



Completing an Applied Project

A Step-by-Step Guide

**Master of Science in Organizational
Leadership
School of Applied Professional Studies
Arizona State University**

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SECTION 1

Your Applied Project: A Snapshot

As a Master of Science in Organizational Leadership student you have two options for your culminating experience: an **applied project** or a **thesis**. The option you choose determines your plan of study through the program. Your coursework—particularly OGL 530, 540, and 550—incorporate elements intended to assist you in developing your ideas early on and give you a head start in drafting a project proposal.

Difference Between an Applied Project and Thesis

A **thesis** is an academic paper that contributes to the field of organizational leadership.

An **applied project** builds a connection between the academic components of the program and applies that knowledge to a real-world context. It is an **independently** produced **deliverable** (e.g., technical manual, website, needs assessment study, diversity training seminar, curriculum development, etc.) that has a function within an organization and can either target an actual workplace need or serve as an exercise in gaining experience. Either way, applied projects are aimed at three audiences: a client/workplace audience with an established need, the faculty overseeing your project in OGL 593, and your classmates who will serve as peer reviewers.

Applied Project Requirements

OGL 593: Applied Project is the 3-credit hour course you take during your *last* term in the program. While you may take other courses concurrently, you must have already completed OGL 520, OGL 530, OGL 540, OGL 550, and OGL 570 *prior* to registering for OGL 593 and be in good academic standing.

Other requirements include

- **Applied Project Prospectus**—a plan of action or proposal for your applied project that includes the scope, rationale, and estimated schedule. The prospectus must also address any approvals (*if needed*) that must be obtained, such as human subjects (IRB), organizational permissions, or confidentiality disclaimers. *This must be approved prior to the first day of OGL 593 and confirmed in your iPOS.*
- **Applied Project**—a deliverable in the form of a product, document, technological platform, program, etc.
- **Reflective Process Framework**—a series of prompts introduced in OGL 593 aimed at making connections between the applied project and academic components of the program.
- **Colloquium Presentation**—this is the final step in the evaluation of your applied project and provides an opportunity to showcase your work to your peers and a public audience

Choosing a Topic for Your Project

Choose a topic as soon as possible. As you progress through your core courses, you will be given the opportunity to develop ideas about what to propose for your applied project. It is highly recommended that you take advantage of that opportunity and solicit the guidance of your professors along the way.

When selecting a project, here are a few things to consider:

- Find out what is needed by an organization (either your current workplace or otherwise) and design your project to fill that need.
- Use the opportunity to further explore topics, approaches, or theories you enjoyed in your Organizational Leadership classes.
- Consider your career goals and use the project experience to demonstrate a skill or area of expertise you can leverage professionally.

Also, keep in mind that all applied projects must be contextualized and/or rationalized within organizational leadership scholarship and theory and draw from quantitative and/or qualitative assessment methods of data analysis in leadership effectiveness.

Academic Integrity and Assurance

The Faculty of Leadership and Integrative Studies has a zero-tolerance policy toward academic dishonesty that is enforced within every course and educational activity offered or sanctioned by the school. Applied projects will be run through Turnitin to ensure the originality of submissions.

Any allegation of academic dishonesty will be referred to the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts Standards Committee for review and recommendation to the dean of the school. If any student is found to have engaged in academic dishonesty in any form – including but not limited to cheating, plagiarizing, and fabricating – that student shall receive a grade of XE for the class and will be dismissed from the school. There will be no exceptions.

Students who violate academic integrity policies may be dismissed immediately. Being withdrawn from a degree program can have immediate consequences regarding visa status.

Protection for Human Subjects (IRB)

**NOTE: Applied projects rarely need IRB approval. If the project deliverable is for your organization and will not be used for any academic conferences or publication purposes, you do NOT need IRB. If you are uncertain whether your applied project will require an IRB speak to the faculty member conducting OGL 550 and/or 570.*

Applied projects that require research involving human subjects conducted under the auspices of Arizona State University are reviewed by the University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) in compliance with federal regulations. Documents containing any data collection from human subjects require that applications be submitted to the University Human Subjects IRB for approval before data collection or recruitment of subjects is initiated. Projects not involving human subjects need not be reviewed by the Human Subjects IRB.

