A quantitative research policy paper is required of Gerontology PhD students by the end of the fourth semester of study. The paper should be nearly comparable to an article that would be published in a professional academic journal. The research paper should contain all of the elements of a scholarly article: statement of the problem and hypothesis, literature review, research design or analytic framework, presentation of quantitative findings including statistical tables, and conclusions. Although collaboration with faculty on the basic research idea and design is encouraged, the paper is designed to give students the opportunity to demonstrate the ability to independently conceptualize, conduct, and report the results of empirical research.
Formal Guidelines
Second Year Paper Requirement
PhD Program in Gerontology

2013-2014

In order to take preliminary exams, all PhD Students are required to complete an empirical paper as described in the Graduate Studies Bulletin of the University of Massachusetts Boston. This paper is designed to provide evidence that the student is capable of conceptualizing, conducting and reporting the results of empirical research. The purpose of these guidelines is to clarify the roles and responsibilities of Program faculty and students in the process.

Fall Semester

In the Fall Semester students are required to enroll in GER 726, “Current National Databases in Gerontological Policy Research.” In this course, students are expected to lay the groundwork for their second year paper by:

1. developing an appropriate major research question,
2. conducting a brief review of the relevant literature, and
3. ensuring the adequacy of the data to address the research question through descriptive analyses.

At the start of the Fall semester, each student will develop a proposed research question to be addressed in his/her empirical paper.

Having identified a research question or topic that the student wishes to study, he or she should write a 1-2 page summary of their proposed research. This summary should include:

1. a statement of the major research question(s),
2. a brief discussion of the importance of the study, and
3. a brief discussion of the adequacy of the proposed data source.

The student will submit this research summary as a homework assignment to the Geron 726 instructor. The proposed research does not have to be original or pathbreaking. However, the study should not simply duplicate an earlier study. Students are expected to extend an earlier study in some way, such as by the specification of additional variables, performing subgroup analyses, or by the use of a different data source.

Students will be assigned two readers who are associated with the Gerontology Program. While students can specify their preferences for assigned readers, reader assignments are based on student preferences subject to the constraint that reader assignments are reasonably balanced among faculty members. Final reader assignments are made by the
Geron 726 instructor in consultation with the Graduate Program Director. Readers are expected to:

1. assess the merits of a student’s proposed major research question, and
2. guide the student to appropriate literature in conducting the literature review.

Readers are not expected to provide students with research questions to study. Readers should evaluate the summary of proposed research in terms of substance, relevance, and feasibility.

The research summary must be approved by the assigned readers before the student can continue on in the process. The readers may:

1. accept the initial proposal,
2. reject the initial proposal and advise the student to revise and resubmit it, or
3. reject the initial proposal and advise the student to change the proposed research question.

The readers are expected to serve as an advisor to the student on substantive issues and should direct the student to relevant literature as necessary. The initial proposal should generally be approved by the 6th week of class in the Fall semester. A form (attached to this document) contains space for signatures of the readers. After the research proposal is accepted by both readers, the student should submit the form to both readers to officially sign-off on the proposed paper. The signed form should be given to the Graduate Program Administrator until the student’s final paper has been formally approved after the end of the Spring semester.

Near the end of the Fall semester, GER 726 students are required to submit a 7-10 page formal concept paper containing an expanded discussion of research questions and study hypotheses, a brief summary of relevant literature identified thus far, and a summary of the proposed statistical analysis. A copy of this report should be reviewed by both readers to assess the feasibility of the proposed study to be carried out in Spring semester. Any potential concerns of the readers should be raised at this time.

The last assignment for Geron 726 in the Fall semester entails creation of an analytic research file. This analytic data file should contain a majority of the variables that will be used in the actual statistical analyses to be conducted by the student in the Spring semester. Potential problems, such as inadequate sample size and significant, missing data may be identified through this assignment. If serious data problems are identified, a student may be required their proposed study to rectify the problem. Students will consult with the Geron 726 instructor and assigned readers for advice in modifying their proposed study.
Spring Semester

In the Spring semester, students are required to enroll in GER 727, “Research Practicum in Gerontology.” Students are expected to carry out their proposed empirical research in this course and to write a paper to satisfy the Second Year Paper Requirement. Homework assignments in this course entail initial drafts of each conventional section of a professional paper: introduction, literature review, conceptual model, data and methodology, empirical results and discussion. Students will be instructed to submit copies of these interim homework assignments to their assigned readers for comment.

The first draft of the complete research paper will be due at the end of the exam period for the Spring semester (May 20, 2011). The completed drafts will be reviewed by both readers and returned to students two weeks later (June 3, 2011). Students will be required to submit final papers with all revisions two weeks after that (June 17, 2011). Students will be notified about the acceptance or rejection of their final paper two weeks later (July 1, 2011).

Note that readers will only provide a detailed review of one draft paper and one final paper for each student. Students who complete a draft paper early should not expect to receive additional reviews as a result.

Revised papers will be accepted in full, or rejected by readers after the second review. If the two readers disagree in their recommendations regarding acceptance or rejections of a revised paper either reader may request that the Graduate Program Director appoint a third reader to review the submitted paper. In the event that readers cannot agree on a recommendation, a vote of the three readers will determine the final disposition.

Students whose final papers are rejected by readers will be given the opportunity to submit a new and original second year paper in the following year. Student swill be given an incomplete (I) grade for GER 727 and required to meet all research paper interim assignment due dates in the following academic year with a new research topic. A second rejection of a student’s second year paper will result in assignment of a failure grade for GER 727. Such students will have no opportunity to go on to write a Qualifying Paper in the PhD Program and will not be eligible to receive the Master’s degree in Gerontology.
Second Year Paper
Sign Off Sheet

________________________ will receive guidance
by the undersigned in the preparation of a research paper which is required in the
Gerontology PhD program in order to write a Qualifying Paper and to receive the
Master’s degree.

____________________________________________  _____________________
Reader  Date

____________________________________________  _____________________
Reader  Date

________________________

____________________________________________
Reader  Date

____________________________________________
Reader  Date

________________________

________________________ has fulfilled the research
paper requirement with a project entitled:

____________________________________________

____________________________________________
Reader  Date

____________________________________________
Reader  Date