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 Liberty University School of Education. This version of the dissertation handbook supersedes all previous versions.
Administration and Support Team for Doctoral Programs

**Dr. Kurt Michael**  
Administrative Chair of Doctoral Programs and Research  
kmichael9@liberty.edu

**Dr. Scott Watson**  
Director of Quantitative Doctoral Research  
swatson@liberty.edu

**Dr. James Swezey**  
Director of Qualitative Doctoral Research  
Director of Applied Doctoral Research  
jaswezey@liberty.edu

**Kirsten Hoegh**  
Director of Doctoral Programs Support  
klstaaby@liberty.edu

**Geoff Matthews**  
Dissertation Coordinator  
gmatthews@liberty.edu

**Megan Stinson**  
Doctoral Secretary  
mestinson2@liberty.edu

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Doctoral Program and the Dissertation Process

The doctoral programs in the School of Education (SOE) consist of two primary components: the coursework and the dissertation. The student completes coursework to develop and hone critical thinking skills, writing skills, and knowledge. The purpose of the coursework is to prepare the student to become a doctoral candidate. The doctoral dissertation is the final academic requirement for the doctoral program and is designed to evaluate the candidate’s capabilities as a scholar. It is often more difficult and can often take longer to complete than the coursework.

1.2 Purpose of this Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to provide information about the dissertation process and related policies. 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 and the committee are outlined. Because the completed dissertation is a publication of Liberty University (LU) and represents the university, the SOE, and the author, candidates are expected to maintain high standards concerning the content and appearance of their dissertations.

2. Academic Policies and Specialized Coursework

There are several academic policies that pertain specifically to the doctoral programs in the SOE. Some of the policies are dependent on the specific degree completion plan (DCP) the student is working under. More information about these policies is detailed below.
2.1 Time Limit for Completion of the Degree

The maximum time limit for completion of the doctoral program is seven years. Any student who does not complete coursework within the permissible time limit for any reason, including discontinued enrollment, must reapply for admission. If the student wishes to continue in the program at a later date, he or she will need to reapply and, if accepted, will be subject to all requirements for the DCP for the current academic year. A student may reapply to the program only once, and the Administrative Chair of Doctoral Programs and Research will determine how many additional semesters will be granted. Students who wish to appeal for extra time in the program should submit a formal appeal via the SOE Policy Appeals Form.

Exception: For students admitted with 18 or more hours of credit from an Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) program or transferring from another doctoral program, the time limit for completion of the doctoral program is five years.

2.2 Number of NP Grades

Students are only allowed one No Pass (NP) grade as part of the doctoral program. Two NPs in any one course will result in removal from the program. This policy applies specifically to EDUC 970, 980, 987, 988, 989, and 990.

2.3 Course Enrollment Limits

Depending on the specific degree completion plan (DCP), candidates are restricted on the number of times they may enroll in the following courses: EDUC 987, 988, 989, and 990. Candidates should refer to the notes section at the bottom of their DCPs for more information about enrollment limits for their programs. Exceeding any enrollment limits will result in removal from the program. If the registration limit is exceeded, students who wish to continue in the program must submit a formal appeal via the SOE Policy Appeals Form in order to request an

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extension. Each student must include a full justification of the request and, if applicable, documentation evidencing his or her chair’s support of the extension.

If an appeal for an extension is approved, the Administrative Chair of Doctoral Programs and Research will determine the new deadline for program completion. Any student who does not complete coursework within the permissible time limit for any reason, including discontinued enrollment, must reapply for admission. If students wish to continue in the program at a later date, they need to reapply and, if accepted, will be subject to all requirements for the DCP for the current academic year.

2.4 Continuous Enrollment Policy

After completion of EDUC 980, 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 doctoral program per semester (including summer). Failure to maintain continuous enrollment will result in removal from the program. If students wish to continue in the program at a later date, they need to reapply and, if accepted, will be subject to all requirements for the DCP for the current academic year.

Note: Students returning to the program after breaking enrollment for more than one year may be required to complete additional coursework or retake courses at the discretion of Administrative Chair of Doctoral Programs and Research.

2.5 SOE Doctoral Community

The SOE Doctoral Community is a Blackboard site that houses important information about the dissertation process. While this handbook provides a general guide for the dissertation process, the SOE Doctoral Community provides more detailed step-by-step information for each milestone in the dissertation process. To access the community,
access Blackboard as you normally would,

look to the left hand side of the page under “Non-term Courses,”

click the link for “SOE_Doctoral_Community_01.”

