



*DEPARTMENT OF
COUNSELOR EDUCATION
AND FAMILY STUDIES*

**Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision
Dissertation Manual**

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From the Ph.D. Program Director

Dear Doctoral Candidate:

Congratulations on reaching this final stage of your doctoral journey! You began this program several years ago and step by step completed all of your coursework, Qualifying Examination, Practicum, Internships, and Candidacy Exam. Now you face the capstone project of the Doctor of Philosophy Program: The Dissertation.

Even before Students arrive at the landmark dissertation stage, they have many questions about the Dissertation and the process by which they complete one. To address the overarching issues, the Department of Counselor Education and Family Studies developed this Dissertation Guide.

It is our hope that this process will prepare you for a lifetime of meaningful research and scholarship that not only evidences the knowledge and skills you've ascertained in this program, but, more importantly, reflects the Heart of Christ for justice, advocacy, mercy, and healing for all of mankind.

May God bless you with all that you need to flourish abundantly as you conduct your research and write your dissertation. Our prayers are with you!

Introduction to the Dissertation Manual

1.1 Purpose of this Dissertation Manual

The purpose of this document is to assist Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral students in completing their dissertation at Liberty University. The best academic tradition and professional practice require the University to prepare doctoral Students to conduct doctoral Dissertation research that prepares them for a lifetime of meaningful empirical and scholarly endeavors that impact society. Because the completed dissertation is a publication of Liberty University, the Department of Counselor Education and Family Studies must maintain high standards concerning the form and appearance of dissertations and require that all students' work meet those standards.

This guide sets forth those standards and provides a set of directives for doctoral students as they walk through the dissertation process. This guide is also intended to serve as an aid to faculty involved in chairing dissertations. It provides an overview of the dissertation process and describes in broad terms the roles and responsibilities of the student, committee chairperson, and other committee members.

Moreover, this guide provides pertinent information about the content and style of the dissertation document and describes the processes for document approval and final publication of the dissertation. Doctoral students should refer to the guide and follow its direction as they plan for and prepare their dissertation and whenever submitting materials to their committee. The committee chairperson is responsible to the University for the structure, content, and final submission of the document for publication and has the ultimate authority in the committee on these matters. This guide is intended to support students and faculty at Liberty University through the essential processes of writing and defending the student's dissertation.

1.2 The Authority of this Dissertation Manual

This version of the Dissertation guide supersedes all previous editions of the Dissertation Manual. Students who are in the process of writing their final chapters, however, may continue under the former guidelines.

Overview of the Dissertation

2.1 Background to the Dissertation

The dissertation is the culminating activity of a doctoral student's degree and represents the student's original contribution to the professional literature. It provides an opportunity to focus on a single, carefully defined area of interest within the student's field of study. The dissertation is a scholarly document intended to demonstrate the research competence of the author and to produce greater understanding of cultural, social, psychological, physical, or spiritual phenomena. The dissertation is to be written in the formal language and style of the author's discipline or field of study, and presents the results of a comprehensive, logical, and ethical investigation. The dissertation is an extension of published research that involves the acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of new data. It is based upon the assumption that there exists one or more of these elements:

- An internal reality that can be sampled, observed, measured, and analyzed.
- An internal phenomenological reality that can be described in sufficient detail by the person experiencing it.
- A social or organizational reality that can be derived by examination of its structure or communicated through its participants' reports.

Regardless of the underlying assumption, the dissertation should address an important problem that is feasibly studied within the student's field. The dissertation study must be carried

out through the application of accepted methods and procedures appropriate to the stated problem. The dissertation is not just descriptive; it must be of a sound extant basis or a well-developed conceptual basis that leads to the question(s) under investigation. This basis serves as the origin for conclusions and inferences that lead to further research, for enhanced theoretical understanding, and for recommendations for organizational improvement.

All doctoral candidates must submit an approved dissertation to satisfy part of the requirements for their degree. The dissertation must be based on original research that has been approved by the student's dissertation committee. The main aim of the dissertation is to encourage independent study and to provide a foundation for future original research that impacts the counseling field and, ultimately, society. In terms of learning, the dissertation should offer the opportunity to develop research skills, demonstrate mastery of a specified topic, and contribute to the body of knowledge.

Dissertations can be divided into two general classifications based upon purpose: (a) inquiry-oriented studies that have as their purpose to find out something about the problem and (b) action-oriented studies that have as their purpose to bring about change or improvement in the area of the problem.

Regardless of the type of dissertation chosen, completing a dissertation tests many of the talents expected of doctoral candidates such as independent thought, judgment, critical thinking faculties, knowledge of their field, research ability, organization, writing style, and verbal presentation. The dissertation requires the student to research and evaluate relevant reference materials to formulate pertinent question and/or hypotheses, to design an appropriate research study to answer those questions and/or hypotheses, and to present findings in the form of a coherent scholarly manuscript of appropriate format. There are many aids to this process

available to the student, but in the final analysis the doctoral student is ultimately responsible for successfully completing all steps of the dissertation process.

The decision as to whether the student has met the necessary qualifications to earn the degree rests with the Committee and them alone. The selection and working relationship with the Committee is crucial to the successful outcome of the Dissertation process. It is critical, therefore, that the student understands the desires and demands of each Committee member and adheres to the standards in this guide.

