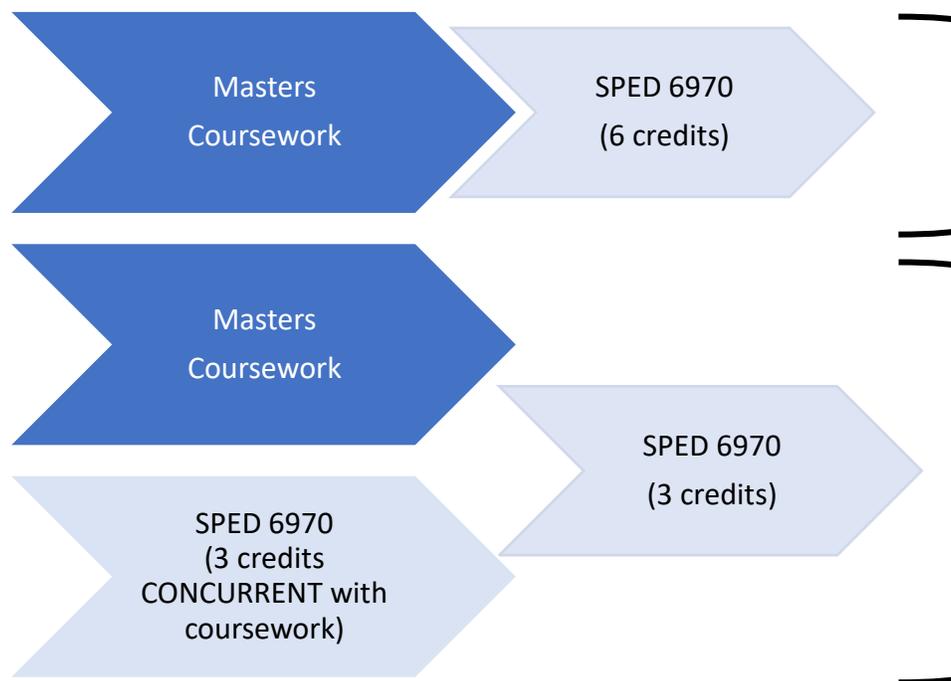


Requirements for a Thesis Project
M.S. Degree from the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation
Utah State University

The culminating project for the M.S. degree is the development, execution, and writing of an empirical study. The goal of a thesis project is for the student to demonstrate knowledge and skill in carrying out quantitative or qualitative research and contributing to the understanding of a topic or problem in education. SPED 6970 requires 6 credits usually spread over two or more semesters. Such a study typically involves a behavior change project in a school setting (such as teaching a new academic skill, changing a behavior) but other options may be feasible (such as a survey, focus groups, interviews, analysis of an existing database, etc.). Students may use single-subject or group research, and/or qualitative methods. Writing guides are available in SPED 6900 and a thesis library appears on this website.

From beginning to end, the thesis takes 9-12 months to complete and requires that students work closely with their Advisor. The thesis document usually runs 30-40 pages excluding appendices.

SPED 6970 can be taken at the conclusion of other master's coursework. Or, three credits SPED 6970 can be taken concurrently with other master's coursework followed by an additional three credits of SPED 6970 at the conclusion of the project when the students "defend" their research to the master's committee. See these alternatives below:



To complete the thesis project, students engage in the following activities under the mentorship of their Advisor:

1. Select a research topic given the current status of special education service delivery, leadership, law or policy, or personnel preparation.

2. Review the research literature related to the topic.
3. Define and delimit the research topic. That is, given the research literature, decide which studies are most relevant to the student's research (inclusion criteria) and which studies are least relevant (exclusion criteria).
4. Based on the review of the research literature, meet with the student's Advisor to decide what new research would logically extend the current understanding of the topic or problem. That is, ask what has been recommended in the research literature as the next study to be undertaken? What gaps exist in the research literature? What new procedures or combinations of existing procedures would extend the research literature?
5. Write a review of the existing research, summarize the current status of the research, provide a rationale for the student's proposed research, and articulate research questions.
6. With support and assistance of the Advisor, design methods for conducting and evaluating the student's proposed research.
7. Propose the research to the student's master's committee (referred to as the "proposal meeting"). Describe the proposed research to the committee.
8. Incorporate any modifications suggested by the student's master's committee.
9. Complete the required training to become a certified researcher at Utah State University, i.e., [Human Research Curriculum Basic Course](#).
10. Submit a protocol to the [Utah State University Institutional Review Board](#) (IRB) proposing to conduct the research. Additionally, submit the proposed research to other entities governing research, such as school district human subjects committee(s).
11. When approved by the USU IRB, establish a plan to carry out the research.
12. Collect data on the variables involved in the research project.
13. Share data on a frequent and regular basis with the Advisor, making adjustments as necessary.
14. Analyze the data to determine if the research questions have been adequately addressed.
15. Rewrite and extend the proposal research document to include results, implications, contributions to the field of research, and limitations of the study.
16. When the revised thesis document is approved by the Advisor, meet with the student's master's committee (referred to as the "defense meeting"). In the meeting, describe the results of the study.
17. Based on the revised thesis document and defense presentation, the Advisor and student's master's committee will decide whether the student has passed the oral examination required for the M.S. degree and inform the student at the conclusion of the meeting.

The final thesis document usually includes the following components. Additional components may be necessary:

- Title Page
- Table of Contents
- Abstract
- Public Abstract (i.e., a simplified version of the more technical Abstract)
- Introduction (i.e., problem statement, definition of terms, review of literature, rationale for student's research, purpose statement, research questions)

- Method (i.e., participants and their characteristics, setting, materials, description of variables, measures, methods for ensuring reliability and fidelity of measures, data analysis)
- Results (i.e., data addressing research questions, anecdotal or qualitative data collected)
- Discussion (i.e., findings, implications, contributions to the field of research, and limitations of the study).
- Reference section
- Tables and Figures
- Appendices