3. The Dissertation Committee

The standard dissertation committee for the doctoral program consists of two members: (a) a dissertation chair and (b) a committee member. One of the two, either the chair or committee member, must be an approved methodologist (see note below). Upon entry in the program, students should begin thinking about identifying a potential dissertation chair. Each candidate should officially secure a dissertation chair by the conclusion of EDUC 980. Then, under the direction of the chair, the candidate should secure his or her committee member. A candidate's dissertation committee must include the following:

1. **Committee Chair:** A committee chair must hold an earned doctoral degree (Ed.D. or Ph.D.) in an education-related field and be employed by LU (residential or online). See Appendix A for more information about chair qualifications and responsibilities. See the SOE Doctoral Community in Blackboard for the approved Chair/Committee Member search list.

2. **Committee Member:** A committee member must hold an earned doctoral degree (Ed.D. or Ph.D.) in an education-related field and be employed by LU (residential or online). See Appendix A for more information about committee member qualifications and responsibilities. See the SOE Doctoral Community in Blackboard for the approved Chair/Committee Member search list.

**Note:** One member of the committee, either the chair or committee member, MUST be a Liberty SOE certified research methodologist. Liberty SOE certified research methodologists are
trained researchers in quantitative and/or qualitative research. They have demonstrated an established record of research, evidenced by their professional contributions to the field of education through peer-reviewed publications and conference presentations. They have experience in chairing and sitting as a committee member on numerous dissertation committees. Before being invited to serve as a Liberty SOE certified research methodologist, the methodologist’s coursework, dissertation, publications, presentations, and teaching ability are considered. The methodologist is required to sit through an interview by a team of Liberty SOE research faculty before certification is granted. See the SOE Doctoral Community in Blackboard for the certified methodologist search list.

3.1 Chair and Committee Selection (Committee Member Form)

The SOE Doctoral Community in Blackboard contains a section called Committee Search, which houses information about SOE approved chairs and committee members. In EDUC 980, candidates will be directed to access that section of the SOE Doctoral Community to select a prospective chair and committee member. Either the chair or the committee member must be a Liberty SOE certified research methodologist.

Candidates should first reach out to prospective chairs one at a time. A mass email must never be sent to multiple faculty members. 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. Candidates who need assistance selecting a prospective chair can email SOEDocPrograms@liberty.edu with an attached dissertation prospectus or methods chapter, as well as the names of any chairs already contacted, and the Doctoral Support Team will assist them in the committee search process.
If a chair indicates he or she is willing to serve on the committee, then the prospective chair and the candidate can discuss inviting the committee member. When the chair and candidate identify a willing committee member, the candidate will complete the Committee Member Form, available in EDUC 980.

All committee requests must be approved by the Doctoral Support Team. The Committee Member Form will be reviewed and candidates will be notified whether or not their chair and committee member selections are approved. Please see the SOE Doctoral Community for an outline of the specific steps in the chair and committee member selection process.

Note: Once a chair and committee member are approved, changes to the committee will only be considered when there are extenuating circumstances. Under these circumstances, the candidate should contact the Doctoral Support Team at SOEDocPrograms@liberty.edu to seek approval for a change in committee. The Doctoral Support Team is available to assist you with any questions or concerns during the dissertation process, and candidates should contact SOEDocPrograms@liberty.edu immediately if they encounter any issues, such as concerns with committee members.

4. Dissertation Guidelines

4.1 Dissertation Research Topics

Students should start considering dissertation topics upon entry to the program. When opportunities exist, students should research the topic of interest in the form of literature reviews and related papers for doctoral coursework. It is important to understand that a research topic is not the same as a research study. A topic is general in nature, whereas a research study is very narrow in focus with defined methods to answer a particular question(s).

Candidates are encouraged to pursue dissertation topics that are of personal relevance and

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significance; however, a candidate needs to ensure that the topic is researchable. It is wise to avoid topics that are overly ambiguous, challenging, and esoteric. Further, it is never ethical to conduct research where the researcher has any type of authority over the participants (e.g., teacher, professor, or administrator) if the data cannot be collected anonymously. Ideally, the research topic should be within the expertise and research interests of the potential dissertation chair. To become familiar with the SOE faculty and their research interests, candidates are encouraged to dialogue with faculty throughout their coursework, as well as look through the Chair/Committee Member search list in the SOE Doctoral Community in Blackboard while enrolled in EDUC 980.

