

Research and Internship Guidelines

Identifying Your Project: You and your advisor should begin discussions about the nature of your project as soon as possible after you arrive on campus. These discussions should result in a clear proposal of how you intend to satisfy the CBSD degree requirement for a project that results in a substantial written document. During these early discussions you and your advisor should be aware of the range of appropriate subjects that could potentially satisfy CBSD degree requirements. It is expected that the topic will have a clear relationship to biological diversity and how human development affects it. The focus may be either basic or applied, but the links to biological diversity and development must be strong and clear. In other words, a project that deals with a biological problem with little or no linkage to biological diversity would be unacceptable, even though the problem might be an important one from a purely biological perspective. Similarly, a social problem with little linkage to challenges of how development can be compatible with maintaining biological diversity would be unacceptable. If you and your advisor are uncertain about the acceptability of a project, it may help to review past CBSD project documents on file in our student commons (Room 15 Science Hall) to get an idea of what worked for past students. You may also want to discuss your project with the CBSD program chair. Your project proposal should be completed by the time of your certification meeting, at which time your committee formally endorses your proposal. It might be risky to begin working on a project without first obtaining approval from your advisor and committee.

There are two basic types of projects that can be used to satisfy degree requirements: an independent research project or an internship. An independent research project focuses on an appropriate question that you—often working closely with your advisor—have independently framed and that can be studied best through a traditional research approach (often involving the testing of hypotheses through the scientific method). An internship project focuses on an appropriate “real world” question that has been framed by a sponsoring agency or organization and offered to the student, even though you may have considerable flexibility in how you address the question. For current listings of internships see Mary Mercier, Senior Student Services Coordinator. The Nelson Institute Academic Programs Office has information on institutions that have sponsored CBSD internships in the past. Internship projects often result in the student actually working or volunteering for the sponsoring institution, whereas independent research projects are typically supported by a research grant or contract. The distinction is, therefore, based largely on the origin of the project. In a research project you have framed the question on your own and pursue it independently, whereas in an internship the question has been framed by someone else who asks you to tackle it and has expectations of a useful product at the end.

Sometimes an agency or organization will offer a CBSD student an “internship” experience in which the student is an employee or volunteer, but is given complete freedom to develop their own independent research project. In these cases the project is, from the CBSD perspective, an independent research project even though the sponsoring institution may call it an “internship.”

The Product of Your Project: Regardless of whether your project involves independent research or an internship, you must produce a substantial document at the end of your project. This document will be examined by your advisor and committee, who will use it to decide whether or not the completed project meets degree requirements. The expectations are that the document deals with the appropriate topic (as approved by the advisor and committee), and that the student has done an adequate job of addressing the topic. The adequacy of the document is judged by criteria established by your advisor and committee.

Most independent research projects result in one of two types of documents: a paper intended for publication (often in a peer-reviewed journal) or a paper that will never be submitted for publication. A document that is intended for publication is often prepared following the style and format of the journal to which it will be submitted, whereas the style and format of a document that will not be published can be determined by the student and advisor.

Internship projects also typically result in one of two types of documents: a report to the sponsoring institution or a paper for an audience other than the sponsoring institution. If the document is a report to the sponsoring institution, the format and style are typically dictated to some extent by the sponsor who has an expectation of what the product will contain. On the other hand, if the document is aimed at another audience, the format and style may be chosen by the student and advisor. It could be a paper prepared in a format and style for eventual publication or a paper written in a form agreed upon by the student and advisor.

In all cases, students are strongly urged to work closely with their advisor when writing their paper so that the final document is in a form ready for examination by the committee at the time of the final examination, which is largely an oral defense of the project document.

Thesis/Non-thesis Options: Regardless of the form of the final project document, the student has a choice of formally submitting it as a thesis or opting for a non-thesis degree. The choice should be made before the warrant is prepared for the final examination. If you will be submitting a formal thesis, you or your designate must bring your unbound thesis to Room B137 Memorial Library before the degree completion deadline. The library does not accept theses by mail. When depositing your thesis at Memorial Library, you (or your designate) must have your student I.D. number **and** your advisor approval page; see “A Guide to Preparing Your Master’s Thesis”

(<http://info.gradsch.wisc.edu/admin/academicservices/mguide.html>) for complete details and formatting requirements. After the library has processed your thesis, it will be catalogued and shelved in the library where it can be accessed by other scholars. If you opt for a non-thesis degree, the Graduate School’s guidelines need not be followed, and no copy of your final document will be added to the Memorial Library. Obviously, there are advantages and disadvantages to each option; the non-thesis option is slightly less work and expense, but your document-especially if it is never published-is less accessible to other scholars.

Filing Final Project Document with the Nelson Institute: All students in the CBSD program are required to file either a bound copy or a CD (with the document as a PDF files) of their final project document with the Nelson Institute Academic Programs Office. A paper

and electronic copy of your abstract (preferably via email in Word) should be submitted to the Academic Programs Office (nelsongrad@mailplus.wisc.edu).

Exit Seminars: CBSD students are required to give exit seminars sometime during their last year of residence before they graduate. This requirement can be fulfilled by a presentation at the CBSD seminar (Envir St 975 or Envir St 976) or by another public forum (e.g., Nelson Institute Forum). For information on the coordination of CBSD exit seminars, talk with your CBSD student representatives.