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Master's Research Project Handbook

Introduction

As part of the program requirements, each student must complete a Master's Project or a Thesis. The decision to pursue the Thesis or the Master's Project must be made in consultation with an Academic Advisor by the time that 36 credits are completed. In general, for those students seeking employment upon graduation, the Master's Project is recommended. For those students interested in pursuing research or doctoral work, the Thesis is recommended.

This handbook offers guidance for those doing the Master's Research Project. The most current version of the guide can be found at the website of the Information Architecture and Knowledge Management (IAKM) Program: <http://iakm.kent.edu/mastersproject.pdf>

Advantages of Completing a Master's Research Project

The Master's Research Project allows students to obtain limited professional experience in a work environment. The project is the opportunity for students to work with an organization so that they can gain knowledge and insight into a specific type of information system, product, setting or service. In such a way, they may anticipate how work might proceed in similar jobs for which they would seek employment. Furthermore, the project allows students to make some contact with professionals in the field, which could be helpful in their career. Students can often use their project supervisors for professional references or as contacts for employment opportunities.

Master's Research Project Purpose

The Master's Project is meant to provide a means for the application of the knowledge and skills learned through study in the Information Architecture and Knowledge Management Program.

For the Master's Project, the student will develop a project in conjunction with the information-related activities of an organization, under the guidance of a Site Supervisor and an IAKM Master's Research Project Advisor. The project must also be approved by the student's regular IAKM academic advisor, who could also serve as his or her Master's Research Project Advisor. Examples of projects include: the creation of a web site for marketing a product or service; an inventory of the information needs of an organization; usability testing of information interface, product or service; applying a knowledge management methodology to elicit the tacit knowledge of employees; creating an ontology, taxonomy, and/or thesaurus for a specific context to facilitate efficient and effective information retrieval; or analyzing the communication flows in an

organization that promote or hinder the acceptance of an information product, process, system or service.

The organization can be suggested by the student or by advisors in the IAKM Program Office. Companies such as KeyCorp, Lexis-Nexis, and Ernst and Young may provide opportunities for such work.

Master's Research Project Requirements

The student is required to complete at least 100 clock hours of supervised work on a project determined by the collaboration of the student, the Site Supervisor and the Master's Research Project Advisor. These hours may be worked on a full-time basis or arranged across a semester, even across semesters, depending on prior arrangements with the cooperating organization. A log of hours should be kept by the student and submitted to his or her Master's Research Project Advisor.

The student is also required to complete a paper describing the nature of the project. The paper might also contain the result of the project, depending on the nature of the project (e.g., the source code for an interface design). The project must be approved by the Site Supervisor and by his or her Master's Research Project Advisor and his or her IAKM Academic Advisor (See Approval Form in Appendix A, page 9, available online at: <http://iakm.kent.edu/project/approval.pdf>). This project should provide a learning experience for the student and the part of the paper should indicate how learning objectives were achieved. This project, its product(s) or results, and its description in a paper, should involve no less than a total of 150 clock hours of effort, which normally would include the 100 hours of supervised work.

Objectives of the Master's Research Project

The objectives of the Master's Project are to enable each IAKM student to:

- Complete an independent experience in the context of the information-related activities in an organization
- Foster a more in-depth, specialized treatment of a information process, product, systems or service than is usual in a formal classroom setting
- Work on an information product, technology, system or service so as to gain organizational, practical experience with these aspects of professional work.
- Submit a report to his/her on-site supervisor, faculty advisors and the program office detailing the nature of the work experience, its methods, process and results.

Prerequisites for the Master's Research Project

In order to enroll in the Master's Project (IAKM 60198), a student must complete 36 credit hours towards their Master of Science degree. Within those 36 credit hours, the student must have completed IAKM 60001, IAKM 60002 and one of the research methods courses (COMM 65020, ECON 64004, JMC 60007, LIS 60604). In addition to the approvals mentioned above, approval of the Master's Research Proposal by the Director of the IAKM Program is also required (See Appendix A or online at <http://iakm.kent.edu/project/approval.pdf>). Completion of courses related to the student's area of specialization or anticipated research project topic may be helpful but is not required.

