This handbook is a guide to the dissertation process for Liberty University School of Education doctoral students. It does not constitute a contract and is subject to change at the discretion of LU SOE. This version of the dissertation handbook supersedes all previous versions.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Doctoral Journey and Dissertation Process

The doctoral journey consists of two primary components: the coursework and the dissertation. The student completes coursework to develop and to further hone his or her critical thinking skills, writing skills, and knowledge. Its purpose is to assess the student’s readiness to become a doctoral candidate. The doctoral dissertation is the final academic requirement for the Ed.D., and is designed to evaluate the candidate’s capabilities as a scholar in education. It can often take longer to complete than the coursework.

1.2 Purpose of this Manual

This handbook has a two-fold purpose: to clarify both the steps leading to the dissertation process and the steps of the dissertation process itself. The handbook is a guide for the dissertation, including the writing, the proposal defense, and the final dissertation. In general terms, the roles and responsibilities of the candidate, the chair, other committee members, and the research consultants are outlined.

Because the completed dissertation is a publication of Liberty University and represents the university, the school, and the author, candidates are expected to maintain high standards concerning the form and appearance of dissertations. Thus, the second purpose of this handbook is to provide directives and standards for doctoral candidates to follow in the dissertation process. The handbook provides specifications about content and style of the dissertation manuscript. The handbook also acts as an aid for the dissertation chair and committee to ensure the maintenance of high standards concerning the form and appearance of dissertations.
2. Academic Policies and Specialized Coursework

There are several academic policies that are utilized specifically for the doctoral programs in the School of Education. Some of the policies are dependent on the specific Degree Completion Plan (DCP) the student is working under. See below:

2.1 Time limit for completion of the degree

The time limit for completion of the Ed.D. program is seven years.

Exception: For students under 2014-2015 and later DCPs who were admitted with 18 or more hours of credit from an Ed.S. program, the time limit for completion of the Ed.D. will be five years.

2.2 Number of NP grades

Students are only allowed one NP grade (no pass or failure) as part of the Ed.D. program. Two NP grades in any one course will result in dismissal from the program. This policy applies specifically to EDUC 970, 980, 989, and 990.

2.3 Limit for times registered for EDUC 989

Students under 2014-2015 and later DCPs are only allowed to register for the EDUC 989 course three times before successful completion of an approved proposal. In addition, students have a limit of nine times registering for EDUC 989. Exceeding either of the limits may result in dismissal from the program. If the time limit is exceeded, the Assistant Dean for Doctoral Programs and Research should be contacted with a request for extension, along with full justification of the request.

2.4 Continuous Enrollment Policy

After completion of EDUC 970 (comprehensive exam), students must be continually enrolled in the program until completion of EDUC 990 (dissertation defense). Continuous
enrollment means that the student must be enrolled in at least one course that will count toward completion of the Ed.D. program per semester. Failure to maintain continuous enrollment will result in dismissal from the program. The student may reapply at that point, but will be subject to current DCP requirements.

2.5 Leave of Absence

A leave of absence, particularly as it relates to the continuous enrollment policy, may be requested by contacting the Assistant Dean for Doctoral Programs and Research. Full justification for the request must be included.

2.6 Relevant Research Courses

Several research courses are directly relevant to the dissertation process. Please be aware that these courses must be taken at Liberty in the SOE Ed.D. program, and cannot be transferred from other schools or universities.

EDUC 812: Advanced Educational Statistics
EDUC 815: Quantitative Methods of Research
EDUC 817: Qualitative Methods of Research
EDUC 915: Quantitative Analysis
EDUC 917: Qualitative Analysis
EDUC 919: Professional Writing and Research
EDUC 980: Dissertation Prospectus
EDUC 989: Dissertation Proposal and Research
EDUC 990: Dissertation Defense
3. Comprehensive Examination

Students must register for the comprehensive examination (EDUC 970) and successfully complete it prior to entering the dissertation phase of their Ed.D. program. This is done in conjunction with EDUC 919.

3.1 Comprehensive Examination Format

The comprehensive examination is based on the methods chapter assignment and the methods presentation for EDUC 919. Methods assignments vary somewhat by form of research, design, and EDUC 919 professor. The main assignment deals with the methods chapter (chapter three) itself.

3.2 Comprehensive Examination Completion (Candidacy Approval)

Upon passing EDUC 919 and the comprehensive exam (EDUC 970), the student will be considered a dissertation candidate.

If the student passes EDUC 919 but fails the comprehensive examination, the student has the opportunity to reenroll in EDUC 970 for a second semester and retake the exam. This will entail improving the methods chapter and presentation from EDUC 919 to the point where it is acceptable to pass the exam. If the student fails to successfully pass the comprehensive evaluation during the second attempt, he or she will not be permitted to continue in the program.

4. Choosing a Dissertation Committee

While enrolled in EDUC 919 and EDUC 970, students should begin thinking about identifying a potential dissertation chair. This is an extremely important decision, as the chair is in charge of the process from this point forward. During the semester in which the Prospectus Development course (EDUC 980) is taken, candidates should officially secure a dissertation chair. Then, under the direction of the chair, the candidate should secure a committee. The
dissertation committee must include the following:

1. A committee chair with an earned doctoral degree (typically an Ed.D. or Ph.D.) who is a full-time member of the faculty (residential or online) at Liberty University, or approved Liberty doctoral graduate found on the Chair Search list;

2. A committee member with an earned doctoral degree (Ed.D. or Ph.D.) who is employed by Liberty University or approved Liberty doctoral graduate found on the Committee Search list;

3. A committee member with an earned doctoral degree (Ed.D. or Ph.D.) outside Liberty University who is approved by the committee chair.

Note: The Assistant Dean for Doctoral Programs and Research must approve committee members who hold degrees other than an Ed.D. or Ph.D. See Appendix A, Dissertation Committee Qualifications and Responsibilities, for more details.

When contacting potential chairs and committee members, the candidate needs to organize and provide a complete methods chapter for a dissertation or a complete prospectus. The methods chapter is developed in EDUC 919, and the prospectus is developed in EDUC 980. The quantitative and qualitative dissertation templates are provided as appendices in this handbook.

4.1 Secure a Chair

Candidates can use the Chair Search webpage to search for a chair, and to determine a chair’s availability. To access the Chair Search page, the candidate will need to use his or her full Liberty email address to log in (not just username). Internet Explorer is the recommended web browser. Prior to contacting a chair, it is important that the candidate check the chair’s availability. Further, potential chairpersons may only be contacted one at a time. A mass e-mail must never be sent.
In some cases, the candidate might find it difficult to find a suitable committee chair. This is often due to a poorly written dissertation prospectus, or an unusual topic that is of little interest to potential chairs. Although it is the responsibility of the candidate to find a chair, the candidate may e-mail a request for assistance to the Dissertation Coordinator with an attached dissertation prospectus or methods chapter to committeesearch@liberty.edu. The Dissertation Coordinator, with the help of the Quantitative or Qualitative Chair of Doctoral Research, will then assist the candidate in identifying individuals to serve on the committee. Candidates may be asked to consult the Committee Member Search webpage for help in identifying and contacting potential committee members.

Note: Once a chair is formally selected, further changes will only be considered if very serious situations occur. Under these circumstances, the candidate should contact the Assistant Dean of Doctoral Programs and Research.

4.2 Update Committee Member Form

Once the chair and the committee members have been secured, the candidate will be prepared to complete the Committee Member Form while enrolled in EDUC 980. A Committee Member form will be created for each student along with his or her My Dissertation Portal site in SharePoint, and the link to the form will be housed in his or her individual My Dissertation Portal site. Candidates will not be able to access this form prior to EDUC 919. To access the Committee Member Form, candidates will need to access their My Dissertation Portal site in SharePoint (to access this page, the candidate will need to use his or her full Liberty email address to log in, and Internet Explorer is the recommended web browser):

https://publicsp.liberty.edu/sites/MDissertationPortal/candportal/SitePages/Home.aspx

Note: It is important that candidates keep their Committee Member Forms up-to-date, as
the information on this form affects final defense scheduling, as well as payment to committee members after the final defense.

5. Dissertation Guidelines

5.1 Dissertation Style

The dissertation is a scholarly document written for professionals in a specific field of study. A dissertation typically ranges from 80 to 200 pages of text, and contains a thorough literature review that is typically 30 to 75 pages in length. Some qualitative dissertations may be up to 300 pages in length. The dissertation needs to follow the most recent edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. All APA guidelines should be followed; however, the formatting guidelines for the dissertation outlined in this handbook and the templates need to be followed where specified. With the approval of the dissertation chair, and for qualitative dissertations only, it is the general policy of the School of Education that the personal pronoun *I* may be used in the candidate’s manuscript as in accordance with the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Quantitative dissertations must be written in third person.

*Note:* It is highly recommend that candidates retain their textbooks from their previous Research and Methods courses. All candidates, chairs, and committee members should have a copy of the following textbooks to guide their studies.

**Quantitative Textbooks:**

Qualitative Textbooks:


5.2 Dissertation Research Topics

Candidates are encouraged to pursue dissertation topics that are of personal relevance and significance; however, a candidate needs to ensure that the topic is researchable and original. It is wise to avoid topics that are overly ambiguous, challenging, and esoteric, thus ensuring that the dissertation process results in successful completion. Conversely, while it makes sense that a candidate selects a topic that is workable, a topic based on convenience must be appropriate and make an original contribution to the field. The dissertation needs to fill a “gap” in the literature. The candidate should not simply choose a topic because it is an issue being addressed in his or her place of work. In fact, it is preferable for the candidate to avoid conducting workplace research if at all possible in order to avoid researcher bias. Further, it is never ethical to conduct research where one is an administrator or has any type of authority over the participants and participants may believe that participation is not voluntary in nature. The research topic should be within the competence and research interests of potential dissertation chairs. To become familiar with the SOE faculty and their research interests, candidates are encouraged to participate in
research teams and dialogue with faculty through the time of coursework. Failure to align research with interests of faculty could result in difficulty locating a chair and committee members. Furthermore, it should be understood that the dissertation needs to align with the discipline of education.

Faith integration within the dissertation is acceptable where appropriate. If a faith perspective is included, it should be well integrated throughout the manuscript and not included as an “afterthought” or simply “tacked on.”

5.3 Dissertation Research Designs

Dissertations may consist of various research designs; however, all research projects for the purpose of a dissertation should include a rigorous production of scientific knowledge. For quantitative research, a candidate may choose to utilize true experimental designs, quasi-experimental designs, ex-post facto designs, correlation, or predictive research designs. All qualitative studies should be designed to account for data triangulation (i.e., a minimum of 3 data collection methods) and trustworthiness should be addressed by incorporating procedures to increase the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of findings.

Mixed-method designs, pre-experimental designs, and action research are NOT appropriate for dissertations. Expository research, descriptive research, and program evaluations are not permitted. If a candidate chooses to develop his or her own instrument /survey, the candidate should understand that instrument/survey development is highly technical and will require numerous trials concerning validity and reliability of the survey and /or instrument.

Note: Any exceptions to the above research design policy may be considered if there is a strong rationale but are subject to the approval of the Assistant Dean of Doctoral Programs and Research.
5.4 Academic Honesty

Liberty University and the School of Education highly value honesty and integrity. The same principles and expectations of academic honestly and integrity in coursework and the comprehensive examination are true for the dissertation. See *The Liberty Way* for specific definitions, penalties, and processes of reporting. The presence of plagiarism within any dissertation manuscript or document may result in dismissal from the program, failing the dissertation course, and/or implementation of an intervention plan. The dissertation chair, the committee, and the School of Education administration decide the final consequences of academic dishonesty.

