

DISSERTATION PROCEDURES MANUAL

The dissertation is a scholarly work that meaningfully contributes to the field of psychology. Since it is the culmination of a program of advanced study leading to a doctoral degree, it is expected to demonstrate a high degree of scholarly competence. It must show that the candidate is capable of both sophisticated independent research and analysis and scholarly reporting in the fields of health service psychology. It must be the product of original scholarly research and of such quality as to represent a meaningful contribution to knowledge in the field.

Every research venture can offer obstacles and opportunities. To help the student navigate the challenges of the dissertation, faculty advisors offer details regarding the norms that will govern the dissertation work. The primary purpose of this document is to promote reasonable, shared expectations regarding dissertations at UHCL.

Choosing a Research Question

The specific hypotheses involved in a research enterprise is typically developed from a combination of review of the existing literature, opportunities afforded in the research environment, and creative innovation. Because good research questions usually emerge over a period of time, we encourage students to think of topic selection as a *process* that may take one of the following trajectories.

One trajectory of research question development involves a student joining a faculty member's ongoing research program, immersing themselves in the literature and procedures for several semesters, and then taking ownership of a project that is a logical next step in the advisor's research program.

A second trajectory involves the student generating a personal interest and specific research question entirely independently. Although the research question should fit within the major advisor's competencies for supervision, this type of project could be a give-and-take process that adds to the existing program of research in the lab.

To help the student begin the process of selecting a topic, students should engage in many of the following suggested activities. Students should:

1. Make note of psychology phenomena that interest them from readings, classes, literature reviews, and past research experiences.
2. Search the literature for the most recent studies investigating their two or three favorite topics. It will be the students' job to become an expert in the domains of

- health service psychology that interest them. The most current research will offer students ideas for state-of-the-art methods, and discussion sections will suggest logical subsequent studies to readers.
3. Consult research advisors as specific ideas emerge. Manageable dissertations must be practical, so expect a collaborative process of helpful feedback that will refine ideas and develop feasible strategies to complete the dissertation.
 4. Think small and doable. Science develops new ideas incrementally, not all at once. Students should not develop enormous, onerous dissertations; they should study a question that interests them.

Dissertation Committee

Selecting a Committee

At a minimum, a dissertation committee is comprised of 3 members. Typically, there must be at least two members who are from the PsyD Program faculty at UHCL. Additionally, one member must be a faculty member outside the PsyD Program. This third committee member could also be an individual not employed by UHCL, if deemed appropriate by the Dissertation Chair (see *Committee Members Not Employed by UHCL Serving on UHCL Dissertation Committees* below). The most important member of the committee is the Dissertation Chair. Students will work most closely with him or her, and she or he will be an integral part of the selection of the other committee members.

The ideal Dissertation Chair (a) possesses competencies in the student's research area; (b) is interested in the student's research question; (c) has the time to devote to the project, and (d) works well with the student. The first criterion-- expertise--is a key consideration, and it determines whom the student will approach to discuss ideas. Likely, students have already determined overlap in interests with their advisor prior to joining the doctoral program, and this person would be a logical choice to chair the dissertation. However, there may also be other individuals with similar interests who have expertise in the topic a student plans to study. After the student has read and feels comfortable discussing the literature on their topic, they should make appointments and describe these interests to their advisor and those members of the faculty whose research fit the topic most closely.

The Dissertation Chair will help the student select the other members of the committee and will help shape the role those members play. The members may have particular expertise (i.e. methodology or content) that makes them invaluable resources for the specific project. Further, there may be differences in the way each student's committee functions. For example, one student's committee may hold committee meetings in which the entire committee develops details of the procedure, or the members merely may be asked to critique and sign off on the ideas the student and Dissertation Chair produce. In either case, each member of the student's committee will be an independent judge of the acceptability of the work, has veto power over the written work, and will provide final approval of the dissertation document. Upon discussion with and approval from the Dissertation Chair, the student will formally ask faculty members to be on his/her dissertation committee.

Procedure for Establishing Dissertation Committee

As they begin to develop their dissertation idea, students should work on developing their dissertation committee. Students will finalize their dissertation committee by completing the *Dissertation Committee Approval Form*. The student needs to complete the form and have all members of the committee sign. The students then submit the form to the Program Administrative Assistant for forwarding to the **Director of Clinical Training (DCT)**. The form will then be placed in the student's file.

The Dissertation Committee shall consist of at least three faculty members:

(1) The dissertation chair must be a member of the PsyD Program and have graduate faculty status. Students may arrange for a faculty member in another department or at another academic institution to co-chair their dissertation with the approval of Program faculty, and provided that a PsyD faculty member co-chairs the dissertation.