Master's Research Project Deadlines

The first step in the Master's Research Project process is selection of a Master's Research Project Advisor. This cannot take place any later than the beginning of the semester prior to that in which graduation is anticipated. Keep in mind that availability of an individual faculty member can be limited due to special assignment, Faculty Professional Improvement Leave, or for other reasons. Faculty availability may also be limited during the summer semester. The student is responsible for verifying that the Master's Research Project Advisor is expected to be available during the semester when completion of the Master's Research Project is anticipated.

The dates below represent final deadlines for the Master's Research Project. Completion of the various stages in advance of the stated deadlines is to the advantage of the student.

	Anticipated Graduation Semester		
	Spring	Summer	Fall
Selection of Research Project Advisor	15-Sept*	15-Feb*	15-Apr*
Proposal to Research Project Advisor	15-Nov*	15-Apr*	15-July*
First Draft to Research project Advisor	15-Feb*	15-June*	15-Sept*
Final Draft to Research Project Advisor	15-Apr*	15-July*	15-Nov*
Approved Final Copies, Disk and Archive Fee to IAKM Office	1-May*	1-Aug*	1-Dec*

*If the date falls on a weekend, the previous Friday

Specific Master's Research Project Advisors may impose deadlines in advance of the stated deadlines. **Deadlines can be extended only with the approval of the student's Master's Research Project Advisor.** Extension of any deadline may result in delayed graduation.

Students planning to graduate in the term during which they complete their research project must remember to apply for graduation **no later than** the Friday of the first week of the semester. Application forms for graduation are available in the College of Communication and Information Office, 202C Taylor Hall.

The Master's Research Project Advisor

Each student is responsible for identifying a Master's Research Project Advisor to guide in the identification of an appropriate topic and of the organization in which to do the project, to approve and to facilitate the development of the Master's Research Project Proposal, to help to conduct the research project, to collaborate with the Site Supervisor, and to assist in the preparation of the final Master's Research Project Report. The role of the Master's Research Project Advisor is to assure the academic quality of the project experience. The Master's Research Project Advisor is usually a full-time faculty member of Kent State University who teaches courses in the IAKM Program. The student's Academic Advisor may serve as the Master's Research Project Advisor. The Master's Research project is a complex process requiring more than a single semester for completion. Selection of a Master's Research Project Advisor should be accomplished early to ensure timely completion of the Master's Research Project.

Selecting a Project

If a project is to be completed, there must be some concrete product to evaluate, such as an interface, search system, database, XML specification, user manuals, results of usability studies, etc. Indexing a series of records is not sufficient, but the development of an ontology for a specific application may be. To provide a context for the project, the student must include a report, mentioned above, to describe the project, the process engaged in for its development, describe its product(s) and processes, and its significance for the organization for which it was developed. Depending on the nature of the project, this may be a separate document or a document that contains the product in some manner (e.g., source code or a CD-ROM with code).

The Master's Research Project Proposal

The student and the Master's Research Project Advisor work together, in collaboration with a Site Supervisor, to determine the specific nature of the Master's Research Project Proposal. A suggested proposal format is to be found in the directions of the Approval Form (Appendix A) using the suggested proposal elements in Appendix B. Adherence to the proposed format is a minimal requirement for the Master's Research Project proposal and is not in

itself a guarantee of approval. It is recommended that the proposal be submitted well in advance of the required deadline to allow for revision to comply with recommendations or requirements of the Master's Research Project Advisor. Although the Master's Research Project Advisor may receive the proposal by the required proposal deadline, there is *no* guarantee that the student will be able to complete the Master's Research Project by the final submission deadline.