It is recognized that the dissertation needs to be an original work of the candidate, and the reuse of previous research, master’s thesis, publications, etc., is not acceptable. All previous work needs to be cited according to the current edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, and the manual’s section on self-plagiarism should be reviewed. Properly crediting another individual’s work is also an ethical imperative.

6. The Prospectus

Upon enrollment in EDUC 980, the candidate develops a complete research prospectus. The Dissertation Templates are used to develop the prospectus (See Appendix D or Appendix E). The prospectus, chapters one, two, and three of the dissertation, is the first formal document candidates write as part of the dissertation process. The prospectus is expected to be foundational to the formal proposal, then ultimately to the dissertation manuscript. It includes a title page and a reference page, but does not necessarily include a table of contents or an abstract. All of the other elements of the first three chapters of a dissertation are present. The prospectus is from 30 to 50 pages long, with a literature review (chapter two) of at least 15
To pass EDUC 980 and progress to EDUC 989, the candidate must pass ALL course assignments. The primary assignment in EDUC 980 is the prospectus. To earn a pass on this assignment, the candidate is expected to incorporate all feedback from the EDUC 919 research plan submission, use correct APA formatting and correct grammar, ensure the research design and analysis sections include scholarly research text references, demonstrate a thorough understanding of research design and analysis, and clearly identify the “gap” in the literature that is being addressed with the research. It is thus highly recommended that this course be taken during a term in which the candidate has sufficient time to devote to developing a solid prospectus. Failure to do so could result in not passing EDUC 980, and this course may only be taken twice.

Upon entrance into EDUC 989, all feedback from the research consultant should be discussed with the chair. Failure to implement the research consultant’s feedback, especially in regard to research design and analysis, will result in significant delays in the dissertation process.

7. Proposal

7.1 Develop the Proposal

After successful completion of EDUC 980, the candidate enrolls in the first three hours of EDUC 989 in his or her chair’s section. If the candidate does not have a chair at this point, the candidate should refer to Section 4.1 of this handbook. Upon enrollment in EDUC 989, the candidate is provided access to the EDUC 989 Blackboard site that is facilitated by the chair. Although EDUC 989 is not a typical course with weekly assignments, the candidate should visit the course site to complete required semester term tasks and dissertation assignments.
Some of the approved dissertation chairs are considered external, meaning they are not a contracted employee for the university, but rather are contracted to work on specific dissertation committees. These chairs will not have their own sections of EDUC 989 in Blackboard. Candidates with external chairs should enroll in EDUC 989 A90. There are instructions in this section for how to submit progress updates to chairs via LiveText in lieu of Discussion Board progress updates in Blackboard.

Upon enrollment in EDUC 989, the candidate immediately begins working with his or her chair to develop a solid dissertation proposal. The proposal needs to consist, at a minimum, of the Title Page, Abstract, Table of Contents, Chapter One: Introduction, Chapter Two: Literature Review, Chapter Three: Methods, References, and Appendices with instruments, participant letters, and IRB applications. The completed proposal is expected to consist of complete, well-edited chapters one, two and three. The proposal is approximately 50-70 pages in length, with a minimum length of 30 pages for the literature review (chapter two). Although the proposal is normally lengthened as it is transformed into the first three chapters of the full dissertation, it may not change drastically once it is completed and approved as part of EDUC 989.

The chair always reviews the proposal manuscript first. When the chair is satisfied with the proposal and has given approval, the chair disseminates the proposal manuscript or asks the candidate to provide a copy of the proposal manuscript to the committee for feedback. This review process should include the review of the candidate’s IRB Application Form in addition to the manuscript. The candidate should expect that the proposal manuscript will go through multiple revisions before a proposal is approved for a proposal defense (note: a review may take between two to four weeks depending upon the length and quality of the manuscript).
7.2 Submit the Proposal for a Research Consultant Review – Milestone One

The research consultant’s primary responsibility is to serve as a consultant directly to the chair, not the candidate. These duties include, but are not limited to, ensuring that the chair and the committee are holding the candidate accountable for all handbook policies and dissertations guidelines. The research consultant will review the entire dissertation proposal, but will focus chiefly on the development of an appropriate design in Chapter Three. The candidate will not contact the consultant except with the consultant’s approval obtained through the chair. The chair will be copied on all correspondence between the consultant and the student and make an effort to attend any phone conferences between the student and the consultant.

Once the chair and committee have reviewed the proposal manuscript and decide the candidate is ready for a proposal defense, the manuscript should be submitted for a research consultant review. Please note that the research consultant must approve the manuscript before the proposal defense can take place. The chair will email the proposal manuscript for a research consultant review to the Ed.S./Ed.D. Gate Coordinator at SOEDissertationReview@liberty.edu. Please use the following naming convention for manuscripts that are sent for review in order to ensure proper tracking:

Last_First_Proposal_Draft 01.

Once the proposal manuscript is submitted to SOEDissertationReview@liberty.edu, the Gate Coordinator will send a confirmation email to the chair stating that the manuscript was received, and will forward the manuscript to the assigned research consultant. The consultant will provide feedback about the manuscript, and especially the research methods of the proposal. Research consultant reviews could take between two and four weeks to be
completed. Once the review is complete, the consultant will send the manuscript back to the Gate Coordinator, and the Gate Coordinator will forward the reviewed manuscript back to the chair. If the manuscript is approved, the candidate may move forward with scheduling a proposal defense. If the manuscript is not approved, the candidate must work with his or her chair to make changes based on the research consultant’s feedback, and the chair will resubmit the manuscript to the Gate Coordinator at SOEDissertationReview@liberty.edu for another consultant review. No proposal defense can take place without approval of the consultant.

7.3 Schedule a Proposal Defense

Once the candidate has incorporated and addressed all feedback from the research consultant, the candidate discusses with the chair his or her readiness for the proposal defense and schedules a time for the defense. Ultimately, the research consultant, with recommendation from the chair and committee members, decides when the manuscript is finished and ready for defense. Upon scheduling the proposal defense, the candidate submits his or her manuscript to SafeAssign, the University’s plagiarism detection software, via the EDUC 989 SafeAssign Submission Link in Blackboard. It is the responsibility of the chair to check the results from this submission.

While it is recognized that dissertation chairs have different ways of managing this process, a formal proposal defense normally takes place via the university’s e-conferencing system (WebEx) or by phone conference. The candidate is responsible for identifying dates and times convenient for the chair and each committee member. Then, a date and time is discussed and decided upon between the candidate and the chair. Once a date and time is established, the chair is responsible for informing the rest of the committee. The chair is also responsible for
facilitating the defense via an e-conferencing system or phone conference. The chair may contact the dissertation support staff at EDUCDissertation@liberty.edu if he or she would like information on how to set up a WebEx meeting. Otherwise, phone, Skype, or other e-conferencing tools are acceptable for conducting the proposal defense.

7.4 Defend the Proposal: Milestone Two

The actual dissertation proposal defense should be approximately 30 to 60 minutes in length. After prayer and preliminary remarks by the chair, the candidate presents the proposal. The proposal needs to include a description of the study’s purpose and significance, the research question and hypothesis, the methods (including the plans for the research design and analysis), and an anticipated timeline for the dissertation process. The presentation is approximately 10-15 minutes. The following procedures are recommended for the proposal defense:

- Introductions and Welcome
- Opening prayer by chair
- 10-15 minute presentation of PowerPoint by candidate
- Questions and comments from committee
- Dismissal of candidate for committee deliberation
- Re-connect with candidate for committee decision
- Final remarks

During the proposal defense, the committee asks questions and provides suggestions. Once the committee is done asking questions, they will dismiss the candidate while they deliberate. The committee discusses the defense and makes one of the following decisions:
• Approved with no further or minor revisions,
• Provisionally approved with revisions, or
• Not approved with recommendation to revise proposal or rewrite a new proposal.

A maximum of two proposals may be defended. Failure to successfully defend within two successive proposals could result in dismissal from the program or remediation before progression in the dissertation process. This decision is made by the Assistant Dean for Doctoral Programs and Research. The chair must contact SOEDissertationReview@liberty.edu to inform the Gate Coordinator when the candidate has successfully defended his or her proposal. Failure to do so could result in the candidate being dismissed from the program.

8. IRB

8.1 Submit IRB Application(s)

After completion of a successful proposal defense, Institutional Review Board (IRB) review and approval is needed. IRB is a federally mandated body, the purpose of which is to ensure ethical treatment of participants in research projects. Research cannot be started prior to full approval from IRB. Within five working days of the approved proposal defense, the candidate submits IRB application and ancillary material. The proposal defense needs to be completed prior to submission for IRB review. These documents are submitted to Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board, irb@liberty.edu.

8.2 Receive IRB Approval: Milestone Three

Although most IRB applications for educational research do not include full reviews, the IRB initial reviewer will make that decision. Please see timeframes for approval on the university IRB website. Some modifications to the application may be expected. Take care to thoroughly review the IRB website and incorporate all of the research consultant’s feedback to
avoid delays.

Execution of research **CANNOT** begin prior to receiving IRB approval. If data are collected or accessed prior to obtaining all necessary and full IRB approvals, the candidate will be dismissed from the program. Once IRB approval is obtained, the chair must forward the approval letter that includes the IRB approval number to the Gate Coordinator at SOEDissertationReview@liberty.edu.

9. The Dissertation

9.1 Execute the Research

After IRB approval is given, the candidate executes his or her research, including data collection and analysis. Please note that depending on the candidate’s level of comfort, ability, and competence with the chosen quantitative or qualitative analysis, an outside consultant may be sought. However, the candidate is held responsible to know, to understand, and to answer for ethical behavior, procedures, accuracy, interpretation, and integrity of the research design and analysis.

9.2 Develop Final Dissertation Manuscript

Under the guidance of the committee chair, the candidate refines chapters one through three and writes chapters four and five. The chair may advise the candidate to seek guidance from committee members on specific aspects, or may require that the candidate seek an outside editor. The Quantitative and Qualitative Dissertation Templates are provided as appendices as the candidate continues to write and refine the manuscript (See Appendices D and E). A typical dissertation is around 100–200+ pages in length. It includes all the elements of a full dissertation. There should be a minimum of 80 pages of text for the quantitative dissertation and 130 for the qualitative dissertation.
The chair always reviews the manuscript first. When the chair is satisfied with the manuscript and has given approval, the chair disseminates the manuscript (or chapters) or asks the candidate to provide a copy of the manuscript to the committee for feedback. The candidate should expect that the manuscript (and chapters) will go through multiple revisions before a manuscript is approved for a defense, and should know that a review may take between two to four weeks depending upon the length and quality of the manuscript.

9.3 Submit the Dissertation Manuscript for a Research Consultant Review: Milestone Four

Once the chair and committee have reviewed the dissertation manuscript and decide the candidate is ready for the final defense, the manuscript must be submitted for a research consultant review. Please note that the research consultant must approve the manuscript before the dissertation defense can take place. The chair will email the dissertation manuscript for a research consultant review to the Ed.S./Ed.D. Gate Coordinator at SOEDissertationReview@liberty.edu. Please use the following naming convention for manuscripts that are sent for review in order to ensure proper tracking: Last_First_Dissertation_Draft 01.