2.2 History of the Dissertation

The tradition of writing a dissertation as part of doctoral study dates back to the late Middle Ages in European universities that were at the forefront of academic and scientific thought. Many of their traditions surrounding dissertation writing are still followed today.

The dissertation as a genre emerged from the oral culture of medieval graduate education, which emphasized mastery of ancient philosophies, and evolved into a public recognition of original scientific investigation in pre-World War I Germany. University scholars enlisted graduate students to facilitate and record their research. Modeled from the original research report, the Dissertation became a *sine qua non*, an essential element, for acquiring the doctoral degree.

James Morris Whiton wrote the first Dissertation in the United States at Yale University in 1861. His study of the proverb “*Brevis vita, ars longa*” contained six pages written in Latin. Fifteen years later, a total of 83 Dissertations had been written in the US. The rate of Dissertations rose modestly from the turn of the twentieth century until the early 1950s, when the number of Dissertations recorded increased exponentially. In 2004, over 32,000 Dissertations were recorded in the University Microfiche Incorporated (UMI) Proquest database. Among the two million

dissertations written since Whiton's, the structure and expectation of the Dissertation remains an instantiation of the scientific method: background, method, analysis, and conclusions.

Dissertation: General Information

3.1 Planning and Budgeting of the Dissertation

The dissertation is a major undertaking, and there are several general considerations and expenses that the student should keep in mind when planning. These include time, money, and additional skills (such as test administration, statistical analysis, editing, or transcription for qualitative research) that the student may need to learn/pay for in order to complete the dissertation research. The student is advised to begin financial planning as soon as possible.

Managing time appropriately is important if doctoral candidates want to graduate on a certain date. In planning a timeline for the completion of the dissertation, students need to consider their personal time limitations and the time constraints of committee members. Normally, a committee member needs at least two weeks in order to turn around student submissions. This timeline, however, can be influenced by a number of events. In other words, it is important to keep faculty schedules in mind when submitting materials for review. If the student believes that the committee chair or other committee members are being negligent in responsibilities, it is the student's responsibility to discuss the matter with them. If satisfaction is not obtained, the student may then go to the Ph.D. Director, the Department Chair, or the College of Behavioral Sciences Dean.

Students submit chapters as they are completed in order to allow the chair or committee members to provide timely feedback. While waiting, the student can continue to work.

Ultimately, the committee will decide when the document is finished and ready to defend. Their decision is based on the quality of all parts of the manuscript. No other deadlines or

priorities will supersede this responsibility.

3.2 The Use of Assistance in the Dissertation Process

It is not unusual for the doctoral candidate to enlist the assistance of others in the course of dissertation research and document preparation. In fact, some students “outsource” particular tasks such as running statistical analysis, administering tests, or transcribing interviews due to the time involvement and need for expertise. Although candidates must make decisions on how to best utilize their time, and how much to use the skills of others, they never relinquish the responsibility for the process or the product of the research.

The student is responsible for knowing every aspect of the research and is answerable to the committee for the ethical behavior, procedures, accuracy, interpretation, and integrity of the results. The student must not include anything in the dissertation that they cannot describe, understand, justify, and explain to the committee. The student must be in control of the research and dissertation and cannot defer to experts or hired assistants without a complete understanding of the reasons, procedures to be used, and appropriate interpretation of the results from these outside efforts. The committee must be confidently convinced that the student has a total grasp of the research and dissertation and has taken measures to ensure accuracy.

Many doctoral students find it helpful to employ a statistics consultant at various points throughout their research and dissertation. Statistical consultants can assist students with the research questions, design, data collection procedures, and statistical procedures necessary for the dissertation proposal. Statistical consultants can also assist students in statistical analysis and interpretation. If students wish to use a consultant, they should discuss this with the Committee Chair first and then with other Members of the Committee.

One consultant each student **must** employ is a professional editor who is also an expert in

APA writing style. Your committee members need to be able to review your work without being distracted by spelling, grammar, and writing errors. Remember that the dissertation will be published in the student's name but will also include the names of committee members. Each person's reputation is tied to the quality of the completed dissertation. Students are responsible to pay for this service. The use of an editor will be money well spent in order to ensure that the dissertation is both well-written and consistent with APA format writing standards. Students are free to ascertain an editor of their choice or to consult with one of the editors listed in the Ph.D. C.E.S. Center.

Dissertation Writing Standards

4.1 Dissertation Writing Formatting and Style

All manuscripts should follow the latest version of the APA style manual. For further information consult the Thesis and Dissertation and Publishing Guides at:

<http://libguides.liberty.edu/content.php?pid=229367&sid=1956460>

4.2 Academic Honesty

Liberty University considers academic honesty and integrity to be one of its highest values. The dissertation should represent an original contribution to the knowledge base of the student's field of study. Students are accountable for conducting original research that leads to the discovery of new information or theories. Thus, they are expected to submit original work. The reuse of end-of-course essays or reports, master's theses, or doctoral research conducted elsewhere is prohibited. If citing their previous work, students treat it as they would any other work cited according to the current edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, which is described in greater detail below.

Students must cite the ideas and work of others appropriately and according to current

APA format. Properly crediting others' scholarly work is an ethical imperative for all academics and one that demonstrates an author's own integrity. The same principles that guide expectations of academic honesty and integrity in coursework and the Qualifying and Candidacy Examinations hold true for the dissertation.

