

University of Houston  Clear Lake  
**HEALTH SERVICE PSYCHOLOGY**  
**PSYD**  
School of Human Sciences and Humanities

## **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 detail 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 develop from a combination of review of the existing literature, opportunities afforded in the research environment, and creative innovation. Since 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 three advisors. Typically, there will 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 a 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 ultimately 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***

Typically after their second year and registering for the qualifying exam, students will be finalizing their research idea and 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 Secretary for forwarding to the program director. 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 program director. To change the committee membership, the student must petition the program director in writing. In the event that the Program Director 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 program director.

### ***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***

Typically, 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 program director.

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. generally 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.

### **Dissertation Proposal**

Prior to enrolling in dissertation credit, the student will produce and defend a detailed description of the project that--ideally--will be 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. 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 analysis
  - d. Appendices that contain materials, including any written scales or surveys and the verbal script or instructions to participants a researcher will use

The proposal is developed by the student, with the dissertation chair doing most of the mentoring. The purpose of the proposal is to convince your committee that there is a tractable question which is worth pursuing and that *you are in a position to do a good job of pursuing it*. Therefore, the proposal should demonstrate that the student has defined and delimited an interesting research question, can explain the importance of the

question, can formulate testable hypotheses, and can develop an appropriate plan for testing the hypotheses. Thus, this process can take a substantial amount of time, and a student should anticipate reading everything that was ever written about anything that might conceivably be relevant to a full understanding of the topic. More specifically, the student needs to be familiar with material that is germane to the topic. Beyond this background and preparation time, students will go through multiple edits with their research mentor/dissertation chair, before the chair approves it.

Once the dissertation chair has approved the proposal, the student contacts committee members, and the written proposal is then presented to each committee member and Chair of CHAS (Clinical Health and Applied Sciences). The proposal should be submitted at least two weeks prior to the targeted date of proposal defense. At this time, the Dissertation Committee and the Chair of CHAS will provide the student with feedback and edits. The student will have two weeks to make the changes, once they have received all feedback. After edits are made, the proposal is resubmitted with all changes made. This process continues until all committee members and the Chair of CHAS give the proposal tentative approval. Once tentative approval is given, the oral defense should be scheduled at a time and day convenient for the faculty and student. The defense can be scheduled through the program secretary. One week prior to the scheduled defense, the student must announce (via Program Secretary) the defense date and time to the College of Human Sciences and Humanities, inviting them to the proposal.

During the oral proposal, 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 to accept the proposal, suggest modifications, or reject it, requires unanimous vote of the committee. Once the proposal is approved, **two *Dissertation Proposal Approval Forms*** need to be completed. Both forms need to be signed by all members of the Dissertation Committee and Chair of CHAS, and then these forms are forwarded to the program director. The program director will sign both forms, and one form will be placed in the student file and the other form will be submitted when the student signs up for dissertation credit. Upon completion of the *Dissertation Proposal Approval Form*, the proposal and signed form is submitted to the Dean's office.

The Dissertation Proposal should be completed by October 1<sup>st</sup> of the fall semester of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in order to apply for internship for the fourth year. If this requirement is not met by the deadline, the program director will not certify the student for Internship application.

### **Registering for Dissertation Hours**

Prior to registering for dissertation hours, a student needs to have:

- Completed a research project or a thesis
- Registered for the qualifying exam
- Completed the *Dissertation Committee Approval Form*

- Completed the *Dissertation Proposal Approval Form*
- Submitted the Proposal and *Dissertation Proposal Approval Form* to the Dean's office, before the first week of the semester they wish to enroll in credit

A student must enroll for a minimum of 9 hours of dissertation credit (PSYC 8930) to fulfill degree requirements. 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 in which the dissertation proposal is approved through the semester in which the student graduates. Continuous enrollment includes summer sessions, if the student is taking any other credit hours during the summer.

A student must defend the completed dissertation before the College of Human Sciences and Humanities posted deadline (several weeks before end of semester) to avoid having to register for Dissertation hours the next semester. It should be noted that Dissertations have to be completed and "turned in" to the Dean's Office approximately one month before the end of any given semester. Students should note that their matter of urgency does not become the committee's matter of urgency. Thus, dissertations submitted to the committee less than a month in advance of the Dean's office deadline likely will not be approved in time given that some additional student revisions are typically needed.

## **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 ordinarily 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. Only after each individual committee member tentatively has approved the manuscript should the student schedule a date for the oral defense. The dissertation, in the form approved by the Dissertation Chair, must be distributed to the committee at least two weeks before the oral examination.

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 be 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 Secretary at least two weeks prior to the defense and must be conducted in University-approved facilities. To initiate this process, the *Scheduling Defense of Dissertation Form* may be completed. The completed form should be returned to the Program Secretary for obtaining the Program Director's signature.