(2) At least one other member of the committee must be a member of the PsyD Program faculty with graduate faculty status.

(3) At least one member of the committee must be faculty from outside the PsyD Program. This can be someone from another department on campus or from another institution.

Any changes to the composition of the dissertation committee must be made with the approval of the Dissertation Chair. A student may change the Dissertation Chair of the committee for justifiable reasons, with approval from the DCT. To change the committee membership, the student must petition the DCT in writing. In the event that the DCT is the Chair of the committee to be changed, the student should direct the request to the Office of the Dean of the College of Human Sciences and Humanities. If any committee member changes throughout the course of the dissertation, a new *Dissertation Committee Approval Form* needs to be completed and given to the DCT.

Committee Members Not Employed by UHCL Serving on UHCL Dissertation Committees

The purpose of this policy is to provide a procedure whereby highly qualified individuals not employed by UHCL may serve on UHCL dissertation committees.

General Comments

Only one external reader may be permitted to serve on each dissertation committee. This person must be specifically requested by the student writing the dissertation and approved, in advance, by the dissertation chair and DCT.

If an approved external reader is located at a distance from the UHCL campus, which would make his/her presence at dissertation committee meetings or a defense impractical, such meetings or defense may be accomplished by a conference call.

An approved external reader will be bound by all pertinent rules, regulations and procedures pertaining to the preparation and approval of theses and dissertations at UHCL.

Qualifications of the Member

It is expected that an external reader should:

1. be a member of the graduate faculty of his/her institution;
2. teach courses at the level of the degree the student writing the thesis or dissertation is pursuing; **or**
3. possess pertinent credentials and/or expertise in the topic area.

Function of Dissertation Committee

The Dissertation Committee shares with the responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the student's progress on the dissertation research.

The Dissertation Chair is responsible for advising the student, serving as a project mentor, and reviewing and approving the student's dissertation proposal and dissertation prior to the formal committee meetings. Students are encouraged to work closely with their Dissertation Chair and to meet regularly with their Dissertation Committee.

The Dissertation Committee reviews and approves the student's dissertation proposal.

The Dissertation Committee monitors the student's progress in the advanced stages of the project and conducts the student's oral dissertation examination.

Registering for Dissertation Hours

The Dissertation Chair is responsible for approving the student's ability to register for dissertation credit with final approval being given by the associate dean. In most cases, this approval will be contingent on the student's ability to provide the Chair with a reasonable and feasible research idea. It should be noted that students cannot register for dissertation hours until they have passed their QEP. Finally, all students are expected to register for dissertation credit hours, as they develop their proposal. It is expected that if a student is requiring work from their advisor on their dissertation proposal or final product, the student must be enrolled in dissertation credit.

Once the Dissertation Chair feels that the student has adequately provided a strong case for starting the dissertation proposal, the *Graduate Option Course Enrollment Form* needs to be completed. Students can complete the form on the HSH website for capstones (<https://www.uhcl.edu/human-sciences-humanities/advising/graduate-capstones/>). Students are expected to signed up for dissertation for the semester they will be writing their proposal.

Thus, prior to registering for dissertation hours, a student needs to have:

- Completed a research project or a thesis
- Completed their QEP
- Completed the *Dissertation Committee Approval Form*
- Have approval from the Dissertation Chair to register for credit
- Completed the *Graduate Option Course Enrollment Form*

A student must enroll for a minimum of 9 hours of dissertation credit (PSYC 8930) to fulfill degree requirements. Normally, students will complete these hours over 3 semesters. Note, that once enrolled in Doctoral Dissertation (PSYC 8930), University policy requires continuous enrollment in a minimum of three hours of dissertation credit from the semester on first enrollment through the semester in which the student graduates. Once enrolled for dissertation research hours, continuous enrollment will be automatic for each successive long semester (fall and spring) until the dissertation is completed and approved. Enrollment is not automatic and is not required during the summer; however, if students need assistance from the dissertation chair with any part of the dissertation, then they need to enroll in dissertation credit. Further, faculty members are not on contract during the summer; thus, the student needs to talk with their dissertation chair to know whether or not they are available to help during the summer semester.