The chair of the doctoral committee will submit the student's doctoral dissertation to Liberty University's plagiarism software. Any consequences of apparent academic dishonesty will be up to the doctoral committee chair and the committee. For more information on the University's policies regarding academic dishonesty, please refer to <https://www.liberty.edu/students/community-life/academic-misconduct/>.

Dissertation Process

5.1 Overview of the Dissertation Process

The idea of completing a dissertation can be overwhelming. In fact, the process seems so threatening to some doctoral students that they never start or complete their dissertation.

It is helpful to not think of the dissertation as one enormous journey, but as a series of steps. For practical purposes, the Department of Counselor Education and Family Studies (DCEFS) conceptualizes the dissertation process as having 12 major progressions or steps:

1. Select a topic
2. Select a chair
3. Form the dissertation committee
4. Complete the proposal
5. Defend the proposal
6. Obtain approval by the Internal Review Board (IRB)
7. Conduct the research

8. Complete the final chapters
9. Submit the entire dissertation for final approval
10. Defend the dissertation
11. Obtain a professional editor to review for form and style
12. Submit the final dissertation to the library

5.2 Step 1: Select a Topic

Without a doubt, selecting a topic is one of the most difficult aspects of the dissertation process. The key is choosing a topic that will sustain the student's interest and attention over a period of six to 18 months—the average length of time to complete most dissertations. Moreover, topics should not be too broad, too vague, too grand, or too global. Once a topic is selected, the student will create a one-page, succinct summary of the research question and method to present to a potential chair. Finally, topics should be relevant to the field of counseling with the goal of extending the empirical literature in meaningful ways that impact real people, policies, and society at large.

5.3 Step 2: Obtain a Dissertation Committee Chair

The second step in the dissertation process is for the doctoral student to choose a dissertation committee chairperson (if not already done). The research interests of each professor in the Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision Program may be found on the department website at: <https://www.liberty.edu/behavioral-sciences/counselor-ed/faculty/>.

Given the importance of the chairperson to the success of a dissertation, the doctoral student should discuss their research ideas with their prospective chair. The doctoral dissertation committee is comprised of three members: the faculty chairperson from the department and two faculty readers. Once a faculty member agrees to be a student's dissertation chair, the student

asks the faculty to email phdcounseling@liberty.edu to request that the student be registered in that faculty member's section of COUC 989.

5.3a Faculty chairperson's role and responsibilities. Faculty chairpersons are vitally important to the success of students working on their dissertation. The chair of the dissertation committee is the liaison for the student, committee, and the school. Using the Dissertation Grading Rubric, the chair guides and supports the doctoral candidate as he or she develops and demonstrates competencies in critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, and integration of relevant theories and research.

The chair reviews and guides the student in the nomination and selection of the remaining committee positions, supervises the design and research, and oversees the completion of the dissertation manuscript. The chair provides feedback on the student's writing and research skills and refers the student to additional support and resources when those skills need further development.

During the dissertation process, the student and chair will be engaged in collaborative efforts involving the communication skills of writing, discussing, and negotiating.

The chair must ensure that the proposal and the completed dissertation comply with all criteria used to evaluate acceptable scholar-practitioner work at the doctoral level. This includes, but is not limited to: the content, structure, format, style, and ethical guidelines. The chair is the focal point for communication between the committee members and the student and facilitates the pace and flow of all meetings. The chair should clearly communicate to the student all University and DCEFS expectations concerning procedures for completing the dissertation research project and the Doctoral degree.

5.3b Committee member role and responsibilities. It is the committee members'

responsibility to encourage, support, and reflect the core values of Liberty University (e.g., Christlikeness, respect, trust, commitment to a positive learning experience and excellence). It is expected that all Committee Members maintain appropriate communication with each other and the student and respond to all student requests in a timely manner. Barring unforeseen circumstances, committee members should read and respond to all student submissions within a two-week period.

5.4 Step 3: Form a Dissertation Committee

The dissertation committee has the sole authority and responsibility for accepting and endorsing all aspects of the dissertation, prior to the final approval by the Ph.D. Program Director or designee. Ultimately, the committee is responsible for the academic progress of the student and the scholarly quality of the dissertation. The committee approves the dissertation based upon satisfactory performance on the dissertation defense. The dissertation committee has overall responsibility for providing content, technical, organizational, ethical, and administrative guidance for the student in the dissertation process. The dissertation committee members work collaboratively with the committee chairperson to guide the student in the development and advancement of academic skills.

Once the committee members have been approved by the dissertation committee chair and the members have agreed to participate on the committee, the student will need to complete the Petition for the Dissertation Committee form and email it to their chair (See Appendix C). No student should assume that a committee member is on his or her committee until the petition has been signed.

To this end, the dissertation committee should form a collective of subject matter and methodological experts that coincide with the topic under investigation and the methods

proposed. Committee members are available to students throughout the dissertation process to provide counsel relevant to the study and consistent with their expertise. The committee members must hold earned doctorates. The committee members evaluate the dissertation proposal and manuscript to ensure that the work meets rigorous academic standards for quality and that the student meets the guidelines for ethical research, academic honesty, and academic writing and presentation.

5.5 Step 4: Complete the Proposal

The process of completing the dissertation leading to committee approval is an iterative process that culminates in the dissertation defense. This iterative process involves the chairperson's initial endorsement of each submission before distribution to other committee members. This entire process begins with the dissertation proposal.

