Policies and Procedures for Final Projects for M.A.-AL and Ed.M. Degrees

(1) **Purpose of the Project.** The M.A./AL and Ed.M. Projects have the following goals:

(a) to provide you with the opportunity to reexamine books and articles already read in your courses;

(b) to provide you with the opportunity to read and critically discuss books and articles in a specialized area within the scope of the program which you have not read in your courses but which are essential to establishing expertise in that specialized area;

(c) to assess your ability to write an extended academic paper in which you analyze a topic critically from a number of perspectives, supporting your assertions with evidence both from the research literature and from your own independent investigations.

(2) **Content:** Selecting a topic

Obviously, it is to everyone's benefit if you choose to write on a topic that truly interests you. By the time you are ready to start a project, we hope that you will already have found possible topics and questions to address, whether from coursework or from other reading within the general area of TESOL/AL; your particular interest may be stimulated by a paper that you have written for a TESOL or AL class at TC. The TESOL/AL Program expects this topic to be suitably narrow and clearly focused on a single question or on a set of integrated questions; the Program also expects that the paper will not simply be a general summarization of literature or points made in one of your core courses or course papers. However, it is entirely possible to extend a paper already written for a course, provided the paper is extended substantially, both in the outside sources it incorporates and in original personal contributions. The Program expects Ed.M. projects to be research-oriented rather than oriented primarily toward issues in language pedagogy (unless the pedagogy draws crucially on research in some way).

What sorts of topic are appropriate for this paper? One possibility is an extensive **literature review** in a specialized area which systematically and critically covers seminal articles and books in that area, which takes account of multiple perspectives in a reasonable way, and which finishes with an overview discussion. For example, a literature review might focus on the current state of research on teaching the Spanish preterite tense. Topics that were narrow enough a few years ago may now be too broad if a substantial amount of research has been done recently. To take one good example, a literature review that covers experimental research on the effectiveness of the explicit teaching of linguistic form (say, as opposed to taking some version of "the natural approach") might have been acceptable as a topic in 1990; today, it would be impossible to cover the literature
adequately in 25 pages. Whatever your topic is, the papers will begin with a statement of existing philosophical positions; reviews of individual papers will zero in closely on the central research hypotheses, and then review, one by one (or type by type), the actual experimental studies against the backdrop of these philosophical positions.

Another project option is a primary research project that is either completely original or replicates prior research, if there is merit in doing replication. Such a project might involve second-language classroom research; it might involve the construction of a pilot test; it might be a data-based language project in grammar or discourse. We encourage this kind of paper since it naturally leads into the kind of work done at the doctoral level.

However, our encouragement comes with a warning: far too many research projects are too ambitiously planned to be feasible within the short duration of a semester and within the short space of 20 or 25 pages. When you evaluate your project plan, one way to begin is simply to assume that it needs further narrowing and that its scope needs to be reduced: in what ways might the project become more feasible?

Keep in mind that you are not expected to provide definitive answers to the 'big' questions in your paper; if you continue toward doctoral work, there will be time for that later in your academic career. If your paper involves classroom research, take the necessary first steps to see whether you will actually have classrooms at your disposal to collect your data. If you plan to collect another kind of field data, make sure beforehand that the type and amount of data that you need will in fact be collectable within a time span that will allow you to analyze the data comfortably.

Whatever your area of focus, the project should address the topic in an organized, coherent way. The central question that you are addressing should be adequately clear to the reader and be treated with sophistication. You should support all assertions either (a) with evidence (= data or logical arguments) from the research literature, and/or (b) with evidence from data which you have personally gathered and analyzed, and/or (c) with logical arguments of your own. Personally-gathered data may come, for example, from surveys, questionnaires, tests, observations inside or outside a classroom context, or experimental research; if appropriate, data may come from introspective judgments. We encourage well-supported original analyses and reinterpretations of data that others have collected. However, any conclusions drawn from data must be presented as tentatively established; you should avoid absolute statements and bald assertions about linear cause and effect.

When you feel that you have a possible topic for a project, consult an AL faculty member to discuss this topic before proceeding to research and write. Normally, a student will decide on the topic and make it known sometime during the semester prior to its planned completion. The Program expects that each student working towards the M.A. or Ed.M. will have an unofficial 'advisor' for the project and that any substantial changes in this topic will be discussed with the advisor as they occur; if the project involves a substantial extension of a paper done for a prior course, the instructor of that course will normally be the advisor. A paper will not be accepted if there is no record of consultation with faculty before the paper was written. The main purpose of an advisor is not to monitor but to assist; it has been our own experience that students tend
to make short projects too ambitious rather than not ambitious enough. While the M.A.
project will normally not involve the same depth or breadth of coverage of a topic as a
Master's thesis, it will be much more than a term paper written for a regular course. While
we anticipate that informal discussions of the topic with advisors will be necessary from
time to time, the project is not intended to be submitted in multiple drafts for revision, as
in a writing class.

(3) Organization

As with all academic papers, the broad format will include an introduction in which a
thesis is presented, a body in which the thesis is developed directly and in depth, and a
conclusion in which the paper's results are commented on. If you are doing primary (e.g.,
experimental) research, i.e. collecting and analyzing field data for the purpose of testing
research hypotheses, your paper should follow the standard format used in scientific
papers. We will make more detailed organizational schemes available for your review.

(4) Language

(a) Your paper should be written in formal academic register. It should be free of
grammatical and mechanical errors, misspellings and punctuation errors. You are
encouraged to use a spell check and grammar check on your computer, but do not rely
exclusively on these tools, as they will not identify every possible error in spelling and
grammar; it is often best to find a colleague with good proofreading skills who can scan
your paper for errors.