The IRB process requires completing online training modules, so be sure to plan accordingly.

For more information on IRB protocols, please visit

<https://researchintegrity.asu.edu/human-subjects/protocol-submission>

Workplace Approval

For applied projects that will require the use of resources (i.e., employees, documents, etc.) or proprietary information from an organization, the student is responsible for gaining workplace approval from the organization. This approval must be *prior* to beginning the project.

OGL 570: Analyzing Organizations (Creating Your Prospectus)

In OGL 570 you will complete a prospectus (also known as a project proposal) that must be approved *prior* to beginning work on the applied project in OGL 593. While you will be working on elements of the prospectus within your core classes, you will also be able to begin development in OGL 540 and OGL 550.

Components of the applied project prospectus include:

- Purpose and scope of project
- Project context and rationale
- Analytical method(s) that will be employed
- Ethical considerations
- Approvals, if needed (IRB or workplace approvals must be obtained *prior* to the start of OGL 593)

OGL 593: Applied Project

The OGL 593: Applied Project course adheres to the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) standards for a 3-credit hour course, which expects *an investment of 135 hours*. While more details can be found in the course syllabus, the following components are factored into the final course assessment:

- Dedicated meetings (in person or virtual) with faculty
- Project reflective process framework—a series of prompts aimed at making connections between the applied project and academic components of the program
- Engagement in peer feedback
- Finalized paper component that supports the deliverable (purpose, literature review, methods section, results, overview of deliverable)
- Finalized applied project deliverable
- Project presentation at the end-of-term colloquium presented to peers and/or public audience

Roles and Expectations

➤ *Your Role as an MSOGL Candidate*

You are the project manager who controls every aspect of your applied project. This includes making sure that you fulfill all requirements, adhere to deadlines, and seek assistance when you need it.

➤ *Role of OGL 593 Faculty*

Applied projects don't require a committee like a thesis does. As a result, your professor for OGL 593 will serve as your project chair whose responsibilities include:

- approving your prospectus developed in OGL 570
- mentoring and guiding you throughout your applied project
- facilitating the other requirements for OGL 593
- issuing your final grade assessment to indicate that you have met the culminating experience requirement necessary for graduation

NOTE: Please be prepared to meet with the OGL 593 faculty very soon after enrolling in the course. This is to set you up for success right from the start!

Planning Your Timeline

The purpose of an applied project is to demonstrate that not only are you capable of producing graduate level work, but that you have an organized plan for completing it. The timeline should be included in the proposal and should cover the period starting from the first day that you are enrolled in OGL 593 to 7 days prior to the last day of class. The dates in-between should be appropriately broken up to reflect significant and attainable milestones throughout the course of your project's duration. The end date (7 days prior to the last day of class) should be the "deliverable delivery" date.

The OGL 593 faculty will then review your project within a week and either:

1. Approve it as is, declaring it ready for the colloquium
2. Request minor revisions that need to be addressed prior to the colloquium
3. Request major revisions accompanied by a contract on what changes need to be made before the project will be approved and the final presentation scheduled. In this situation, the candidate will likely receive an "Incomplete" grade and be held up from graduating until the project is brought up to standard and the defense completed.

The Colloquium

A colloquium will be scheduled during the last week of every term where the final presentations will be delivered with peers in OGL 593 and may be open to a general audience per the instructor's discretion. This is the last step in the evaluation of your applied project. The tradition of presenting your project serves as a rite of passage from master's student to a graduate and professional. It serves as an opportunity to share your project, the process you took to complete it, lessons learned, impact it had (or will have), and future directions.

More details about the format and timeframe will be provided in OGL 593.

Course Grades and GPA

Graduate students must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) overall and in courses included on their plans of study. Courses taken as an undergraduate at ASU and reserved for use in a graduate degree program are included in the GPA (i.e., a "4+1" program).