Typically, a dissertation proposal is comprised of chapters one through three (e.g., Introduction, Review of the Literature, and Method) of the entire dissertation. The chapters, references, and appendixes may be updated throughout the dissertation process, but should be written with a final draft in mind. The submission of the proposal should include the title page, abstract, table of contents, references, and appendixes. The actual format of the dissertation, however, will be determined by the nature of the research and in collaboration with the committee.

As for the submissions of the dissertation proposal, many revisions are likely. This process is usually done through the development of outlines, identification of reference sources, the submission of drafts, the receipt of feedback, and the revision of drafts. At the discretion of the committee chair, this process may be supplemented with face to face or teleconference meetings as necessary.

5.6 Step 5: Defend the Proposal

Proposal defenses may take place in person or virtually. Due to the geographic dispersion of the University's student body and faculty, most defenses are virtual.

The defense of the proposal is not just a formality. Issues that require clarification or changes that must be made may emerge from the defense. The candidate is expected to demonstrate a mastery of the proposed study, the related literature, and adequately answer committee member questions.

Questions about the proposal may include:

1. Does the design clearly relate to the purpose of the study?
2. Does the design adequately address the research questions?
3. What are the data sources? Are they useful, reliable, and sufficient?
4. Is the design feasible within the stated limitations and delimitations?
5. Does the design attend to the protection of human subjects?
6. Is a realistic timeline established?
7. Is the sample clearly defined?
8. Do the research methods reflect the literature?
9. Is this the "best" design for the study and the subject area?
10. Are the theoretical frameworks appropriate to the study?

Three possible outcomes may result from the dissertation proposal defense. First, the student passes the proposal defense and the candidate will be given permission to begin step six of the dissertation process. Second, the committee may accept the proposal with modifications. The committee will not approve the proposal until such changes are made. The candidate should submit these modifications to the chair for review. Third, the committee may not approve the

proposal. Rescheduling and recommendations for a second attempt will be determined on a case-by-case basis by each committee. A successful proposal defense must be accomplished before the candidate can move forward with any aspect of conducting the research.

5.7 Step 6: Obtain Approval by the Internal Review Board

The federal government requires that all institutions, whether university, company, or agency ensure that all state and federal regulations are observed by researchers in their community. The Internal Review Board (IRB) examines all research to ensure that the welfare of human research participants is protected. Data collection cannot begin until IRB approval has been obtained. The IRB's current guidelines and application portal can be found on their webpage: <http://www.liberty.edu/index.cfm?PID=12606>. The student's doctoral committee chair serves as the faculty sponsor and works with the student to ensure that proper ethical standards are applied to the project and that informed consent is used when appropriate. **Absolutely no data can be collected without IRB approval.** Students should be aware that the IRB must adhere to strict governmental guidelines when approving human science research. Thus, it is vital that students carefully adhere to the IRB application guidelines and submit work that is written scholarly. Students often lose much time awaiting approval if they do not submit accurate and appropriately scholarly applications.

5.8 Step 7: Conduct the Research

After the successful defense of the proposal and approval of the IRB, the candidate can proceed to implement the investigation as designed and agreed upon by the Committee. The responsibility of the candidate is to implement the study as presented in the proposal. **Any deviations from the proposal and IRB application need both committee and IRB approval.**

5.9 Step 8: Complete Final Chapters

In the approved research proposal, the candidate typically completes chapters one through three. After the research is completed and chapters four and five are being written, the first three chapters should be changed to the past tense (reflecting completed action). The remaining chapters present the results, summarize and interpret the data, draw conclusions, discuss practical implications for the field of counseling, and make recommendations for future research. Further, the candidate must complete the entire dissertation document (i.e., abstract, appendixes, table of contents, transition paragraphs). When the chair becomes confident that the student is ready to defend their final dissertation, the chair emails phdcounseling@liberty.edu to request that the student be registered in their section of COUC 990. The chair should not request registration for COUC 990 for the student unless there is enough time left in the term for the student to defend the dissertation and complete all the steps outlined in 5.13 Step 12 number six (see below). A final grade cannot be posted for any student in COUC 990 until the dissertation is edited by a professional editor and uploaded to the library (receipt from editor posted in the CES Center and email confirmation from the library posted in the CES Center). Moreover, students cannot graduate until they post all the required assignments for the entire program in the CES Center (including the Candidacy Examination Feedback Form). Students should plan accordingly.

5.10 Step 9: Submit the Entire Dissertation for Final Approval

Once the doctoral student has completed the final draft dissertation, it should be submitted to the committee. Typically, the committee will provide feedback to the candidate within 14 days. Any required changes to the document should be made and resubmitted to the committee. This process will continue until all of the committee members approve the document. At that time, the Student and the Committee should schedule the dissertation defense.

The student must create a Dissertation announcement (see Appendix E) and forward it to

the Ph.D. Program Director (Dr. Lisa Sosin: lssosin@liberty.edu) and the Office Administrator (Ms. [Bonnie Gould: bcsmith@liberty.edu](mailto:bcsmith@liberty.edu)). A copy of the announcement will be e-mailed to all faculty and fellow doctoral students.

5.11 Step 10: Defend the Dissertation

5.11a Purpose of the dissertation defense. The oral defense of the dissertation is open to the public. It should be approached seriously and with dignity because it is the culminating event of a student's doctoral degree. Members of the committee will evaluate the student's ability to present his or her research in a scholarly manner. Committee Members will assess the student on his or her ability to: (a) share knowledge with the academic community, (b) be innovative and creative in applications of scholarship and practice, (c) interact with the academic community, and (d) logically and adequately present ideas when undergoing scrutiny.

