Culminating Experiences

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Culminating Experience Options

Overview
The Culminating Experience is a requirement for completion of the Master’s Program. The Culminating Experience can be completed through one of the following ways. Not all Masters program options utilize all of the following means of fulfilling the culminating activity requirement. Please check with your Masters option before proceeding.

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<td>Thesis</td>
<td>Educators interested in research, learning to conduct research on their own instruction or their students’ learning, trying to test a solution to an identified problem, and/or interest in pursuing doctoral studies</td>
<td>Conduct a research study of interest according to the appropriate research design approved by a committee and reported in a format using the APA Style Manual.</td>
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<td>Project</td>
<td>Educators interested in providing leadership beyond the classroom level, e.g. professional development, central office, private industry</td>
<td>Define a need relating to curriculum or professional development through a review of existing programs. Meet the need through the design, development, and implementation of curriculum or a professional development program that has not been previously addressed by others. The project must be approved by the committee and reported in a format using the APA style Manual.</td>
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<td>National Board Application Process</td>
<td>Educators interested in obtaining NBPTS certification. (This option does not guarantee NBPTS certification)</td>
<td>Investigate the options provided by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), complete application and portfolio for the National Board Certification. The portfolio must be submitted to the committee prior to submission for the National Board Certification process.</td>
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<td>Exam</td>
<td>Educators interested in demonstrating depth of understanding in one specific area.</td>
<td>Written exam – Candidate identifies area of focus for in-depth investigation. The candidate works closely with the chair and reader to develop a customized list of readings. The candidate obtains a set of customized questions from a mutually defined set of study areas. Questions will be posed requiring analysis, synthesis, and application of the area of study with a defined time limit to electronically submit responses. Responses are assessed by the chair and reader.</td>
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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Who will be on my Culminating Experience Committee?
You will need a committee composed of:
1. A Chair from your option unless there is a special need for expertise that is not available. Selecting someone outside your area must be approved by the coordinator of your option and the Associate Dean.
2. A Second Reader who usually provides input at the initial stage in developing the culminating experience and provides feedback/approval at its completion.

Before asking someone to be on your committee, you should consider what you are interested in doing and what faculty member has the most experience and knowledge on your topic. Then you should carry on an initial email conversation and follow up by making an appointment with the individuals you would like to serve on your committee.

Please keep in mind that the faculty work collaboratively in program and discipline teams. As such, they make every effort to distribute the workload of Masters students. Do not be discouraged if the first faculty member you ask is unable to work with you. It is most likely that the faculty member’s workload is full.

What if I’m not done with my culminating experience at the end of the semester?
Yes. You must remain continuously enrolled in thesis units until the culminating experience is completed. The Chair of your committee will determine which of the following options you should take if you are not finished.

A. If there remains work that will require your Chair’s input and support in a significant way, you must re-enroll in EDUC 698.
B. If it is a case of minor revisions, you may register for GRAD E699 through Extended Studies. This is a special course that is designated as meeting the continuous enrollment criteria, but does not require full tuition. Information on GRAD E699 is available on the CSUSM Graduate Studies website.

If you intend to do significant work on your culminating experience during the summer and do expect to get support by your chair and reader, then you should enroll in thesis units over the summer (EDUC 698). However, be sure to check with your chair and second reader on their availability during the summer before making any plans.

Remember, once you start with thesis units you need to remain continuously enrolled until the culminating experience are completed.

But life does happen when you are a fulltime educator, making completion of the culminating experience more difficult than you anticipated. If you are ALMOST finished, just needing a little extra time, you may enroll in GRAD E699, a one unit course through Extended Studies, for a brief extension. See the Graduate Studies Website for additional information.
However, there may be some extenuating circumstances that necessitate a leave of absence. There is a university policy related to taking a leave of absence, which should be consulted. All leaves are handled through the Associate Dean’s Office. NOTE: All Masters students should notify the Graduate Programs Office (Beverly Mahdavi) should any change in status be requested in order to keep your file accurate.

**What are the specifications for each of the options?**

Explanatory sheets are available that describe the process for each of the culminating experience options. Before making a decision, read each option carefully paying particular attention to the timeline and approval process. Additionally, make sure you have met all requirements as outlined on the Masters in Education Timeline developed by the Graduate Studies Office.