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

4.2 Dissertation Research Designs

Dissertations may consist of various research designs; however, all research studies for the purpose of a doctoral dissertation should include a rigorous production of scholarly knowledge. Ph.D. candidates will choose either a quantitative or qualitative method, while Ed.D. candidates on the 2018-2019 degree completion plan (DCP) may choose an applied method (see note below for further explanation). Candidates may choose from among the following designs:

- For quantitative studies, standard research designs that a candidate may choose include true experiments (rarely done in education), quasi-experiments, causal-comparative designs, and correlational studies;
- for qualitative research, a candidate may choose to utilize phenomenological, grounded theory, case study, historical, and ethnographic designs; and

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• for applied research (Ed.D. candidates on the 2018-2019 DCP only), a candidate may choose to utilize an applied research design.

If a candidate wishes to use an alternate design, he or she will need to provide a rationale and seek approval from the Administrative Chair of Doctoral Programs and Research.

**Note:** Ed.D. candidates on the 2018-2019 DCPs may choose an applied study for the dissertation. If an Ed.D. student on the 2018-2019 DCP successfully completes EDUC 816 and EDUC 919 (Professional Writing & Research, applied section) or EDUC 812, EDUC 815, EDUC 817, and EDUC 919 (Professional Writing & Research, applied section), then he or she may do an applied dissertation.

4.3 Recommended Textbooks

It is highly recommended that candidates retain their textbooks from their previous research and methods courses. These include:

**Quantitative Textbooks.**


**Qualitative Textbooks.**


Sage Publications.

**Applied Research Textbook.**


### 4.4 Academic Honesty

Honesty and integrity are highly valued at LU and in the SOE. The same principles and expectations of academic honesty and integrity in coursework are true for the dissertation. The [Liberty University Code of Honor](#) details specific definitions, penalties, and processes of reporting. The presence of plagiarism, including structural 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 SOE administration decide the final consequences of academic dishonesty.

The dissertation needs to be an original work of the candidate, and the reuse of previous research (e.g., master’s theses, publications) is not acceptable. All previous work needs to be cited according to current American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines, and the APA manual’s section on self-plagiarism should be reviewed. Properly crediting another individual’s work is also an ethical imperative.

### 5. The Prospectus

In EDUC 980, the candidate develops a complete research prospectus. The Quantitative, Qualitative, or Applied Dissertation Template (located in the SOE Doctoral Community in Blackboard) is used to develop the prospectus. The prospectus, comprised of 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 and

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then ultimately to the dissertation manuscript. All other elements of the first three chapters of a
dissertation are present. The prospectus is typically from 30 to 50 pages long, with a literature
review (Chapter Two) of at least 15 pages.

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 previous dissertation
courses leading up to EDUC 980. When submitting the manuscript for review, candidates must
use correct APA formatting and grammar and ensure the research design and analysis sections
include scholarly research text references. It is highly recommended that EDUC 980 be taken
when 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 988, all feedback from the EDUC 980 course should be
discussed with the chair and committee member. Failure to implement the feedback,
especially in regard to research design and analysis, will result in significant delays in the
dissertation process.

6. Proposal

6.1 Develop the Proposal

After successful completion of EDUC 980, the candidate enrolls in the first three hours of
the proposal course. Depending on the specific program and DCP, candidates will either enroll in
EDUC 987, 988, or 989. Candidates on Ed.D. DCPs for 2017-18 and earlier will enroll in EDUC
989 to work on the proposal. Candidates on Ed.D. DCPs for 2018-2019 will enroll in EDUC 988
to work on the proposal. Candidates on the Ph.D. DCP for 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 will enroll
in EDUC 988 to work on the proposal. Candidates in the Ph.D. DCP for 2019-2020 and later will
enroll in EDUC 987 to work on the proposal. These courses will have individual sections for each

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chair. If the candidate does not have a chair at this point, the candidate should request to enroll in EDUC 988 section A00 and refer to Section 3.1 of this handbook for information about securing a dissertation chair.

Upon enrollment in the appropriate dissertation course, the candidate immediately begins working with his or her committee to develop a solid dissertation proposal. The proposal needs to consist, at a minimum, of the following: Title Page, Abstract, Table of Contents, Chapter One: Introduction, Chapter Two: Literature Review, Chapter Three: Methods, References, and Appendices with instruments, participant letters, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) applications. 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 by the chair, committee, and research director. A change in topic and/or design may warrant the need for a candidate to complete additional coursework or retake courses at the discretion of either the Director of Quantitative, Qualitative, or Applied Doctoral Research.

