



UNIVERSITY OF
DENVER

Morgridge College
of Education

**COMPLETING THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION:
GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS**

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Letter to Students from the Morgridge College of Education Faculty

Dear Student,

The final step leading to completion of your doctoral degree in the Morgridge College of Education is preparation of a dissertation and successful defense. Some students have prepared and defended Master's theses and some have had major involvement in other research projects before beginning their dissertation. But, for the majority of students, preparation of a dissertation will be a new experience in which you assume responsibility for a major project. Preparing a dissertation is a learning experience guided by your director(s) and committee in which all aspects of the doctoral program are brought together. That is, material from your content areas, your work in the area of research strategies and design fundamentals, your skill in writing in a professional style, and your ability to locate and critically evaluate professional literature are all integrated into one project that you carry out independently, with faculty guidance. Your motivation and commitment to the project are the impetus to finishing the dissertation in a timely manner. This leads to graduation and your professional career.

Articles and books have been written describing the intensity of the experience. Problems that students encounter in preparing a dissertation vary widely, but accounts of the success experiences of the majority of graduates seldom surface. The material in these guidelines is intended to provide you with direction for positive experiences and success with your dissertation.

Although initiation of the task has on occasion been viewed as vague and difficult to grasp, there is an organizational pattern to it. It may be helpful to look at completed dissertations online at the DU library <http://library.du.edu/site/>. The structure varies from study to study; each one is unique. The structure for your own study will become clear after you identify a problem and develop a design to implement it. Your dissertation director and committee will guide you through this process. They are your personal consultants throughout your study but your own initiative is the most important component.

This handbook is specifically designed to address dissertation work. However, students will also find it helpful in competing the Master's Thesis. For Master's Thesis, please refer to the MCE Bulletin for completing the thesis. The purpose of these guidelines is to describe the process for completing the dissertation in the Morgridge College of Education. Our goal is for you to have a successful experience with your study and to produce a manuscript that you will be proud of. Consult with faculty as needed, but your own initiative and resourcefulness will facilitate completion. Finally, as you begin your dissertation, download the forms and instructions for completing your dissertation from the University's Office of Graduate Studies website at: <http://www.du.edu/currentstudents/graduates/graduationinformation.html> and follow them closely. It has important information that can help you avoid having to revise sections of the dissertation at the last minute.

The MCE Faculty

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

Successful completion of a dissertation is the culmination of doctoral study. The dissertation provides students with the opportunity to display their knowledge in a specialized area of study and to demonstrate creative skills in defining a problem and conducting original research to shed light on that problem. The doctorate is not granted to those who simply accumulate the proper number of credits; rather, it is awarded to those who have demonstrated significant skill in conceptualizing, conducting, and defending original research. It is possible, therefore that a student may succeed in completing course work, but have difficulty or fail in efforts to complete the dissertation. In general, the doctoral dissertation in Education must meet all of the criteria listed below.

The dissertation deals with a significant issue or problem.

Education is a professional field. As such, its practitioners must confront and solve practical problems in curriculum and instruction, administration, or in the provisions of mental health of human services. Education is also a controversial field, one in which there is often sharp disagreement about educational philosophy, theory, and practice. A doctoral dissertation in Education must deal with a relevant issue - a proposition or set of propositions about which there may be honest disagreement - and must address a problem, i.e., a matter of professional concern or activity wherein some significant improvement in practice could be brought about through improved understanding of the phenomena involved. Unlike certain other areas of research, educational research is directed toward some immediate or long-range solution to an actual problem confronted by people in the field. The contribution of the research may be a clearer understanding of a philosophical issue, testing or development of a theory, or the development and evaluation of a new practice. The research, therefore, can be either "basic" or "applied," but it must be relevant to some problem faced in the profession.

The dissertation employs a theoretical awareness and a discernible methodology.

Lewin (1945) said that "nothing is so practical as a good theory." A dissertation must be located within some broad range of theory and must employ an explicit and discernible methodology. Theory provides the setting; methodology is the road that is traveled in solving the problem. The research must utilize the theories and methodologies generally associated with one or more of the academic disciplines. It must employ a recognized and accepted set of methods and techniques or create and test new methods and techniques. It is our policy not to exclude *a priori* any particular methodology and not to give greater prestige or preference to a particular methodology. Thus students are free to employ, for example, experimental design, ethnography, case studies, correlational studies, historical studies, and grounded theory depending on the appropriateness of the methodology to the problem under investigation. It is recognized that the level of information available varies with the type of problem; therefore, the methodology will vary with the nature of the problem and the extent to which it has been investigated. The appropriateness of the methodology and the manner of its employment within a theoretical framework are extremely important.

It should be recognized, however, that individual faculty members, because of their particular skills and/or philosophical stances, may prefer to be involved with certain kinds of research and may choose not to be involved with other kinds of research. We regard this as an important aspect of academic freedom, and it falls upon the student, therefore, to seek out those faculty members whose interests and methodological expertise are compatible with his or her projected area of research.

The dissertation explains the phenomena under study.

A good term paper usually reports and describes a state of affairs; a dissertation goes beyond description to analysis, understanding, and explanation. Research that must ultimately shed light on a problem is designed in such a way as to analyze and *explain* the phenomena under investigation, i.e. to demonstrate how something functions, why it functions the way it does, how it came to be, and/or how it is likely to function in the future. Explanations, of course, must be based on evidence. Depending on the methodology employed, the phenomena under investigation may or may not be conceptualized as variables, and the statements describing the phenomena may or may not be tested in the form of hypotheses, but all research at the doctoral level will have as its underlying goal the analysis and explanation of the phenomena under investigation as a significant ingredient in the solution of a problem.

The dissertation has thematic or generalizable results.