**Can I work with someone else on the same project?**

Generally, it is recommended that culminating activities be completed independently. However, exceptions can be made with large projects that have roles clearly defined and are approved by the committee. Please do not assume that the scope of a collaborative project is sufficient without consulting with the advisor and second reader. Additionally, if you are considering a collaborative project, make sure you have a conversation with your partner about the division of labor before you meet with your advisor. This relationship can be like a marriage. Be very sure that this is what you want to do.

**What is the timeline for the culminating experience?**

The timeline is of your making. However, the university has deadlines that must be adhered to if you are targeting a specific date for graduation. With your chair, create a work plan that is reasonable for your work style and the topic you have chosen. Check the CSUSM website for College of Education deadlines and a link to the Graduate Programs division for the university deadlines.

**What does a culminating experience document (thesis, project) look like?**

Your culminating experience can take many forms; it is something you will work out with your committee. If you want to see samples of theses, go to the Kellogg Library and look at what has been submitted. (Projects are generally kept with the faculty chair). Remember, CSUSM is a young university. Some of the prior thesis and projects were created before strong guidelines existed. Have a little patience with your colleagues! Additionally, you can go to UCSD, USD, and SDSU to look at what their students have produced. Looking at what others have done will give you a sense of the possibilities as well as the generally accepted format.

**Will you present your results in a public forum?**

Each Masters option has designated a public event to share your results, provide a formal presentation, and respond to questions. Check with your option to discover how you will be sharing the results of your work. This gives you an opportunity to share your work, answer questions, and have upcoming graduate students look at possibilities.
Who owns the intellectual property produced as a project or thesis?

The intellectual property created as part of a thesis or project is generally considered university property as it was created with the support of university resources. However, Masters Candidates may engage in a conversation with the university to release rights to the project or thesis for commercial use. Additional development of a project or thesis beyond the scope of the university’s interest for completion of the Culminating Experience becomes the property of the scholar.
Suggested Timeline for Thesis or Project Options

1. **IDENTIFY A QUESTION** - In the semester before you are to begin your culminating experience, identify a research question or project you are interested in.

2. **SELECT A COMMITTEE** - Ask faculty that you think have experience and knowledge of your topic to meet with you and create your committee.

3. **MAKE A PLAN** - Check the approval dates outlined by the Graduate Studies Office to ensure that you set a reasonable timeline for yourself for completion of the thesis or Project. Culminating experiences that do not meet the deadline will be pushed to a later graduation date.

4. **WORK WITH YOUR COMMITTEE** - Be sure you work closely with your committee chair as the thesis or project unfolds. Your Chair will provide you with feedback on each facet of the process and advise you on such things as when you are ready to submit the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application (available at [http://www.csusm.edu/research/IRB.htm](http://www.csusm.edu/research/IRB.htm)).

5. **TIMELINE SAMPLE** - The semester you are enrolled in thesis units, your advisor will give you specific dates for the following:
   
   - **Week One** - Set up an appointment with your Chair to formulate your schedule for completion.
   
   - **About Week 8** - Deadline to apply for graduation. Go to [http://www.csusm.edu/graduate_studies/graduation_info.htm](http://www.csusm.edu/graduate_studies/graduation_info.htm) for details.
   
   - **About Week 10** - Request clearance of all requirements from College of Education Graduate Evaluator: (760-750-4281).
   
   - **About Week 10** - Final version due to Chair for assessment (Chair and Second Reader should have received multiple versions prior to this time for formative feedback).  
   
   - **About Week 12** - Public presentation of your work. (Arranged by your Masters option faculty)  
   
   - **About Week 13** - Thesis sign-off from Chair and Second Reader. Following signing, make appointment with Associate Dean (call Associate Dean’s secretary at 750-4287) for signature on Certification form. Bring all documents.
   
   - **About Week 14** - **Deadline** for library sign-off. See [http://library.csusm.edu/services/thesis.asp](http://library.csusm.edu/services/thesis.asp) for guidelines and details. Appointments should be made in advance.

   - **About Week 15** - Commencement
Culminating Experience: THESIS

Thesis should be completed by:
Educators interested in research, learning to conduct research on their own instruction or their students’ learning, trying to test a solution to an identified problem, and/or interest in pursuing doctoral studies.

Description
A thesis is a monograph embodying original research. Prior to beginning the actual thesis research, students write research proposals that must be approved by their thesis advisors. The research proposal includes Chapters 1 through 3 of the thesis (introduction, review of literature, methodologies and procedures) and appendices (timeline, budget and instruments you plan to use).