Dissertation Proposal

Prior to starting the dissertation, the student will produce and defend a detailed description of the project that--ideally--will serve as the first half of the finished dissertation. A dissertation **proposal** contains:

1. A review of the relevant literature
2. A rationale and justification for the specific research question
3. An explicit hypotheses
4. A method section detailing
 - a. The sources and nature of the research participants
 - b. The materials and procedures to be used
 - c. Proposed data and power analysis (if applicable)
 - d. Appendices that contain supplementary materials, including any written scales or surveys and the verbal script or instructions to participants a researcher will use

The proposal must be developed entirely by the student who should work closely with the dissertation chair throughout that process. The purpose of the proposal is to convince your committee that there is a tractable question that is worth pursuing and that *the student is in a position to do a good job of pursuing it*. Throughout the proposal, the student define and delineated the research question, explore the significance of the research question in the context of the existing literature, formulate a testable hypothesis, and develop a viable plan for testing the hypothesis. Producing such a document will take a substantial amount of time, in part because the student will read carefully every existing relevant publication or other item in order to develop a full understanding of the topic. More specifically, the student must exhibit mastery of the material that the dissertation chair or other members of the committee indicate is germane to the topic. In addition, students should expect to complete multiple revisions of the document with the dissertation chair before the chair will approve it. Because the proposal is the basis for the work to come, it is essential that the student produce a well-written, thoroughly researched proposal that meets with the chair's approval.

Once and only after the dissertation chair has given the approval for the proposal to be sent to committee members, the student should contact the other committee members, and the written proposal should be sent to each committee member for review and approval. Typically, the proposal is sent to the committee members two weeks prior to the announcement of the proposal, so the committee has time to give feedback before the proposal defense is announced. During this time, it would be expected that the Dissertation Committee will provide the student with feedback and edits. The student will have two weeks to make changes that should directly and completely address the feedback from the members of the committee. After edits are made, the proposal will be resubmitted to all on the committee, including the chair. This process continues until all committee members give the proposal tentative approval.

Once tentative approval is given, the proposal defense should be scheduled at a time and day convenient for the faculty and student and no later than the dates indicated at the conclusion of this section. The student should schedule the proposal defense through the program's administrative assistant who will communicate to the members of the committee and will confirm the date, time, and location for the defense. All proposals need to be announced two weeks prior to the scheduled proposal defense. The student must announce (via the program Administrative Assistant) the proposal defense date and time to all faculty in the College of Human Sciences and Humanities and all students in the PsyD program, inviting them to the proposal defense.

During the proposal defense, the student describes the purpose and objective of the study, reviews the literature, presents the methodology, and defends its importance and relevance to the field. Members of the committee, other faculty, and doctoral students may ask questions, make suggestions, or challenge any part of the proposal. The final decision requires a unanimous vote of the committee who will agree to accept the proposal or to suggest modifications and schedule a review of the revision or to reject the proposal. Once the proposal is approved, the *Dissertation Proposal Approval Form*, which should be prepared by the student in advance of the defense, must be signed and filed. Specifically, the form must be signed by all members of the Dissertation Committee and forwarded by the chair of the committee to the DCT. The DCT will sign the form, and the form will be placed in the student's file for permanent archiving.

The oral defense of the dissertation proposal must be completed by October 1st of the fall semester of the student wishes to apply for internship. If this deadline is not met, the DCT will not certify the student for Internship readiness, except under extraordinary circumstances. Under extraordinary circumstances, students may petition the DTC for an exception to this deadline, but that request will be granted at the DTC's discretion and only with approval by all members of the dissertation committee.

Dissertation Procedures

A student's work on the dissertation is likely to include these activities:

- When preparing a proposal or a finished dissertation, the student will submit several drafts of the work to their Dissertation Chair before submitting material to the other members of the committee. The student will receive several rounds of helpful criticism and prepare several different versions of the work before their Dissertation Chair is completely satisfied.
- The other members inspect the student's work. They are independent critics, and several more drafts may be required to satisfy their concerns.
- Each round of review during this process of revise-and-resubmit will take at least two weeks. When presenting written matter to a committee member, the student should correspond with him or her to set a target date for receiving feedback on the work. Expect such feedback no sooner than two weeks from the day the member acknowledges receipt of the materials; a member may sometimes need longer than two weeks to give the work the attention it deserves.
- Further, **all faculty members are on 9-month contracts**; thus, they may not be as available during the summer months. Students should plan for a delaying in responsiveness.
- Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) approval must be obtained before any data is collected from human participants. If a student's procedure requires a review by the full Committee, expect this approval process to take at least one month.

