

IDSC Final MA Project

The final project of the MA degree is a research paper (based on primary research and/or secondary sources) or a thesis (based on primary research). Alternatively, students may write a technical report for their final MA project. IDCE 30213 is the course unit designation for the final project. IDSC students register for one credit in either the fall or the spring semesters of their second year, or half credit in each semester of their second year.

Option 1: Final Research or Critical Review Paper

The MA final research paper or critical review paper will focus on a theme, question, or problem of particular interest within the field of international development and social change. Students identify a suitable topic of research within the field of international development and social change from course work and/or field experience, formulate a carefully thought-through line of argument, and offer critical insights on that topic after synthesizing and analyzing the relevant data. The paper may be based on primary or secondary research and must be reviewed by a committee of two IDSC faculty readers. The first reader should be a core IDSC faculty member. The paper will be approximately 25 to 30 pages in length (double spaced; 12 pt. font size).

Option 2: A Technical Report

The technical report should reflect an innovative, applied project carried out by the student that contributes to a development process or organization — e.g. in building capacity, fomenting better participation, improving monitoring and evaluation, raising funds, or contributing new data for planning, whatever the case may be. That is, the work must be original and demonstrate state-of-the-art practice.

The work may be either voluntary or paid, but it should have been carried out during the two years of the MA program. The standard of work for this technical report should go beyond something carried out for an internship both in timing (it should be more than the required 210 hours of an internship) and substance (as reflected by the professional responsibilities assumed). That is, the student must demonstrate both initiative and creativity in some aspect of the project cycle and give appropriate credit and cite should any information or data acquired from the organization but not collected by the student.

The student is solely responsible for making contacts and establishing a relationship to a development organization or process of their choice. The practicum/technical report supervisor may provide some ideas, but it is the task of the student to do all the necessary groundwork for finding a practice experience suitable to his/her own skills and interests.

While the student may choose to write up a separate report for the internal purposes of the development organization with which he/she collaborated, the final technical report submitted to IDSC should be understandable to a broader audience that may not be familiar with the background, context, and institutional history of the actors involved.

Option 3: A Master's Thesis

Graduate students of extraordinary academic achievement may choose to pursue a thesis option with the written permission of the IDSC Graduate Coordinator and IDCE Director. Like the final MA paper, a thesis must focus on a particular theme but be based on a deeper review and analysis of the chosen topic. To reflect this depth, the thesis is expected to be longer than a paper, usually approximately 100 pages and must be defended orally before a committee of three faculty members including at least two IDSC faculty. As with the MA paper, the first reader or thesis committee chair should be a core IDSC faculty member. Students planning to write a thesis must begin preparation earlier than those writing an MA paper and should seek written permission from the IDSC Graduate Coordinator and IDCE Director by early April of the second semester of their MA program.

Please note: IDCE reserves the right to make modifications to guidelines and procedures at any time.

The Quality, Style and Content of the IDSC Final MA Project

The final paper or thesis should:

- Articulate a clear question or argument to be addressed in the paper/thesis.
- Locate the topic within the key debates and/or the literature in the field of international development and social change.
- Describe your research methodology. That is, indicate what constitutes the principle data or evidence of your work, how it was collected (from primary or secondary sources), and how it will be used to address the central research question.
- Develop your argument systematically by drawing on supporting evidence and organizing your points clearly so that they speak to your central question.
- Conclude by offering insightful remarks or making an original contribution to the discussion of the central issue you have chosen to address.

The technical report should:

- Contain a concise executive summary describing the development problem or project tackled.
- Make clear the appropriate institutional, historical, geographic context, such that it is understandable by any development practitioner.
- Describe the work carried out and how it contributed to solving the problem defined.

- Show evidence of how the student put into practice new ideas, theories, or skills learned as part of his/her course of study. If the work is part of a team project, the student should clarify his/her role and contribution to the team's work.
- Conclude with specific, but realistic recommendations.
- Append appropriate annexes that show:
 - A. Written evidence of how the report has been presented by the development organization, for example, a cover letter, copy of a powerpoint presentation, or a transcript of oral presentation,
 - B. *And/or* any feedback received from the organization in response to the work conducted.
 - C. If the report is part of a team project, the report itself or its annexes should clearly describe the role and contribution of each student.

All MA final projects (research papers, technical reports and theses) should

- Contain a correctly and consistently formatted bibliography of relevant sources and references cited in the paper, report or thesis. See: www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/index.cgi?section=resources.
- Reflect professional or graduate-level standards in terms of the writing quality, style and content of the final project. The project, including bibliography and footnotes, should be in the format required by Clark University Graduate School and the IDSC Program. Clark University's **Thesis Format** guidelines are available at www.clarku.edu/graduate/current/formattingguides.cfm. If you have questions see Denise Robertson in the Graduate School Office, 2nd floor, Geography Building. If you wish you may use the template available at www.clarku.edu/departments/idce/docs/IDSC_masterstemplate.pdf to format the first few pages of your final project. Also see the **IDSC MA Project Checklist below**.
- Avoid plagiarism. For the University policy on Plagiarism and for resources on how to avoid it, see: www.clarku.edu/departments/writingatclark/citation.cfm.

Procedure and Timeline for IDSC Final MA Project

1) In the fall semester of the first graduate year, students reflect on what they learn in their course work and discuss possible themes for the research project with their faculty advisors to determine suitability of the topic, the feasibility of the approach, and the relationship of the topic to their selected area of specialization and interest. They also discuss selection of an IDSC faculty or affiliate faculty member who would be suitable to serve as first reader.

