



UNIVERSITY OF
DENVER

Morgridge College
of Education

COMPLETING THE DOCTORAL
DISSERTATION
GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS

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 advisor(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 in Room 201 of the Ammi Hyde Building. Feel free to read the dissertations, but do not remove them from the reading room. 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 advisor(s) 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 form and instructions for completing your dissertation from the University's Office of Graduate Studies website at <http://www.du.edu/grad/gradinfo/graduation.html> and follow them closely. It has important information that can help you avoid having to redo sections of the dissertation at the last minute.

The MCE Faculty

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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 skills 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 following criteria:

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.

It has been 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 eschew involvement 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.

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 which 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 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 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.

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 advisor, 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.

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 advisor and committee is described and the way in which students 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 (updated 5/4/08)

*Please note there are two (2) Continuous Enrollment Policies: one for the Morgridge College of Education and one for DU Graduate Studies. **Students MUST adhere to the MCE Continuous Enrollment Policy at all times AND, under certain circumstances described below, should follow the DU Graduate Studies Continuous Enrollment Policy as well.***

1. Morgridge College of Education Continuous Enrollment 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.

2. DU Graduate Studies 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, the Graduate Studies Continuous Enrollment Policy should be utilized so that you are in active status and are continuously enrolled which is the university policy.

If a student is registering for XXXX5995 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 Continuous Enrollment 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 Vice Provost for Graduate Studies for final approval.

For the complete DU Graduate Studies Continuous Enrollment Policy, please go to: http://www.du.edu/grad/forms/ContinuousEnrollmentPolicy_003.pdf.

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

<http://www.du.edu/grad/current-students/forms.html>.

Some examples of how to use these two policies:

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

Working with your advisor

As the dissertation progresses, the student and advisor 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 an advisor's support and interest are critical. For many students, the relationship with the faculty advisor evolves into a truly "collegial relationship." The dissertation advisor 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 advisor, as different program areas in the College may have policies regarding who may serve as dissertation advisor.

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 advisor for permission to attend.

INITIATING THE DISSERTATION PROCESS

During course work students should begin thinking about their dissertation. An initial step is identification of a problem and selection of a dissertation advisor (or in some cases, co-advisors). Because of their specialized backgrounds and interests in the topic, the advisor 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 full, 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 advisor *but not necessarily*. It is important for the dissertation advisor'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 chairperson 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-advisor working relationship. They also discuss the advisor's style of management of the dissertation process, the advisor'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 advisor (and/or co-advisor) 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 advisor'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. In addition, each committee member must be approved to serve on dissertation committees from the Morgridge College of Education and then the Office of Graduate Studies. 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.

DU Graduate Studies Doctoral Committee Composition Policy

- A. The doctoral candidate's dissertation committee is comprised of a minimum of three and a maximum of seven members. Normally, the candidate's dissertation advisor and at least two committee members must be faculty members of the candidate's graduate unit. However, faculty from appropriately related units may also serve on the committee as long as the candidate's graduate unit has the majority representation. When a doctoral degree is interdisciplinary, faculty representation from all disciplines is expected on the committee.
- B. In general, all members of the committee should be full-time DU faculty members. However, an exception can be made in that one member may be less than full-time faculty, an adjunct faculty member, post-doctoral appointee, professor from another institution, or another qualified person including someone without a doctorate but with other appropriate qualifications. These exceptions must have the prior approval of the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies.

Note: The Morgridge College of Education Appointment, Promotion, and Tenure Committee must approve all requests for exception prior to approval by the Vice Provost of Graduate Studies.

The proposal process is one in which the primary dissertation advisor (and/or co-advisor) works directly with the student to develop all aspects of the written proposal. Other committee members may or may not be actively involved in the initial development of the proposal. All committee members read the document and provide critical feedback to the student at the time of the proposal meeting. These faculty will sign a proposal defense approval form when suggested changes have been made. (See Appendix A-1)

Prior to the Proposal Meeting the student must obtain a form from the MCE Office of Admissions and Enrollment Services that includes the names of the three committee members, the date, time, and room of the Dissertation Proposal Meeting. This needs to be filed with the MCE Office of Admissions and Enrollment Services well before the proposal meeting to ensure adequate time for committee member appointments. All proposal defenses and final dissertation defenses are posted on the MCE website and are open for others to attend. A copy of the proposal must be delivered to each committee member at least **4 weeks before the meeting unless all committee members agree that less lead time is necessary, but no less than 2 weeks.**

At the Proposal Meeting there may be changes that the student will be asked to make. These changes must be made before the proposal is approved. Typically, the committee members will sign the approval form at the meeting if the proposal meets

their approval. The dissertation advisors will sign the form when all of the required changes have been made. Morgridge College of Education policy requires that once the student makes all of the required changes and the proposal has been approved by all members who were in attendance at the proposal meeting, the student will give a hard copy of the approved version to the dissertation advisors and a copy on disk to the MCE Office of Admissions and Enrollment Services. This disk will remain in the student's folder in the MCE Office of Admissions and Enrollment Services until the dissertation has been completed.

