**Guidelines for a Successful and Enjoyable ISP**

**Name of Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Chosen Stream for ISP: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**The ISP invites students to:**

* Analyze a specific social problem and contemplate responses to it
* Integrate self-directed learning with coursework and field placement learning in the context of a student’s learning objectives
* Contribute to the advancement of practices, programs or policies relevant to a student’s chosen field of social work in the context of your ISP

**Essay Format:**

The independent study project culminates in a written report in appropriate scholarly form. The scope of the project should be appropriate for a 9-credit course. It is approximately 40 pages in length excluding any appendices and full list of cited references), supported by a solid review of literature derived from 25-40 well-selected, relevant references APA format (latest version)

**Each ISP must have the following Cover Page:** (follow example below)

* A title with a maximum length of 55 letters; a subtitle is optional
* Student name given in full
* Advisor’s name
* The date shown is the month and year of convocation

Should a student wish to submit a reduced version of their ISP for scholarly publication, the student may do so *after the requirements of the MSW have been met*. Thus, the ISP would be graded as an essay paper and then consideration would be made for possible publication(s) with or without the student’s advisor or other persons as co-authors. Consider attending the Skillset Academic Integrity Day event for a detailed look at ethical authorship practices between students and professors (http://www.mcgill.ca/skillsets/calendar).

**The ISP is graded by the Advisor** according to the following McGill grading scale:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| A | 4.0 | 85 – 100% |
| A- | 3.7 | 80 – 84% |
| B+ | 3.3 | 75 – 79% |
| B | 3.0 | 70 – 74% |
| B- | 2.7 | 65 – 69% |

**Deadlines:**

If the ISP is not completed by the end of a student’s third full-time term (for part-time students, by the term in which course work and field work are completed and during which a student has registered for the ISP credits), an additional session to maintain student status is required and involves the equivalent of full-time fees; it is thus strongly recommended that students complete the ISP the time frame set out in the MSW program. Note the following deadlines for submitting the ISP to graduate:

* For graduation in Winter (Feb), ISP submission deadline is the last Friday in November
* For graduation in Spring (June), ISP submission deadline is March 31
* For graduation in Fall (Oct/Nov), ISP submission deadline is August 15

All students intending to graduate following the submission of the ISP must sign on to MINERVA and “apply to graduate”. Check the following McGill Graduate and Post-Doctoral Studies Office website for specific deadlines: http://www.mcgill.ca/students/graduation/applying.

**Some thoughts on the ISP to consider:**

* The ISP is not a Master’s thesis or PhD Comprehensive Exam; it is an opportunity to “master” the core literature in a given area
* The ISP distinguishes undergraduate from graduate education. At an undergraduate level, students are exposed to and absorb existing knowledge, while graduate students are expected to not only reflect on knowledge but also participate in its further development. Thus, based on a critical review and synthesis of empirical research and theoretical scholarship, an ISP should present *a new idea or a new understanding that advances knowledge relevant to practices, programs, or policies*
* Ideally the ISP builds on course work and/or field placement
* While it often takes the form of a thorough review, synthesis, commentary, and analysis of scholarship with implications for informing practices, programs or policies, some students participate in their advisors’ research projects that might entail some data analysis as well
* The primary audience for an ISP is a professional social worker. If asked to provide an expert opinion on the topic or participate in the development of a program/policy, imagine being able to refer to your completed ISP, do a quick update, and feel confident about your expertise. The secondary audiences are the advisor who grades and of course colleagues in the field
* Some professors suggest a study summary table in the appendix

**Three key meetings with assigned ISP Advisor**

The assigned ISP advisor meets with students on three occasions in order to:

1. Help articulate students’ preliminary ideas for the ISP, assist in narrowing the topic for the ISP and help identify literature search strategies
2. Review and provide feedback on an outline of the ISP and assist students to map out a reasonable timeline to completion
3. Provide advice or guidance on any outstanding questions or concerns or review a ‘good draft’ section of the ISP

Some students prefer to begin the ISP more formally in the winter term for many reasons: settling into a new program takes time; figuring out an ISP topic also takes time. Many professors suggest that students explore their areas of interest through their courses and field placement and use first term as a time to work on choosing an ISP topic. Nonetheless, a meeting in November – December is suggested in order to discuss issues/ themes/ questions for the ISP, ensure students’ familiarity with supportive resources and workshops, and help with literature search strategies.

If a student is intending to secure employment during the summer months or returning home (away from campus), it is important to plan for the completion of the ISP in advance. Students who have discussed the direction of the ISP in advance and who devote much of their time on their ISP from mid-April to Mid-Aug can manage very well.

Because some students aim to start their ISP in the Winter term, and others in the Spring term, meetings will occur at different times of the academic year. The following table is offered as a guide for planning out these three key meetings:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Topics for Discussion | Winter Start  | Spring Start  |
| * Discuss interests for ISP
* Identify one issue/ theme/ question to be explored
* Develop a search strategy, paying attention to possible difficulties and solutions (e.g. too broad key words leading to a massive number of articles to review)
* Propose library and writing resources and workshops for support
 | * November/December
 | * February/March
 |
| * Discuss the search strategy to date; refine accordingly
* Review the current state of knowledge and theoretical debates related to the issue selected
* Review and provide feedback on a draft outline of the ISP, a preliminary bibliography, and a timeline for completion
* The ISP outline: 1-2 single spaced pages outlining sections & argument; refine accordingly
 | * March/April
 | * May/June
 |
| * Discuss implications for practice and future research directions
* Discuss any outstanding questions or concerns or review a ‘good draft’ of a section of the ISP
* Confirm date of final submission
 | * June
 | * July
 |

**Scheduling meetings with assigned ISP Advisor**

* It is advisable to schedule meetings via email
* Student or advisor can take the initiative to do so
* If there is difficulty in starting the process, the student or advisor can inform the MSW Program Director who will assist in making initial contact
* Students should come to these meetings well prepared so that their goals for succeeding and completing their ISP can be met step by step