The results of research should be of interest and value to more than one individual or set of individuals in a localized setting. A dissertation should deal with a significant issue or problem about which there is *general* interest or concern. The research should be designed, therefore, in such a way that the results will have implications for or be applicable to other settings. Results may be thematic or generalizable. The degree to which one can generalize depends on the nature of the problem, the theory employed and the methodology. Some phenomena are “historically unique,” and the degree of generalization may be limited. When proper caution has been taken against overgeneralization, the student is encouraged to draw inferences from the specific to the general to validate these inferences, and, insofar as possible, to make recommendations to educators and others who face common problems in similar professional settings.

The dissertation is original and creative.

The dissertation should demonstrate the student’s ability to conduct *original* research. This does not mean that every student must embark upon something totally new and untested. The “newness” and originality must come in the way the student has conceptualized the problem and undertaken the research. Two or more researchers, sometimes far removed geographically, may knowingly be studying the same phenomena at the same time, but it is still possible for all parties to be conducting “original” research, assuming that they are using different theories, methodologies, and techniques. Originality is not a function of methodology. It is important, however, for each doctoral student to know exactly what other researchers in the field are investigating; it is not necessary to be the only person conducting investigations of the phenomena.

Mere creativity is not sufficient. A dissertation should not only be “creative,” but should also meet the other criteria outlined above. A student, for example, who wishes to write a fourth grade reader or design a better scheduling system for a high school may do so, but only if the “creative work” falls within some larger context, wherein the effectiveness of the project is tested in such a way as to meet other criteria for a dissertation.

The dissertation is of significant scope.

It is difficult to define the proper scope of a dissertation. To decide whether a proposed dissertation is of significant scope, students may wish to consider some of the following criteria: (a) the research should involve a number of variables, (b) the design of the study should incorporate “sufficient intellectual interest,” i.e., an intelligent selection of variables and a unique combination of the variables or investigation of possible causal factors, (c) the sample should include an appropriate number of participants for a given research question and methodology, or, as in the case of historical research, an adequate investigation of sources, (d) the selection of subjects or material should not be unduly localized, i.e., the study should be broadly applicable, (e) the nature and extent of the treatment, where experimental design is involved, should be of sufficient intensity and duration to produce the anticipated effects, (f) the analysis of the data or source documents should be sufficiently complex and (g) the study should be of sufficient quality to warrant publication and/or to be considered for a presentation at a professional meeting.

Obviously, students are cautioned against undertaking a study which goes beyond the limits of their financial resources and a reasonable expenditure of time. A dissertation usually is not as extended in scope as a national study or the various types of research supported by a sponsoring agency.

Aiming for Excellence in the Dissertation

The following is from Chapter 3 in the book *Developing Quality Dissertations in the Social Sciences: A Graduate Student's Guide to Achieving Excellence* by Barbara E. Lovitts and Ellen L. Wert. Published by Stylus Publishing, LLC, 22883 Quicksilver Drive, Sterling, Virginia 20166-2102 Copyright © 2009 By Stylus Publishing, LLC. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission. These authors interviewed faculty members to determine what contributes to an excellent dissertation and those that are not acceptable.

You read the scholarship of others to learn. But in the process, you also make judgments about the quality of their work. In the same way that you make judgments about the scholarship of others, your director and committee members make holistic judgments about the quality of their students' dissertations.

However, your faculty director also reads student work with another purpose: They read to teach. They must read carefully to see where they can suggest improvements in students' conceptualization of the topic, in their methods, in their presentation of results, and in their writing.

Moreover, your director and committee read to certify quality. That is, they must make sure their students' dissertations demonstrate professional competence and capacity for future professional-quality contributions.

In short, your director and committee are reading your drafts and final version to determine whether your dissertation is at a level of quality that demonstrates your readiness to make the transition from student to professional.

Degrees of Quality

Like published articles, completed dissertations have been written and rewritten. The ideas and presentation have been subjected to expert criticism and honed through repeated drafts, feedback, and editing. And, like published research articles and books, most dissertations are very good. A few dissertations are remarkable or outstanding in some aspect. On the other hand, some dissertations are considered unacceptable.

Faculty members who participated in the study provided descriptions of what makes a dissertation outstanding, very good, acceptable, or unacceptable. For the MCE, this document outlines the outstanding and very good dissertations below given that this is what we aim for in a dissertation. Descriptions of unacceptable dissertations have also been included. Outstanding

Outstanding dissertations are characterized by originality, high-quality writing, and compelling consequences. They show deep knowledge of a massive amount of complicated literature and mastery of the subject matter. They display a richness of thought and insight, and make an important breakthrough. The body of work in outstanding dissertations is deep and thorough. The student demonstrates a sophisticated grasp and use of theory.

In experimental fields, the experiments are well designed and well executed. The quality and care put into the measurement techniques and analyses instill confidence in the results. The data are rich and come from multiple sources

Even though outstanding dissertations are rare -faculty see them once or twice a decade, if that often -the faculty in the study were able to provide a very consistent set of descriptors. They described an outstanding dissertation in the social sciences at the higher levels of originality or significance in that it

- * asks new questions;
- * addresses an important question or problem;
- * uses or develops new tools, methods, approaches, or new types of analyses;
- * pushes the discipline's boundaries and opens new areas for research;
- * has practical and policy implications;
- * is of interest to a larger community and changes the way people think.