6.2 Proposal Review: Milestone One

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 to the committee member for feedback. Committee member reviews can take up to two weeks. Whichever member of the committee is serving as the methodologist will provide feedback on the manuscript, with a specific focus on the proposed research methods. Once the committee is satisfied with the proposal, the chair will send it to SOEDocReview@liberty.edu for a review by either the Director of Quantitative, Qualitative,
or Applied Doctoral Research. A director review can take up to two weeks. No proposal defense can take place without approval from either the Director of Quantitative, Qualitative, or Applied Doctoral Research.

The candidate should expect that the proposal manuscript will go through multiple revisions before a proposal is approved for a proposal defense. Candidates should contact the Dissertation Coordinator if two weeks is exceeded or the committee chair becomes unresponsive. The committee chair should contact the Dissertation Coordinator if the committee member is not responsive. Once the chair and the committee member decide the candidate is ready for a proposal defense and the proposal has passed the director review, the candidate may move forward with scheduling a proposal defense.

6.3 The Proposal Defense

Once the candidate incorporates and addresses all feedback from the chair, committee member, and director, the candidate discusses with the chair his or her readiness for the proposal defense and schedules a time for the defense. At this stage of the process, the candidate submits his or her manuscript to SafeAssign, the university’s plagiarism detection software, via the SafeAssign submission link in the dissertation course in Blackboard. It is the responsibility of the chair to review the results from this submission.

The 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 committee member. The chair is responsible for facilitating the proposal defense via WebEx (instructions for setting up a WebEx meeting are provided in the SOE Doctoral Community in Blackboard).

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6.4 Defend the Proposal: Milestone Two

The formal dissertation proposal defense is normally about 60 minutes in length. After prayer and preliminary remarks by the chair, the candidate presents the proposal. The proposal needs to include the following: a description of the study’s purpose and significance, the research question(s) and hypothesis(es) (if quantitative), and the methods (including the plans for the research design and analysis). The following procedures are recommended for the formal 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
- Chair will contact the candidate with the committee decision and any required revisions
- Chair will notify the SOE at SOEDocReview@liberty.edu of the outcome of the proposal defense within 24 hours

A maximum of two proposals may be defended. Failure to successfully defend within two successive proposal defenses could result in removal from the program or remediation (e.g., enrollment in additional coursework) before progression in the dissertation process. This decision is made by the Administrative Chair of Doctoral Programs and Research in consultation with the Director of Quantitative, Qualitative, or Applied Doctoral Research. Within 24 hours of a successful proposal defense, the dissertation chair must send the Proposal Defense Decision Form to SOEDocReview@liberty.edu to inform the Doctoral Support Team when the candidate has successfully defended his or her proposal (see Appendix B for the Revised 11/5/2019
Proposal Defense Decision Form). Failure to do so could result in the candidate being removed from the program.

7. IRB

7.1 Submit IRB Application(s)

After completion of a successful proposal defense, IRB review and approval is needed before any participants may be recruited or data may be collected. IRB is a federally mandated body established to ensure ethical treatment of human subjects. Within 10 business days of the approved proposal defense, the candidate must submit his or her IRB application, ancillary material, and documentation of site permission(s) to his or her chair for an initial review and approval. The chair is responsible to ensure (a) candidates use the most current application retrieved directly from the LU IRB website and IRB SOE webpage, (b) all applicable items are fully addressed and free from spelling or grammar errors, and (c) that correct templates provided by the IRB are used (e.g., the informed consent). Once the chair has reviewed and approved the IRB application (by completing the signature page of the application), the candidate will submit the IRB application and all other related documents to irb@liberty.edu for review. The chair MUST be copied on all communication with the IRB.

Candidates must submit documentation of institutional permission from each research site to the IRB prior to receiving IRB approval. If study procedures will involve schools or school districts, permission should come in the form of a letter or email, but if study procedures involve colleges or universities, IRB approval from those institutions will need to be obtained as directed by the specific institution’s IRB. Permission from the research site may be sought prior to submitting the LU IRB application, but candidates must not begin recruiting participants until after receiving full IRB approval. If a candidate is unable to gain permission from the research site

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prior to submitting an application for IRB approval, LU IRB will review the rest of the application and issue a conditional approval letter to assist in obtaining needed site permission. Then once the candidate provides the applicable site permission documentation to the LU IRB, the IRB will change the conditional approval to a full approval, and the candidate may begin his or her research.