Once the dissertation manuscript is submitted to SOEDissertationReview@liberty.edu, the Gate Coordinator will send a confirmation email to the chair stating that the manuscript was received, and will forward the manuscript to the assigned research consultant. The consultant will provide feedback about the manuscript, and especially the research methods of the study. Research consultant reviews could take between two and four weeks to be completed. Once the review is complete, the consultant will send the manuscript back to the Gate Coordinator, and the Gate Coordinator will forward the reviewed manuscript back to the chair. If the manuscript is approved, the candidate may
move forward with scheduling a dissertation defense. If the manuscript is not approved, the candidate must work with his or her chair to make changes based on the research consultant’s feedback, and the chair will resubmit the manuscript to the Gate Coordinator at
SOEDissertationReview@liberty.edu for another consultant review. The defense cannot be scheduled until the consultant has reviewed the dissertation and granted approval for a final defense.

9.4 Submit the Dissertation Manuscript for a Professional Edit

During the final revision process and prior to the defense, a professional edit of the manuscript is required. This may include a full edit, or may simply be an APA edit. This step must be completed prior to the defense. The School of Education has a list of recommended editors located in SharePoint:

9.5 Schedule a Dissertation Defense (Register for EDUC 990)

Once the dissertation manuscript is approved by the research consultant, the candidate discusses with the chair his or her readiness for the dissertation defense and schedules a time for the defense. Ultimately, the research consultant, with recommendations from the chair and committee members, will decide when the manuscript is finished and ready for defense. In the rare instance where the chair and consultant may disagree about the candidate’s readiness for the defense, the Assistant Dean for Doctoral Programs and Research may intervene and make the final decision. Upon the chair’s approval and scheduling of the defense, the candidate may register for EDUC 990 (3 hours).

If the candidate originally enrolled in EDUC 989 because it was not certain he or she would defend, it is very important that he or she DOES NOT participate in the course by
completing the SafeAssign report or any other task in EDUC 989. If candidates do participate, they will need to withdraw from EDUC 989 and pay a balance. They will also need to pay for the full amount for EDUC 990. If they do not participate at all in 989, advising should be able to assist them in dropping EDUC 989 and enrolling in EDUC 990, with no additional charge for EDUC 989. The candidate will need to pay for EDUC 990. Once the candidate has the chair’s e-mail approval for EDUC 990, he or she needs to work with advising to drop and enroll in the needed courses.

Traditionally, candidates attend the final defense on campus, along with any committee members who are local to the university. If the chair or any committee members are at a distance, they may attend the defense via the university e-conferencing system. The research consultant typically attends the defense on campus, and the chair and candidate should include the research consultant in the scheduling of the defense. Alternatively, candidates may request a distance defense using the university e-conferencing system, allowing them to attend the defense virtually. This request would first need to be made to the chair, who (if he or she approves) will then bring it to the Assistant Dean for Doctoral Programs and Research (EDUCDissertation@liberty.edu). Please see the instructions for requesting a distance defense in SharePoint. The Assistant Dean of Doctoral Programs and Research will consider the rationale given by the candidate and chair, and will either approve or deny the request for a distance defense. Please note that these requests should be made at least two weeks prior to the requested defense date. If approved, the chair and candidate should review the list of requirements for having a distance defense, all of which must be agreed to and fulfilled in order to move forward with scheduling the defense. The candidate is responsible for identifying dates and times convenient for the chair, each committee member, the research consultant, and the
university regarding the use of facilities (See the Dissertation Defense Calendar) and provide a list of dates and times to the chair. The candidate is also responsible to complete the Dissertation Announcement Template and send the completed form to the chair. The defense date must be scheduled and the defense successfully completed at least four weeks prior to the last day of the semester term (deadlines for each semester are noted on the Dissertation and Candidate Portals).

Once a date and time are established, the chair is responsible to forward the Dissertation Announcement Template and SafeAssign report of the manuscript to the dissertation support staff at EDUCDissertation@liberty.edu to schedule the defense. The chair should submit the dissertation manuscript to SafeAssign as a Direct Submit in any class he or she is teaching that has SafeAssign in it. (EDUC 989 may be used by the chair for this. There is no link to SafeAssign in EDUC 990, and chairs do not have access to this course, as it is overseen by the Associate Dean for Graduate Programs). Candidates should not attempt to run the SafeAssign report for the final dissertation manuscript.

The dissertation support staff provides the chair with information about conducting the defense via the e-conferencing system, if needed, and posts the defense time and date in the Dissertation Defense Calendar. The dissertation support staff also e-mails an Outlook appointment to the candidate, committee, as well as the faculty, staff, and doctoral students of LU SOE. Once this Outlook appointment is sent out, the date and time of the defense is considered to be officially set. Do not make travel arrangements prior to receiving the Outlook appointment from the dissertation support staff. The chair is responsible for informing each committee member of the date, time, and procedures of the defense. The following procedures are recommended:
• Introductions and Welcome
• Opening prayer by chair and introduction of the committee and candidate
• 15-20 minute presentation of PowerPoint by candidate
• Questions and comments from committee
• Questions and comments from the research consultant
• Questions and comments from the School of Education Faculty
• Dismissal of candidate for committee and research consultant deliberation
• Re-connect with candidate for decision
• Final remarks

9.6 Pre-defense

One to two weeks prior to the defense, the chair, the committee members, and the candidate may schedule and conduct a pre-defense phone call or e-conferencing session to finalize all the defense details and complete a practice defense. Although not required, the pre-defense is good practice for the candidate to prepare for the final defense.

9.7 Preparing for the Defense

The candidate is responsible for providing the final edited copy of the dissertation manuscript to all of the committee members and the research consultant at least two weeks in advance of the dissertation defense. The candidate prepares a 15-20 minute presentation of his or her research plans for the defense; a PowerPoint presentation is required. The PowerPoint presentation should be sent to the chair and the committee member at least one week prior to the defense. If the defense occurs on campus, the candidate should bring the PowerPoint presentation to the defense on a USB drive, along with three hard copies of the dissertation
manuscript. There is a computer, projector, and a presentation clicker in the defense room, located in DeMoss Hall 1154. Candidates may arrive at the defense room 30 minutes ahead of time to begin setting up for the defense. Parking can be limited, so it is recommended that the candidate arrive early to check-in with LUPD for a parking pass and to find a parking spot near DeMoss Hall.

If the defense is completed at a distance, the candidate should check with the research consultant to see if he or she would like to receive a hard copy of the dissertation at least one week prior to the final defense. The candidate must have a professional location such as a work office from which to participate in the online defense. The candidate must have a computer with web cam capabilities, and access to a reliable internet connection. WebEx must be used for distance defenses, and the chair is responsible for setting up the WebEx meeting (please see instructional information about this in on the Dissertation Portal). The chair and candidate are required to have a “test defense” on WebEx at least two days prior to the final defense in order to ensure that the technology works properly on the computers and phones that will be used on the day of the defense. Please see additional information about distance defenses on the Dissertation Portal.

9.8 Defend the Dissertation: Milestone Five

The dissertation defense will take approximately one hour to complete. After prayer and preliminary remarks by the chair, the candidate gives the defense presentation. The presentation needs to include an overview of the study’s purpose and significance (both practical and empirical), the methods, the analysis, the results, limitations, discussion of the findings, and suggestions for future research. The presentation is approximately 15-20 minutes. The PowerPoint for the presentation should be used as an aid. Reading from the
PowerPoint or script is not acceptable and may result in an unsuccessful defense. Following the defense presentation, the committee members ask questions. Then, graduate faculty will be provided with the opportunity to ask questions. Following questions, all individuals not on the committee, including the candidate, are asked to exit the room to provide the committee the opportunity to discuss the defense. Using the Ed.D. Dissertation Defense Rubric for guidance, the committee and research consultant will make a decision. The candidate is invited back into the room, and the chair will inform the candidate of the outcome. The committee makes one of the following decisions:

- Approved with no further or minor revisions
- Provisionally approved with revisions
- Not approved with recommendation to revise dissertation or write a new dissertation.

If the committee makes one of the first two decisions, the chair delineates the required steps and specifies a timeline for completion (usually 7-15 days). It should be noted that, at the discretion of the chair and dependent upon the number of revisions that need to be made, the candidate may have his or her manuscript professionally re-edited.

A maximum of two dissertation defenses may be completed. Failure to defend successfully within two defenses will result in dismissal from the program. Once everything is completed, the chair should notify the Associate Dean for Graduate Programs with a recommended grade for the candidate for EDUC 990 (chairs do not have their own sections of EDUC 990; there are only one or two sections of EDUC 990 each semester, which are overseen by the Associate Dean for Graduate Programs).

10. Publication and Graduation

Upon approval from the chair, the candidate follows the ILRC submission guidelines for
publication. These guidelines must be strictly followed and can be accessed at Theses and Dissertation Publishing Guidelines. The candidate is required to furnish bound copies of his or her dissertation to the chair, the committee members, and the Liberty University School of Education (Step 10 on the ILRC website: the bindery). The candidate selects cover color 588 – Royal Blue, gold lettering for the cover, title printed on the spine and the cover, and single-sided printing option.

As a reminder, the candidate must complete requirements and paperwork necessary for graduation and should plan to attend the hooding ceremony and graduation exercises in May. Graduation information can be found on the Registrar's website. Application for graduation should be completed no later than the beginning of the term in which the candidate intends to defend the dissertation.
Appendix A: Dissertation Committee Qualifications and Responsibilities

The Chair

Qualifications

- Full time Liberty University faculty member or Liberty University School of Education doctoral graduate found on our Chair Search list.
- Must hold an earned doctorate degree from a regionally accredited university. This normally means a Ph.D. or Ed.D. The Assistant Dean for Doctoral Programs and Research must approve committee members who hold degrees other than an Ed.D. or Ph.D.

Responsibilities

- Provides mentorship to doctoral candidates (up to six) through the dissertation process as outlined in the dissertation handbook, from the development of the proposal to the final publishing of the dissertation. This includes providing timely and thorough feedback. All feedback on manuscripts, unless otherwise communicated to the candidate, should be provided within a two to four week timeframe.
- Provides feedback on doctoral candidate’s skills and provides necessary referrals for additional support.
- Ensures that the proposal and the dissertation manuscript comply with all university criteria and are acceptable scholarly works, including conformity to content, structure, format, style, and ethical guidelines.
- Ensures frequent communication with candidate and consultation with committee members.
- Communicates with the committee members frequently and welcomes their suggestions.
for the candidate's manuscript.

- Uses all dissertation technologies as outlined in the Dissertation Handbook. Updates statuses on SharePoint workflow and completes Blackboard responsibilities as outlined in the dissertation handbook.
- Completes necessary forms and rubrics as outlined in the dissertation handbook.
- Makes proposal and dissertation defense arrangements.

*For specific information about compensation for serving as a dissertation committee chair, please email EDUCDissertation@liberty.edu.*

**Committee Member #2**

**Qualifications**

- Liberty University faculty member or Liberty University School of Education doctoral graduate found on our [Committee Search](#) list
- Must hold an earned doctorate degree from a regionally accredited university.

**Responsibilities**

- Provides mentorship to doctoral candidate through the dissertation process as outlined in the dissertation handbook, from the development of the prospectus to the final publishing of the dissertation. This includes providing timely and thorough feedback.
- Works collaboratively with the committee chair to guide the student in the dissertation process. All feedback on manuscripts, unless otherwise communicated to the candidate, should be provided within a two to four week timeframe.