The Master's Research Project Report and Research Product(s)

The Master's Research Project Report is an official document of the IAKM program representing and reflecting an essential student learning experience. Rigorous standards of research conduct and professional presentation of results are to be employed throughout the Master's Research Project process. It is recommended that draft and final versions of the Master's Research Project Report and related research product(s) be submitted well in advance of the stated deadlines to allow for revision and to comply with recommendations or requirements of the Master's Research Project Advisor. Receipt of the final version of the Master's research project report and product(s) by the required final submission deadline does not guarantee that the student will be able to complete the degree during that semester.

The length of a Master's Research Project Report is a function of the specific information system, product, process or service to be addressed, the methodologies, techniques and tools employed, and the analytical and expository processes required for effectively presenting the results and the implications of the project, its context or background, any research involved and any other pertinent materials. There are no fixed minimum or maximum page lengths. See Appendix B (available online at <http://iakm.kent.edu/project/elements.pdf>) for a list of major elements suggested for the Research Project proposal, most of which should be included in the final report as well. Also see the arrangement suggestions and samples of pages in the Appendices of this guide.

The research product(s) of the project usually is attached to the report in the format of Appendices. This could be the source code in digital and/or printed format, with appropriate images and other required components. Any product(s) is required to have a specification document in addition to the main body or core components of the product(s), for example, a specification of a database or a software program, an introduction to a thesaurus, an introduction or user manual of a metadata schema, a specification of a set of XML DTDs or XML schemas, or an introduction of an ontology and related taxonomies or thesauri. The Master's Research Project Advisor and the student will discuss and agree on the format and content of the final product(s) when the Proposal is submitted. If the product or the descriptive paper involves intellectual property of a sensitive nature to the cooperating organization, the student will provide a report and a product in such a way that does not violate intellectual property laws.

Style Manual

The required style manual for the Master's Research Project Report is *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, latest ed. (Washington, DC: APA). Students should refer to this style guide for formatting, structure and design of the written format of the Master's Research Project Report. Questions not covered by the Publication Manual should be referred to the Master's Research Project Advisor.

Research Involving Human Subjects

Master's Research Projects employing questionnaires, interviews, observation, or other methodologies involving human research subjects must conform to the University's *Administrative Policy Regarding Research Involving Human Subjects* (policy 3342-3-02), which mandates prior approval by the University Institutional Review Board. A student developing a topic involving human research subjects is responsible for working with a Master's Research Project Advisor to determine the procedures for human subjects approval review. Human Subjects approval must be obtained before data collection procedures begin and may take a significant amount of time. It is recommended that the Human Subjects Review form be included with the Research Proposal submitted for the Research Project Advisor's approval. Human Subjects Application materials and sample consent forms are available in the IAKM office as well as at the Division of Research, Graduate Studies and Technology Transfer website at <http://www.kent.edu/rags/RAGS-Forms.cfm>. A sample cover letter meeting Human Subjects requirements is included in Appendix G of this handbook.

Master's Research Project Grading

Credit for IAKM 60198 (Master's Project) is awarded on an Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) grading basis. A grade of In Progress (IP) may be awarded if the student and Research Project Advisor agree that additional time beyond the semester of enrollment is required for successful completion of the Master's Research Project. A "Request for IP Grade" form specifying the requirements for completion and anticipated completion date, which will under no circumstances exceed one year from the end of the semester of enrollment, must be signed by the student, the student's Master's Research Project Advisor, and the student's Academic Advisor. Failure to complete requirements for changing the IP grade to a grade of S by the completion deadline will result in a change from IP to U.