They explained that in its execution, the outstanding dissertation

- * is very well written and very well organized;
- * exhibits mature, independent thinking;
- * displays deep understanding of a massive amount of complicated literature;
- * exhibits command and authority over the material;
- * challenges the literature and strongly held traditional views;
- * is thoroughly researched;
- * is synthetic and interdisciplinary;
- * clearly states the problem and explains why it is important
- * has a brilliant research design
- * has well-planned and well-performed experiments (if experimental);
- * is theoretically sophisticated and shows a deep understanding of theory;
- * has rich data from multiple sources
- * has a comprehensive, complete, sophisticated, and convincing analysis

The faculty also described the outstanding dissertation as having the potential to "illuminate an entire area," "startle the field," or "stimulate a lot of activity in the profession." Indeed, the results or conclusion of an outstanding dissertation push the discipline's boundaries and are publishable in the top-tier journals.

Along with offering new and significant knowledge, an outstanding dissertation is a pleasure to read. It has a point of view and a strong, confident, independent, and authoritative voice. Each part of the outstanding dissertation, from introduction to conclusion, is excellent, and the pieces are integrated seamlessly. The writing is clear and persuasive.

The ideas are set out very clearly and concisely. The writer anticipates -and answers -the reader's questions.

Outstanding dissertations were described as "page turners," surprising and edifying the reader. Readers often react with, "Wow! Why didn't I think of that?" Other terms the faculty used to describe outstanding dissertations were "compelling," "concise," "counterintuitive," "creative," "elegant," "engaging," "exciting," "insightful," "surprising," and "thoughtful."

Very Good

The very good dissertation is very good indeed. It fulfills the purposes of the dissertation requirement and establishes the student as a capable social scientist. The majority of the dissertations that faculty see are very good, and this is the level that they expect of most graduate students.

The faculty in the study explained that a very good dissertation displays the student's mastery of the field, addresses a meaningful question or problem, and is executed competently. Although it might not hold the promise of altering the field, it has the potential to contribute to the field by expanding its knowledge

and thinking. The dissertation contains material for two or three papers that could be published in top-tier professional journals.

More specifically, the faculty described a very good dissertation as "original or significant," making a "modest contribution to the field." A very good dissertation has a good question or problem. It shows understanding and mastery of the subject matter; uses appropriate, standard theory, methods, and techniques; includes well-executed research; demonstrates technical competence; presents solid, expected results/answers; and is well written and well-organized.

Unacceptable

It is your responsibility to produce professional-quality work, and it is your director's responsibility to prevent unacceptable work from advancing.

As the faculty who participated in the study concurred, faculty directors should provide the guidance necessary to ensure that the dissertation meets professional standards. The director should make sure that the student is working with a clearly defined question or problem and must make sure that the student is using proper methods. The director should also provide prompt and constructive feedback. It is also your responsibility to follow through on your director's and committee's advice and guidance.

Work that is poorly written and full of errors and mistakes or has other serious flaws is not of adequate quality. The faculty in the study were clear that they would turn back a draft if the question or problem is trivial, weak, or unoriginal. Work that does not demonstrate that the student understands the relevant literature and basic concepts and the key processes or conventions of the discipline is unacceptable when

- * the literature review is weak or missing;
- * methods are used inappropriately, or incorrect methods are used;
- * theory is missing, wrong, or not handled well;
- * hypotheses are inconsistent, do not flow from theory, or are missing;
- * the data are flawed, misrepresented, "fudged," or wrong;
- * the results presented are obvious, already known, unexplained, or misinterpreted;
- * the analysis is wrong, inappropriate, incoherent, or confused;
- * the conclusions drawn from the data are invalid or oversold.

The faculty also described the unacceptable dissertation in terms of its presentation: The organization is confusion and the writing is filled with spelling and grammatical errors. They said that a dissertation that violates standards of academic integrity through plagiarism, falsification of data, or misrepresentation of data is unacceptable.

These problems should be caught early. Use the criteria in this booklet as a starting point for identifying problems or as a way to plan improvements. If your director and other members of your dissertation committee ask you to revise and rewrite, make sure you understand specifically what you need to do to improve - and make the improvements. Many students are confused by the amount of feedback and revisions required for a dissertation. A dissertation is different from a paper that was submitted as a class assignment. Often for these types of papers, comments are given, a grade is assigned, but there is no expectation that the paper will be revised as a way to strengthen it.

COMPLETING A DISSERTATION

When students enroll in a doctoral program, they are made aware of the many requirements for successfully completing it, one of which is the production of a doctoral dissertation. The nature of the dissertation is often discussed in advising conferences and at student orientation meetings. Morgridge College of Education faculty members promote discussions and experiences within their courses that are meant to demystify and initiate the dissertation process for each student.

However, courses are structured with a defined beginning and end, specified readings, written assignments and projects, and peers with whom to share ideas. The dissertation is a highly independent activity and some students have difficulty adjusting to this change of structure. They may find that it is difficult to get started and to shift into this new mode of operating with only their dissertation director, committee, and themselves. There is no structured course outline prescribing exactly what to do. Different problems require different approaches and procedures. The first major step is the creation and defense of a dissertation proposal, which becomes the guide for the rest of the process.

Students **MUST** pass their doctoral comprehensive exam prior to defending their dissertation proposal.

Dissertation preparation courses and seminars

In order to facilitate completion of a proposal and eventually the dissertation, the College organizes courses and seminars. These can be formal classes for credit or they may be short-term informal seminars arranged for small groups of students who are ready to begin the process. In these courses/seminars, guidelines for preparing a dissertation are discussed and suggestions are provided to make this a successful experience for the student. The role of the dissertation director and committee is described and the way in which student progress through the various stages of the dissertation is outlined. Suggestions for preparing the dissertation proposal as well as the application to be submitted to the Institutional Review Board are presented. Suggestions for writing each of the chapters are discussed as well as important skills such as developing a support system, and working with your dissertation committee. Many students find these courses/seminars helpful.

Continuous Enrollment Policy and Dissertation Credit Policy (updated 1/1/2011)

Please note there is a University Continuous Enrollment Policy and a Dissertation Credit Policy for the Morgridge College of Education. Students MUST adhere to both policies at all times.