*For specific information about compensation for serving as a dissertation committee member, please email EDUCDissertation@liberty.edu.*
Committee Member #3

Qualifications

- Normally external to Liberty University; it is recommended that this committee member is local to the candidate and/or is employed at the location where candidate is completing research.
- Holds an earned doctorate degree (see above).

Responsibilities

- Provides mentorship to doctoral candidate through the dissertation process as outlined in the dissertation handbook, from the development of the prospectus to the final publishing of the dissertation. This includes providing timely and thorough feedback.
- Works collaboratively with the committee chair to guide the student in the dissertation process. All feedback on manuscripts, unless otherwise communicated to the candidate, should be provided within a two to four week timeframe.
- Completes and signs the appropriate forms as requested by the university.

For specific information about compensation for serving as a dissertation committee member, please email EDUCDissertation@liberty.edu.
Appendix B: Dissertation Technologies

Blackboard

Blackboard is a content management system. It is used in EDUC 980, EDUC 989, and EDUC 990. Under the supervision of the research consultant, EDUC 980 is completed via Blackboard. The chair and the candidate will have access to EDUC 989 throughout the dissertation process. Blackboard is used to host SafeAssign and links to required dissertation tasks. The chair and the candidate log into the Blackboard course between Monday and Wednesday of the first week of the term. The chair will verify the roster (since there are no assignments to complete in EDUC 989, the chair can verify the roster based on emails or other interaction with the candidate). At the end of each term of EDUC 989, the chair will post a final grade of Pass (P) or No Pass (NP). The candidate will complete the course evaluation. Note that the candidate will need to be enrolled in the Blackboard course his or her chair is facilitating.

SharePoint: The Dissertation Portal

SharePoint is a content host and collaborative workplace. Each candidate is provided with a workspace, known as My Dissertation Portal, to which only the candidate, the chair, the committee members, and the research consultant have access. The candidate and chairs have required tasks within the My Dissertation Portals throughout the dissertation process and candidates and committees are highly encouraged to use the portal for collaboration. SharePoint is on a secure (https) server and is backed up regularly. It is a Microsoft program and integrates well with Microsoft Office; Internet Explorer should be used when working in SharePoint. To log into the Dissertation Portal, the user must enter their LU e-mail address and corresponding password when prompted to provide a username and password.
WebEx – meet.liberty.edu

WebEx is an e-conferencing system used to facilitate defenses in which some or all members of the committee (and in some cases, the candidate) attend from a distance. Liberty faculty and staff have host access to WebEx, and so they may schedule meetings or proposal defenses as WebEx meetings. Chairs are also responsible for facilitating final defenses that are fully online (defenses in which the candidates do not come to Liberty’s campus to defend), but a member of the School of Education’s dissertation support staff will set up the WebEx meetings for final defenses that take place on campus (defenses for which the candidates do travel to campus to defend). Through WebEx, candidates can share their PowerPoint presentations as well as share video of themselves defending. An audio connection can be established either through phone or VoIP. WebEx can be accessed at meet.liberty.edu.
Appendix C: Dissertation Timeline and Approval Process

Preface:

Once you complete all coursework and pass the comprehensive exam, you become a dissertation candidate and should register for EDUC 980 (Dissertation Prospectus). This course is offered in different sections for quantitative and qualitative formats.

Give thanks to the Lord for getting you this far in the process, and pray for help and guidance for the rest of the journey. Do not expect to finish the doctoral dissertation process in a short period of time. You should plan to spend a minimum of one full year to complete all requirements, and many candidates take much longer.

Below is an overview of the dissertation process from the time a candidate enrolls in EDUC 980.

Steps:

1. Once in EDUC 980, start searching for a committee chair. Once a chair has been secured, start forming the remainder of the committee. Please see section 4 of this handbook for more information about how to find potential chairs.

2. Register for EDUC 989, Dissertation Proposal and Research, the semester after the completion of EDUC 980. Registration for EDUC 989 is required once every semester until you are approved to defend the dissertation (including the summer term).

3. Complete the dissertation proposal you started in EDUC 980. This will be the final proposal that you will submit to your dissertation committee. The proposal itself will be 50-70 pages, with a literature review of at least 30 pages.

4. Work with your committee chair to develop the final proposal. Once approved by the
chair, the candidate is to provide an edited, electronic copy of the proposal for the chair.

5. After the chair approves the proposal manuscript, arrange to distribute the proposal to the other committee members.

6. Once the chair and committee approve of the proposal manuscript, the chair will email the manuscript to the Ed.S./Ed.D. Gate Coordinator at SOEDissertationReview@liberty.edu to request a Research Consultant review. Please see section 7.2 of this handbook for more information about Milestone One in the Dissertation Approval Process.

7. Once the chair receives an approved manuscript back from the Ed.S./Ed.D. Gate Coordinator, the chair will work with the candidate and committee to arrange a proposal defense, which will be conducted through a WebEx meeting, phone conference, or other electronic means.

8. At the scheduled time, the candidate will present the proposal to the committee. This will be followed by suggestions and questions. If approved, the candidate may move to the next step. The proposal must be defended within the first three semester of enrollment in EDUC 989. Please see section 7.4 of this handbook for more information about Milestone Two in the Dissertation Approval Process.

9. If human subjects are involved, the candidate submits the proposal to the IRB for approval. Forms can be found at the IRB website. Please see section 8 of this handbook for more information about Milestone Three in the Dissertation Approval Process.

Please note: the chair must send the IRB approval letter to the Gate Coordinator at SOEDissertationReview@liberty.edu.

10. Work with the committee chair and the other committee members to further refine chapters one through three and to begin work on chapters four and five.
11. After full IRB approval, begin the research and data collection process.

12. With appropriate support, begin any analysis of data. This may include the employment of an outside statistician or expert in qualitative analysis, although it is preferable to do the work yourself.

13. Complete chapter four (under the direction of your chair), followed by chapter five.

14. After the chair approves the dissertation manuscript, arrange to distribute the manuscript to the other committee members.

15. Once the chair and committee approve of the dissertation manuscript, the chair will email the manuscript to the Ed.S./Ed.D. Gate Coordinator at 
   [SOEDissertationReview@liberty.edu](mailto:SOEDissertationReview@liberty.edu) to request a Research Consultant review. Please see section 9.3 of this handbook for more information about Milestone Four in the Dissertation Approval Process. The research consultant, with recommendation from the chair and committee, will decide whether the candidate is ready for defense.

16. Work with the chair to incorporate suggestions from the committee and research consultant into the defense draft of the dissertation. Upon approval by the chair, the candidate may register for EDUC 990, Dissertation Defense.

17. Once the manuscript has been approved and the candidate has enrolled in EDUC 990, he or she may schedule a final defense. Please see section 9.5 of this handbook for more information about scheduling the final defense, and section 9.8 for information about Milestone Five in the dissertation process.

18. Prepare a 15-20-minute PowerPoint presentation of the research and results for the dissertation defense.

19. Defend the dissertation in an on-line or face-to-face session with your committee, research
consultant, other members of the Liberty faculty, and other doctoral students.

20. After deliberation, your committee will recommend one of three outcomes:
   a. Approved with no further or minor revisions
   b. Provisionally approved with revisions
   c. Not approved with recommendation to revise dissertation or write a new dissertation

21. In almost every case, there will be further revisions required after the defense. These revisions may take from one day to several months to complete.

22. After all revisions have been completed, the chair will provide approval to the candidate to submit the final form of the dissertation. The candidate will then arrange for an electronic submission to be sent to the Liberty University library.

23. The successful candidate is also required to furnish bound copies of the dissertation (one for the School of Education, and one for the committee chair and one for each committee members, if requested). It is also recommended that candidates order bound copies for themselves.

24. Complete the requirements and paperwork necessary for graduation. Often, this is done early in the expected defense semester.

25. If at all possible, attend the hooding ceremony and graduation exercises as scheduled during May following the successful completion of the dissertation.
Dissertation Approval Process

EDUC 989

Chair Proposal Manuscript Review

Proposal Defense

IRB

Chair Dissertation Manuscript Review

Final Defense

EDUC 990 Rubric and Final Grade

Milestone One
Proposal Review
SharePoint Update

Milestone Two
Proposal Defense Pass/Fail
SharePoint Update

Milestone Three
IRB Approval Form
SharePoint Update

Milestone Four
Dissertation Review
SharePoint Update

Milestone Five
Final Defense Pass/Fail
SharePoint Update

Consultant Review
(Approved Yes/No)

Chair Send Email
Not Approved

Chair Send Email
Approved

Chair Send Email
Accept

Chair Send Email
Accept

Chair Send Email
Not Approved

Chair Send Email
Approved

Schedule Defense Pass
No Pass
Appendix D: Quantitative Dissertation Template

The purpose of Appendix D is to ensure that the dissertation manuscript is a quality document. This Appendix provides information about formatting and the content contained in each section of the dissertation.

Formatting

The margins for all chapters of the dissertation are as follows: 1 inch at the top and bottom, 1 inch on the right side, and 1 inch on the left side. All text should be Times New Roman, 12 point font. Text within the body of the manuscript should be left justified. Double-spacing should be employed throughout the manuscript. Page numbers should be in the upper right hand corner. All pages should use Arabic numerals, with the page number for the title page suppressed. All manuscripts should follow the latest version of the APA style manual.

Below is the Dissertation Template with a description of each section.
THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE SIGNATURE PAGE: THE TITLE SHOULD GO HERE

(ALL CAPS)

by Student’s Full Legal Name

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

Year

APPROVED BY:

Name and degree, Committee Chair

Name and degree, Committee Member

Name and degree, Committee Member

Scott Watson, Ph.D., Associate Dean, Advanced Programs
ABSTRACT

The abstract summarizes the contents of the manuscript, including the importance of the study, purpose of the study, the research questions, the methodology, results, conclusions, and recommendations for further research. Descriptions of the methodology should include the design, the sample, setting, and data collection and analysis methods. Approximately 250 words or less is recommended; however, some dissertation abstracts are a little longer. No more than one page is allowable, and the abstract should be written as one, double-spaced paragraph. The abstract should include results of the study, but should not include statistics. The word “ABSTRACT” should be in all caps and centered. Begin the abstract here, justify left with no indentation, double space. Keywords should be located at the end of the Abstract. Indent and italicize the work Keyword followed by a colon, then a list of the words in lower case separated by a comma.

Keywords: This is a list of 4-7 words (separated by commas) that are central to your study.
Copyright Page (Optional)
Dedication (Optional)

The dedication page is a page in which the candidate dedicates the manuscript. This page is optional.
Acknowledgments (Optional)

The acknowledgments page provides the opportunity for the candidate to acknowledge individuals who influenced the writing and completion of the dissertation. This page is optional.
Table of Contents

The Table of Contents lists the various chapters and subsections of the manuscript along with their page numbers. The Table of Contents should include the Acknowledgement, List of Tables, List of Figures, CHAPTER TITLES (all caps), REFERENCES (all caps), and APPENDIX or APPENDICES (all caps). These should be left justified. The subsections included should only be APA level 1 and level 2 headings within the manuscript. Level 1 headings should be indented one half inch and Level 2 headings should be indented one inch. Chapter titles are not considered level 1 headings. Entries should be double-spaced.