If a student's GPA falls below 3.0, the student will be notified in writing and placed on probation. If the student's GPA is not raised to at least a 3.0 by the end of the next semester, a recommendation will be made to the Graduate College to remove the student from the program.

To receive their degrees, students also are required to earn at least a B (3.0) in their culminating experience of a thesis or applied project.

Incomplete Grades

Students who receive an "Incomplete" grade in a graduate-level course (500-level or above) must complete the necessary work within one calendar year. If the incomplete is not removed within one calendar year, it will become part of the student's permanent transcript and cannot be used on a student's plan of study. To receive credit for the course and applied project, the student must repeat the course by re-registering, paying fees and fulfilling all course requirements. This may also delay or prevent a student's graduation.

Students with more than one "Incomplete" at any time will be considered "failing to make adequate progress," and will be notified and placed on probation. If the student does not complete the work to remove the incomplete and earn a letter grade by the end of the calendar year, a recommendation may be made to the Graduate College to remove the student from the program.

SECTION 2

The following section is also available in PowerPoint form with graphics that can be found in the appendix.

Getting Started: Considerations

Steps in Applied Research Process

Applied projects use **applied research** approaches. Applied research draws from existing conceptual and empirical knowledge to systematically study an issue and produce context-specific insights to solve real-world problems (i.e., real issues faced within your organization).

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Problem Identification | <p>What change needs to occur, and why (i.e., culture, system, process, procedures, etc.)?</p> <p>What is problematic about the existing situation?</p> <p>Who is impacted by the issue?</p> |
| 2. Reviewing the Literature | <p>What is currently known about the issue or problem?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use credible scholarly work (journal articles, books, government sources) to draw on leadership theories and practices • Use your own company resources to learn more about the issue |
| 3. Data Collection | <p>What new information is needed to solve this problem?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can you get this information in a timely & ethical manner? • Developing surveys to gather information (descriptive statistics or frequencies) • Developing interview questions to learn from leaders, colleagues, stakeholders |
| 4. Analysis | <p>What common themes and patterns exist across these data?</p> <p>Depending on your data collection will you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze statistical results if your survey (scale response) • Analyze interview data for themes/common pattern on what people are telling you |
| 5. Drawing Conclusions | <p>How can you make sense of these patterns?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What inferences can you make from your analysis? • What action/applied steps could be put in place? |
| 6. Making Recommendations | <p>With these new insights, what can be done to address the problem?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations should be grounded in the literature and your findings. |

Types of Applied Research

Formative Research: To inform a new initiative or project or shed light on an issue that is now well known.

| Type | Definition | Examples |
|--|--|---|
| Effective Practices (sometimes called “best practices” guidelines) | Identifies successful practices used in an industry or other domain | <p>A systematic process used to identify, describe, combine, and disseminate effective and efficient clinical and/or management strategies developed and refined by practitioners.</p> <p>Evidence-based management</p> |
| Literature Reviews | <p>Synthesizes existing academic and practical knowledge about an issue, phenomenon, population, or context to generate actionable insights. Draws from both scholarly peer-reviewed literature and credible practitioner sources</p> <p>Editorially reviewed publications, e.g., Harvard Business Review</p> <p>Reports by government agencies and trade associations</p> | <p>Is co-production just a pipe dream for applied health research commissioning? An exploratory literature review</p> <p>An exploratory literature review on open educational practices</p> |
| Needs Assessments | A systematic approach for identifying individual, organizational, or community needs and determining capacity to address them | <p>Assessing a Human Relations department</p> <p>Training needs assessment</p> <p>Assessing professional development offerings</p> <p>Organizational needs assessment</p> <p>Needs assessment in school districts</p> |

Strategic & Operational Research: To guide decisions making, strategy, and change.