1. Morgridge College of Education Dissertation Credit Policy

Once the student has completed successfully all required courses and the required comprehensive exam, a student must register for dissertation credits. The faculty support students in the dissertation process by providing advising during this phase of the Ph.D. It is the expectation of the faculty that each student will successfully complete the required dissertation with quality work. In order to encourage the completion of the dissertation, the policy requiring continuous enrollment is as follows:

A student is required to remain continuously registered for dissertation credit at the minimum rate of one credit per quarter (Academic Year of Fall, Winter, and Spring quarters), until the student has completed the minimum necessary number of dissertation hours required by the student's program AND until a successful dissertation defense has occurred. Therefore, depending on the time a student takes to successfully complete the dissertation, registration for additional dissertation credits may be necessary beyond the required minimum. Students MUST be registered for a dissertation credit in the quarter they plan to graduate, including summer. IF a student is graduating in the Summer quarter, the student must register for one dissertation credit during the summer.

2. University Continuous Enrollment Policy

All graduate degree-seeking students must be in active status and continuously enrolled. Enrollment may consist of registration for courses, thesis, or dissertation credits, or Continuous Enrollment registration. The Graduate Studies Continuous Enrollment Policy is ideal for students who need to defer loan repayment while completing the dissertation though you must consult with the appropriate DU Financial Aid Office for more specific information.

Keep in mind you must also register for one credit hour of dissertation research (XXXX 5995) each quarter until you graduate per MCE Policy (noted above). If a student is on a full-time, year-long internship required by your program, this generally applies to Counseling Psychology and Child, Family, and School Psychology students only, please see your program handbook for specific instructions on meeting MCE and DU requirements.

If a student is registering for XXXX 5995 for less than four (4) credits in a given quarter AND you are attempting to defer student loan repayments, the DU Graduate Studies Continuous Enrollment Policy should be utilized in addition to the MCE Dissertation Credit Policy. You are advised to always contact the DU Office of Financial Aid to clarify any financial aid requirements. The MCE does not provide financial aid policy interpretation so please consult the appropriate office for support on any financial aid policy.

To register for DU Graduate Studies Continuous Enrollment, a form must be completed and approved by the Morgridge College of Education, who will submit it to the Associate Provost for Graduate Studies for final approval.

For the complete DU Graduate Studies Continuous Enrollment Policy, please go to:
<http://www.du.edu/media/documents/graduates/10-11policy.pdf>

For the DU Graduate Studies Continuous Enrollment form, please go to:

<http://www.du.edu/media/documents/graduates/CE.pdf> Some examples of how to use these two policies:

1. If you are not concerned about loan repayment issues or not currently receiving some form of financial aid, you may only need to register for the MCE Dissertation Credit Policy. Please consult the DU Office of Financial Aid for specific requirements.
2. If you are receiving some form of financial aid and/or you need to defer loan repayment while you are working on your dissertation, the University Continuous Enrollment Policy would be necessary in addition to the MCE Dissertation Credit Policy. Please consult the DU Office of Financial Aid for specific requirements.

Working with your dissertation director

As the dissertation progresses, the student and dissertation director have frequent contact with each other to make decisions about the nature and scope of the study and to monitor its progress. This is an important relationship and a dissertation advisor's support and interest are critical. For many students, the relationship with the faculty director evolves into a truly collegial relationship. The dissertation director may or may not be the same individual as the academic coursework advisor. Faculty members have different research interests and areas of expertise and it is important for the student to identify a good match given the topic of the dissertation. During their several years of course work, students come in contact with a number of faculty and have an opportunity to learn about their individual backgrounds and research interests. They also become familiar with the style that different faculty members use in working with students and their expectations of the student. All students should consult with their academic coursework advisors prior to choosing a dissertation director, as different program areas in the College may have policies regarding who may serve as a dissertation director.

Learning from your peers

Current and former students can provide an important perspective of the dissertation process. Although the information passed along may occasionally be inaccurate or outdated, those who have completed or are working toward completion of the dissertation are invaluable resources. Such students are typically eager to speak to others about their experiences.

It is highly recommended that students sit in on one or more dissertation or proposal defenses prior to engaging in their own. If the defense is not advertised as an open forum, the student spectator should ask the student who is defending and the dissertation director for permission to attend.

INITIATING THE DISSERTATION PROCESS

During coursework, students should begin thinking about their dissertation. An initial step is identification of a problem and selection of a dissertation director (or in some cases, co-directors). Because of their specialized backgrounds and interests in the topic, the director guides the student through the dissertation process. Occasionally, a faculty member may suggest a dissertation topic that the student ultimately pursues. But, in all cases, the dissertation is meant to be the student's project and she/he must have appropriate autonomy regarding every aspect of the project.

After several years of pre-dissertation course contacts, a student becomes familiar with a number of faculty members along with their research interests and areas of expertise. Lists of faculty and their backgrounds/interests can be accessed via the Morgridge College of Education website. Often, one's academic advisor also becomes the dissertation director *but not necessarily*. It is important for the dissertation director's background and interest to **mirror the problem** that the student intends to study.

Having identified a potential problem for study, a student typically approaches a full-time faculty member to serve as the dissertation director and discusses the proposed area of study with them. Often, in this initial contact, they discuss the nature of this topic as a possible problem area for study and they may agree on a student-director working relationship. They also discuss the director's style of management of the dissertation process, the director's expectations of the advisee, potential supporting committee members, a proposed timeline, steps and stages of the process, and an agenda for a next appointment. The student describes his/her special interest in the subject and any personal constraints that may have an impact on dissertation completion such as nature of the topic, timeline, finances, one's personal and family situation, etc. If a working arrangement is agreed upon, the student and director (and/or co-director) begin the process of refining the proposal. The faculty member may also refer the student to someone else if she/he feels another person would be a better choice for the dissertation chair.