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List of Figures

The List of Figures cites the figures and the corresponding pages of each figure. This enables the reader to easily locate the figures in the manuscript. The title of this page should be a Level 1 heading, centered, 1 inch from the top of the page. Entries should be double-spaced.
List of Abbreviations

The title of this page should be a Level 1 heading, centered, 1 inch from the top of the page. Entries should be double-spaced. Examples are provided below.

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

The background educates the reader regarding the topic. You want to start this section by catching the reader’s attention. This can be done by using what is referred to in English composition as a “hook.” The “hook” convinces the reader that a particular issue (not your research study) is important. The “hook” is established by using recent evidence from at least 3-4 scholarly journal articles published within the last 5 years.

After the reader’s attention has been caught, the background section moves into an overview of the most relevant literature regarding the issue and provides a historical, social, and theoretical context regarding the issue. Remember this is just an overview. You will go into more depth in the Review of Literature section.

The historical overview examines how the issue has evolved over time from the past to present-day. The background’s historical overview should be well supported by at least 5-7 scholarly journal articles or books. Some sources may be older than 5 years old for this section.

The society-at-large discussion examines how the issue (not your study) impacts society, the education community, education system, etc. This section should be well supported by at least 3-5 scholarly journal articles and/or books. Some sources may be older than 5 years old for this section.

The conceptual framework and/or theory(s) overview relates the issue to related studies and discusses the theories that drive them. The background’s theory discussion should be supported by at least 3-5 scholarly journal articles and/or books. Some sources may be older than 5 years old for this section. Conclude the background section by summarizing the
information and preparing the reader for the problem. The Background is approximately 4-5 pages long.

Problem Statement

The problem statement discusses how the literature has not completely addressed the issue. For example, there may be controversy regarding mix results from other studies, unexamined populations, lack of new testing instruments, etc… In other words, convince reader that there is not enough research available to bring the issue to closure. This is often referred as “gap” in the literature. The problem statement finds its “roots” in other studies and expands on their recommendations for further research. In general terms, the problem is always a lack of research on a particular issue. The problem statement should be well supported by at least 1-3 scholarly journal articles published within the last 5 years. The problem statement ends with a declarative statement: “The problem is …” which is clearly supported by current literature. The Problem Statement is approximately 1 page long.

Purpose Statement

The purpose statement usually begins with, “The purpose of this study is…” The purpose statement gives the reader a quick overview on how you plan to help “solve the problem.” Once again, since the problem is a lack of research on a particular issue, your purpose is simply to propose another research study. However, you need to be specific on what you plan to do. The purpose statement foreshadows the research question(s) and hypothesis(es). The purpose statement includes the variables (i.e., Independent/Dependent and/or Predictor/Criterion) and defines each of the variables. Dictionary definitions are not acceptable. The purpose statement also includes a “brief” description of the population. The purpose statement is directly linked to the problem statement and provides the reader with a brief overview of how the “gap”
in the literature will be addressed by your study. The *Purpose Statement* is approximately 1/2 page long.

**Significance of the Study**

The to this point, you have convinced the reader that the issue is important; that there is a lack of research on the issue; and you have a proposed study to help solve the problem. Now, the final step is to convince the reader that your proposed study will be significant in filling the “gap” and helping the educational community. The significance of the study convinces the reader that the study will add to the existing body of knowledge by building off similar studies that investigate the same issue. It contains a description of the contributions that your study will make to the knowledge base or discipline, both theoretically and empirically. This section also includes a brief description of how the study is important to other locations, organizations, general populations, or sample being studied. References are very important here to lend additional credence and support for your study. All assertions in this section need to be well supported by the literature; at least 3-5 scholarly journal articles published within the last 5 years. The *Significance of the Study* section is approximately 1 page long.

**Research Questions**

The proposed research questions need to be derived from the problem and purpose statements. A well-formulated research question does the following: (a) asks about the relationship/differences between two or more variables, (b) is stated clearly and in the form of a question, (c) is testable (i.e., possible to collect quantitative data to answer the question), (d) does not pose an ethical or moral problem for implementation, (e) is specific and restricted in scope (i.e., The aim is not to solve the world's problems), and (f) identify exactly what is to be solved. A good research question also clearly identifies the sample population. In addition, it should be
noted that the research question implies the research design and statistical analysis. A typical dissertation contains one to three research questions. Research questions should be listed, each on a separate line. Example:

**RQ1:** Is there a difference between high school students’ *sense of classroom* who use an asynchronous on-line learning system and those who use a synchronous on-line learning system?

**RQ2:** Is there a difference between high school students’ *sense of school community* who use an asynchronous on-line learning system and those who use synchronous on-line learning system?

**Null Hypothesis(es)**

The null hypotheses need to be written with words, not symbols. Every research question should have at least one corresponding null hypothesis; however, sometimes more than one is needed. The number of hypotheses needed should be based upon the number of variables under study and planned analysis. Well-formulated hypotheses are based on the following criteria: (a) the hypothesis stated the expected relationship/differences between variables, (b) the hypothesis is testable, (c) the hypothesis is stated simply and concisely as possible, and (d) the hypothesis is founded in the problem statement and supported by research. Like the research questions, the hypotheses in null form directly influence the statistical procedures used. Example:

The null hypotheses for this study are:

**H01:** There is no statistically significant difference between the *sense of classroom* scores of high school students’ who use an asynchronous on-line learning system and those who use a synchronous on-line learning system as shown by (the instrument name).
**Ho2:** There is no statistically significant difference between the *sense of school community* scores of high school students’ who use an asynchronous on-line learning system and those who use a synchronous on-line learning system as shown by (the instrument name).

**Definitions**

Terms pertinent to the study should be listed and defined as the final section of chapter one. All definitions in this section also need to be supported by the literature. Include terms that use abbreviations. Citations are needed. Dictionary definitions are not acceptable. Example:

1. *Attitude* - Attitude is a psychological tendency that involves evaluating a particular object with some degree of favor or disfavor (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

2. *Interest* - The combination of emotion and personal valuation of a task resulting in a desire for various levels of enjoyment (Ainley & Ainley, 2011).

3. *Etc*…
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter two is often the longest chapter of the dissertation. The minimum length should be 30 pages, but most are longer. Its purpose is to provide a context for the research and to demonstrate its importance based on the problem demonstrated via the literature as well as the gap in the literature. Chapter two is comprised of at least four sections: (a) the introduction, (b) a theoretical or conceptual framework section, (c) the literature section, and (d) a summary.

The introduction should provide a general explanation and overview of the chapter with links to the purpose of the study.

The theoretical or conceptual framework section should provide the reader with a direct connection to the conceptual or theoretical framework that will effectively guide the study and allow the findings to be situated within a greater context. According to Maxwell (2005), “the point is not to summarize what has already been done in the field. Instead, it is to ground your proposed study in the relevant previous work, and to give the reader a clear sense of your theoretical approach to the phenomena that you propose to study” (p. 123). Start by describing the theory(ies), including origination and major theorist(s), next discuss how the theory(ies) has advanced or informed the literature on your topic, conclude by articulating how your specific research focus relates to the theory and how it may potentially advance or extend the theory(ies). Examples of theoretical frameworks include Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, Maslow’s (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, Knowles (1980) Adult Learning Theory, etc. Situating the study and research questions within an established theoretical framework helps establish the significance of the study.
The purpose of literature review section is to provide a tight synthesis (not simply a study-by-study summary) of the existing knowledge on this topic and link this existing knowledge to the proposed study. Remember that the literature review is the argument for the significance of the study. It communicates what has been examined on the topic(s), what has not been examined or how understanding on the topic is still developing, and how the study can fill the gap or further understanding in the field.

The chapter should end with a focused summary of what is currently known, what is not known, and how the study can specifically address gaps in the existing literature. Subheading at level 2 and 3 are often necessary. Often 1,000 – 2,000 articles are read and at least 100 – 200 integrated in the construction of this chapter. The majority of the literature cited in the chapter needs to be current (i.e., < 3 - 5 years since publication).

It is important to remember that chapter two is not a library, that is, a summary of facts or summaries of relevant research. Rather it is a critical argument. Derived from Rudestam and Newtons’ (2007) *Surviving Your Dissertation*, here are some keys to a successful construction of a literature review:

**#1 Be a convincing writer.** Remember that your literature review provides the context for your dissertation and demonstrates why your topic is important and relevant. Your literature review demonstrates the relationship between previous research and your study, and it demonstrates how your study is distinctive and different from previous research.

**#2 Be a critic not a reporter.** Adopt a critical perspective in reading and identifying relationship among research articles. Avoid composing a literature review that is a library of facts. That is, make sure your literature review is a coherent argument that leads to the problem
statement or description of the study you are proposing. Your literature review should begin with a clear statement of your goal and be followed by a structured argument.

**#3 Be a selective writer.** Avoid the temptation to report all of your great knowledge and insight— all the literature you review. Be selective and discuss only the articles that are most relevant. Keep in mind that you may review 1,000-2,000 articles and only include about 200.

**#4 Be a skillful researcher.** Use primarily seminal articles and articles that are no more than 5 years old in your literature review. Always strive to cite primary sources and reputable and scholarly sources.

**#5 Be a reasonable problem solver.** At the conclusion of your literature review, write a statement that summarizes or highlights the most relevant literature and conclusions that lead to your proposed study. Be sure that you clearly identify that your problem has both theoretical (i.e. fills a gap in the literature) and practical value (i.e. solution to a problem or concern in the professional field, improves professional practice).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Design
You begin this section by identifying the research design. The research design needs to be specific. For example, it is not sufficient to state that “a quasi-experimental study was used.” It would be more appropriate to state that “a quasi-experimental static-group comparison design was used.” In addition to identifying the design, a rationale for why the design is most appropriate for the study is needed. This rationale needs to be supported by research text as well as topic specific, peer-reviewed literature. In other words, what is the purpose of the design? When is it used? Why is it the most appropriate choice for the present study? Refer to your educational research texts for the proper design description and use them to support your rationales. The chosen research design(s) should be consistent with the research question and hypothesis proposed as well as the procedures described in your study. Sometimes more than one research design is appropriate. Write this section in past tense.

Research Question(s)
This section is the same as chapter one.

Null Hypothesis(es)
This section is the same as chapter one.

Participants and Setting
Begin this section with an overview of your population. For example, “The participants for the study were drawn from a convenience sample of middle school students located in southeastern Virginia during the spring semester of the 2013-2014 school year. The school district was a middle-to-upper income suburb outside of …” Describe the population from which your sample was drawn. Make sure to specify your sampling procedure. Real names for
people, schools, and school districts should never be used. Use pseudonyms for people and
descriptors for schools, colleges, and school districts.

After you have described the population, next describe the sample. You might begin by
reporting the sample size. For example, “…for this study, the number of participants sampled
was 00 which exceeded the required minimum for a medium effect size. According to Gall et al.
(2007) 66 students is the required minimum for a medium effect size with statistical power of .7
at the .05 alpha level.” Quantitative literature citations must be provided to demonstrate the
adequate sample size. Then, describe where the sample came from, for example “… the sample
came from three difference middle schools in the district. Within each school, students were
selected from six introductory math classes. The introductory math classes taught basic
additions, subtraction and multiplication skills to…” Also include sample demographic
information regarding the age, ethnicity, gender, grade level, etc. of your sample. You may need
to consider tables to represent this data. Note: If you are still developing your plan, prospectus,
or proposal, please plug in “place holders.” For example “… the sample consisted of 00 males
and 00 females from a first grade physical education class.” This section will be updated after
you have collected your real data and then real numbers will be inserted. The sample must be
described with enough detail so that other researchers could possibly replicate your study with
similar subjects if your results need to be verified.

