MA Project Structure and Guidelines

The MA Project is an applied study that gives students the opportunity to use sociological research to inform an organizational or policy related problem. Although projects vary in scope, research activities, and strategies for research application, all candidates should include as part of the project write-up a comprehensive report paper that states a research problem, offers background information about the problem (literature review), details the project’s research design in a method’s section, reports on the empirical research and data analysis that inform the problem, and concludes with practical recommendations to begin to solve the problem. Further, the proposed project must have a concrete deliverable that can be used by practitioners in the area or field of study. See below for more details on both components for an MA project.

I. Structure of Report Paper

1. Abstract
   - Write a 120 word (or less) comprehensive summary of the contents of the paper, including the project deliverables and recommendations.

2. Introduction/Statement of the Problem
   - Introduce the problem that the project research will inform.
   - Address why the problem is sociologically relevant.
   - Introduce what methods you employ to generate data to address the problem.

3. Literature Review/Background Information about the Problem
   - You should start by providing background information about the problem your study addresses, which entails doing a fair amount of library, web, and news research about your problem.
   - This section discusses the sociological relevance/grounding of your research problem; situate your research within a wider body of sociological research.
   - This should not just be a summary; it should be a critical and engaged analysis that highlights the main sociological arguments in the areas you are covering.
   - Use this literature to show why you are doing this exact research project; show what you hope to contribute to our understanding of the problem.
   - You should include at the end of this section your main research question generated by your consideration of the literature and that will be answered by your data analysis, report, or recommendations.

4. Research Methodology
   - Discuss what you did to research this topic (your research design, sampling, and methods of data generation, analysis, and write-up)
     - Give enough detail so that another researcher could replicate your study based on what you have shared.
   - You should have a thorough discussion of your methods, including how your sample was selected, justification of why you used a particular sample, dataset, etc., and the kinds of methods you employed to generate the information for this project.
   - Explain your method of analysis in detail (don’t forget equations if appropriate for a quantitative analysis). Discuss why the method you are using is appropriate, and if necessary, why a different approach was not taken.
5. **Findings that Inform the Problem**
   - What are your findings?
     - Include subsections with subtitles, which present prominent themes in data.
     - Organize your data so that it offers explanations of the problem.
   - Demonstrate your data – use tables, graphs, quotes, textual data or other appropriate techniques.
   - For evaluation research and/or design and trainings, include the details necessary for these projects – the proposed instrument, PowerPoint, brochures, or any training materials.
   - This section should simply present and describe the results but hold off on analytic discussion until the next chapter. The key is to highlight the salient points or themes that you will discuss further in the following chapter. This section should not simply be a data dump, as the act of grouping and highlighting core patterns is the first step in analytical presentation of your findings.

6. **Implications/Recommendations for Practice**
   - Offer your analysis of what the data teaches us about the problem.
   - Based on your demonstration of data, statement of core findings, and analysis, make recommendations or propose practice changes based on these findings.
   - Summarize your experience with developing and completing the project.

7. **References**
   - This section should contain the full reference to any work cited in the body of your paper. Works that were *not* cited in your paper should be eliminated.

**II. Deliverable Options* (you are not limited to this list):**

- **Analysis Report** (a report that highlights significant analytical findings from the research and recommendations that address the needs of a program or governmental body).
- **Project Evaluation**, or a developed Program Evaluation Design that could be used by the program (project evaluations typically take from 24-30 months to design and implement; the Program Evaluation Design is a detailed plan for the type of data, points of data collection, and the assessment instrument that can be used by the program).
- **Policy Brief** (an elaboration of the project recommendations for its impact on policy and reported to the project or governmental body).
- **Training Materials** and/or **Informational Workshop** (can include an interactive training workshop with PowerPoint teaching a relevant public about the information generated in the project; a lesson plan centering active-learning, as a way to train with the information found in the project; a workshop that implements project recommendations).
- **Informational Brochure** (a visually compelling document that details insightful project information and recommendations; information is presented in such a fashion that it engages a broader but relevant public for the project).

* The presentation of the deliverable is at the discretion of the faculty chair.
III. Examples of Projects (you can see copies of these projects in the sociology office):


Abstract
In 2014, the office of Academic Programs announced that part of CSUF’s Strategic Plan Goal 2 was to reduce by at least 50% the current 12% achievement gap between underrepresented and non-underrepresented students (California State University, Fullerton. 2016). In order for CSUF to accomplish this goal, special emphasis will need to be placed on the academic success of Latina/o students as they comprise the largest ethnic minority group on campus at 37 percent (California State University, Fullerton 2016). I propose that in order for CSUF to understand Latina/o student success, it must first develop a better understanding of the experience of Latina/o students by investigating 1) the barriers that threaten academic success for Latina/o students and 2) how Latina/o students respond to these challenges. Aiming to address both questions, I propose a mixed methods research study that begins with a sample of Latina/o students from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences being surveyed to explore the challenges being faced and the resources being used to navigate these challenges. Upon statistical analysis of the survey data, focus groups will then be conducted for deeper exploration of important themes that emerge from survey data analysis. The analyses and major findings will be compiled in a report and delivered to the College of Humanities & Social Science, which may help the institution better support the academic success of Latina/o students.

“Insights from a marginalized community: Day laborers in Orange County, CA” by Juan Villavicencio (2015)

Abstract
This exploratory study highlights day laborers’ subjective experiences and interactions within the context of their workplace and community. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 day laborers at three open-air day labor hiring sites in Orange County, CA. This study revealed that participants often experience injustice such as wage theft, being paid less than promised, and exploitation. They are also stigmatized and discriminated against. They endure negative community perceptions of them, xenophobic sentiment, police harassment, and are often discriminated against by persons of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. However, day laborers utilize negotiation strategies and demonstrate resilience to manage with these challenges. They find positive meanings and value in their roles as jornaleros, or day laborers. Increased outreach from community agencies is recommended to provide day laborers with a variety of available services to meet basic needs, give them assistance in legal issues, and offer conflict management services and English-language learning programs. Outreach and education for day labor bosses is also suggested. Immigration policy should reflect the conditions under which day laborers are in the country and grant temporary work visas.