THE PROPOSAL AND COMMITTEE

When the proposal has been refined, the student (with director's recommendation) contacts at least two other full-time faculty to serve as committee members. Each committee member should be given a statement concerning the nature of the study and their anticipated role in the process. The dissertation committee members' backgrounds should complement the area of anticipated study. This does not require that each member be an expert on every aspect of the study. Potentially, the members will all bring different strengths or knowledge bases to the committee.

Students should refer to the Graduate Studies Policy Manual for full information on the DU Graduate Studies Doctoral Committee Composition Policy.

The THESIS/ DISSERTATION ORAL DEFENSE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION FORM must be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies no later than 30 calendar days following the thesis or dissertation proposal approval.

<http://www.du.edu/media/documents/graduates/committee.pdf>

Content of a proposal

The proposal includes several sections but not necessarily in this order. Work with your director to determine the best way to organize your proposal.

⇒ An introduction section. This section should give a short overview of the problem, issues, or topic to be studied and reasons why it is an important problem to study. Often, it includes some historical background of the problem.

⇒ A statement of the problem section. This is a more complete discussion of the problem of the dissertation. The major questions, hypotheses, or statements should be included with a possible list of secondary questions if appropriate. This section is an extended discussion of the problem often with some literature noted.

⇒ A statement of the significance of this study to the field should be included. In other words, why is this study important? It should include a statement about how it advances knowledge in the field with reference to past literature and general concerns of the area.

⇒ The next section should review literature related to the problem, issue, or topic. In this section, various schools of thought on this problem are explored with significant attention to the conceptual and the theoretical aspects of the problem and how those contribute to the topic's development.

⇒ The method section outlines the procedures and research design of the dissertation. It includes a discussion of the research design, the population to be studied, discussion of appropriate instruments, sampling concerns, data collection approaches, analyses to be conducted and a projected timetable for completion of the dissertation. A limitations section is usually necessary to clarify or limit the scope of the method(s) employed in this study.

The dissertation proposal is a detailed plan of the student's intended research. These are general guidelines for preparing the proposal. Since studies differ from one another, it is important for the student to work closely with his/her director to shape the proposal in such a way as to provide a clear outline of the intended research. The requirements for organization of the proposal vary by academic program area in the College. For example, some programs or concentrations in the Morgridge College of Education require 2 chapters and some require 3 chapters depending on the nature of the study. In some areas, the proposal is a condensed version of the first three chapters of the dissertation. Some areas require a complete draft of the first 3 chapters that will need to be updated later. For those programs that use a 3 chapter dissertation proposal, the first chapter is an introduction and background for the study, the second is a review of the literature related to the problem, and the third is a presentation of the proposed methodology. Your director will let you know what chapter structure is required in your concentration area.

Note that a proposal is considered an agreement or contract describing how the student will conduct the study and cannot be changed without director/committee

approval. Substantial changes to the methods, goals, and objectives articulated in a proposal will necessitate a new proposal defense.

The student, director, and committee meet as required to discuss and approve the proposal and then the remaining chapters at a later date. It is the student's responsibility to contact the director and committee members to arrange meetings. This coordination can be difficult due to the nature of faculty schedules, so be prepared to offer multiple options to your committee members when attempting to schedule defense dates. Before and after the proposal, the student has regular contact with the director who guides the flow of the dissertation process. The director provides ongoing consultation to the student and is familiar with all of the details of this particular study. Failure to carry out the dissertation as specified in the proposal may result in problems at the dissertation defense. Major problems encountered or deviations from the proposal may require committee consultation. Before the dissertation defense can be scheduled, the director and committee members must agree that the study has been completed as previously agreed upon and that the student has their permission to schedule the defense. Under no circumstances should the student schedule it without their director's and committee's consent.

Once the student has received the go-ahead from their Dissertation Director to defend their proposal, the student should schedule the proposal defense. Once the proposal has been successfully defended, the student should ensure that the Dissertation Director completes and submits the following form to OAS:

http://www.du.edu/education/display/docs/forms/Dissertation_Proposa.pdf.

THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL PROCESS

Researchers who use human participants in their research must follow specific guidelines as a condition for using the data provided by these persons. If your proposal involves human participants, you will need to submit an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

In consultation with his or her doctoral director, the student prepares an IRB application and submits it to the University's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP). The IRB judges your application on issues related to protection of participants from physical and emotional distress and not on theoretical or methodological grounds. Your study cannot go forward until IRB approval is received. In many cases, minor revisions to your study will be necessary to gain approval. The IRB meets monthly, so plan on a several week lag between approval of the dissertation proposal and the beginning of data collection. Collecting data prior to receiving IRB approval is considered sufficient grounds for halting a research study. In general, students should not submit their IRB application before the proposal defense as any major changes in the proposal would necessitate re-applying to the IRB.

IRB procedures, requirements, and application materials can be viewed/downloaded at: <http://www.du.edu/osp/irb.html>.

A short, multiple choice test is required with the IRB application that can be taken on line or in person. According to DU's ORSP, "education on the protection of human research participants is required for all investigators conducting research involving

human subjects. To access DU's on-line "Education Program for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research" go to: <http://www.du.edu/osp/instructions.html>." Please call 303-871-4052 with any questions you may have about the testing process for IRB at DU.

COMPLETING THE DISSERTATION

Important tasks

Following acceptance of the proposal and human subjects approval from the Institutional Review Board, one typically embarks on completing the study. As this progresses, certain other tasks accompany the main effort. These are summarized below.

