during the same week. This greatly diminished the caliber of the projects because faculty members are deprived the ability to provide input on the project at an early stage that would have improved the final product. Additionally, students experience a great deal of anxiety as to work to locate professors willing to hear their projects. These same professors are frustrated by the lateness of these requests, especially as they balance their other teaching duties.

In order to streamline the process, the DSS will implement a series of Senior Project Presentation Day. During these occasion, faculty mentors and SP students and instructors will gather to hear the oral presentations.

Recommendation:

- *Institute Department of Social Science Senior Project Presentation Days*
 - *Attended by SP faculty, SP students, and faculty mentors*
 - *Open to the campus*
 - *2-3 sessions scheduled during the closing weeks of the term*

Supporting Directives

Fostering Student Success

Effective management of the RM/SP process is only part of the formula needed to ensure optimal student success. Students are enrolled in the RM/SP courses typically during their Junior and Senior years in college. Even though these are upper-level students, faculty member frequently find that they are ill-equipped for the successful completion of the RM/SP program. Most concerning are the lack of research and writing skills, followed by a lack of familiarity with modes of research and research terminology. Beyond these specific skills, many

students lack the “soft skills” necessary for successful matriculation in these course: timeliness, inquisitiveness, grit/persistence, and responsiveness. The combination of these factors severely impact the quality of instruction and the quality of the final projects.

Recommendations:

- *The creation of a RM/SP handbook for students to clearly articulate the RM/SP process and to demystify the steps toward success in these course. The handbook should be circulated with the students between their Sophomore and Junior years.*
- *Encouraging a more active role among faculty mentors in coaching/advising student projects, in collaboration with instructors. This includes training students on the mentorship process, especially the revision process.*
- *Class visits/testimonials from students how have passed SP*
- *Giving points/credit for receiving help/support in the Writing Lab.*
- *Encouraging writing and research across the curriculum, to close the “skill gap” that we are experiencing in the RM/SP pipeline. Focus on the 300/400 level in the Sophomore and Junior years, esp. in CRJ, SOC, and PSY courses.*
- *Sending a status report to the students’ homes after midterms during the SP course, to signify either adequate or inadequate progress in the course.*
- *Weekly emails to students outlining class meetings, assignments, alerts, and deadlines.*

RM/SP Peer Training

In addition to course with a large number of students, another factor that compromises the quality of instruction in the RM/SP courses is faculty burn-out. The same faculty members teach these courses, semester after semester, and are simply worn down by the demands of instructing these intensive course. One solution is to expand the number of faculty who teach the RM/SP course. This, however, cannot be undertaken haphazardly.

To assist, the work group has proposed to implement a series of RM/SP Peer Training sessions, led by our senior and/or most skilled faculty members, to both share best practices, refresh the course content, but also to train others interested in teaching these courses.