| Type | Definition | Examples |
|----------------------|---|---|
| SWOT Analysis | A framework to understand an organization's external landscape, competitive position, and internal capabilities and challenges | Welsh Government regional SWOT report City of Hayward |
| Gap Analysis | Assessment of a unit's current performance, differences between current and desired state, and an action plan to eliminate that gap | System-wide safety improvement gap analysis Housing management system gap analysis Cybersecurity training programs gap analysis |
| Environmental Scan | A systematic survey and interpretation of relevant data to identify external opportunities and threats to guide decision making | PESTLE analysis (political, economic, social, technological, legal, environmental factors) Trends Report- —identifies likely future scenarios in an organization's operating environment |
| Cultural Audit | Analysis of an organization's explicit and implicit norms, interactions, practices, behaviors, and working environment to assess how these promote or hinder organizational effectiveness | St. Cloud State University Cultural Audit Play Your Part Cultural Audit |
| Stakeholder Analysis | The process of identifying individuals or groups likely to affect or be affected by an organization's actions | Dow Corporate Stakeholder Analysis |

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| <p>Appreciative Inquiry & Action Research</p> | <p>Appreciative Inquiry (AI): a collaborative, strengths-based approach for creating positive change in organizations and other human systems</p> <p>Action Research (AR): a process of simultaneously taking action, doing research, and engaging in critical reflection to produce transformative change</p> | <p>Social Change Assistance Trust Appreciative Inquiry Report</p> <p>Action Research to study effectiveness of differentiated instruction in a 4th grade class</p> |
| <p>Change Management Planning</p> | <p>A roadmap for guiding an organization to successfully implement a desired transformation</p> | <p>Facilitating organizational change for deeper engagement with diversity, equity, & inclusion (DEI)</p> <p>Bellevue College new IT system</p> |
| <p>Innovation Planning</p> | <p>A systematic process of capabilities development to continuously deliver novel products and services and remain adaptive to changing conditions</p> | <p>Oregon's 10-year innovation plan</p> <p>Developing an innovation economy in Oklahoma</p> |

Examples of Applied Research Data

Human Subjects – This type of data may require IRB approval.

IRB should be obtained if you are studying students at ASU. If you are studying students at another university/college, you will need that institution's IRB approval. If you plan to present your work publicly at conferences or have intentions to publish your work.

REMINDER: If your data collection is for your organization and the applied project results are only for your organization you DO NOT need IRB.

Human subject data includes

- Observations
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Surveys/Questionnaires

Archival Data – If this is only a data type, no IRB is required.

➤ Internal Examples

- Organization's website
- Organizational documents (e.g., annual report, strategic plan, org. chart)
- Meeting agendas and minutes
- Social media generated by company

➤ External Examples

- Competitor websites and documents
- Media coverage
- Mentions in social media by others
- Trade reports and professional reports

Research Design Considerations

Choose your research design based on the purpose of your applied project goals, your research question, and type of evidence you need to answer that question. You will learn about *qualitative* and *quantitative* research designs in OGL 540 and 570.

Research Design Guides:

<https://libguides.usc.edu/c.php?g=235034&p=1559832>

<https://library.sacredheart.edu/c.php?g=29803&>

Feasibility

➤ Realistic Scope and Timeline

- Can your project be done in 6-7 weeks? If not, reduce the scope!! (e.g., design a training curriculum instead of implementing and assessing it).
- If your project requires an IRB, consult with your instructor to see if a thesis might be a better fit for your research design.

➤ Access to Data

- Will the company give you permission to conduct research on them (if you work there or need internal resources)?
- Can you get access to proprietary documents you need?
- Can you easily reach the people you want to interview or survey?

Quality Indicators

- Validity (construct, statistical, internal, and external): is your study free of biases, distortions, and unsupported assumptions and conclusions?
- Reliability: if someone else did this study would they arrive at similar findings?
- Effectiveness: does your study meet its stated goals?
- Efficiency: does this study use as little time, resources, and effort as possible to meet your goals and objectives?
- Feasibility: is your study feasible for the time, expertise, and resources within which you would operate?
- Relevance: is the information collected relevant for answering your key questions?
- Sufficiency: is the information collected sufficient to answer your key questions?