Content of a proposal

The proposal includes several sections but not necessarily in this order. Work with your advisor 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 question, hypotheses, or statement should be included with a possible list of secondary questions following as 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. 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 might be 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 advisor 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. 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 often a presentation of the proposed methodology. Your advisor 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 advisor/committee approval. Substantial changes to the methods, goals, and objectives articulated in a proposal will necessitate a new proposal defense. Furthermore, elapse of too much time between proposal defense and dissertation defense, may necessitate a new proposal defense.

The student, advisor, 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 advisor 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 chairperson(s) who guides the flow of the dissertation process. The advisor 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 had been 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 chairperson 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 advisor's and committee's consent.

THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL PROCESS

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

In consultation with his or her doctoral advisor, the student prepares an IRB application and submits it to the University's Office of Sponsored Programs. 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 Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP), "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.

- 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 advisor and committee members need clear readable copies of your various chapters to read. 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 advisor(s) will typically wish to 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 **four 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 (if necessary), approval page, 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 advisor 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 exam, may the student proceed to make arrangements for it.**

- Verification of Committee Composition Form
 - A. Students must obtain the *Schedule of Oral Examination* form from the Graduate Studies office or website, fill it out and return it to the appropriate student services office with a copy to his/her department three weeks prior to the date of the Oral Examination.
 - B. Students must designate on the *Schedule of Oral Examination* from the Dissertation/Thesis Chairperson, the Outside Chair of the Oral Examination Committee and all other members of their dissertation committee.
 - C. Filing of this form is a prerequisite for students to graduate.
- File an application for graduation **a quarter before** you expect to graduate. The forms are available from the university’s Office of Graduate Studies. Consult with your advisor before submitting a graduation application.
- Students are required to post notice of their final dissertation defense with the Morgridge College of Education Web Liaison in the Ammi Hyde Building. The template for the standardized notice to be used will be available in the Morgridge College of Education’s Office of Admissions and Enrollment Services. It is expected that the dissertation defense be open to students and faculty of the university as well as interested community members. However, the outside chair, the dissertation advisor(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 until 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. There may be some final changes to be made to the manuscript, an outside chairperson must be contacted, and time and space arrangements must be made for the defense. Oral Examination (Defense) Forms must be filed with DU's Office of Graduate Studies **three (3) weeks prior to the date** of oral examination or defense of the dissertation. A copy of the oral examination form must be filed with the MCE Office of Admissions and Enrollment Services. All committee members and the outside chairperson must have a final copy of the dissertation **four 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 Outside Chairperson, 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 **chairperson of the committee**. The outside chairperson is a non-voting member of the committee. This person needs to be outside of the Morgridge College of Education and must be tenured full-time faculty at the University of Denver. The function of the outside chair is to run the defense meeting and ensure that the student is treated in a fair and reasonable manner during the defense. The outside chair may or may not actively participate in the questioning of the candidate, although some students will choose an outside chair who has some interest in the subject matter. Your dissertation advisor can suggest persons to serve as outside chair if you do not have such contacts outside of the Morgridge College of Education.

The outside chairperson is a representative of the University at large and oversees the defense to ascertain that it is conducted appropriately and is fair to the student. He/she must be a tenured faculty member of the University of Denver (administrators do not qualify, unless they also hold a tenured faculty appointment). DU's Office of Graduate Studies has a list of eligible chairpersons. The student should consult with their advisor concerning a possible person to be contacted for this role. The chairperson 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. Some students prefer a certain outside chairperson who they know from coursework taken outside of the college or through other professional contact.

On the date of the defense, the student and committee assemble at the assigned time and place for the 2-hour proceeding. The outside chairperson convenes the defense and may ask the dissertation advisor to present the first question to the candidate that is usually a request for the student to **briefly** describe their professional background and preparation and give a **brief** overview of the study and its outcome. This leads to further questions, comments, requests for clarification, etc. from committee members. The dissertation advisor maintains a written log of concerns that have been indicated by committee members and shares this with the student after the defense has been completed. This log is the basis for updates and modifications to the dissertation that must be completed before the dissertation chairperson(s) signs the Approval Page.

When the committee has completed their questioning of the candidate, he/she is asked to leave for a short time while the committee decides on the adequacy of the dissertation and defense and any needed changes to the manuscript. Committee members sign a form that is returned to DU's Office of Graduate Studies indicating their 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 advisor monitors these changes before the Dissertation Approval page is signed and copies of the dissertation are forwarded to the Office of Graduate Studies. A bound copy of the revised manuscript should be given to the advisor(s) when it is available.