Dissertation Defense

Students must pass an oral defense of the dissertation. Typically, the proposal be sent to the committee members two weeks prior to the announcement of the proposal, so the committee has time to give feedback before the proposal defense is announced. During this time, it would be expected that the Dissertation Committee will provide the student with feedback and edits. The student will have two weeks to make changes that should directly and completely address the feedback from the members of the committee. After edits are made, the dissertation will be resubmitted to all on the committee, including the chair. This process continues until all committee members give the dissertation tentative approval. Only after each individual committee member tentatively has approved the manuscript should the student schedule a date for the oral dissertation defense.

There may be situations where one member of a committee disagrees with the majority of the committee as to whether a draft is appropriate for defense and/or final approval. If the disagreement cannot be reconciled after extensive discussion, and the faculty member strongly disagrees with other committee members over the quality of the dissertation, the matter may be referred to the DCT. It may appropriate for the faculty member to resign from the committee. The dissertation cannot then proceed unless and until the student secures agreement of another faculty member to join the committee. Appointing

additional committee members follows the same procedures as original appointment of the committee.

The oral defense should be scheduled with the Program Administrative Assistant at least two weeks prior to the defense and must be conducted in University-approved facilities. To initiate this process, the student should send the Program Administrative Assistant the name, date, and time of the defense, along with the title of the dissertation.

Typically, all committee members will be present for the final oral defense. The defense is a public (university community) ceremony open to any student or faculty member. The defense may last between 1 and 2 hours, so it should be scheduled for a 2-hour block. The committee will discuss the work, and it is the student's responsibility to provide an opportunity for questions and answers to those in the audience. After this discussion, the committee evaluates the dissertation. The committee has the responsibility to accept, recommend changes and/or revisions, or reject the document. Changes proposed, if any, must be made; otherwise, a student's graduation may be barred.

Format and Final Procedures

Format

In all instances, the final draft of the manuscript must conform to University-wide specifications for dissertation format. The PsyD Program follows the current American Psychological Association Publication Manual, with regard to all issues not addressed by the University specifications.

The final work must also be acceptable to the UHCL Library, which will retain the original signed copy of each student's dissertation. Students must follow the library's and the University's explicit guidelines for preparation of the final document, which are described on the library website (<https://uhcl.libguides.com/dissertation>) and in library dissertation guidelines attachments.

It should be noted that dissertations can be submitted to the library before final approval of the dissertation. The deadlines each semester for submission are posted on the library's website.

Submission Procedures

All dissertations have to be approved by the Dissertation Committee. Once they have approved the dissertation, they need to sign the *Dissertation Approval Form* and several signature pages of the dissertation. The dissertation, including signed signature pages, are submitted to the Dean's Office via email. The student must send one Word copy of the dissertation with a blank signature page and a separate PDF of the signature page signed by those on the committee. After it is approved by the Dean's Office, it is sent back with the PDF of the signature page signed by the Dean and Associate Dean. Along with the signature page, the PDF of the dissertation with the blank sig page is sent back, which is what goes to the library.

Dissertation Deadlines

Dissertations always take longer than anticipated. Even if a student is diligent in preparing materials and meeting deadlines, these projects involve various other issues that may delay progress (e.g., committee members who may be unavailable during semester breaks or summers, review boards with intermittent meetings, and research participants who forget their appointments or misunderstand their tasks). If students want to collect data from outside agencies, their own review procedures may add several weeks or months to the project.

In addition, students must adhere to the deadlines for dissertation work established by the University, the College of Human Sciences and Humanities, the UHCL Library, and the PsyD Program:

- The University's deadlines are published several semesters in advance at <https://www.uhcl.edu/provost/documents/calendar.pdf>
- The Library deadlines can be found at <https://uhcl.libguides.com/dissertation>.

The PsyD Program **will not** certify a student as being eligible to apply for internships, unless the student has completed a successful oral defense of the dissertation proposal by **October 1** of the fall semester that precedes the intended internship. This deadline occurs early in the year because internship applications will need to be in place only one month later, and there is much to do to make that happen. Please note that students *can* defend their dissertation proposal earlier than this, such as in the preceding spring or summer semester. Typically, to meet the October 1st deadline, students will need to receive permission from their full committee to stage the proposal defense before the fall semester begins. Keep in mind that faculty often are completely unavailable for weeks during the summer, including the two weeks just before the fall semester begins.

Typically, all students should have their dissertation proposal tentatively approved by their Dissertation Chair and ready to submit to the other members of the committee by **September 1** of the fall semester that precedes the intended internship year. If a student has not developed a complete proposal that satisfies their Dissertation Chair by September 1, he or she should not expect to go on internship the following summer

To accomplish the September 1 deadline, the student must provide their Dissertation Chair a complete draft of the dissertation proposal that allows the review process to begin by the **close of the spring semester**. We strongly encourage students to **clarify by Spring Break** exactly whether and when committee members will be available to assist them during the summer months.