- The DU Dissertation and Thesis Formatting Guidelines document, available at <http://www.du.edu/media/documents/graduates/formatting.pdf>, will assist you in ensuring your work is in the correct format and will make submission much easier. A preformatted template is also available on the student tab in webCentral.
- If the proposal was a mini version of chapters 1 through 3 or chapters 1 and 2, then they need to be expanded and refined for inclusion in the dissertation. The review of literature should be as comprehensive and up-to-date as possible.
- The dissertation should include a chapter(s) that summarize the results of the student's research and a discussion chapter in which the student provides a thoughtful critique of the research study and its implications within the larger body of writings in the field.
- Morgridge College of Education faculty require that students write their dissertations (and dissertation proposals) using the style prescriptions of the American Psychological Association. This APA style involves very specific methods for organizing the sections of a scholarly paper, for presenting information in tables and figures, and for citing outside literature. Failure to follow APA style may result in the student being asked to revise their written document. APA style is detailed in several books published by the American Psychological Association.
- Your director and committee members need clear readable copies of your various chapters. Give them ample time to read the manuscript before you meet with them. Stay in close contact with them and follow their suggestions. Format the text and tables appropriately.
- Students are strongly encouraged to take full possession of the analysis of their research data and the writing of their dissertation. On occasion, a student may hire a tutor or consultant to assist in some aspect of the project. However, it is expected that the final product represents the student's own work. Any outside assistance received with analyses or writing must be acknowledged in the dissertation and at the dissertation defense. The faculty will hold the student accountable for fully understanding all analyses and their interpretation.
- Your director(s) will read multiple drafts of each chapter during the course of your study. Other committee members may ask to read copies of your chapter drafts, but are generally expected to read only the dissertation proposal and the final written

document just prior to each defense. As with the dissertation proposal, the final dissertation must be given to each committee member **two weeks before the defense meeting.**

- Students should include a number of other sections within the text of the dissertation as specified by University of Denver's Office of Graduate Studies. These include the preparation of a table of contents, title page, lists of tables and figures, references section, appendices, abstract, acknowledgments page, etc. Note that the Office of Graduate Studies requires that the final dissertation meet certain content and formatting standards, e.g., related to margins and to the type of paper used; they will not approve the dissertation and allow a student to graduate until all deviations are rectified. **The specifications of the Office of Graduate Studies take full precedence over those of APA style, the Morgridge College of Education, or any faculty member.**

Is the dissertation finished now? Am I ready for the Dissertation Defense?

After working on the dissertation for an extended period of time, one may be anxious for closure and the opportunity to say, "That's it. I'm finished." You have read every word, paragraph, and chapter many times and it seems like you found all the typos and grammatical errors. There has been frequent contact with one's director and committee. They have read the proposal and the chapters of the dissertation and provided feedback of passages or whole chapters that may need revision. They provided assistance with interpretation of findings and resources needed to complete the study most effectively. **Only after they have reviewed the entire manuscript and the student is explicitly told that it is appropriate to schedule the oral defense, may the student proceed to make arrangements for it.**

- Verification of Committee Composition Form: Students should complete and return the following form to Graduate Studies with a copy to the MCE Office of Academic Services four weeks prior to the date of the Oral Defense: <http://www.du.edu/media/documents/graduates/oralexam.pdf>. Students must designate on the *Schedule of Oral Defense* from the Dissertation Director, the Oral Defense Committee Chair, and all other members of their dissertation committee. The role of the Oral Defense Committee Chair is to provide the student with a fair defense. It is important that the Oral Defense Committee Chair is unbiased and therefore the student should not pick someone who they have had a close relationship with. The student should ask the Dissertation Director for specific guidance in selecting this person. Often, faculty have recommendations about who might be willing to serve in this role. The Oral Defense Committee Chair needs to be a tenured faculty member at the University of Denver. Filing of the *Schedule of Oral Defense* form is a prerequisite for students to graduate.
- File an application for graduation following the deadlines posted on line by Graduate Studies at <http://www.du.edu/currentstudents/graduates/graduationinformation.html>. Consult with your dissertation director before submitting a graduation application.

- Students are required to post notice of their final dissertation defense with the Morgridge College of Education's Office of Academic Services. It is expected that the dissertation defense will be open to students and faculty of the university as well as interested community members. However, the Oral Defense Committee Chair, the Dissertation Director(s), the committee members, and the student defending have the right to expect that observers will exercise professionalism and civility. Observers should not present questions or comments unless invited to do so after the student has presented her/his study and the committee has sufficiently questioned the Ph.D. candidate.
- The student should leave sufficient time between the dissertation defense and the university deadlines for receiving the final document for revisions. For most students, four weeks are needed in order to make even minor revisions. Although faculty are cognizant of a student's desire to meet certain deadlines, such timelines do not excuse the student from completing all revisions specified by the committee.
- A reception for doctoral graduates is held at least once during the year. It is an opportunity for you to be recognized for your achievement in the company of your family and friends.

THE DISSERTATION DEFENSE

After the committee has indicated that it is appropriate to schedule the defense, the student makes arrangements for it. Typically, there are some final changes to be made to the manuscript, an Oral Defense Committee Chair must be contacted, and time and space arrangements must be made for the defense. Oral Defense Forms must be filed with DU's Office of Graduate Studies **four (4) weeks prior to the date** of oral defense of the dissertation. A copy of the oral defense form must be filed with the MCE Office of Academic Services. All committee members and the Oral Defense Committee Chair must have a final copy of the dissertation **two weeks before** the date of the defense.