As mentioned in the Letter from the Faculty, print the forms and instructions for completing your dissertation from the University's Graduate Studies Office at (<http://www.du.edu/grad/gradinfo/graduation.html>) and follow them closely. 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 outside chairperson, scheduling the exam, what to do after the exam, procedures for copyrighting your study, etc.

ELECTRONIC THESIS AND DISSERTATION

The electronic submission process eliminates the need to print these documents for final submission and allows students to pay online via credit card. The process is managed through ProQuest(UMI). **Please read instructions for submitting your dissertation at:** <http://www.du.edu/grad/forms/Dissertation%20Instruc.doc>.

Electronic Theses and Dissertations Policy and Procedures

Note: If the Dissertation/Thesis Chair and the student believe that submitting the work to ProQuest (UMI) will create serious ethical or other issues, please request an exception to this process by submitting a memo to the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies that explains the concerns. Please see "opt out" procedure at the end of this section.

All theses and dissertations must be submitted electronically to ProQuest (UMI) unless an exemption is granted using the “opt out” procedure. ProQuest (UMI) provides access to graduate works for thousands of libraries around the world.

You will find step-by-step instructions on how to submit the thesis/dissertation using the “ETD Administrator” software via the following website:
http://www.proquest.com/products_umi/dissertations/.

The electronic submission instructions can be found at
<http://www.du.edu/grad/gradinfo/graduation.html>.

Criteria for a Master’s Thesis or Doctoral Dissertation

- Requires an outside chair and oral examination (defense). The Master’s committee is comprised of a minimum of two and a maximum of five voting members. The Ph.D. oral exam committee is comprised of a minimum of three and a maximum of seven voting members.
- The scheduling of the oral exam and formatting of the thesis/dissertation must be coordinated through the Office of Graduate Studies in accordance with the university schedule of deadlines and graduate policy.
- All copyright issues must be cleared before the thesis or dissertation is submitted. The student is responsible for obtaining proper permissions for all material used within the work. Evidence of copyright permission may be required with the student’s submission to ProQuest (UMI). For additional information about copyright permission and the copyright process go to http://www.proquest.com/products_umi/dissertations/UMI_CopyrightGuide
- Upon graduation, the theses and dissertations are submitted electronically to ProQuest (UMI) and will be made available electronically through the DU Library. Paper copies will no longer be kept in the library.

Note: Master’s papers that do not meet these criteria will not be called a thesis and the paper title will not be listed on the student’s transcript.

Embargos and Restrictions on Accessing Theses and Dissertations

Students should be advised that a thesis or dissertation may be considered to be “previously published” by some publishers if it is put into a searchable repository (eg. ProQuest). Students should discuss their future publication goals with their advisor regarding their scholarly work. Students planning to publish from their thesis or dissertation should consider requesting an embargo of their work. An “embargo” will completely restrict access to the document. The thesis or dissertation will be held in the ProQuest (UMI) repository with no access until the specified embargo period has expired.

Reasons for Embargo

- Patentable rights in the work or other issues in which disclosure may be detrimental to the rights or interests of the author. If a patent is pending, or

there is patentable work in the thesis or dissertation, the student should be working with the DU Technology Transfer Office and reach an agreement about the timeline for releasing the work.

- There is an ethical need to prevent disclosure of sensitive or classified information about persons, institutions, technologies, etc.
- The student is interested in pursuing the option of an academic or commercial press in acquiring the rights to publish the dissertation or thesis as a book. This should be discussed with the student's department. Even after the work has been submitted to ProQuest (UMI), the student still owns the copyright.
- The student is interested in submitting work from the thesis/dissertation to a peer-reviewed journal.

The following embargo time periods can be put into place by the student through ProQuest (UMI). When an embargo expires, the thesis or dissertation will be automatically made available by ProQuest (UMI).

6 months

1 year

2 years

Renewing an Embargo

Embargos through ProQuest (UMI) may be renewed by the student. Each renewal may be requested for a maximum of two years. Students needing to renew the embargo must contact ProQuest (UMI) directly, prior to the initial embargo being released at 1-800-521-0600 x7020 or via email at disspub@proquest.com.

Restrictions

For the first two years after submission to ProQuest (UMI) or after an embargo period ends, the work will be made searchable on the internet via Google and Google Scholar. The Google search will retrieve basic metadata for each graduate work (title, author, abstract, keywords, etc), and provide links to ProQuest (UMI) for purchase or access. However, a student can place a "restriction" on the work that will reduce the availability of the thesis or dissertation via external search engines during the two year period.

