**School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability**

**Master’s Research Paper Guidelines**

The Master’s Research Paper (MRP) is considered an independent research project that seeks to address an environment, resource and sustainability issue. As such the scope of the project is relatively open and the nature of the problem to be examined is driven largely by student interests and opportunities. Engaging with research partners to collaboratively identify a research question or applied problem is entirely appropriate, while more theoretical or conceptual research initiatives are also suitable.

A successful MRP will connect with a range of core SERS learning outcomes, including: 1) understanding the challenges and opportunities of moving towards sustainability; 2) being able to define and articulate core skills and areas of knowledge relating to your areas of strength; 3) understanding and working within, between and across disciplines and ways of knowing; 4) mobilizing your skills and knowledge to contribute to better understandings, diagnoses and solutions for environmental and sustainability challenges and opportunities; 5) working collaboratively and effectively with people and organizations affected by or responsible for addressing environmental and sustainability challenges and opportunities; and 6) communicating ideas effectively in different oral and written formats to professional and public audiences.

The SERS MES (MRP) and MES (Thesis) programs are equivalent, but they differ in emphasis. As such, it is important to note that a Major Research Paper is not a ‘thesis’. Because MES (MRP) students are engaging in more course work, the MRP itself is typically completed in eight months (or two terms) from the start or conception of the initial idea. As well, the research project should be more defined and narrow in scope, take less time than a thesis and it will be shorter in length. Primary data collection is not a requirement of an MRP, although there are a wide range of opportunities and approaches available to engage with data collection and analysis (e.g., examining existing datasets, undertaking some limited field work and/or survey activities).

Expectations for the MRP are that it reflects independent analysis as well as a thorough understanding of the relevant literature. Contributions of the MRP can take the form of empirical insights on the problem of interest, practical insights and recommendations to address environment, resource and sustainability problems, methodological insights, critiques or applications, and/or some theoretical and conceptual refinements or explorations.

All MRP projects must also include the completion of the proposal milestone (normally undertaken in the context of core course requirements: SERS 680, 681 and 669). However, there is no ‘defense’ of an MRP. Rather, the MRP is reviewed and assessed by the supervisor and one reader (typically another SERS faculty member). This review is done independently and a final grade agreed upon.

A typical MRP will be approximately 8,000 - 10,000 words (excluding references, appendices, etc.) and it should be formatted according to GSPA thesis guidelines with a well-organized and structured format. Normally, these sections will include an introduction and problem setting section, including research question, goal or objectives; literature review and/or research context; a methodology section; some combination of results and discussion section(s); and a conclusion section.

If you have any questions about the scope or structure of the MRP, talk to your supervisor and/or contact the graduate program administrator.