**MDSE 5920: Problem in Lieu of Thesis**

**Fall 2025**

**Instructor:** Dr. Tammy Kinley

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**Office Hours**: By appointment.

**Class Meeting: To be scheduled each week at a time convenient for Dr. Kinley and the student. The mode and length of the meeting will vary depending on the agenda for the week. Please plan for one-hour meetings.**

**Description of Course:** The Problem in Lieu of Thesis (PILOT) in CMHT is best designed as a graduate student working on a research project with a faculty member. Usually, the project will be part of the research agenda of the professor. The ultimate goal is an outcome the leads to dissemination of the research, via a presentation to a learned conference or published in an appropriate academic journal. If the student has a project that is already pretty well fleshed out from other tools classes, we may carry that project through to completion.

**Required Textbook**: *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, latest version.

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| \*\* While there are many online resources for APA direction, many seem to add their own details. It will be wise to purchase and use the manual.  \*\* Reliance on Microsoft Word to do the formatting is consistently problematic. |

**Dr. Kinley’s Policies**

* Weekly accountability is critical for successful and timely completion. Therefore, weekly meetings will be scheduled.
* Students are expected to work on PILOT pretty much every day. The graduate expectation is that the student invest 5 clock hours for every credit hour every week. That means, PILOT should have 15 hours blocked in your planner each week. In most cases, if you are unwilling to put in the time, you will not produce a high enough quality to warrant a grade of A.
* When you submit materials for me to read, I ask for at least a calendar week for feedback. While I am reading, you should be working on something else related to the project – not spending a week waiting on me to get back to you.
* Revisions are to be expected. The draft/discuss/revise process is a normal academic research process. It is expected that feedback will be incorporated.

**Grade Policies**

PILOT is a graded project. The student and Dr. Kinley will work together to develop a plan of work that will result in the dissemination of research.

* **In order to receive an A (Excellent),** the student will need to complete the plan of work at the very beginning of the semester and then work to meet weekly goals. The PILOT is not a weekend project to be pulled together during the last two weeks of the semester. The following is expected:
  + **Weekly meetings**, either in person or via Zoom (or similar); some meetings may even be email.
  + Top quality final project
  + Adherence to the plan of work – which is a PLAN that may need to be adjusted for a variety of good reasons over the course of the semester.
  + Submission of the project for presentation. The timeline might not work for presentation at an appropriate academic conference (of Dr. Kinley’s choosing), but you will provide the document to submit when the Call for Presentations is published.
  + Submission of the project for publication to an academic journal. You will work with Dr. Kinley to decide which journal will be most appropriate. This journal will be determined fairly early in the semester, and then the project can be specifically targeted to this goal.
* **In order to receive a B (Above Average),** you must
  + Participate in weekly meetings
  + Turn in a quality project
  + Meet most of the objectives of the project
* Submission of the project for presentation at an appropriate academic conference (of Dr. Kinley’s choosing). The timeline might not work for submission, but you will provide the document to submit when the Call for Presentations is published.
* **A grade of C (Average)** will be posted if you simply do what is asked with limited attention to excellence
* **A grade of D (Below Average) or F (Failure)** will be posted if the quality of your work is not adequate for at least presentation at an academic conference.

**Class Meetings**: While the PILOT is assisted student research, a commitment to working on the project each week (preferably each day) is critical.

If the only time you work on the PILOT project is “in class,” during our meetings, you will not earn an A, a B, or a C on this project and you will need to repeat the Problem in Lieu of Thesis with another professor for degree credit. You cannot accomplish the objectives of the class if this is the extent of your commitment to the project. It is not the instructor’s role to motivate you or nag you.

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| **Week of:** | **Assigned Task1** | **Points Possible** | **Points Earned** |
| Aug. 18 | Topic is decided and the Plan of Work is completed. This table can serve as the starting space for the POW. | 50 |  |
| Aug. 25 |  | 50 |  |
| Sept. 1 |  | 50 |  |
| Sept. 8 |  | 50 |  |
| Sept. 15 |  | 50 |  |
| Sept. 22 |  | 50 |  |
| Sept. 29 |  | 50 |  |
| Oct. 6 |  | 50 |  |
| Oct. 13 |  |  |  |
| Oct. 20 |  | 50 |  |
| Oct. 27 |  | 50 |  |
| Nov. 3 |  | 50 |  |
| Nov. 10 |  | 50 |  |
| Nov. 17 |  | 50 |  |
| Nov. 24 | Happy Thanksgiving! | 50 |  |
| Dec. 1 | Abstract is ready for submission to a conference. The graduate presentation will be the oral presentation (15 minutes) prepared for this purpose. | 100 |  |
| Dec. 8 | The manuscript is approved by Dr. Kinley and submitted for publication to an appropriate academic journal. | 200 |  |

1Since this class is dependent on your individual plan of work, you will work with Dr. Kinley to determine what your weekly assignments are. This will manifest as an evolving plan, depending on the goals of the project and the skills of the student. With PILOT, steps generally can’t be skipped – the goal is to complete the project.

If there is no outcome for the week, the grade will be -0-. The points assigned will be determined by the quality of the work that week. That said, the assignment of final grade is dependent on the policies described above, regardless of points earned.

The following grade scale will be employed:

Grade Scale for Weekly Goals:

90% and Above: 45-50 Points: Excellent!

80% - 89%: 40 – 44 Points: Above Average

70% - 79%: 35 – 39 Points: Average

60% - 69%: 30 – 34 Points: Below Expectations

50% and Below: 29 Points or Less: Very Serious Problems; Missing work

If the student earns a D or an F (or perhaps a C, depending on GPA), they will need to repeat the PILOT experience with another faculty member.

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| I have read the syllabus for MDSE 5920 (Problem in Lieu of Thesis), asked questions when I didn’t understand something, and I agree to the timeline and policies herein.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Student Signature Date |

The Scientific Method:

I.  Define the problem

II.  Literature Review on the topic – what do we already know?

III.  Purpose - what questions remain to be answered?

III.  Methodology – how will you collect data?

IV.  Findings

V.  Conclusions