The student's chair coordinates the meeting and the procedures for conducting the defense. If the candidate wishes to graduate at the upcoming commencement, he or she must schedule the defense early in the semester. Each committee member must approve the final draft before the defense can be scheduled. The defense may be scheduled 30 or more days following final acceptance of the document by all committee members.

The elements of the defense should be negotiated with the student's committee chair prior to the defense meeting. Most chairs require the student to develop a PowerPoint presentation that reviews the study and results.

5.11b The defense proper. While presentations may vary in length, most reviews can be accomplished in approximately 20 minutes. Following the presentation, questions will be addressed to the doctoral student. Questions may relate directly to the research, its theoretical underpinnings, or be of a more general nature to test the qualifications of the student to receive

the doctoral degree. Following a period of questioning by committee members, other attendees may question the candidate.

When the questioning is completed, typically the student and observers will be excused so that the committee can deliberate privately. From these deliberations three results are possible:

1. The candidate passes, though minor editing changes may be required.
2. The candidate is provisionally passed pending the submission of changes, review, and approval by the candidate's committee.
3. The student is not passed. In this case the candidate must meet with the chair (or committee) to develop a plan to be completed before the resubmission of the document and the rescheduling of a defense.

The successful defense of the dissertation concludes the work of the committee. The work of the chair and the student is not completed until all changes have been made, the student obtains a professional edit, and the dissertation is uploaded to the Jerry Falwell Library.

5.11c Dissertation evaluation criteria. The evaluation of a dissertation is guided by a common set of standards and benchmarks that assist the committee in evaluating and providing constructive formative feedback on each chapter of the dissertation. These requirements are clearly outlined on the Dissertation Grading Rubric found in the Appendix of this manual. The following provides an idea of how committee members will evaluate the dissertation.

Chapter One. Introduction: (a) the introduction adequately establishes the background and context of the study; (b) the problem statement is adequately articulated, supported with research, and amenable to the investigation; (c) the justification of purpose and significance is integrated with the problem statement and makes an adequate case for conducting the research; (d) the nature of the research design adequately describes and is appropriate to the stated

problem; (e) the research questions and/or hypotheses are stated in answerable or testable form and are appropriate to the stated problem; (f) the relevant assumptions and limitations have been identified; (g) all technical terms have been adequately defined and explained, and (h) summary.

Chapter Two. Literature Review: (a) the literature review establishes an adequate theoretical framework for the study; (b) the literature review examines current empirical, theoretical, and relevant literature associated with key variables of the problem; (c) in areas where literature that directly addresses the topic is limited, current literature in related fields is used to build a rationale for the problem; (d) the literature review cites appropriate research literature to defend the selection of research design and procedures for this study; and (e) summary.

Chapter Three. Method: (a) the research design is adequately described and justified; (b) the relationships between the problem, the research questions/hypotheses, design and methods are defended; (c) the description of the population/sample and/or participant selection procedures is adequate; (d) all the constructs involved are operationalized; (e) the data processing and analysis procedures are appropriate in light of the study's design and hypotheses; and (e) summary.

Chapter Four. Data Analysis and Results: (a) the data have been analyzed using the appropriate techniques as described in the method chapter; (b) the analyses are performed and presented correctly; (c) the results address the hypotheses and/or questions; and (d) summary.

Chapter Five. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations: (a) the findings are discussed in terms of research problem, conceptual framework, and research questions/hypotheses; (b) all the relevant conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis are identified; (c) findings are clearly placed within the context of the current literature (d) the

recommendations for future research directions and practice are identified and justified; (e) the general conclusions are warranted in light of the results and current literature; (f) the ramifications and implications for practice are appropriate; and (g) summary.

APA Format: The current APA standards will be followed: (a) for the orderly presentation of ideas; (b) for the smoothness of expression; (c) for the economy of expression; (d) for precision and clarity; (e) for expressing ideas without biased language; (f) for the grammar; (g) for punctuation; (h) for citations; (i) for presenting the reference list; and (j) general dissertation format is followed including title page, copyright page/signature page, abstract, dedication, acknowledgments, table of contents, text, references, appendixes, list of tables, and list of figures (when applicable). Students should read several examples of excellent quantitative or qualitative (depending on which method they are using) dissertations to get a clear idea of the required format and organization of the Dissertation project. The COUC 989 syllabus contains a Dissertation Organization Template and Grading Rubric to insure proper formatting and appropriate scholarship for the Dissertation. The student's dissertation chair and committee members will use the Grading Rubric to assess each chapter of the dissertation.

5.12 Step 11: Obtain a Professional Editor to Review the Dissertation for Form and Style

After the successful defense of the dissertation, the student will make corrections as required by the committee. **All Students are required to obtain an editor to have their Dissertation carefully reviewed to ensure excellence in style, format, grammar, spelling, syntax, and APA (most recent edition) standards.** The student will be required to make all the necessary changes and resubmit the corrected dissertation for review. The student is responsible for the costs associated with obtaining the editor. Contact information for approved editors can be found in the C.E.S. Center.

5.13 Step 12: Submit the Final Dissertation

Once compliance has been verified, the student is then ready to submit the dissertation for publication. Submission guidelines can be found on the Jerry Falwell Library website:

<https://www.liberty.edu/library/submitted-Dissertations-and-theses/>.