Depending on your study, after you have described the sample, you may need to identify
and describe each group (e.g. treatment, control, etc.). Describe each group’s make-up in enough
detail so that the study can be replicated. Include similar information as described in the sample
section, but at the group level. Write this section in past tense.
Instrumentation

In the instrumentation section, the instrument(s) that are used to measure each variable needs to be identified. The instruments may be tests, surveys, questionnaires, or other measurements. Only validated instruments may be used. A description of each instrument, its content, its origin, and its appropriateness needs to be included. State other peer reviewed studies where the instrument was used. This will help with its credibility for example, “the instrument was used in numerous studies (e.g. Smith, 2009; Jones, 2013; Jackson, 2014).” The scales of measurement need to be discussed and include the number of questions. For example “… the instrument consisted of 30 questions and used a five-point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Responses were as follows: Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1.” Include scoring information regarding the instrument for example, “… the combined possible score on the ATSF range from 20 to 200 points. A score of 20 points is the lowest possible score meaning that… etc... And a score of 200 points is the highest meaning that…etc.” The composite and each subscale need to be included as well as validity information and reliability statistics. The validity and reliability information should be cited. In some cases, reliability statistics need to be reported for the data in the present study. A brief overview of how the instrument should be administered should be discussed and the approximate time to complete the instrument should be reported. State that permission was granted. All instrumentation material (e.g., the instrument, instructions, permission to use the instrument, and any other pertinent information, etc…) should be included in the appendices.

Procedures

The procedure section is similar to a “cookbook.” It should contain enough detail that a reasonable person can read your procedure and conduct your study and produce the same results.
This includes but is not limited to information about securing IRB approval, eliciting participants for the study, conducting a pilot study, training individuals to implement treatment, administration of the procedures, gathering the data, and recording procedures. The procedures should be described in a chronological, step-by-step format. Remember; describe the procedures clearly and with enough detail so that the study can be replicated. All procedural material (e.g., IRB permission, school permission, consent forms, assent forms, protocol, training manual, and any other pertinent information, etc...) should be included in an appendix.

**Data Analysis**

In the data analysis section, the type of data analysis is identified and a concise rationale for the type of analysis is provided. The chosen statistical procedures should be consistent with your research questions, hypotheses, and type of data collected (as outlined in chapter one and three). In other words, why is the chosen analysis the most appropriate choice to test the hypothesis? The rationale needs to be supported via your research textbooks. For each identified analysis, all assumption tests and how they were tested, the statistic used to report the effect size and the convention used to interpret it, and the alpha used needs to be discussed. In this section, there needs to be identified statistical procedures for each hypothesis. Thus, it is useful to organize this section according to the research hypotheses.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Research Question(s)

This section is the same as chapter one.

Hypothesis(es)

This section is the same as chapter one.

Descriptive Statistics

Use descriptive statistics to describe your data. The purpose of descriptive statistics is simply to give your reader an overview of your findings. Statistics such as mean, median, mode, frequency, standard deviation, etc… should be used. Only report the descriptive statistics that are relevant to your study; do not overwhelm the reader with unnecessary data. It may be useful to organize and manage this section by using tables and charts. Unlike inferential statistics which are directly related to your nulls, descriptive statistics only describe and cannot be used to draw conclusions.

Results

Null Hypothesis One

It is useful to organize the result section according to each research hypotheses. That is, describe the null hypothesis then the corresponding statistical test should be identified with the hypothesis. Include assumption tests, analysis, alpha level, effect size and if you rejected or fail to reject the null. Once you have finished analysis of the first null, state the second null and adhere to the same stringent level of analysis and reporting. Repeat this process until all the nulls have been addressed.

For each statistical analysis technique data screening will need to be addressed. All assumption tests must be conducted and reported. Tables and figures should be used when
appropriate and in accordance with APA guidelines. Note: If only one statistical test is being used, then you may report all assumption tests at the beginning of the section. In which case, consider using a title labeled Assumption Tests.

**Null Hypothesis Two**

Example… An independent-samples $t$ test was used to analyze the second Null Hypothesis that looked at the difference between the *sense of school community* scores of high school students’ who use an asynchronous on-line learning system and those who use a synchronous on-line learning system. The assumption of normality was examined using a Shapiro-Wilk test etc…

**Additional Analysis**

Optional: After you have tested the hypotheses, you may want to do some additional analysis. This analysis is less formal in structure but yet you must adhere to the same stringent level of analysis.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

Begin this section with the purpose of the study and a brief overview. The purpose of the study should be a one sentence declarative statement. Then it is useful to organize the discussion section according to each research hypotheses. Each research hypothesis should be restated and discussed in light of the results, literature, other studies, and theory. The discussion should look at whether the results support or contradict other studies and theory. The discussion section relies heavily on your review of literature.

Conclusions

The conclusion pulls together the contents of the entire manuscript (do not just do a summary). The conclusion takes into account the discussion section and clearly explains to the reader what it all means based on the literature. This is where you as a researcher get to add new insight based on your results into the problem and shine as a candidate.

Implications

The implications of the study helps convince the reader that the study added to the existing body of knowledge and theory and help improve the conditions, lives, work environment, etc. of others. In other words, how did your study help “close the gap” or “not close the gap?” In many ways, this section allows the candidate to talk about the meaning of the findings beyond the statistical findings.

Limitations

Limitations should be discussed in terms of threats to both internal and external validity. Identify the type of threat and describe it in terms of the present study. Discuss how the
limitation could potentially impact the study, and discuss if any steps will be taken to limit the threat.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for further research need to be discussed. Consider different populations, testing instrumentation, theoretical constructs, and limitations, etc. Recommendations for further research should add to the body of knowledge and help close the “gap” in the literature.
REFERENCES

All the references cited within the text should be listed in accordance with the most recent edition of the *Publication Manual of APA*. The reference title should be capitalized and centered.
APPENDIX or APPENDICES

The Appendix may include a variety of artifacts. The appendix may include the IRB application (replace with the approval letter for the complete dissertation), informed consent/assent forms, surveys/questionnaires/instruments, protocols (interviews or observations), sample transcripts of interviews, theoretical memos, and other documents used to establish and audit trail. Any identifying or personal information (names, schools, districts, phone numbers, email addresses) should be eliminated. If numerous types of artifacts are included as appendices, each type should have a section labeled as Appendix A, Appendix B, etc. The appendix title should be capitalized and centered.
Appendix E: Qualitative Dissertation Template

The purpose of Appendix E is to ensure that the dissertation manuscript is a quality document. This Appendix provides information about formatting and the content contained in each section of the dissertation.

Formatting

The margins for all chapters of the dissertation are as follows: 1 inch at the top and bottom, 1 inch on the right side, and 1 inch on the left side. All text should be Times New Roman, 12 point font. Text within the body of the manuscript should be left justified. Double-spacing should be employed throughout the manuscript. Page numbers should be in the upper right hand corner. All pages should use Arabic numerals, with the page number for the title page suppressed. All manuscripts should follow the latest version of the APA style manual.

Below is the Dissertation Template with a description of each section.
THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE SIGNATURE PAGE: THE TITLE SHOULD GO HERE

(ALL CAPS)

by Student’s Full Legal Name

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

Year

APPROVED BY:

Name and degree, Committee Chair

Name and degree, Committee Member

Name and degree, Committee Member

Scott Watson, Ph.D., Associate Dean, Advanced Programs
ABSTRACT

The abstract summarizes the contents of the manuscript, starting with the purpose (see template below) or rationale of the study, the research questions, the methodology, and the results. The first sentence is not indented. Descriptions of the methodology should include the design, the sample, setting, and data collection and analysis methods. Approximately 120 words or less is recommended; however, some dissertation abstracts are a little longer. It is written in the future tense until the study is completed. No more than one page is allowable, and the abstract should be written as one, double-spaced paragraph. The abstract should include results of the study, but should not include statistics. The word “ABSTRACT” should be in all caps and a Level 1 heading, centered, but not bold. As an outline for your purpose statement, we recommend the template provided by Creswell (1994, 2003):

The purpose of this _________ (phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, case) study is (was? will be?) to _______________ (understand? describe? develop? discover?) the ____________ (central phenomenon of the study) for _____________ (the participants) at __________ (the site). The theory guiding this study is (identify theory and cite theorist) as it (explain the relationship between the theory and your focus of inquiry)…. Briefly introduce proposed data collection and data analysis strategies.

**Keywords:** This is a list of 4-7 words (separated by commas) that are central to your study.
Dedication (Optional)

The dedication page is a page in which the candidate dedicates the manuscript. This page is optional.
Acknowledgments (Optional)

The acknowledgments page provides the opportunity for the candidate to acknowledge individuals who influenced the writing and completion of the dissertation. This page is optional.
**Table of Contents**

The Table of Contents lists the various chapters and subsections of the manuscript along with their page numbers. The Table of Contents should include the Acknowledgement, List of Tables, List of Figures, CHAPTER TITLES (all caps), REFERENCES (all caps), and APPENDIX or APPENDICES (all caps). These should be left justified. The subsections included should only be APA level 1 and level 2 headings within the manuscript. Level 1 headings should be indented one half inch and Level 2 headings should be indented one inch. Chapter titles are not considered level 1 headings. Entries should be double-spaced.

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List of Tables

The List of Tables cites the tables and the corresponding pages of each table. This enables the reader to easily locate the tables in the manuscript. The title of this page should be a Level 1 heading, centered, 1 inch from the top of the page. Entries should be double spaced.
List of Figures

The List of Figures cites the figures and the corresponding pages of each figure. This enables the reader to easily locate the figures in the manuscript. The title of this page should be a Level 1 heading, centered, 1 inch from the top of the page. Entries should be double-spaced.
List of Abbreviations

The title of this page should be a Level 1 heading, centered, 1 inch from the top of the page. Entries should be double-spaced. Examples are provided below.

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of Chapter One is to provide a framework for the research. The chapter should create reader interest, provide a foundation for the problem that necessitates the research, overview the context of literature in which the research is founded, identify the importance of the research for a specific audience, and briefly introduce the research via the research questions. The introduction contains several subsections; they are listed below. Chapter One may vary in length from 10-15 pages for the final dissertation.

Background

The Background section contains a summary of the most relevant literature and provides the historical (e.g., how the problem has evolved over time), social (e.g., contexts), and theoretical (e.g., important variables, the theoretical concepts, and the principles underpinning the research) contexts for the research problem. The candidate should be sure to link and relate the background of the study to the proposed research. Questions that may be asked or addressed in this section may include but are not limited to: What is the problem and why is it an interest? Who else is affected by the problem? What research has been done to investigate or address the problem? How will the proposed research extend or refine the existing knowledge in the area under study? Who will benefit or use the proposed research? What new information does the current research add to the body of existing literature regarding the topic? The majority of literature cited in this section should be no more than five years old.

Situation to Self

This section provides an opportunity for the researcher to articulate his or her motivation for conducting the study and identify the philosophical assumptions (ontological,
epistemological, rhetorical, axiological) he or she brings to the research and the paradigm (positivism/post-positivism, constructivism, participatory, and pragmatism) that will guide the study. Keep in mind that qualitative research is written in the first person rather than third person voice.