Process
1. After you have selected your committee and have had a preliminary discussion about your ideas, identify a research problem you would like to investigate.
2. Check the approval dates outlined by the Graduate Office to ensure that you set a reasonable timeline for yourself for completion of the thesis and submission of the document for completion of the degree. Culminating experiences that do not meet the deadline will force a later graduation date.
3. Follow the procedure outlined in the research methods course (EDUC 622) for completion of the research project.
4. Complete the appropriate Institutional Review Board application prior to beginning the data collection phase of the study.
5. Make sure you work closely with your committee chair as the project unfolds. The chair will provide you with feedback on each facet of the project.
6. Obtain a set of guidelines from the library for completion of the manuscript.

In EDUC 622, Research Methods in Education, you will explore quantitative and qualitative methods of designing and conducting research in the context of classroom settings. EDUC 622 is designed to help you improve your knowledge of research and your understanding of various research methodologies, enhance your skills in planning and conducting research, develop your abilities in summarizing and interpreting research, and advance your abilities in critiquing educational research. You will develop a proposal for a research project in 622. All graduate students take 622 and develop a research proposal, regardless of the type of culminating experience they plan to complete. All students completing graduate degrees should be able to plan and carry out research, and write up the results, conclusions and implications of research studies.

Thesis Chapters
The APA Style Manual contains information on the elements of a thesis as do most educational research texts. Be sure to check with your thesis chair to ensure that all the desired elements are included. In general, a thesis contains the following:

1. Chapter One: Introduction: Identify and clearly state the question you will research. Explain what you hope to accomplish in your thesis. What issue is to be addressed and explored? What are your sub-questions? Be very clear about your research question.
Definitions of terms must be very clear in this section. Do not assume that the reader knows what you mean when you use educational jargon. Everyone might not agree with your definitions, so you can define them and call them operational definitions.

2. **Chapter Two: Review of the Literature:** Review what is currently known (and not known) about the issue to be explored by reviewing articles and books relevant to your question. Try to put your project/issue in a theoretical context. On what theories/principles are you basing your thesis? What are your assumptions? What has informed your own thinking about this project? The review of the literature puts the question into perspective and lets the reader know why the project is of significance. **You must have at least 15 referred journal articles.**

3. **Chapter Three: Methodology:** How was the research conducted? How will you collect data and how will you analyze it? This chapter should be written in past tense. Use these subheadings for Chapter Three:
   a. Design – Explain which type of methodology you used and why.
   b. Setting – Give demographics of school district and setting, do NOT name schools or districts, you may give them a pseudonym.
   c. Subjects – Give details about how the subjects were chosen, who they are.
   d. Materials – Cite any tests or books you will be using, explain why they were selected.
   e. Procedure – This should almost be a cookbook type description, write it so that a peer could possibly replicate what you have done. For example you might describe what was done by days or weeks.
   f. Analysis – Explain how you will analyze all data you collect.
   g. Limitations – Discuss the limitations of the study.

4. **Chapter Four: Results:** What were the results of your research? This is not the place for opinions or conclusions, just the facts. Put as many of your findings in tables and charts. Organize the chapter by using subheadings for each type of data that was collected.

5. **Chapter Five: Conclusions:** This Chapter is your chance to explain what you think the results of your study mean. What are the implications of your findings? What recommendations would you make for future study? What questions did your thesis raise? What other kinds of research would be helpful?
Culminating Experience:

PROJECT

The Project should be completed by:
Educators interested in providing working at a leadership beyond the classroom level, e.g. professional development, central office, private industry.

Description
Define a need in curriculum or professional development. Meet the need through the design, development, and implementation of curriculum or professional development program that has not been previously addressed by others. Provide an assessment/evaluation of the effectiveness of the project.

Process
1. After you have selected your committee and have had a preliminary discussion about your ideas, identify a problem for which you would like to explore a solution.
2. Check the approval dates outlined by the Graduate Office to ensure that you set a reasonable timeline for yourself for completion of the project and submission for completion of the degree. A Culminating Project that does not meet the deadline will force a later graduation date.
3. All projects must have a written component. The written document is not as extensive as a thesis but does provide documentation of the development and implementation of the project. The report includes the following sections:
   a. Chapter 1 – Introduction - Follow the outline for a thesis including the statement of the problem and background.
   b. Chapter 2 – Literature Review – Provide a survey of the relevant professional literature that provides the information which was used to inform the development of the project. The Review of Literature should follow the guidelines provided for a thesis.
   c. Chapter 3 – Process/Product – Outline the process that was used to develop the project. This chapter will highlight the significant findings of Chapter Two and relate how you used those findings in your project.
   d. Chapter 4 – Implementation/Results – This is where you place the content of your project.
   e. Chapter 5 – Conclusions/Next Steps – Describe what was learned from the implementation and what revisions or extensions might be developed in the future.
Culminating Experience:

NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION PROCESS

NBPTS Certification should be completed by:
Teachers interested in obtaining the NBPTS certification. (This option does not guarantee NBPTS certification)

Description:
From the NBPTS Website:

National Board Certification® measures a teacher's practice against these high and rigorous standards. The process is an extensive series of performance-based assessments that includes teaching Portfolios, student work samples, videotapes and thorough analyses of the candidates' classroom teaching and student learning. Teachers also complete a series of written exercises that probe the depth of their subject-matter knowledge, as well as their understanding of how to teach those subjects to their students.

Teachers who have participated in National Board Certification have overwhelmingly stated it is the most powerful professional development experience of their careers. They say the experience changes them as professionals and that through the process they deepen their content knowledge and develop, master, and reflect on new approaches to working with their students.

Process:
The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards process is well defined. For each cycle of certification, a timeline and details are published on the NBPTS Website (www.nbpts.org). Candidates wishing to pursue this option must follow the timeline and specifications outlined in the NBPTS process.

1. Meet with your advisor to determine the chair of your NBPTS portfolio process. CSUSM may have an NBPTS support group in operation at the time you are going through the process. The facilitator of the support group may be an appropriate chair for your portfolio. Many school districts and county offices operate support groups.

2. After you have selected your committee and have had a preliminary discussion about your focus area, identify the appropriate guideline document to request from NBPTS. Please remember that there is a substantial fee associated with the application process. CSUSM does not pay the NBPTS application fee. However, there may be resources available from your school district or the state to supplement the cost of the application process.

3. Check the approval dates outlined by the Graduate Office to ensure that you set a reasonable timeline for yourself for completion of the project and submission for completion of the degree. Culminating Projects that do not meet the deadline will force a later graduation date.

4. With your Committee Chair, set a timeline for developing your portfolio. The timeline will precede the due date of the portfolio to NBPTS. Your Committee Chair, prior to submission to NBPTS, must approve your portfolio. Please allow enough time for revisions, if necessary, prior to the final submission date.
Culminating Experience:

EXAMINATION

Examinations should be completed by:
Teachers interested in demonstrating a depth of understanding in one or more options.

Description:
The examination is conducted in a written format. – Candidates who choose this option collaboratively develop a plan for study with their Committee Chair. After substantial discussion, the Chair will provide the candidate with a suggested minimal reading list. After regular meetings with the chair to discuss the readings, a set of questions is produced to guide the candidate’s final preparation. The questions developed require analysis, synthesis, and application of the concepts learned in the in-depth study. The questions cover each predetermined area of study with a defined time limit to electronically submit responses.

Process

1. After you have selected your committee and have had a preliminary discussion about your ideas, identify a focus area for your in-depth study.
2. Check the approval dates outlined by the Graduate Office to ensure that you set a reasonable timeline for yourself for administration and evaluation of the examination including submission of the results for completion of the degree. Examinations that are completed and/or scored after the deadline will force a later graduation date.
3. Discuss your topic with your Committee Chair. Submit Intent to Complete by Examination Form with a signed copy of the form to your Committee Chair and an additional signed copy to the Graduate Office in the Student Services Center.
4. Set a calendar of meeting dates with your Committee Chair to guide your reading and study.
5. Complete your in-depth studies as directed by your Committee Chair.
6. Establish your examination time period with your Committee Chair. You will be given a set of questions to answer within a specified time period. Some Committee Chairs may choose to stretch out the examination period by administering the sections one at a time with each section due before the next is administered. Other Committee Chairs may choose to provide all the questions at once with all responses due at the same time.
7. Establish a date to meet with your Committee Chair to discuss your responses and receive the assessment. It is possible that your Committee Chair may request elaboration or clarification on some of your responses.
8. NOTE: The Committee Chair will have your second reader and, perhaps, others read your responses. In the event that responses are deemed inadequate, the Committee Chair reserves the right to either request an additional response or assign additional study to support an additional administration of the examination.