Opt Out Procedure

Occasionally there will be situations where it is not appropriate for a student to submit their work to ProQuest (UMI). The most likely circumstances where this is the case will be when the work includes (1) proprietary information such as company data and records; (2) confidential information that should not be made public such as client records/interviews; or (3) copyrighted material for which it is not possible to get clearance.

If a student and his/her thesis/dissertation chair (advisor) believe that the student's work meets one of these conditions or some other serious condition that should be considered, the student and their advisor should submit a memo to the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies at least one month prior to graduation explaining the issue and

requesting an exemption from the electronic submission process. The memo and any attachments should provide enough detail to enable an appropriate decision to be rendered.

Petitions for such an exemption will be evaluated by a committee who will recommend a course of action to the Vice Provost. The committee will be composed of the dean of the student's academic unit (or the dean's designee); a representative from the University Counsel's Office; and a Graduate Council representative from outside of the student's academic unit. If the request for an exemption to electronic submission is granted the student's work will be deposited in the Penrose library with appropriate restrictions regarding public access. In addition to a permanent exemption there may be situations when copyright clearance is delayed but will be forthcoming at some point in the future. In these cases a memo of explanation along with documentation should be submitted to the Vice Provost. The memo should address the expected delay time period. Once copyright clearance is obtained, the student is required to follow the normal electronic submission process.

Although the dissertation proposal defense is often a nerve-racking experience for students, the tenor of the dissertation defense is typically quite relaxed and collegial. If a student has followed the plan laid out in the proposal defense, has maintained a close working relationship with an advisor and committee, and has produced a final written document of high quality then the final defense will resemble a group of colleagues sharing observations and ideas. 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.

As a new Ph.D. holder, please plan to attend the following two events:

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

THE MCE CHECKLIST OF DISSERTATION COMPLETION TASKS

- Passed 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
- Prepare an Outline of a Proposed Research Project
- Schedule a Meeting / Meet with Dissertation Advisor /
- Select 2 More Dissertation Committee Members who agree to participate
- 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
 - Two (2) Copies of Schedule for Proposal Meeting filed with the MCE Office of Admissions and Enrollment Services
 - Bring Dissertation Proposal Form to Proposal Meeting
 - Dissertation Proposal Approval Process
 - Copy of Approved Proposal to Chairperson and MCE Office of Admissions and Enrollment Services
 - Prepare IRB (Needs Advisor's Approval)
 - Submit Application to IRB
 - Approval from Other Human Subjects Boards
- Begin Data Collection, Continue the Study:
 - Begin Data Collection (Site approved and cooperates)
 - Finish Data Collection
 - Begin Analysis of Data
 - Finish Analysis of Data

- File Application for Graduation (One quarter before expected quarter of graduation)
- Prepare Tables of Data, Write Results
- Update Literature Review, Finished Chapter
- Schedule Intermittent Meetings with Advisor and/or Committee:
- Refine and Complete First Chapters
- Finish Summary, Discussion Chapter
- Prepare Abstract (350 Word Limit)
- Refine Table of Contents, Bibliography, Appendices, Title Page, Etc.
- Meeting with Advisor and Committee to receive approval for defense
- Schedule the Defense:
- Select Outside Chairperson from another Department
- Identify Date, Time, and Location for the Defense:
- Schedule with Advisor, Committee, College
- File Oral Exam (Defense) Schedule Form with Office of Graduate Studies
- AND
- File a Duplicate of the Form with the MCE Office of Admissions and Enrollment Services
- Request MCE Web Liaison to post Defense Location, Date, and Title
- Distribute Copies of Dissertation to Committee 4 Weeks Prior to Defense
- (Defense) Oral Exam Completed (Passed!)
- Revisions Completed, Approved/Signed by Advisor
- Give Revised Copies of Dissertation to Chairperson and Committee
- All Holds, Incompletes, Parking Tickets, Fees Fulfilled
- Final Copies and Forms to Office of Graduate Studies/Electronic Submission
- Attend MCE Academic Hooding Ceremony, MCE Graduate Reception, & DU Ph.D. Luncheon / Reception
- Graduation

APPENDIX A-1: Schedule for Proposal Defense

Student Name:

Academic Program:

Title of Proposal:

Date of Proposal
Meeting:

Time of Defense:

Room No.:

Committee Members:

APPENDIX A-2: Dissertation Proposal Approval Form

- **Post Two Weeks Before the Proposal Meeting**

Name of Student: _____

Date: _____

Title: _____

Signature of Dissertation Chair

Check One:

Approve _____

Do Not Approve _____

Dissertation Committee Member or Co-Chair

Check One:

Approve _____

Do Not Approve _____

Dissertation Committee Member

Check One:

Approve _____

Do Not Approve _____

Dissertation Committee Member

Check One:

Approve _____

Do Not Approve _____

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 advisor, 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: Josset-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."

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, California: 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.