**Problem Statement**

“A problem might be defined as the issue that exists in the literature, theory, or practice that leads to a need for the study” (Creswell, 1994, p. 50). A problem statement summarizes “the context for the study” and the main problem the study seeks to address (Wiersma, 1995, p. 404). It usually identifies the general problem, the specific problem, the focus of the research, and the population sample. The problem statement draws from the background section; it includes current (i.e., < 3-5 years since publication) literature (3-5 citations) to show that the proposed research is empirically significant and relevant to the field. It should be stated clearly and unambiguously in one to two paragraphs. The candidate may state: “The problem is . . .”

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose statement should follow the problem statement and clearly and succinctly state the focus and intentions of the proposed research. “The purpose statement should provide a specific and accurate synopsis of the overall purpose of the study” (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987, p. 5) and begin with the following statement: “The purpose of this study is . . .” It foreshadows the research question(s) and the statement must be used consistently throughout the dissertation. The candidate is encouraged to use the following template generated by Creswell (1994, 2003):

The purpose of this __________ (phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, case, historical) study is to _______________ (understand? describe? develop? discover?) the
___________ (central phenomenon of the study) for ______________ (the participants) at ____________ (the site). At this stage in the research, ___________ (central phenomenon) will be generally defined as ________________ (a general definition of the central concept). The theory guiding this study is (identify theory and cite theorist) as it (explain the relationship between the theory and your focus of inquiry).

Although brief in nature, the problem and purpose statements are two very important aspects of the manuscript. These statements support the importance of the study and identify the goal of the research. All preceding writing within the manuscript should funnel into the problem and purpose statements. And, all proceeding aspects of the manuscript are aligned with, support, and further expand upon the problem and purpose statements.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study section contains a description of the contributions that the study makes to the knowledge base or discipline, both theoretically, and empirically (e.g., How does it relate to other studies that are similar or that investigate the same issue?)

This section also includes a brief description of the practical significance of the study; why it is important to the location, organization, general population, or sample being studied (e.g., Why and how does it affect them? How will it improve the conditions, lives, work environment, etc.? How can this study be used on a wider scale to affect change to help a wider group of people or the organization as a whole?). References are very important here to lend additional credence and support the study. All assertions in this section need to be well supported by the literature. Citations are needed.
Research Questions

The proposed research questions should be derived from the problem and purpose statements. A well-written research question is feasible, clear, significant, and ethical. In qualitative studies, research questions are often philosophical or pragmatic in nature and ask about meaning, process, perceptions, or behavior. Qualitative research questions are usually broader and become more specific as you move into the actual data collection/analysis process. Identify at least three research questions. If a central research question is used, the subsequent questions are called sub-questions. Include a brief description and discussion of each one before moving to the next question, using the literature to support the focus of the question. Remember that each research question will need to be addressed in the data collection, data analysis, and discussion sections of later chapters. Be sure these questions do not elicit simple yes/no responses. Provide literature support, with citations, for your research questions. Note that traditional research hypotheses are not necessary or appropriate for most qualitative studies.

Research Plan

Clearly and succinctly describe how the study will be conducted, explaining that the study is qualitative and will employ a suitable (phenomenological, ethnographic, case study, grounded theory, or historical) design. Provide a brief description of the setting, participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations are purposeful decisions the researcher makes to limit or define the boundaries of the study (e.g., only including participants over the age of 18, selecting an ethnographic over a phenomenological study, etc.). Describe the rationale behind decisions made to limit or define the scope and focus of the study.
Limitations are potential weaknesses of the study that cannot be controlled. They may be related to the design, the analysis, or the sample (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, geographical location, etc.). For your prospectus and proposal, discuss potential limitations here. After you have collected and analyzed your data, move your discussion of limitations to the appropriate section in Chapter Five, while keeping your discussion of delimitations in Chapter One.

Definitions

Terms pertinent to the study should be listed and defined as the final section of chapter one. All definitions in this section also need to be supported by the literature. Include terms that use abbreviations. Citations are needed. Dictionary definitions are not acceptable. Example:

1. **Attitude** - Attitude is a psychological tendency that involves evaluating a particular object with some degree of favor or disfavor (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

2. **Interest** - The combination of emotion and personal valuation of a task resulting in a desire for various levels of enjoyment (Ainley & Ainley, 2011).

3. **Etc**…

Summary

Provide a chapter summary here.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter Two is often the longest chapter of the dissertation. The minimum length should be 30 pages, but most are much longer. Its purpose is to provide a context for the present research and to demonstrate its importance based on the problem demonstrated via the literature as well as the need or gap in the literature. Chapter Two is comprised of at least four sections: (a) the Overview, (b) a Theoretical (or Conceptual) Framework section, (c) a Related Literature section, and (d) a Summary. Subheadings at level 2 and 3 are often necessary. Often 1,000–2,000 articles are read and at least 100–200 integrated in the construction of this chapter. The majority of the literature cited in the chapter should be current (i.e., < 3-5 years since publication), though it is understood that some seminal studies published more than five years are appropriate in certain sections and discussions.

Theoretical Framework

This section should provide the reader with a direct connection to the conceptual or theoretical framework that will effectively guide the study and allow the findings to be situated within a greater context. According to Maxwell (2005),

The point is not to summarize what has already been done in the field. Instead, it is to ground your proposed study in the relevant previous work, and to give the reader a clear sense of your theoretical approach to the phenomena that you propose to study. (p. 123)

Start by describing the theory(ies), including origination and major theorist(s), next discuss how the theory(ies) has advanced or informed the literature on your topic, conclude by articulating how your specific research focus relates to the theory and how it may potentially advance or extend the theory(ies). Examples of theoretical frameworks include Bandura’s (1986) Social
Cognitive Theory, Maslow’s (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, Knowles (1980) Adult Learning Theory, etc. Situating your study and focus of inquiry within an established theoretical framework helps establish the significance of your study.

**Related Literature**

The purpose of this section is to provide a tight synthesis (not simply a study-by-study summary) of the existing knowledge on this topic and link this existing knowledge to the proposed study. Remember that this section is the argument for the significance of the study. It communicates what has been examined on the topic(s), what has not been examined or how understanding on the topic is still developing, and how the study can fill the gap or further understanding in the field.

**Summary**

This section should provide a focused summary of what is currently known, what is not known, and how your proposed study can specifically address gaps in the existing literature.

**General notes:**

It is important to remember that Chapter Two is not a library, that is, a summary of facts or summaries of relevant research, rather a critical argument. Derived from Rudestam and Newtons’ (2007) *Surviving Your Dissertation*, here are some keys to a successful construction of a literature review:

1. **Be a convincing writer.** Remember that your literature review provides the context for your dissertation and demonstrates why your topic is important and relevant. Your literature review demonstrates the relationship between previous research and your study, and it demonstrates how your study is distinctive and different from previous research.
2. **Be a critic not a reporter.** Adopt a critical perspective in reading and identifying relationship among research articles. Avoid composing a literature review that is a library of facts. That is, make sure your literature review is a coherent argument that leads to the problem statement or description of the study you are proposing. Your literature review should begin with a clear statement of your goal and be followed by a structured argument.

3. **Be a selective writer.** Avoid the temptation to report all of your great knowledge and insight--- all the literature you review. Be selective and discuss only the articles that are most relevant. Keep in mind that you may review 2,000 articles and only include 250.

4. **Be a skillful researcher.** Use primarily seminal articles and articles that are no more than 5 years old in your literature review. Always strive to cite primary sources and reputable and scholarly sources.

5. **Be a reasonable problem solver.** At the conclusion of your literature review, write a statement that summarizes or highlights the most relevant literature and conclusions that lead to your proposed study. Be sure that you clearly identify that your problem has both theoretical (i.e., fills a gap in the literature) and practical value (i.e., solution to a problem or concern in the professional field, improves professional practice.).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of Chapter Three is to present the procedures, research design, and analysis for the present research study. That is, it provides the reader with the details of what will occur during the execution of research. Descriptions in this chapter should be comprehensive and in sufficient detail as to permit the replication of the study. Chapter Three contains several subsections; they are listed below.

The overview may begin with a brief restatement of the nature and purpose of the study. It should clearly and concisely outline the contents and organization to the chapter.

Design

In the Design section, the planned type of study (i.e., qualitative) and research design (e.g., case study, ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, or historical research) should be identified. Additionally, the research design type should be fully defined (with a brief history of the research design type), with citations. Further, a concise rationale for the research design and a concise description of the implementation of the design should be included. The purpose and the research design should be consistent with the research questions proposed as well as the procedures described. Be sure to also identify and describe the specific approach within the approach. For example, if selecting a phenomenological study, be sure to identify what type (e.g., hermeneutic, transcendental, consensual, etc.). If conducting a case study, identify whether it is a single instrumental, collective, or intrinsic case study. Be sure to provide a clear rationale, linking the design to your purpose. Throughout this section, refer to primary qualitative research texts for the proper design description and use them to support your rationales.


**Research Questions**

Restate just the research questions from Chapter One – no literature.

**Setting**

Depending on your design, you may choose to title this section “Site” or “Setting.” In this section, the setting (or the site) of the study should be described (e.g., geographic location, school system, the course, etc.). Just as you should be purposefully selecting your participants for a qualitative study, it is also important to provide a rational for your site selection. Convenience alone is not sufficient. Only important features which have the bearing on the present study should be included. The following questions should be addressed: Why was this setting (site) chosen for this project? What does the organization look like with regards to leadership, organizational structure, etc.? Describe it with details. Pseudonyms for both individuals and institutions should be provided in this section as well.

**Participants**

In the Participants section, the sample size, type of sample (e.g., theoretical, purposive), and sampling procedures (e.g., convenience, snowball sample, maximum variation, etc.) should be clearly explained and each decision should be supported by research citations. Demographic information (age, ethnicity, gender, etc.) should be described in narrative or tabular form. Given the nature of qualitative research, pseudonyms should be provided. Support all practices from research literature with citations. The number of participants will most often range from 12-15, or higher, and NO fewer than 10 participants will be acceptable without written approval from a research consultant.

**Procedures**

In the Procedures section, the steps necessary to conduct the study are outlined. This
includes but is not limited to information about securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, eliciting participants for the study, gathering the data, and recording procedures. Details provided below.

**The Researcher's Role**

In this section the researcher must clearly and thoroughly explain his or her role as the “human instrument” in the study. The researcher must be straightforward about his or her relationship to the participants, his or her role in the setting or research site, and any bias or assumptions he or she bring to the study that may influence how he or she views the data or conducts his or her analysis. The role of the researcher must also be articulated in light of the chosen design and the implications of this role on the data collection and data analysis procedures must be addressed.