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.

Once the dissertation has been approved, **five** *Dissertation Approval Forms* need to be completed. All forms need to be signed by all members of the Dissertation Committee, and then these forms are forwarded to the program director. The program director will sign both forms, one form will be placed in the student file, and the other forms will be submitted when the student hands in the dissertation to the Dean's office.

The last day to defend a dissertation is two weeks prior to the deadline to submit the dissertation to the Dean's Office, which is denoted in the academic calendar, located at <http://prtl.uhcl.edu/portal/page/portal/AR/Calendars>.

## **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 (<http://libguides.uhcl.edu/dissertation>) and in library dissertation guidelines attachments ([http://libguides.uhcl.edu/ld.php?content\\_id=10463419](http://libguides.uhcl.edu/ld.php?content_id=10463419)).

### **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 <http://prtl.uhcl.edu/portal/page/portal/AR/Calendars>.
- The College's deadlines can be found at <http://www.uhcl.edu/portal/page/portal/HSH/HOME/>.
- The Library deadlines can be found at <http://libguides.uhcl.edu/dissertation>.
- The Program requires approval of the *Research Project & Thesis Waiver Form* (see website) before a student is eligible to enroll in PSYC 8930, Doctoral 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. To meet the October 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

Students are required to have the dissertation proposal approved by their Dissertation Chair and ready to submit to the other members of the committee by **September 1**. 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. A student's Dissertation Chair will be expected to notify the Program Director by September 1 if the student is on track to become eligible to apply for internships that fall.

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 (which is several weeks before the end of the semester), 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.

A dissertation timeline is provided below to aid the student in meeting these deadlines:

Spring semester (1st year)

- Discuss possible dissertation topics with potential chairs

Summer semester (1st year)

- Choose a topic
- Select a Dissertation Chair
- Refine plans

Fall semester (2<sup>nd</sup> year)

- Select other committee members
- Specify procedure and detail plans
- Create proposal outline
- Write first draft of complete proposal

Spring semester (2<sup>nd</sup> year)

- Revise and resubmit drafts of proposal to Dissertation Chair
- Submit refined proposal to other committee members
- Revise and resubmit drafts of proposal

#### Summer semester (2<sup>nd</sup> year)

- Register for PSY 8930, Doctoral Dissertation
- Complete oral defense as early as possible before October 1
- Obtain approval of institutional review boards

#### Fall semester (3<sup>rd</sup> year)

- Register for PSY 8930, Doctoral Dissertation
- Begin data collection

#### Spring semester (3<sup>rd</sup> year)

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

#### Summer semester (3<sup>rd</sup> 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 Program Director.
3. Send the Proposal to the Dissertation Committee and Chair of CHAS two weeks prior to Oral defense of the proposal.
4. Schedule and defend the dissertation proposal defense.
5. Once the proposal has been approved, send *Dissertation Proposal Approval Form* to Program Director.
6. Submit Proposal and *Dissertation Proposal Approval Form* to the Dean's Office.
7. Submit CPHS application (human subjects approval). Student must have CPHS approval before collecting data.
8. Complete dissertation drafts with Dissertation Chair and committee members.
9. Take draft to Library for approval of basic style and format (approximately 6 weeks prior to graduation; see library website for specific deadlines).
10. Make any changes requested by the Library

11. Send a draft of the dissertation to the Dissertation Committee two weeks prior to oral defense.
12. Schedule the oral defense using the *Scheduling Defense of Dissertation Form*.
13. Defend the dissertation proposal.
14. Make recommended changes and return corrected copy to committee members.
15. Secure signatures of Dissertation Committee on five copies of the signature page (on bonded paper) and on the *Dissertation Approval Form*.
16. Send one copy of the *Dissertation Approval Form* to the Program Chair.
17. Take 4 copies of the *Dissertation Approval Form* and the dissertation to Dean's Office.
18. After approval of the dissertation by the Associate Dean and Dean of HSH, take four copies of dissertation (on bonded paper), 3 copies of signed signature page (on bonded paper), 1 copy of unsigned signature page, an extra abstract and title page (on regular paper), and Dissertation Approval Form to the Library. Verify current process with Library at <http://libguides.uhcl.edu/dissertation>.
19. Final approval forms will be forwarded by the Office of the Dean to HSH Advising.
20. A final grade will be assigned once the Dean's Office received the 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 Proposal Approval Form* (form and proposal submitted after successful proposal defense)
- *Dissertation Defense Approval form* (signed by committee after successful defense)
- *Dissertation Approval Form*

The current versions of these forms can be obtained from the Health Service Psychology PsyD website.