The three persons who are on the dissertation proposal committee will be the same three members present at the dissertation defense. There also will be an additional member, the Oral Defense Committee Chair, present at the defense. Extenuating circumstances, such as a faculty member leaving the university or being on sabbatical, may require a change in the constitution of the committee. Special circumstances or changes in the committee must be approved in writing by the student's Dissertation Director and the Office of Graduate Studies. The Oral Defense Committee Chair is a non-voting member of the committee. This person must be outside of the Morgridge College of Education and must be a tenured faculty member at the University of Denver and must hold an earned doctoral from an accredited institution. The function of the Oral Defense Committee Chair is to oversee the defense meeting and ensure that the student is treated in a fair and reasonable manner during the defense. The Oral Defense Committee Chair may or may not actively participate in the questioning of the candidate, although some students will choose an Oral Defense Committee Chair who has some interest in the subject matter. The dissertation director can suggest persons to serve as an Oral Defense Committee Chair.

The student should consult with their director concerning a possible person to be contacted for this role. This person is selected from a department other than the Morgridge College of Education with some thought given to their likely interest in the topic of the dissertation.

On the date of the defense, the student and committee assemble at the assigned time and place for a defense meeting that is generally scheduled for 2-hours. The Oral Defense Committee Chair convenes the defense and may ask the dissertation director to present the first question to the candidate that is usually a request for the student to **briefly** describe his or her professional background and preparation and give a **brief** overview of the study and its outcomes. This leads to further questions, comments, requests for clarification, etc. from committee members. The dissertation director maintains a written log of concerns that are indicated by committee members and shares this with the student after the defense has been completed. This log is the basis for updates and revisions to the dissertation that must be completed before the dissertation director(s) signs the Approval Page.

When the committee has completed its questioning of the candidate, he/she is asked to leave the room while the committee decides on the adequacy of the dissertation and defense and needed changes to the manuscript. Committee members sign a form that is returned to DU's Office of Graduate Studies by the Oral Defense Committee Chair indicating the decision concerning the defense. Following this, the student returns and is given a brief report of the committee's decision and the defense is concluded. If changes are to be made to the manuscript, the dissertation director monitors these changes before the Dissertation Approval page is signed and copies of the dissertation are forwarded to the Office of Graduate Studies.

As mentioned in the Letter from the Faculty, follow closely the instructions for completing your dissertation as outlined by the University's Graduate Studies Office at <http://www.du.edu/currentstudents/graduates/graduationinformation.html>. These documents have specific instructions for implementing the dissertation defense process. That is, they include a listing of the forms to file, procedures for selecting the Oral Defense Committee Chair, scheduling the defense, what to do after the defense, procedures for copyrighting your study, etc.

Although the dissertation proposal defense is often a nerve-wracking experience for students, the tenor of the dissertation defense is typically collegial. If a student has followed the plan laid out in the proposal defense, has maintained a close working relationship with the dissertation director and committee, and has produced a final written document of high quality, then the final defense should go smoothly. It is often at this point that the student realizes she/he has not only obtained the Ph.D., but also attained a professional status that few in a field of study ever reach.

SUBMITTING THE DISSERTATION AFTER THE DEFENSE

The final step in completing your degree is submission of your completed dissertation to Graduate Studies. Full instructions can be found at: <http://www.du.edu/currentstudents/graduates/graduationinformation.html>

Ordering a Bound Copy

In instances where students would like to receive a hard bound copy of their thesis/ dissertation, DU has maintained the relationship with the Denver Bookbinding Company. Students may submit up to six printed copies of the complete document (in separate boxes) for binding to the Office of Graduate Studies. The cost to the student is \$15 per copy. (Additional charges apply for documents over 2 inches thick.) After the documents have been bound, they will be returned to the student's department for the student to pick up.

Finally, as a new Ph.D. holder, please plan to attend the following three events:

- MCE Academic Hooding Ceremony
- MCE Graduate Reception
- DU Ph.D. Reception

THE MCE CHECKLIST OF DISSERTATION COMPLETION TASKS and FORMS

- Review Program Handbook for specific department or program requirements
- Pass Doctoral Comprehensive Exam
- Register for at least 1 Dissertation credit each quarter until graduation
- Determine if you should also register for Continuous Enrollment via the web each quarter until graduation: <http://www.du.edu/media/documents/graduates/CE.pdf>
- Prepare an outline version of your Proposed Research Project
- Schedule a Meeting with Dissertation Director: Discuss additional committee members
- Select 2 More Dissertation Committee Members who agree to participate
- Submit Thesis/Dissertation Oral Defense Committee Recommendation form after proposal defense: <http://www.du.edu/media/documents/graduates/committee.pdf>
- Begin the Study: Proposal
 - Introduction
 - Statement of the Problem
 - Review of the Literature
 - Conceptual/Theoretical Framework
 - Methods, including research questions
 - Contribution to the literature of the field
 - Proposal Distributed to Committee 4 Weeks before the Scheduled Meeting Date
 - Bring Dissertation Proposal Form to Proposal Meeting:
http://www.du.edu/education/display/docs/forms/Dissertation_Proposa.pdf
 - Dissertation Proposal Approval Process
 - Copy of Approved Proposal to Dissertation Advisor and MCE Office of Academic Services
 - Prepare IRB (Dissertation Director's Approval is required)
 - Submit Application to IRB:
http://www.du.edu/orsp/download/irb_application_eprotocol.pdf
 - Approval from Other Human Subjects Boards
- Begin Data Collection, Continue the Study:
 - Begin Data Collection
 - Finish Data Collection