Once the Dissertation has been deposited the student will receive an email confirming the submission has been received. The Office of Scholarly Communications will review the work submitted for publishing. The student will then receive an email requesting revisions or acceptance.

Per the Graduate School, all the following steps must be completed before a student receives a final grade in COUC 990:

1. Student defends the dissertation
2. Student completes all edits the dissertation committee requests
3. Chair provides final approval
4. Student gets the dissertation professionally edited and posts the receipt in the CES Center
5. Student uploads the dissertation to ProQuest through the library. Student forwards the email they receive from the library confirming that the dissertation manuscript was successfully uploaded to the library
6. Student posts a copy of the confirmation email in the CES Center
7. Chair posts the passing grade for COUC 990 (the grade should not be posted until steps 1-7 are completed)
8. Chair emails the Ph.D. CES program director with the following information:
 - A. Student name and LU ID
 - B. Chair name and LU ID
 - C. Reader names and LU ID

Components of the Completed Dissertation

Although Dissertations can vary in number of chapters and organization, in essence all Dissertations consist of four major components or parts: (a) Preliminary pages; (b) Text; (c) References; and (d) Appendixes. These components are detailed below.

6.1 Preliminary Pages

Preliminary pages must appear in the order described below.

Title Page (Required)

Each copy of the Dissertation must include a title page prepared exactly in accordance with the EXAMPLE. This is the only page among the preliminary pages that does not bear a page number; it is page “1” but the “1” is not printed on the page. The Student’s full legal name should be used on the title page.

Abstract (Required)

All Dissertations must have an abstract that briefly describes the problem, purpose, methods, and summary of findings. Abstract should adhere to current APA Manual word count (150-250 words).

Dedication (Optional)

The Student may wish to include a dedication.

Acknowledgement (Optional)

Many authors include an acknowledgement page to express their appreciation to those who have assisted in the Dissertation.

Table of Contents (Required)

The Table of Contents (TOC) lists the chapter and section headings with concomitant page numbers. Only Chapter headings, Level 1, and Level 2 headings should appear in the TOC. All entries in the TOC should be made in precisely the same wording as the headings appear in the text. It is also critical that page numbers are accurate (this needs to be checked every time a change is made to even one word). Main headings in the TOC should be written in all capitals. Each chair may have a particular preference for where tables, figures, and illustrations are printed in the document. Some prefer that all tables, figures, and illustrations be listed separately on their own pages whereas others prefer

them at the end in an appendix.

6.2 Text

All dissertations by students in the Department of Counselor Education and Family Studies must comply with the writing format of the most recent version of The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. The Dissertation text is typically divided into Five Chapters (Introduction, Review of the Literature, Method, Results, Summary of Findings, and Recommendations).

6.3 References

The third major section of the Dissertation is the reference list, which directly follows the last page of the text. References must comply with APA format style. For the Dissertation, however, spacing of each reference should be single spaced with double spacing in between each full reference.

6.4 Appendixes

A final section of the Dissertation, the Appendix contains all supporting materials. If there is more than one appendix, each should be lettered in alphabetical sequence (e.g., Appendix A, Appendix B, Appendix C). Supporting materials include such documents as letters of permission to use instruments, the instruments, participant recruitment letters, copies of informed consent, and other information that supports the Dissertation.

APPENDIX A: Overview of the Dissertation Format

In order to prepare a quality dissertation document, the following overview provides detailed information on the format and general content of each component of the dissertation.

THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE TITLE PAGE OF YOUR DISSERTATION: THE TITLE OF YOUR
DISSERTATION SHOULD GO HERE (ALL CAPS)

by

Student's Full Legal Name

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University Month, Year

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 Philosophy Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

Year

APPROVED BY:

Name and degree, Committee Chair

Name and degree, Committee Member

Name and degree, Committee Member

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 left justified and Level 2 headings should be indented one-half inch. Chapter titles are not considered level 1 headings. Entries should be double-spaced. Sample TOC:

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Acknowledgements.....	???
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List of Figures	???
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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.

Table I	95
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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.

Figure 1.....	45
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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.

American Counseling Association (ACA)

Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)

[Double Spaced]

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.

Special note: This is how Chapter Headings should appear in actual Dissertation. Also, a new chapter begins with a new page

The Dissertation begins with a clear, succinct but general presentation of the problem area or need to be addressed in the research. The statements should orient the Committee's thinking to the topic and they should be satisfied after reading the Problem section that: (a) A case is made for the existence of a problem and it is clearly delineated, and (b) The problem has intellectual merit worthy of Dissertation research. Remember that what sections are included in the Dissertation will vary based upon the nature of the research (e.g., qualitative or quantitative) and the Committee's preferences.

Background of the Problem

New Heading Level 1

This section provides the historical, social, and theoretical contexts for the problem that is to be addressed. It is a distillation or summary of the most relevant background literature. After reading this section, Committee Members should be able to understand: (a) how the problem has evolved over time, (b) what are the contexts of the problem, and (c) what theories support the research area to be explored.