**Data Collection**

A critical aspect of qualitative inquiry is rigorous and varied data collection techniques. There should be several subsections detailing at least three different methods of collecting data. The subsections must be listed sequentially in the order they will be collected. These may include, but are not limited to interviews, observations (participant and/or direct), document analysis (e.g., archival records, journals, letters, etc), artifact analysis (e.g., photographs), and researcher field notes/theoretical memos. Discuss the data collection strategies in the order in which they will be conducted (and order the sub-sections for each individual strategy below in the same sequence) and explain why you’ve chosen this particular sequence. These data collection procedures should follow the recommendations of established qualitative researchers in the field (e.g., Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980, 1990, etc.).
Interviews

At the outset of each of the sub-sections for the individual data collection strategies, you should identify the data collection strategy, fully define it in the context of qualitative inquiry (with citation), explain the data collection strategy in layman’s terms (if appropriate), and justify its appropriateness for your research. Discuss any logistics (when/where/how/with whom will data be collected, recording, etc.) and explicate which of your research questions will be answered by this data collection strategy. It is important to demonstrate that interview (and focus group) questions are generated from and grounded in the literature on your topic. Your questions should be included in a numbered bullet list with an item by item discussion of each question and its basis in the literature. Here is an example as it would appear in your paper:

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

Premigration to the United States

1. Please describe your life before immigrating to the United States, beginning with your childhood.

2. Please describe all of your educational and training experiences prior to coming to the United States, including your time in Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya or elsewhere.

3. Please describe both your mother and father’s views toward education and their role in your education. Were their views similar or different from your elders and members of your tribe?

4. How has your Sudanese culture influenced you in terms of your education?

5. What helped you cope and achieve an education in Africa?
6. What challenges did you face trying to get an education in Africa? How did you cope when you had setbacks?

Postmigration to the United States

7. . .

8. . .

The purpose of the questions pertaining to premigration to the United States was to gather information about the participants’ cultural and educational experiences prior to immigration to the United States. Questions 1 through 7 were developed to account for the cultural resilience research emphasis on understanding how an individual’s cultural background and prior life experiences facilitated the process of overcoming adversity (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008). Questions 1 and 2 were specifically designed to get a general picture of the life and educational experiences participants encountered prior to immigration in the United States. As secure attachments with a primary caregiver early in life protect against the effects of future risk and adversity (Bowlby, 1988; Rutter, 1990), by prompting them to describe their childhood through Question 1, I hoped to gain insight into the nature of the relationship participants had with their parents.

Resilience literature demonstrates that schools and teachers increase a child’s potential to overcome challenges and experience success (e.g., Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Christiansen & Christiansen, 1997; Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2003; Martin & Marsch, 2006). Furthermore, Clipper (2008) found that premigration education experiences were significant factors in Sudanese refugee adjustment experiences. Hence, Question 2 was developed to assess the presence (or absence) and type of education and training opportunities the participants were exposed to prior to U.S. immigration.
Given the recent emphasis on the critical role of culture in resilience research (e.g., Clauss-Ehlers, 2003, 2004; Clauss Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2003; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Kumpfer, 1999; Rousseau & Gagne, 1998), Questions 3 and 4 were included to explore the value and emphasis that Southern Sudanese culture places on education. Cabrera and Padilla (2004) found that the cultural backgrounds of students play a significant role in their social, emotional, and educational development, and it is therefore of great interest to determine what effect Sudanese culture played in the participants’ acquisition of an education prior to migration.

While resilience research traditionally aimed to produce lists of risk and protective factors, contemporary resilience researchers stress the importance of identifying the processes or mechanisms initiated by single or accumulating traumatic events (Clauss-Ehlers, 2003; Grotberg, 2003a; Fraser et al., 1999; Rutter, 1985, 1987, 1990). For example, although separation from parents (Geltman et al., 2005; Kinzie et al., 1986; Macksoud & Aber, 1996; Masten et al., 1990), ambiguous loss (Boss, 2004; Sagi-Schwartz et al., 2003), and forced migration (Bolea et al., 2003; Luster et al., 2008; Rojas & Pappagallo, 2004) can have deleterious effects on children, studies demonstrate that such experiences can also serve to transform and make individuals stronger (Grotberg, 2003a; Pardekooper et al., 1999; Schweitzer et al., 2007). Thus, questions 5 and 6 were developed to understand how various events and experiences served as resilience mechanisms with regard to achieving an education.

--- End example---

By doing this you not only establish the validity of your questions, but also establish the basis for your discussion of findings in relation to the literature in Chapter Five. After developing the questions, discuss in your procedures that you will get experts in the field to review, and then pilot the interview with a small sample outside of your study sample to ensure
clarity of questions and wording. The anchoring in the literature and the expert review should be conducted prior to your proposal defense; the piloting needs to be done after you receive IRB approval to collect data.

After developing the questions we advise you discuss in your procedures that you will get a few "experts" in the field to review, and then pilot the interview with a small sample outside of your study sample to ensure clarity of questions and wording. The anchoring in the literature and the expert review should be conducted prior to your proposal defense; the piloting needs to be done after you receive IRB approval to collect data.

**Surveys/Questionnaires**

If using a published survey or questionnaire, be sure to gain permission to use and explain here how the survey was developed and how validity and reliability were established. If generating your own, you need to address face and content validity and describe piloting procedures.

**Document Analysis**

Document analysis may be applied to a variety of sources including, but not limited to legal documents, records, meeting minutes, letters, diaries, etc. Every effort should be made to incorporate primary, as opposed to secondary, sources.

**Focus Groups**

Focus groups provide an opportunity for the researcher to interact with multiple participants at the same time. Focus groups are especially useful for exploring complex, multi-layered concepts from the perspectives of the participants.

**Observations**
If conducting observations, please develop and include in the appendices your observation protocol (examples are provided in most qualitative research texts), and be sure to address both descriptive and reflective field notes. Be sure to discuss whether observations will be scheduled or unscheduled, and whether you will be a participant or non-participant observer. Identify frequency and duration of observations.

**Data Analysis**

In this section the data analysis procedures should be identified and a concise rationale for each type of analysis should be provided. Be sure that your analysis procedures are aligned with your research design. For example, open, axial, and selective coding are appropriate for grounded theory studies, but not necessarily for other designs. As another example, if conducting a transcendental phenomenological study, be sure to order the primary sources for this design (i.e., Moustakas, 1994) and describe these design specific procedures in depth. Be sure to use the primary resources on your topic to guide your development of this section. While secondary sources (e.g., course textbooks) provide good overviews of different research designs and analysis procedures, they typically lack the detailed procedural information needed to write Chapter Three. You need to provide enough detail that someone can replicate your study by following procedures outlined in this chapter. Further, as your study involves multiple forms of data collection in order to achieve triangulation, you need to discuss how you will analyze each set of data and then synthesize findings across all three (or more) sets of data. Some form of coding, along with bracketing and memoing, are tools commonly used to organize data and identify recurring themes for many qualitative data analysis strategies. If you are employing these tools while you analyze data, be sure to discuss them here (fully defined and cited).

Additionally, if you will use a Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) such as NVivo,
Ethnograph, or MaxQDA, discuss that in this section as well. Surveys and quantitative instruments cannot be analyzed in accordance with analysis procedures for textual (qualitative data). If utilizing quantitative instruments be sure to clearly address how you will analyze and then integrate or triangulate the quantitative findings with the qualitative.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness addresses credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Each topic must be covered in detail under its own subheading. In each subheading, fully define the aspect of trustworthiness (credibility, dependability, transferability, or confirmability) addressed and discuss its importance (with citations). Then, identify the methods whereby you propose to achieve each aspect of trustworthiness (triangulation, direct quotes, enumeration, member checks, prolonged engagement, etc.), fully defining each method (with citations).

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings accurately describe reality. Credibility depends on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher. Dependability is similar to reliability in quantitative studies and deals with consistency, which is addressed through the provision of rich detail about the context and setting of the study. Transferability is another aspect of qualitative research that should be considered; it refers to the possibility that what was found in one context is applicable to another context. Methods for increasing trustworthiness include, but are not limited to, triangulation, member checks, prolonged engagement, negative case analysis, peer/expert review, external audit, etc.

**Ethical Considerations**

Any ethical considerations or implications of the research should be discussed. These might include data storage (e.g., locked filing cabinets and password protection for electronic
files) and usage, influence, confidentiality (e.g., use of site and participant pseudonyms), and any other potential issues that might arise and how they will be addressed.

**Summary**

Provide a chapter summary.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of the Chapter 4 is to present the results of the data analysis. This chapter is reserved for findings specifically; methodological information should be discussed in Chapter Three, and an interpretation and discussion of results should be reserved for Chapter Five. The chapter should begin with a brief overview of the chapter content. The overview should also include a brief restatement of the study purpose. The data, in the form of themes (narrative), charts, graphs, tables, or models, should then be presented. Data should be presented in the order in which the research questions were stated or according to themes generated, though the research questions should still be answered before concluding the chapter. NOTE: This chapter is not part of the plan, prospectus, or proposal.

Participants

While the overall sample should be described or presented in tabular form in Chapter 3 (e.g., sample size, age, ethnicities represented, gender, etc.) it is typical in qualitative dissertations to provide a rich description or portrait of each individual who participated in the study (using pseudonyms). Pseudonyms should be realistic, and reflective of the culture of your participants, but not in such a way that their anonymity could be compromised. You can organize these participant descriptions using level 2 APA headings.

George

Sally

Etc.
Results

This section can be organized thematically or according to research questions, depending on the design and the advisement of the chair and committee. If organized thematically, be sure to conclude this section by clearly answering your research questions. Theme development, whether under its own heading or embedded within the research questions, must reflect the steps for data analysis described in Chapter Three. Theme development must be supported using appropriate data from each data collection method, especially use of participant quotes. Unexpected themes that do not correlate to specific research questions are also presented. Data from each collection method are clearly and meaningfully integrated into theme development. Codes, if developed, are presented in meaningful tables demonstrating how they were organized to inform themes.

Summary

Provide a chapter summary.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Chapter Five is unique in that the candidate is expected to use his or her own interpretations and ideas. Chapter Five consists of six sections: (a) an overview of the chapter, (b) a summary of the findings, (c) a discussion of the findings and the implications in light of the relevant literature and theory, (d) an implications section (methodological and practical), (e) an outline of the study limitations, and (f) recommendations for future research. NOTE: This chapter is not part of the plan, prospectus, or proposal.

Begin the Overview section with a brief restatement of the purpose of the study and an overview of the chapter.

Summary of Findings

Provide a concise summary of the study findings, briefly answering each research question.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss the study findings in relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. How does your study confirm or corroborate previous research? How does your study diverge from or extend on previous research? What novel contribution does your study add to the field?

Implications

The purpose of this section is to address the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study. Depending on the topic, it may be appropriate to include specific recommendations for various stakeholders, such as policy makers, administrators, teachers, parents, etc. This discussion could be organized by adding level 2 APA headings.
Limitations

When identifying limitations and weaknesses of the study, think about the design of the study and inherent limitations in qualitative studies, for example, using volunteers, self-report data, and sample characteristics (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, geographic location).

Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of the study findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on the study, provide multiple recommendations and directions for future research.

Summary

Provide a summary of the study. From your Implications section, reiterate what you consider to be the one or two most important “take-aways” from the results of your research (you may consider including an anecdotal illustration).
REFERENCES

All the references cited within the text should be listed in accordance with the most recent edition of the *Publication Manual of APA*. The reference title should be capitalized and centered.
APPENDIX or APPENDICES

The Appendix may include a variety of artifacts. The appendix may include the IRB application (replace with the approval letter for the complete dissertation), informed consent/assent forms, surveys/questionnaires/instruments, protocols (interviews or observations), sample transcripts of interviews, theoretical memos, and other documents used to establish and audit trail. Any identifying or personal information (names, schools, districts, phone numbers, email addresses) should be eliminated. If numerous types of artifacts are included as appendices, each type should have a section labeled as Appendix A, Appendix B, etc. The appendix title should be capitalized and centered.