

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION
THE MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION

RESEARCH AND GRADUATE EDUCATION

A philosophy of engaged scholarship centralizes the role of research and collaboration in those endeavors in the Master of Arts in Communication at Western Michigan University. The educational benefits of research partnerships are many. Students who experience research partnerships as an integral part of their education are likely to develop an appreciation for the role of research in their professional endeavors. Those who aspire to become future faculty will see first hand how professors integrate research with teaching and service responsibilities. Others will develop awareness of the importance of research and the potential contributions of a body of knowledge to their professional careers outside of academe.

Research partnerships are also a valuable structure for instruction in research methodologies. They provide opportunities for hands-on application of research techniques and increase awareness of the finer details of research processes that may not become apparent in classes.

Further, in research teams that include two or more students, the students may learn as much or more from peers as from faculty members, particularly if their peers have had prior research experiences. Indeed, advanced students may assume increasing levels of leadership in planning and conducting research, and in mentoring their peers.

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP MODEL

A *research partnership* is comprised of one or more faculty members working with one or more students on a research project. Research partnerships may be small, such as 1 faculty member working with 1 student, or they may be large, such as three (3) faculty members working with six (6) students on an interdisciplinary project.

FORMS OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION

ASSIGNED PARTICIPATION – FORMALLY ARRANGED BY DEPARTMENT

Graduate Assistants may be assigned to research partnerships during the semester in which they are scheduled to assist with large-lecture courses. Typically, this would mean a student would devote ten (10) hours/week to course assistance and ten (10) hours/week to the research partnership.

Thurgood Marshall Assistants may also be assigned to devote ten (10) hours/week to a research partnership.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION – INFORMALLY ARRANGED WITH FACULTY

Graduate students may participate in research partnerships on a voluntary basis. This is especially recommended for students who plan to complete a thesis or pursue doctoral work.

Some students may choose to participate in two research partnerships simultaneously to gain varied research experiences. Even when graduate students are formally assigned to one partnership, they may voluntarily participate in a second partnership.

When participating in voluntary research partnerships, students may prearrange independent study credit commensurate with their research contributions.

PROCEDURES FOR ARRANGING RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

Faculty biographies (see the appendix B), identifying general areas of research interest, can be found on the website. Students may contact faculty members directly to ask about research goals and ideas and discuss expectations and abilities.

STUDENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

Students engaged as research partners may make a variety of contributions contingent on their abilities and interests, as negotiated with their faculty partners. Ideally, they would have the opportunity to experience all aspects of the research process from conceptualization to publication. This would be possible with less complex studies or in long-term partnerships. Alternatively, students may contribute to phases of research projects. They may, for instance, be involved in the following:

- conducting library or database searches in a topical area;
- reviewing and abstracting research articles;
- conceptualizing research problems based on a literature review;
- researching available sources of funding for research;
- writing and submitting grant proposals to funding agencies;
- developing study designs, procedures, and instruments;
- gathering data (e.g., conducting interviews, observations, surveys, focus groups);
- recording data (e.g., coding, transcribing, or entering data into a computer program);

- analyzing and interpreting data;
- writing sections of research reports;
- preparing reference lists in APA or another style;
- identifying outlets for presenting and publishing research;
- developing research presentation materials;
- presenting or co-presenting study results in professional contexts;
- preparing manuscripts to submit to journals; and
- responding to editorial recommendations for journal submissions.

Student contributions may increase over time as they gain experience and develop essential competencies.

FACULTY CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

In ideal research partnerships, faculty members are more than *supervisors*; they are *mentors*. At a minimum, research mentors would:

- provide guidance and support during all phases of the research process;
- identify students' current competencies and provide instruction and hands-on opportunities to build further competencies;
- negotiate roles, responsibilities, and timelines at the outset of a project to ensure clear expectations, and revisit and renegotiate expectations as needed during the project;
- meet regularly, perhaps weekly, with students, ensuring ongoing commitment and accountability; and
- provide timely feedback to students, addressing problems as they arise and seeking outside support as needed.

ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

Ethical issues arise at every stage of the research process. Students and faculty should familiarize themselves with university standards, NCA standards, APA standards, and other accepted disciplinary standards for ethical research conduct, and adhere to these standards at all times. NCA encourages communication researchers to consult the APA guidelines for ethical conduct of social scientific research at www.apa.org/ethics/code.html, American Anthropological Association guidelines for

ethnographic research at www.ameranthassn.org/ethcode.htm, and American Historical Association guidelines for historical research at www.theaha.org/pubs/standard.htm.

The School of Communication has adopted two ethics policy statements that address the research partnership (see this Handbook, under School of Communication/University policies).

HUMAN SUBJECTS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (HSIRB)

All research involving protected or regulated subjects and materials must be in compliance (approved review or approved exemptions as applicable) with federal, state, and Western Michigan University requirements for the protection of human/animal subjects. The student researcher who prepares the paper is responsible for obtaining the appropriate forms from the official WMU review board (i.e., HSIRB, forms available online), and must receive approval or an approved exemption for the conduct of the research from the board **prior to initiation of the study**. Written approval from the board must be included as an appendix to the thesis. The Graduate College will not approve any thesis that does not comply with these requirements.

In the School of Communication, a research project with human subjects may be conducted as a class assignment or sometimes students wish to conduct an independent study (COM 7100) that requires the use of human subjects. For the protection of the participants, the researcher, the School, and the University, these projects must also receive HSIRB review and approval.

RESEARCH MISCONDUCT

The WMU community has approved a Research Misconduct Policy. This policy may be found on **page 64** of the handbook and online at <http://www.wmich.edu/research/ethics/docs/ResearchMisconductPolicy2006.pdf>