A final grade for IAKM 60198 (Master's Project) will be recorded only when the following steps have been completed:

- The final version of the Master's Research Project Report has been approved by the Research Project Advisor
- One error-free copy of the Project Report printed on acid free paper has been submitted to IAKM for the University Archives
- \$1.00 to cover library binding of the report has been submitted, and
- A disk copy of **two data files** has been submitted, including:
 - File 1 contains the abstract in ASCII format (See Appendix D)
 - File 2 contains the full Project Report in either WordPerfect or Microsoft Word or PDF format.If the files are too large and contain non-ASCII format(s), zip the files with the file structure and hand-in a zip file or CD-ROM or other media that would handle the content of the project (e.g., DVD).

To facilitate the process, a checklist is provided in Appendix H.

APPENDIX A

**Kent State University
Information Architecture and Knowledge Management
Master's Research Project Approval Form
IAKM 60198 – 3 credit hours**

STUDENT INFORMATION

Name of student _____

Address _____ City/state/zip _____

Home phone _____ Work phone _____

Email _____

SITE INFORMATION

On-site project supervisor _____

Title _____ Work place _____

Address _____ City/state/zip _____

Work phone _____ Email _____

Date of initial meeting with on-site project supervisor _____

Please attach:

- 1) a 300-word abstract describing the project or problem to be addressed and a timeline for completion of major stages of the research project (to be completed in cooperation with On-Site Supervisor).
- 2) a complete copy of the Master's Research Project Proposal for approval by your Master's Research Project Advisor.

Student Signature Date

On-Site Project Supervisor Date

Research Project Advisor, Academic Advisor and Director Approvals

Student Signature Date

Research Project Advisor Date

IAKM Academic Advisor Date

IAKM Program Director Date

APPENDIX B

Suggested Master's Research Project Proposal Elements

1. A working **title** that is succinct but indicative of the nature of the project and its product(s).
2. A **project description** that indicates the nature of the project in terms of its processes, partners, collaborators, participants and potential product(s). It could also indicate its importance, scope, and potential for the student and/or organization involved.
3. If appropriate, a preliminary **literature review** that provides context and background for the project or study. Alternatively, it could provide a **history** or the **context** of the research project, indicating such things as organizational constraints or parameters, the role of the current project in terms of organizational needs or existing organizational projects.
4. A statement of the **goals and objectives** of the project that could include such things as a more detailed description of the nature of the intended product(s), process, service or system; or research questions, hypotheses, and key assumptions that might be involved, if the project is more aligned to a research question.
5. A statement of the **methodology** for the realization of the project. It could define the general approach to how the project and its product(s) will be realized or the methodological area as well as the specific design of the procedures, data collection instruments, data gathering procedures, and/or testing procedures.
6. A description of **tools**, if any, to be used for the development of the product, including specific software tools, programming languages, hardware devices or other appropriate technologies.
7. A **work plan** that outlines the sequencing, flow, and timeline of the project.
8. Depending on the requirements of the Research Project Adviser, proposal **appendices** may include Human Subject Review application, flowchart, proposed data dictionaries, sample database records, source code, etc.

APPENDIX C

Arrangement of Front Matter of Final Research Project Report

1. Abstract (See sample abstract page in Appendix D)
2. Blank page
3. Title page (See sample title page in Appendix E)
4. Blank page
5. Approval page (ii) (See sample approval page in Appendix D)
6. Blank page
7. Table of contents (iii)
8. List of illustrations (if any)
9. List of tables (if any)
10. List of appendixes (including printed or electronic products)
11. Acknowledgments (if any)
12. The Introduction should begin pagination in Arabic numerals

APPENDIX D

Sample Abstract Page for Final Research Project

Author: Harry Pottergeist

Title: An Evaluation of the Use of a Web Interface by Adolescent Mental Health Professionals for Accessing Adolescent Mental Health Sources

Semester: Spring

Year: 2003

Adviser: Dr. Thomas J. Froehlich

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the use of a web interface by adolescent mental health professionals for accessing adolescent mental health sources. A sample of ten adolescent mental health professionals was given a series of tasks for finding specific types of resources through the web interface. Their performance was measured in terms of success of task completion, directness of navigation to obtain results, speed with which the task was completed and error rates. While the sample size was too little to assume statistical significance, a threshold was set for these measures, and based on this threshold, the designed interface seemed to be effective in providing resources to different types of mental health professionals in finding desired content. However, a larger sample size is needed to validate this result.

