

The Dissertation Proposal Defense

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Dissertation Proposal: Purpose and Overview

Once a student has completed all course work and passed the Comprehensive Examination, he or she is eligible to write and defend the dissertation proposal. Students shall defend the proposal within one year from the time of achieving Candidacy.

The dissertation is a written report of an individual student's investigation of a significant research question and is required for satisfactory completion of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD). Dissertations address a substantive issue through theoretically based research relevant to nursing practice or education and may serve as a preliminary study in developing a program of research.

The dissertation proposal is the first step of dissertation research and consists of: 1) an approved written document, and 2) a successful oral defense. The written proposal is developed in close collaboration with the dissertation chair and committee members. After successful completion of the dissertation proposal defense and IRB approval, the student is fully sanctioned to complete the conduct of the dissertation research.

Proposal Format

Students admitted to the program before fall 2009 have two options in proposal format, Options I and II. Students admitted after fall, 2009 are required to develop the proposal in the published manuscript option, Option II.

- For students admitted before Fall, 2009: The format choice for the dissertation proposal defense is guided by the final dissertation format to be used, whether the traditional five chapter manuscript (Option I) or the published manuscript compendium (Option II). Option II is strongly recommended to enhance the scholarship record of the student. Both Option I and II are described below.
- For students admitted in or after Fall, 2009: Students admitted to the program in (or after) Fall, 2009 can only choose Option II for the dissertation proposal format. (PhD Committee, October, 2008) Option II format prepares for the published manuscript compendium as a dissertation and is described below.

Format Requirements

Option I format for dissertation proposal prepares the student to write the traditional five chapter dissertation. For the proposal defense, the student develops

Chapters I – III, and References and Appendices (no page limit, double spaced)

Chapter I: Introduction

Includes the purpose and aims of the study, significance of the problem or issue, the conceptual/theoretical basis of the study.

Chapter II: Literature Review of the related research

Chapter III: Methods

Includes specific hypotheses to be tested (if appropriate) or research questions, study design, sample, setting, instruments or methods, and data collection procedures, data analysis plans, plans for presentation of findings in dissertation, and human subjects protection. The IRB Application information is included in this section. Address any the status of the data/populations under study: exemptions, minors, women, inclusions and exclusions, enrollment protocol, etc.

References Cited

Appendices

Protection of Human Subjects

The IRB Application information is included in this section. Address any the status of the data/populations under study: exemptions, minors, women, inclusions and exclusions, enrollment protocol, etc.

Option II prepares the student to write the published manuscript dissertation, and is a requirement for students admitted in or after fall, 2009. The format of the Option II dissertation proposal follows NIH grant proposal guidelines, specifically the PHS 424 application electronic version found at:

<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/index.htm> , PHS 424 Version B. The following has been abstracted from the website.

Specific Aims (limited to one page)

- State concisely the goals of the proposed research and summarize the expected outcome(s), including the impact that the results of the proposed research will exert on the research field(s) involved.
- List succinctly the specific objectives of the research proposed, e.g., to test a stated hypothesis, create a novel design, solve a specific problem, challenge an existing paradigm or clinical practice, address a critical barrier to progress in the field, or develop new technology.

Research Strategy (limited to 12 pages, single spaced—formatted in double space for ease in reading—24 pages)

Organize the Research Strategy in the specified order and using the instructions provided below. Start each section with the appropriate section heading - Significance, Innovation, and Approach. Cite published experimental details in the Research Strategy section and provide the full reference in the Bibliography and References Cited section.

(a) Significance

- Explain the importance of the problem or critical barrier to progress in the field that the proposed project addresses.
- Explain how the proposed project will improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice in one or more broad fields.
- Describe how the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or

preventative interventions that drive this field will be changed if the proposed aims are achieved.

(b) Innovation

- Explain how the application challenges and seeks to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms.
- Describe any novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation or interventions to be developed or used, and any advantage over existing methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.
- Explain any refinements, improvements, or new applications of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.

(c) Approach

- Describe the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project.
- Include how the data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted as well as any resource sharing plans as appropriate.
- Discuss potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success anticipated to achieve the aims.
- If the project is in the early stages of development, describe any strategy to establish feasibility, and address the management of any high risk aspects of the proposed work.
- Point out any procedures, situations, or materials that may be hazardous to personnel and precautions to be exercised.

References Cited

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Proposal Development

The student will enroll in a total of at least six semester hours of the course NRPHD 990: Dissertation during the candidacy period, until the dissertation is defended. The student is responsible to utilize the expertise of each committee member in preparing the dissertation proposal defense. (See policy on Committee Member Selection) The Committee Chair works the most intensely with the student, particularly during early phases of proposal development. However, each committee member will contribute unique expertise to separate aspects of the dissertation and the rigor of the proposal as a whole.

Hence, all dissertation committee members will fully read, provide edit, and agree that the student's written proposal is ready for oral defense prior to the scheduling of an oral defense date. (Voted: February, 2011, PhD Committee) Member consensus should be confirmed by the dissertation chair. Once agreed, the student and dissertation committee members agree upon a date and two hour time block for the defense of the proposed research.

The student should notify the PhD Program Administrative Support person of the date and time for defense and need for CON room and technical support for a distance

defense. The student should ensure that all faculty are notified of the arrangements.

Oral Proposal Defense

- The proposal defense meeting is confined to the student and dissertation committee only.
- Exemplars of a proposal defense are archived on the CON website, to be used as examples of the defense format.
- The student will present a 20 to 30 minute overview with powerpoint slides of the proposed research. The defense can be accomplished from a distance.
- After the presentation, committee members have the opportunity to ask questions in relation to the oral presentation or the written proposal.
- All members of the dissertation committee must approve the proposal.
- If there are conditions that require further development, the student will continue to work with the committee to fulfill any requirements before proceeding with the research.
- The student should bring/send the partially completed (except for signatures) *Plan of Research* and *Certification of Successful Defense of Dissertation Proposal* Forms to the defense.

Plan of Research Form Completion

Once the proposal defense is successfully completed, the student and the committee chair will complete the *Plan of Research* and the *Certification of Successful Defense of Dissertation Proposal* forms and send them to the director of the PhD Program. This documents the approved title and content of the research project.