If the study will include faculty, students, or staff from a single department or group within LU, the candidate must obtain permission from the appropriate supervisor (e.g., Dean, Department Chair, Coach) and submit a signed letter or date/time stamped email to LU’s IRB to verify approval to use students from that department or group. The candidate may submit the application without having obtained this permission; however, the IRB will not approve the study until proof of permission has been received. For studies that will include only SOE students, please contact SOEDocPrograms@liberty.edu to request the Use of SOE Students in Research Form. If the study will include faculty, students, or staff from multiple departments or groups within LU (e.g., all sophomores, LUO), the IRB will seek administrative approval on the candidate’s behalf. Candidates should NOT contact the Provost’s office directly.

Liberty University researchers planning to conduct survey research limited to LU students, faculty, and/or staff are required to use Qualtrics. Qualtrics is Liberty University’s approved web-based survey software tool. It allows the user to construct and distribute complex surveys and provide statistical reports based on the results. For studies that will involve survey research with LU students, faculty, and or/staff please contact SOEDocPrograms@liberty.edu for information about Qualtrics.

7.2 Receive IRB Approval: Milestone Three

Although most IRB applications for educational research do not require full reviews, the

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IRB will make that decision. Candidates should refer to approval timeframes on the LU IRB website. Modifications to the application should be expected. Candidates should take care to thoroughly review the LU IRB website and incorporate all of the methodologist’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 removed from the program. Once IRB approval is obtained, the candidate must forward the IRB approval letter only, which includes the IRB approval number, to the Doctoral Support Team at SOEDocReview@liberty.edu.

**8. The Dissertation**

**8.1 Execute the Research and Develop Dissertation Manuscript**

After IRB approval is given and all necessary consents (adults) and/or assents (minors) are given from participants, the candidate executes his or her research, including data collection and analysis. Each candidate should note that depending on his or her level of comfort, ability, and competence with the chosen quantitative, qualitative analysis, or applied research, he or she may seek an outside consultant. 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.

Under the guidance of the committee chair, the candidate refines Chapters One through Three and writes Chapters Four and Five. The committee chair may advise the candidate to seek guidance from the committee member (if applicable) on specific aspects or may require that the candidate seek an outside editor. The Quantitative, Qualitative, and Applied Dissertation Templates are provided in the SOE Doctoral Community.
8.2 Dissertation Review: Milestone Four

The chair always reviews the dissertation manuscript first. When the chair is satisfied with the dissertation and has given approval, the chair disseminates the manuscript to the committee member for feedback. Committee member reviews can take up to two weeks. Whichever member of the committee is serving as the methodologist will provide feedback on the manuscript, with a specific focus on the research methods. Once the committee is satisfied with the dissertation, the chair will send it to SOEDocReview@liberty.edu for a review by either the Director of Quantitative, Qualitative, or Applied Doctoral Research. A director review can take up to two weeks. *No dissertation defense can take place without the approval of either the Director of Quantitative, Qualitative, or Applied Doctoral Research.*

8.3 Submit the Dissertation Manuscript for a Professional Edit

The final defense cannot be scheduled until the chair, committee member, and director have reviewed the dissertation and each granted approval for a final defense. During the final revision process, a professional edit of the manuscript is required. The professional edit can be performed prior to or after the defense at the discretion of the dissertation chair and/or committee member based on the quality of the manuscript. This requirement may include a full edit or may simply be an APA edit. Candidates may use any professional editor.

8.4 Schedule a Dissertation Defense (Register for EDUC 990)

Ultimately, the chair and committee member, with approval from either the Director of Quantitative, Qualitative, or Applied Doctoral Research, decide when the manuscript is approved for defense. In the rare instance where the chair and committee member may disagree about the candidate’s readiness for the defense, the Director of Quantitative, Qualitative, or Applied Doctoral Research may make the final decision.

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Once the dissertation manuscript is approved by the committee and director, the candidate and chair will schedule a time for the defense. The candidate is responsible for identifying dates and times convenient for the committee and for providing a list of dates and times 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 in the SOE Doctoral Community in Blackboard).

Once a date and time are established, the candidate is also responsible for preparing and forwarding the Dissertation Announcement Template (available in the SOE Doctoral Community in Blackboard) and SafeAssign report of the manuscript to the Doctoral Support Team at SOEDocReview@liberty.edu (including the chair in the CC line) to schedule the defense. The candidate should submit the dissertation manuscript to SafeAssign in EDUC 989. The chair should review the SafeAssign report to ensure it is acceptable before the candidate submits the Dissertation Announcement Template.