(b) Your paper should include in-text references to research literature cited. Page
numbers of references should be included wherever possible. Example:

... Use of the Total Physical Response method of second language teaching
is reported to lead to higher student evaluations in foreign-language
courses (Krashen 1982:158) ...

It must be clear to the reader at all times whether you are presenting your statements as
original statements or statements attributed to your research sources. In general, unless
some kind of explicit citation is done in each paragraph, the reader will assume that the
statements within the paragraph are original. If you are in doubt about whether you have
made your attributions clear, consult an advisor or other competent person before you
hand in a final copy of your paper.

(c) Your paper must include a bibliography of all references used for the paper. These
normally include all books, articles and films. Every item in the bibliography must be
referenced at least once within the text of your paper (i.e., don't give 'ghost references').
Follow the referencing format of the APA Manual for both bibliography and in-text
references.
(5) **Format, Copies, and Deadlines**

(a) Your paper should be word-processed or typed and presented without erasures or white-out. The standard word-processing font is in twelve-point block letters. Papers should be double-spaced. The standard margin size is one inch; page numbers should appear either on the top or bottom of the paper, where the margin will be slightly larger; pagination begins with the first page of text. Shorter tables, charts, transcript segments, pictures and diagrams, where they play a central role in the discussion, should be conveniently located for reference within the body of the paper. Longer tables, charts, transcripts, etc. are more suitably placed in separate, labeled appendices following the main text of the paper.

(b) The paper should be submitted with a cover sheet which includes (1) paper title, (2) "AL Project for the M.A./Ed.M. Degree", (3) student ID#, and (4) date of submission.

(c) Please submit three copies of the paper within the established deadline for the project. Put your name on one copy but not on the other copies; on all copies put (1) the last four digits of your Student ID#, (2) your program ("AL" or "TESOL") and level ("M.A., "Ed.M."), and (3) the title of your paper. For those planning to graduate in Spring 2012, the deadline for submitting the paper is **Friday, February 3, 2012**. For those planning on graduating at the end of 2012, the deadline will be approximately September 30, 2012. The deadlines for all semesters thereafter will follow the same rough set of deadlines. You are welcome to submit a paper before the deadline as well.

(d) TESOL/AL projects should be around 20-25 pages of running text, exclusive of appendices and bibliography; Ed.M. papers will be somewhat longer, depending on the nature of the project. For Ed.M. students, confer with your advisor on this issue, as length requirements may vary.
Final Project Evaluation Criteria

Your paper will be read either by two AL faculty members or by one TESOL and one AL faculty member, there may be a third reader as well. The grades given are 'high pass' (A), 'pass' (B), or 'rewrite' (R) based on the following criteria.

1. CONTENT ("A", "B", "Rewrite", weighted by 3)
   - The paper addresses a question or issue in an organized, coherent, and cogent way.
   - The topic is sufficiently narrow and focused, given the expected length of the paper (20-25 pages for MA-AL); the paper is not overly general in scope.
   - The main idea is clear and treated with sophistication.
   - The paper clearly and consistently engages available research literature that is directly relevant to the topic.
   - The paper properly cites all sources used and cites no sources not used.
   - The paper provides support for any specific or general claims made by the writer. These claims may be original, or they may be attempts to refine or reinforce others' prior claims.
   - The paper clearly documents specific and general claims made by authors cited and clearly outlines (where relevant) the support given by those authors for their claims.
   - The paper adequately permits the reader to distinguish the claims of the writer from those of the research sources used by the writer.
   - The paper provides a critical approach to the analysis and includes a reasonable consideration of other perspectives.
   - The paper shows depth and breadth of thinking. If the entire paper is a comprehensive literature review on a particular topic, it is expected that the writer will go beyond mere summarization of others' work by highlighting problems and potential directions for future research.
2. ORGANIZATION ("A", "B", "Rewrite", weighted by 2)

- The paper includes an introduction which effectively orients the reader to the topic and explicitly states a thesis which informs the reader of what to expect in the body of the paper.

- The essay includes a literature review (where applicable) which orients the reader to the current state of opinion regarding the topic. (In a research paper, the literature review normally follows the introduction.)

- The paper includes a conclusion which not only reinforces the thesis but also guides the reader toward new insights into the topic.

- The paper is organized into discrete, logically ordered sections which are separate yet form a logical whole. If the paper involves original, primary experimental design, the organization of the paper will normally follow the standard format of "Introduction > Methods > Results > Discussion".

- The sections of the paper are organized into separate, internally unified paragraphs.

- The paper shows coherence between paragraphs and between sections. Where helpful, cohesive devices should assist the reader in understanding how the various parts of the paper fit together.

- The paper contains logical headings for the different sections of the paper and subheadings, if applicable. Headings should be easily distinguishable from subheadings.

- (Ed.M. papers only:) If a paper is longer than thirty pages and contains multiple sections and subsections, a table of contents is desirable.
3. LANGUAGE ("A", "B", "Rewrite", weighted by 2)

- The paper is written in formal academic register.

- The paper is free of grammatical and mechanical errors, misspellings and punctuation errors.

- The paper demonstrates knowledge of the conventions for in-text referencing (including both paraphrases and direct quotations) based on the APA system, used in publications such as *TESOL Quarterly* or *Language*.

- The essay contains a full bibliography which follows the APA conventions used in publications such as *TESOL Quarterly*.

- Where applicable, the paper includes ordered and numbered appendices.

- The paper includes a cover page with student name and paper title; pages are properly formatted and are numbered beginning with the first page of text.