Purpose of the Study

This section of the chapter is brief, but important. Here is where the Candidate states clearly and succinctly the focus and intentions of this current research effort. All previous writing funnels to this specific statement of the purpose of the Dissertation, and all subsequent chapters illuminate, support, or describe efforts to implement a design and interpret findings related to this specific purpose. There may be several sub goals of the Dissertation stated along with the purpose, but after reading these statements, the Committee should be able to: (a) give support to the worthiness of the study, (b) have a clear understanding of the essential goals or products of the Dissertation, and (c) see a clear interrelationship between the problem statement, the background and essential literature, and the statement of the purpose.

Research Questions or Research Hypotheses

In order to accomplish the stated purpose of the study, there are several conceptual questions or hypotheses that are developed whose answers will allow the researcher to interpret his/her results in relationship to the reason(s) for this study. These are often general questions that are later operationalized with specific measures and statistical parameters in the form of null hypotheses (if appropriate) in Chapter Three. After reading the research questions or hypotheses, the Committee should: (a) be able to understand what is being asked or explored by the author of the research, and (b) see the clear link between the questions and the statement of the purpose.

Assumptions and Limitations

This section is a clear summary of the assumptions and limitations of the research. It is the author's responsibility to alert the reader to unavoidable and avoidable factors that may influence the research outcome. The significance of this section is that it deals with the

generalizability of the study's findings.

Assumptions are premises taken to be true without proof or demonstration. They are not tested; rather, they are accepted on the basis of logic or reason. The author briefly discusses only those select assumptions that are strongly relevant to the proposed study.

Limitations include boundaries, exceptions, and qualifications that are inherent in every research and restrict the interpretation and generalizability of the findings. The author includes statements that clarify, qualify, or restrict aspects of the research decisions made to give the reader introductory information about the actual scope of the study.

Each research study has inherent strengths and weaknesses. Particular methods have their own limitations. Subsequently, these limits must be imposed upon the interpretation of the results of the study.

Included in the section are any fundamental assumptions about the methods employed in the study, or threats to validity (e.g., instrumentation issues), design problems (e.g., lack of randomization, participant bias), and other factors that may have an impact on interpretation of the data. The limitations of the study might be due, for example, to "self-imposed" limits (e.g., selecting a particular gender, age group, ethnicity, geographic region) related to the particular sample for a quantitative study. After reading this section, the Committee should be able to: (a) judge whether the limitations are too restrictive to be useful in reaching the goals of the study, realistic, completely described, or too broad and (b) ascertain whether the assumptions and/or limitations threaten the quality of the research or evaluation, thereby nullifying the value of the project.

Definition of Terms

Key terms must be clearly understood among Committee Members so that all of the contributors to the Dissertation process, and all subsequent readers, understand the author's intended meaning. Often there is new terminology related to a current research problem. There are also terms or constructs that have different meanings depending on the context or theoretical orientation of the author. The section of definitions puts all readers "on the same page" and develops a fundamental agreement about what is meant when a particular term is used in the Dissertation. This alphabetical listing should reflect definitions of terms most commonly used in the field and be supported by appropriate citation. If the term is to be operationalized with a scale, score, or specific product, then this should also be included in the definition statement. After reading the definitions, the Committee should: (a) be able to clearly understand and comprehend each definition, (b) judge that the definitions are consistent with research standards and the literature of the field, and (c) be able to reach agreement on the appropriateness of each definition for the present study.

Significance of the Study

The researcher must state what potential impact the study will have on the current thinking about the research questions, its potential for contributing to existing theory or practice, its application to other venues, and/or its potential for bringing about change in existing practice. The Committee must decide if the importance of the study is congruent with scholarly expectations, and that the Student has a realistic and clear view of the potential impact of the results from this study.

Conceptual Framework

This section includes a succinct description of the framework, discussion of concepts that are relevant to the proposed study, and explanation of the relationship among the concepts. The framework for the study should include the problem, the theoretical lens used to explore the problem, a summary of the empirical status of inquiry related to the problem as approached from this theoretical lens, and the rationale for the research method employed. It should provide a succinct and clear argument for the need for the study, with reference to the literature review in chapter two, wherein it is fully explicated.

Organization of the Remaining Chapters

The final section is a brief description of each subsequent chapter.

Summary

Each chapter should have a summary.

[Double Space]

New Chapter, new page

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The bulk of the review of the literature, a critical developmental component in the entire dissertation process, is presented in this section. The review for the literature must be a selective and analytical summary of essential research, presented in a logical manner to support the researcher's claim as to the merit of the inquiry. After reading the Literature Review chapter, the committee should be able to be confident that: (a) the essential literature supports the existence of the problem; (b) they understand the patterns of inquiry presented in the literature related to the topic; and (c) proposed methodological directions reflect the patterns in the literature and fill a need or gap in our understanding of the problem area.

Summary

[Double Space]

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

New Chapter,
new page.

In this chapter of the proposal, the researcher presents the design, procedures, and analysis plan for carrying out the purpose of the study. When it is revised for the final dissertation, this chapter will include all aspects of the methodology, both proposed and what actually occurred during the course of the research, in replicable detail. Although there will be different headings for studies of various approaches, the following are examples of sections most commonly found in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method dissertations.

The chapter should begin with a brief introduction, which can include the general type of methodology employed in the research (i.e., experimental, survey, descriptive, etc.) and a brief restatement of the nature and purpose of the study.

Research Design

In this section, the researcher describes the specific design used in his/her study. Variables and classifications are clearly spelled out and are consistent with the definitions in Chapter One. This section will often have several subsections or subheadings.

