University of Delaware
School of Education
PhD In Education
Learning Sciences Specialization Area Qualifying 2nd-Year Project

The purpose of the Learning Sciences (LS) specialization area project is to support students to develop (a) scholarly skills (e.g., research design, analysis, writing, argumentation, synthesis) and (b) knowledge of the major issues, literature, and research in the learning sciences. The project provides LS students with opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills they acquired in the first two years in the Ph.D. program, including LS and methodology courses. The assessment format is similar to a peer review process in which scholars submit manuscripts for publication, which include reviews of the literature and research studies, and receive feedback from a panel of reviewers. Moreover, it builds on skills developed in the first year in the Ph.D. program where students learned to critique research studies. In this qualifying project, students produce research using the same knowledge and skills.

Planning for the 2nd year qualifying project begins one year earlier. Students discuss and agree with their advisor on the focus of their 2nd year project, and submit a form endorsed by their advisor declaring their plans by May 31 of their first year in the program. During their second year of study, LS students will prepare a literature review or conduct a pilot study, and then produce a written product of approximately 20-30 pages. They will also present their literature review or pilot study findings at a meeting of the LS students and faculty (e.g., LS brown bag series) for about 25 minutes (15 minutes to present and 5-10 minutes to answer questions and engage in discussion). Only the written product will be evaluated. The purpose of the presentation is for the LS community to learn about the ideas and research its members are engaging in and to provide insights or a different perspective that might be helpful for the student to consider as they continue this work. It provides students with an opportunity to practice how to communicate their research. This situation is similar to presenting scholarly work at a conference, invited talk, or a job talk, which is addressed in a manuscript that is undergoing peer review for journal publication at the time of the presentation. The scholar receives valuable feedback on their work informally prior to formal reviews of the manuscript in which the work is presented in detail. In addition, it is possible to receive favorable feedback during a presentation and still receive feedback that requires extensive revision on a paper. Thus, students should not assume that the written paper will automatically receive a pass rating when their presentation goes well.

The topic and format of the project will be chosen in consultation with the student's advisor. Students may wish to enroll in an independent study course with their advisor as they undertake the project. The written product will be reviewed by a committee of three LS faculty members. The committee will consist of the student's advisor and two faculty members from LS, who will each provide written feedback as well as an overall rating. Students are not informed of which two faculty members will evaluate the written product before or while they work on the project (i.e., the review is anonymous as with journal reviews). If the three reviewers do not agree on the overall rating, then the LS project coordinator[1] will adjudicate between the different views (much like an editor would do in the peer review process of a manuscript submitted for publication).

The project must be completed by the final deadline (i.e., last day of classes in the Spring semester) unless an extension has been approved by LS faculty. If a student does not meet this deadline, then they will be notified that they have one month from the deadline to complete the project. If they do not complete the project within a month, then they will fail the project and be assisted in filing for the terminal masters. Passing is required to advance to proposing, researching, and writing the dissertation.

Projects are rated as Pass/Conditional Pass with Minor Revisions/Revise/Fail. A rubric will be used to evaluate the pilot study or literature review, which provides the basis for the overall rating. Within two weeks, the LS project coordinator will share the results with the student. In addition, the project coordinator will share the names of the reviewers, provide a consolidated summary of what the student needs to address to pass (if revisions required), which have been agreed upon by the two reviewers (does not include advisor), and include the comments provided by each reviewer without identifiers (i.e., R1, R2, and R3).

- If a student receives a rating of "Pass," then the student is eligible to advance to preparation of the dissertation. No action is required on the part of the student with respect to the project, but the reviewers' feedback will be shared for the student's consideration as they progress in their scholarly endeavors.
- If a student receives a rating of "Fail," then the student is terminated from the LS specialization area.

[1] The LS project coordinator will not have any advisees who are going through the process the year in which they hold the position.

- If a student receives a rating of “Conditional Pass with Minor Revisions,” then the student must complete revisions as determined by the three reviewers (and possibly also the LS project coordinator if there is disagreement) and write a letter to the LS project coordinator explaining how they addressed the concerns of the reviewers for which revisions were required (much like authors do when they receive a decision of “minor revisions required” by editors in peer-review journals). The student’s advisor and LS project coordinator will then re-evaluate the student’s performance on the project based on the revisions and assign either a “Pass” (i.e., submitted revision by deadline and adequately addressed the reviewers’ concerns) or “Fail” (i.e., did not make revisions by deadline or inadequately addressed concerns) rating, with consequences as outlined above. Only one revision round is permitted. Students have one month from the time they receive the feedback to make the revisions.

- If a student receives a rating of “Revise,” then the student must complete major revisions to the project as determined by the three reviewers (and possibly also the LS project coordinator if there is disagreement) and write a letter to the LS project coordinator explaining how they addressed the major concerns for which revisions were required (much like authors do when they receive a decision of “revise and resubmit” by editors in peer-review journals). The three reviewers will then re-evaluate the student’s performance on the project based on the revisions and assign either a “Pass” (i.e., submitted revision by deadline and adequately addressed the reviewers’ concerns) or a “Fail” (i.e., did not make revisions by deadline or inadequately addressed concerns) rating, with consequences as outlined in the first two bullets. Only one revision round is permitted. Students have one month from the time they receive the feedback to make the revisions.

Timeline

*By the End of Spring Semester in the **First Year** (May 31):*

1. Students will meet with their advisor to select the format and topic of the LS Specialization Area Project, and to plan when in the second year the student will complete the written product and presentation.

2. Students and advisors will complete the LS Specialization Area Project Proposal Form and send the form to the LS project coordinator[2].

3. The LS project coordinator will form an evaluation committee for each student.

During the Summer Before and During Second Year:

- Students collaborate with advisor
- Advisors provide levels of support with examples and guidelines
- Advisors set up boundaries for students' projects
- Advisors set up tentative milestones for students (e.g., date to aim submit IRB, etc.). and provide some timeline goals for students.

*By End of Spring Semester in the **Second Year**:*

- Students will work on the Specialization Area Project based on the proposal form that they submitted to the LS project coordinator at the end of their first year. Advisors can provide feedback to their students on the project in the form of comments, but not line edits. Note that it is possible to change the proposed plan as long as the revised plan is approved by the advisor. If this happens, then a new form must be completed and submitted to the LS project coordinator.

- Students will review the rubric and discuss the expectations with their advisor. Note that the criteria within the pilot study rubric apply to all students, regardless of the type of research conducted for the pilot study project.

- Students inform the LS project coordinator of when they will complete and would like to present their project during the spring semester of their second year.

[2] Failure to provide a format (i.e., literature review or pilot study) and topic will require that the student request an extension, signed by the advisor.

April Submission in the Second Year

- The written product for evaluation must be submitted to the LS project coordinator by April 1st.
- The presentation must be completed no later than April 8th.
- The review committee will evaluate the written product and return results and comments to the student no later than April 15th.
- If a “Conditional Pass with Minor Revisions” or a “Revise” rating is received, then revisions as specified by the review committee must be completed and submitted within one month of the initial evaluation (i.e., by May 15th).
- The review committee will evaluate the revisions, and the LS project coordinator will share the final decision for the written product with the student by May 30th.

Last updated 3/07/2024 NCL