- Begin Analysis of Data
- Finish Analysis of Data
- Submit Application for Graduation by deadlines posted at:
<http://www.du.edu/currentstudents/graduates/graduationinformation.html>
- Prepare Tables of Data, Write Results
- Update Literature Review, Finish Final Chapters
- Schedule Intermittent Meetings with Director and/or Committee:
- Refine and Complete First Chapters
- Finish Summary, Discussion Chapter
- Prepare Abstract (350 Word Limit)
- Refine Table of Contents, References, Appendices, Title Page, Etc.
- Meeting with Director and Committee to receive approval for defense
- Schedule the Defense:
- Select Oral Defense Committee Chair from another Department who meets Graduate Study requirements
- Identify Date, Time, and Location for the Defense:
- Schedule with Director, Committee, College
- Request MCE Technology Coordinator to post Defense Location, Date, and Title
- Distribute Text Copies of Dissertation to Committee two (2)weeks Prior to Defense
- Pass Oral Defense three (4) weeks prior to graduation date
<http://www.du.edu/media/documents/graduates/oralexam.pdf>
- Revisions Completed, Approved/Signed by Dissertation Director
- Give Revised Copies of Dissertation to Oral Defense Committee Chair and Committee
- All Holds, Incompletes, Parking Tickets, Fees Fulfilled
- Final Copies and Forms to Office of Graduate Studies/Electronic Submission two (2) weeks prior to end of term
- Attend MCE Academic Hooding Ceremony, MCE Graduate Reception, & DU Ph.D. Dinner or Luncheon / Reception
- Graduation

REFERENCES

Becker, Howard. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.

Howard Becker, pre-eminent social scientist, *Tricks of the Trade*, brings support and stellar advice to doctoral students and researchers looking for common sense suggestions to stimulate the effective presentation of their studies.

Brause, Rita. 2000. *Writing Your Doctoral Dissertation: Invisible Rules for Success*. London: Falmer Press.

This volume is labeled a “handbook” and is a concise book of advice for doctoral dissertation students. This manual contains the usual chapters devoted to identifying the topic and research questions, and then carrying out the project. However, this timely book includes chapters on forming the dissertation committee, their roles and responsibilities and the intricacies of working with the committee, as well as interacting with ones colleagues, the broader university community, and the “others” in one’s life.

Bryant, Miles T. 2004. *The Portable Dissertation Advisor*. Thousand Oaks California: Corwin Press Inc.

Practical, targeted and no nonsense, this book includes suggestions and tips for: finding a topic, a theory, and a research method. The author suggests that creating a dissertation support group, using a research library from off campus and developing a productive relationship with your director, will support your dissertation experience.

Glatthorn, Allan A. 1998. *Writing the Winning Dissertation; A Step by Step Guide*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, Inc.

Here’s an experience-based, step-by-step, practical guide to take you through planning, writing and presenting your dissertation or thesis.

Goodchild, Lester F., Green, Kathy E., Katz, Elinor L., Kluever, Raymond C. 1997 *Rethinking the Dissertation Process: Tackling Personal and Institutional Obstacles*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Reading this volume will enable faculty members to gain new insights about how to tackle doctoral students’ difficulties in completing their dissertations. Administrators will gain new perspectives on what campuses are doing to improve doctoral degree progress.

Creswell, John. 2002. *Educational Research*. Merrill (Pearson Education).

A compendium on research –quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods - with valuable appendices devoted particularly to dissertations and theses.

Fitzpatrick, Jacqueline, Jan Secrist and Debra Wright. 1998. *Secrets for a Successful Dissertation*. Thousand Oaks: CA Sage.

The book uses a lighthearted approach, replete with humorous sub-titles for the various chapters, to bring a less serious and ominous tone to the completion of a doctoral dissertation. The authors contend that their short book is meant to encourage each doctoral candidate toward beating the overwhelming odds of remaining. "ABD."

Developing Quality Dissertations in the Social Sciences: A Graduate Student's Guide to Achieving Excellence by Barbara E. Lovitts and Ellen L. Wert. Published by Stylus Publishing, LLC, 22883 Quicksilver Drive, Sterling, Virginia 20166-2102 Copyright © 2009 By Stylus Publishing, LLC. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Meloy, Judith. 2001, 2nd edition. *Writing the Qualitative Dissertation: Understanding by Doing*. Hillsdale, NJ. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Meloy's advice for writing the dissertation has proven useful to quite a number of doctoral dissertation candidates in the fields of education and the social sciences. In her book, Meloy tries to instill confidence by quoting various doctoral dissertation completers, from their letters to her, and from a questionnaire she implemented. The book discusses working with one's committee using the quotes and opinions she obtained through letters and questionnaire.

Piantanida, Maria and Noreen Garman. 1999. *The Qualitative Dissertation: A Guide For Students and Faculty*. Thousand Oaks: CA: Corwin Press.

These authors stress that the doctoral candidate goes through "cycles of deliberation" which they describe in detail in each chapter of the book. They note that the purpose of their book on completing the dissertation is to demystify the dissertation process, to challenge dysfunctional, taken-for-granted assumptions, to flag issues that arise for students, and to suggest strategies for moving into and through the cycles of the dissertation process.

Roberts, Carol M. 2004. *The Dissertation Journey: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing, and Defending Your Dissertation*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.

The Dissertation Journey provides concise, straightforward information on the dissertation process, from conceptualizing a topic to publishing the results.

Rudestam, Kjell E., Newton, Rae R. 1992. *Surviving Your Dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process*. Newbury, CA: Sage Publications.

Using a wide range of disciplines, Rudestam and Newton provide readers with expert advice on the entire dissertation process.

Wolcott, Harry. 2001. *Writing Up Qualitative Research*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks: CA Sage.

Woods, Peter. 2000. *Successful Writing for Qualitative Researchers*. London: Routledge.

Two invaluable books for not only the doctoral dissertation writer, but also for researchers and academics in the social sciences, generally, are Peter Woods' and Harry Wolcott's offerings. Both books feature suggestions, as well as sterling examples from these widely acknowledged and accomplished social scientists. They discuss strategies for getting started and for staying on course in writing one's project. Both authors emphasize attention to style and the uses of editing; and they include tips for publication.