Selection of Participants

In this section, the researcher should provide a complete description:
(a) of the process by which participants were included in the study and (b) of the individuals who participated in the study.

Instrumentation

In this section, a complete description of the instruments, tests, surveys, questionnaires,

observational protocols, or measures used in the study is presented. This includes information on reliability, validity, origin, and appropriateness or rationale for inclusion in the study. Any instruments created for this study should be included in an appendix, along with information on instrument development.

Research Procedures

Since the work done for the dissertation must be replicable, the procedures section of Chapter Three must be very detailed. It must include all of the information necessary for others to implement this same research, from securing institutional permission to conduct the investigation (if necessary), the first contact with participants, instructions or materials used in the study, setting, development of special instruments, conducting pilot studies, and any other information that would take the reader from start to finish. All appropriate and supporting materials (e.g., protocol, training manual) should be included in an appendix. This section will include information about data gathering and recording procedures.

Data Processing and Analysis

Some studies may not involve statistically analyzed results. Regardless of whether the study is quantitative or qualitative, however, each study must explain how data was processed and analyzed. The processing and analysis of the data will depend on the design of the study, type of data collected, and the research hypotheses (which were stated in Chapter One). In a quantitative study, research hypotheses should be reiterated with the applicable null hypotheses along with the level of significance and statistical methods used to test it. Any other processes for presenting the data, including figures, charts, and graphs should also be listed with each

hypothesis of the study.

In the proposal phase of writing, not all conditions can be anticipated. For the completed dissertation, the researcher will report what was actually done, any deviations from the proposal, and why these decisions were made.

Summary

[Double Space]

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The results of the data collection and analysis of the data are presented in Chapter Four of the dissertation. There are several methods of presenting this information. The one thing in common for all data in Chapter Four is that it is factually presented and free of interpretation. Data may be presented in charts, graphs, tables, or as a statistic, or in any combination of these methods, according to the guidelines in the APA Publication Manual.

The chapter should begin with a brief restatement of the Purpose of the study, and an introduction to the content of the chapter. Data should be presented in the order in which the research questions appeared in Chapter One. The research questions provide the best guidance as to the number, level, and title of subheadings within this chapter. Analysis that is included subsequent to the initial planning of the research should be given its own heading following the initial presentation of the research questions. Each section should present the question or hypothesis, the analysis or graphic display, and the results before moving on to the next question. The chapter should conclude with a summary of all the findings, often as a table, and provide a transition paragraph to the final chapter of the Dissertation.

Summary

[Double Space]

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The final chapter begins with a brief summary of what was presented in previous chapters. This includes a brief and accurate statement of the problem, methodology, and the findings. The researcher should discuss how these findings interact with the hypotheses and also with the current literature (the conceptual framework). For example, in a quantitative study, care should be taken to identify how the study's findings support or contradict previous similar studies in the area. Thoughtful potential explanations should be proposed to account for these differences. Once the study has been placed within the literature, the researcher should discuss what can be accurately concluded from the findings, and the implications of these results on future research. Relevant conclusions about design, measurement, or other methodological considerations should be fully discussed. The researcher also elaborates on recommendations for future research or the application of the findings to the Dissertation topic. The committee will be particularly interested in the extent to which: (a) the summary is clear and comprehensive; (b) the study is presented in the broader context of the previous literature; (c) the recommendations are practical and a logical extension of the completed research; and (d) the implications are related to the procedures and findings and are specifically related to the field of counseling and counselor education.

Summary

REFERENCES

Because the student is earning a degree in Counselor Education and Supervision, it is essential that the citations throughout the dissertation include abundant references to the counseling literature and American Counseling Association journals. References should not be limited to the counseling literature, because there is much to report from the related fields. 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 A: Recommended Books for Dissertation Preparation

The most up to date texts will be those recommended in your research courses throughout the program and on the COUC 989 syllabus.

APPENDIX B: Petition for Establishing a Dissertation Committee

Please complete the following section and return to your dissertation chair.

Name: _____ ID Number: _____

Address: _____

Home: _____ Work _____ Cell: _____

Email: _____ Specialization: _____

Advisor: _____ Phone: _____

The following faculty members agreed to serve on my dissertation committee.

Student Signature

Date

				Faculty Director Initial	Name of Nominee Initial
Chair	Co-Chair	Member	_____	_____	_____
Chair	Co-Chair	Member	_____	_____	_____
Chair	Co-Chair	Member	_____	_____	_____
Chair	Co-Chair	Member	_____	_____	_____

The above student has completed all the necessary requirements and is able to begin work on his or her dissertation

APPENDIX C: Dissertation Grading Rubric

The most up to date Dissertation Grading Rubric is posted on the Dissertation link of the Ph.D. Website and in the CES Center on Canvas. Students must carefully organize their dissertation chapters and adhere to the structural/mechanical guidelines outlines on the Grading Rubric. The chair and committee members evaluate dissertation chapters strictly according to the Grading Rubric.

APPENDIX D: Dissertation Defense Meeting Announcement Format

DISSERTATION DEFENSE MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE TITLE PAGE OF YOUR DISSERTATION:

THE TITLE OF YOUR DISSERTATION SHOULD GO HERE

by

Full Student Legal Name

Liberty University Doctoral Student

Department of Counselor Education and Family Studies

INSERT YOUR ABSTRACT HERE

Open to the Public

Date and Time of the Dissertation

Room in which the Dissertation Defense will be held