2) In the spring semester of their first year, students meet with their advisor and proposed first reader to explore the topic and whether the faculty member is available to serve as first reader. Students then prepare a two-page prospectus indicating the specific topic for the project, the relevance of courses taken and field work conducted or to be conducted on the topic, and the research towards the project that the students plan to undertake. This prospectus, signed by the first reader, should be submitted to the reader, faculty advisor, and the IDSC Graduate Program Coordinator for approval no later than fall pre-registration advising week. Students should file a copy of the signed prospectus in the IDCE Student Services Office.

3) Once the prospectus is approved, the student designs a plan of work for the summer. Generally students proceed with their research or work on their final project independently over the summer and resume work with their first reader in the fall of their second year.

4) Throughout the fall semester of their second year students work on their final project in conjunction with their first reader and independently. At this time, students select a second reader from among the IDSC core or affiliate faculty to serve on a two-person Final Project Review Committee. Students are required to have an approved topic and readers by drop-add period of their third semester (typically the fall semester of their second year). Students should work out with the first reader a timeline for completion of the various stages of the paper. (Note that the last day of classes is in early December; finals are mid-December. Classes resume in mid-January. Most faculty members are not on campus during the holidays and semester break.)

5) By the beginning of the February (of their fourth and last semester) before a May graduation, students submit a draft of their final project to their first readers and meet with the reader to discuss the necessary changes to the project. Re-work this draft into a polished version. If you wish to receive your Master's degree in May, you must submit an **Intent to Graduate form** (see page 20) to the IDCE Student Services Office on the last working day in February.

6) By the end of February (of their fourth and last semester), the student has a review session with the two readers. Both readers should receive the polished draft at least one week, and preferably two weeks, before the review session. At this session, the paper, its scope, contents, fit with the literature, etc. will be thoroughly reviewed. This meeting is not designed as a “defense” and is not open to other students. Rather, it is a work session for the student and two readers. Students should anticipate that they will require several more weeks to finalize the paper. If a student is planning to have an MA degree awarded in May, the review session must be held by the end of February in order to allow time to incorporate comments, make revisions, and put the paper in the required final format by the end of March. **It is the student's responsibility to set up the review session.** (Note: Spring break is usually the week after the first weekend in March and faculty are not available during break.)

7) Once both readers have approved the revised paper, the student submits one hardcopy and one CD of the final version signed by the first reader to the IDCE Student Services Office by the last

working day in March. The paper should be in the format required by the Clark University Graduate School for theses and formal papers including proper front matter, accepted page numbering, etc. Download the **Thesis Format** guidelines from www.clarku.edu/graduate/current/formattingguides.cfm. See Denise Robertson in the Graduate School Office, 2nd floor, Geography Building, with questions. If you wish you may use the template available at www.clarku.edu/departments/idce/docs/IDSC_masterstemplate.pdf to format the first few pages of your final project. Also see the **IDSC MA Project Checklist below**.

8) The Clark University Board of Trustees meets quarterly (in May and October of each year) to grant degrees. If you wish to receive your Master's degree in May, hand in the finished, formatted and signed copy of your Final Project to the IDCE Student Services Office on or before the end of March (check exact date with the IDCE Student Services Coordinator, Dilma Lucena). There are no exceptions to this deadline. If you miss the deadline to graduate in May or wish to graduate in October, discuss this with your advisor and submit the **Intent to Graduate** form to the IDCE Student Services Office before the start of classes in August (to avoid being charged Non-resident Student fees). The finished, formatted copy of your final project, signed by your advisor, is due into the IDCE Student Services Office before the last week of September.

9) After final revisions have been made, the student should confer with the two faculty readers on their views regarding journal submission and proceed according to their recommendation. If the readers of the student's final project judge the work to be of exceptional merit and originality, they will recommend its submission to an academic journal such as *World Development, Signs, Environment, Development & Sustainability; Human Ecology, Water Resources Development, or Development in Practice*. It is not a requirement to submit the paper to an academic journal. It is an honor to be asked to do so, as well as a mark of distinguished accomplishment if the paper is accepted for publication.

10) The procedures and timing for the IDSC Final MA project are outlined in the Table below.

Timing		MA Practicum and Technical Report	MA Paper	MA Thesis
1 st year	March/April	Supervisor chosen & organizational contacts established for a feasible work plan	First reader chosen & topic approved	Petition made and approved, First reader chosen
	End of semester	Terms of reference completed	Research proposal completed	Research proposal completed and two other readers identified
	Summer	Internship or applied work	Research (Primary or Secondary)	Research (Primary)
2 nd year	Fall semester	Conduct research on comparative best practices, contextual background, and other relevant research from grey literature. Sign up for IDCE 30213 (½ credit or 1 credit or leave this until the spring)	Conduct literature review and research analysis. Sign up for IDCE 30213 (½ credit or 1 credit, or leave this until the spring)	Conduct literature review and research analysis. Sign up for IDCE 399 (½ credit or 1 credit) and IDCE 30213 (½ credit or 1 credit or leave this until the spring). Contact and finalize two other readers
	Spring semester	Complete the technical report and send to the affiliated development organization for approval. Sign up for IDCE 30213 (½ credit or 1 credit or none if this was done in the fall)	Complete the MA paper. Sign up for IDCE 30213 (½ credit or 1 credit, or none if 1 credit was taken in the fall)	Complete the MA paper. Sign up for IDCE 399 (½ credit or none if 1 credit was taken in the fall) and IDCE 30213 (½ credit or 1 credit or none if 1 credit was taken in the fall)
	Feb/March	Working session with two readers	Working session with two readers	Defense with three readers