Students must defend their dissertation by the date posted by the College of Human Sciences and Humanities to avoid having to enroll in dissertation in upcoming semesters. If a student defends after that date, but before the end of the semester, that student will still have to enroll in dissertation hours the following semester.

Unless compelling circumstances warrant an extension, all students must complete the program within five years of their first registration in the doctoral program. During the

period of data collection and analysis, it is the student's responsibility to maintain close consultation with each member of the committee in order to keep them informed of progress in a timely manner. Ideally, students will complete the dissertation before departing for internship.

To help student understand the timeline of events, a dissertation timeline is provided below to aid the student in meeting these deadlines:

Fall (1st year) – Fall (2nd year)

- Complete Thesis

Spring semester (2nd year)

- Discuss possible dissertation topics with your research advisor

Summer semester (2nd year)

- Choose a topic
- Refine plans

Fall semester (3rd year)

- Pick a topic for QEP
- Specify topic details
- Create outline
- Complete edits on drafts of QEP Outline
- Begin Writing the QEP

QEP should be completed by early Spring, and it needs to be completed before registering for Proposal Hours. Registering for Proposal Hours will start when the Proposal is being developed with your Dissertation Chair.

Spring semester (3rd year)

- Select committee members
- Specify procedure and plan details
- Create proposal outline
- Begin writing the first draft of complete proposal

Spring/Summer semester (3rd year)

- Submission of draft to Dissertation Chair
- Revise and resubmit drafts of written proposal to Dissertation Chair
- Revise and resubmit drafts of written proposal
- Register for PSY 8930, Doctoral Dissertation

Fall semester (4th year)

- Have proposal approved by their Dissertation Chair and ready to submit to the other members of the committee by September 1
- Complete proposal oral defense as early as possible before October 1
- Obtain approval of institutional review boards (UHCL and external sites, if applicable)
- Register for PSY 8930, Doctoral Dissertation

Spring semester (4th year)

- Register for PSY 8930, Doctoral Dissertation
- Complete data collection
- Write first draft of dissertation

Summer semester (4th year)

- Register for PSY 8930, Doctoral Dissertation
- Revise and resubmit drafts to Chair
- Revise and resubmit drafts to other committee members
- Complete dissertation defense
- Complete final committee revisions
- Submit to the library for processing

Dissertation Process Checklist

1. Student selects a topic and assembles a committee.
2. Complete and send *Dissertation Committee Approval Form* to the DCT.
3. Complete *Dissertation Option Course Enrollment Form*
4. Send the written proposal to the Dissertation Committee two weeks prior to Oral defense of the proposal.
5. Upon tentative approval, schedule defense and announce dissertation proposal defense two weeks prior to the proposal defense.
6. Defend the dissertation proposal defense
7. Once the proposal has been approved, send *Dissertation Proposal Approval Form* to DCT.
8. Submit CPHS application (human subjects approval). Student must have CPHS approval before collecting data.
9. Complete dissertation drafts with Dissertation Chair and committee members.
10. Get approval from the Library of basic style and format (approximately 6 weeks prior to graduation; see library website for specific deadlines)
11. Make any changes requested by the Library
12. Send a draft of the dissertation to the Dissertation Committee two weeks prior to oral dissertation defense.
13. Upon tentative approval, schedule defense and announce dissertation proposal defense two weeks prior to the dissertation defense.

14. Defend the dissertation proposal.
15. Make recommended changes and return corrected copy to committee members.
16. Secure signatures of the signature page of the dissertation and on the *Dissertation Approval Form*.
17. Send dissertation to the Dean's office for approval.
 - After approval of the dissertation by the Associate Dean and Dean of HSH, upload your dissertation to the library. Verify current process with Library at <https://uhcl.libguides.com/dissertation>.
18. A final grade will be assigned once the Dean's Office have given final approval.

Dissertation Forms

There are a number of forms that students need to complete during the dissertation process. These include forms for the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Health Services Psy.D. Program. Each of these forms requires a number of signatures. Students are encouraged to check with the Psy.D. Administrative Assistant to make sure that they have the most up-to-date versions of these forms completed and signed.

Forms that need to be completed include:

- *Dissertation Committee Approval Form* (completed before proposal)
- *Dissertation Option Course Enrollment Form*
- *Dissertation Proposal Approval Form* (form and proposal submitted after successful proposal defense)
- *Dissertation Approval Form*

The current versions of these forms can be obtained from the Administrative Assistant of the Health Service Psychology Program.