APPENDIX E

Sample Title Page for Final Research Project

THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INTERFACE AND DATABASE FOR RESOURCES FOR PROFESSIONALS DEALING WITH ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

A Master's Research Project Report submitted to the
Kent State University Master's Program in Information Architecture and
Knowledge Management
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Science
in Information Architecture and Knowledge Management

by

Harry Pottergeist

May 2003

APPENDIX F

Sample Approval Page for Final Research Project

Master's Research Project by

Harry Pottergeist

B.S., Baldwin-Wallace College, 1996

M.S., IAKM, Kent State University, 2003

Approved by

Master's Research Project Advisor _____ Date _____

IAKM Academic Advisor _____ Date _____

IAKM Program Director _____ Date _____

APPENDIX G
Cover Letter Sample
(Printed on IAKM letterhead)

Re: Name of Project

June 12, 200X

Dear CIO:

I am a graduate student in the Master of Science Program in Information Architecture and Knowledge Management at Kent State University. As part of the requirements for my master's degree I am conducting a study about the information needs of chief information officers (CIOs). The enclosed questionnaire elicits information that will help me to discern the major sources of information used by CIOs to perform their jobs and to conduct their personal research. This information would be useful to both theorists and practitioners in the Knowledge Management.

Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed, as you do not need to sign your name to individual questionnaires; only the investigator has access to the survey data. There is no penalty of any kind if you should not choose to participate in this study or if you would withdraw from participation at any time. While your cooperation is essential to the success of this study, it is, of course, voluntary. A copy of the results of the study will be available upon request.

If you have any further questions, please contact me at (330) 672-2782 or [Name of advisor], my research advisor, at (330) 672-2782. If you have any further questions regarding research at Kent State University you may contact Dr. Rathindra Bose, Vice President for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies at (330) 672-2851.

Thank you very much for your cooperation; it is much appreciated. You may return the questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope to me at the following address:

Jane Doe
123 Terrace Drive
Kent, Ohio 44240

Sincerely,

Jane Doe
Graduate Student

*NOTE: Underlined portions must be included, but text should NOT be underlined in the letters you will mail.

APPENDIX H

Research Project Requirement Checklist

The times in parentheses following the item are *suggestions* only, unless otherwise indicated. Be aware that individual Research Project Advisors may require more specific deadlines than the ones suggested here.

- _____ Complete all core courses.
- _____ Find an appropriate Research Project Advisor (*at least* a month before submitting the proposal) to discuss the topic and possible Human Subjects Review requirements.
- _____ Submit proposal to Research Project Adviser. Include "Request for Approval of Research Project Proposal." (For timing, see "Deadlines" on page three of this handbook)
- _____ Submit "Application for Approval to Use Human Subjects in Research" to Research Project Advisor if human subjects are involved in your research, (e.g., if you will invite subjects to test your software). This should occur at approximately the same time that you submit your proposal to your Research Project Advisor.
- _____ Obtain all necessary signature(s) on the "Request for Approval of Research Project Proposal form.
- _____ Submit signed "Request for Approval of Research Project Proposal" form to IAKM office, obtain registration information, and register.
- _____ Sign up for graduation (the first week of the semester you plan to graduate)
- _____ Submit first draft of research project report and product (see "Deadlines" on page three of this handbook)
- _____ Obtain approval of Research Project Adviser for final draft of research project (see "Deadlines" on page three of this handbook)
- _____ Submit one error-free copy of the Research Project Report on acid free paper, \$1 for binding, a disk (floppy, CD-ROM, zip-disk or DVD) containing both the abstract and the entire project report and product(s), plus a copy of the paper for your Master's Research Project Advisor (if required).