The chair is responsible for informing each committee member of the date, time, and procedures of the defense. The chair is also responsible for scheduling and facilitating the WebEx meeting for the defense (instructions for setting up a WebEx meeting are provided in the SOE Doctoral Community in Blackboard).

When the defense date and time are finalized, the candidate will be moved from EDUC 989 to EDUC 990 by the Doctoral Support Team. **Please note that a candidate may not enroll in EDUC 990 without a confirmed dissertation defense date by all parties involved.** Candidates should remain enrolled in EDUC 989 until a final defense is scheduled with the SOE.

### 8.5 Pre-defense

One to two weeks prior to the defense, the chair may schedule and conduct a pre-
defense phone call or e-conferencing session to finalize the defense details and complete a practice defense. This is a good opportunity to make sure WebEx works well for the candidate and committee members before the final defense date. At the chair’s discretion, the pre-defense conference may include only the chair and candidate.

8.6 Preparing for the Defense

The candidate is responsible for emailing the final copy of the dissertation manuscript to the committee approximately two weeks prior to the dissertation defense. The candidate prepares a 15-20 minute presentation of his or her dissertation for the defense; a visual presentation (e.g., PowerPoint) is required. The presentation should be sent to the committee at least one week prior to the defense. Candidates are required to use a webcam, have reliable internet and phone connections, be in professional dress, be in a professional location, and have technological support on hand, if needed, to ensure the defense runs smoothly. WebEx must be used for distance defenses, and the chair is responsible for setting up the WebEx meeting (instructions for setting up a WebEx meeting are provided in the SOE Doctoral Community in Blackboard). Only the candidate is required to share video through WebEx during the defense.

8.7 Defend the Dissertation: Milestone Five

The dissertation defense takes approximately one hour to complete. The only people who should attend a defense are the candidate, the dissertation committee, LU faculty members, and SOE doctoral students. The following procedures are recommended:

- Introductions and welcome
- Opening prayer by chair and introduction of the committee and candidate
- 15-20 minute presentation by candidate
- Questions and comments from the committee

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Questions and comments from the SOE Faculty

Dismissal of candidate for committee deliberation

Re-connection with candidate for decision and discussion of revisions, as applicable

Final remarks

After prayer and preliminary remarks by the chair, the candidate gives the defense presentation. The presentation needs to include the following: 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 should be used as an aid. Reading from the presentation or script is not acceptable and may result in an unsuccessful defense. Following the defense presentation, the committee members will ask questions. Following questions and discussion, all individuals not on the committee, including the candidate, will disconnect to provide the committee the opportunity to discuss the defense. Using the Dissertation Defense Decision Form for guidance, the committee will make a decision (see Appendix B for Dissertation Defense Decision Form and related rubrics). The candidate is invited to reconnect, and the chair will inform the candidate of the outcome. The committee makes one of the following decisions:

- Approved with no revisions or minor revisions
- Provisionally approved with major 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
chair may require that the candidate have his or her manuscript professionally edited again.

A maximum of two dissertation defenses may be completed. Failure to defend successfully within two defenses will result in removal from the program. Within 24 hours of the defense, the chair should send the Dissertation Defense Decision Form (which includes a final grade) to SOEDocReview@liberty.edu so that the Doctoral Support Team can post the final grade in EDUC 990.

9. Publication and Graduation

Upon approval from the chair, the candidate follows the Jerry Falwell Library (JFL) submission guidelines for publication. These guidelines must be strictly followed and can be accessed at the following webpage: Theses and Dissertation Publishing Guidelines. Candidates should note that the final grade for EDUC 990 cannot be posted without the JFL confirmation e-mail evidencing that the dissertation is accepted. This email must be forwarded to SOEDocReview@liberty.edu by the last day of the term in order to receive a final grade for EDUC 990. The dissertation should be submitted to the JFL no later than one week before the end of the term as it may take one to two weeks to receive the confirmation e-mail from the JFL.

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 LU faculty member or approved chair found in the Chair/Committee Member search section of the SOE Doctoral Community in Blackboard.
- Must hold an earned doctorate degree from a regionally accredited university. This normally means a Ph.D. or Ed.D. in an education-related field.

Responsibilities

- Provides mentorship to doctoral candidates (no more than 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 member.
- Communicates with the committee member frequently and welcomes his or her suggestions for the candidate’s manuscript.
- Uses all dissertation technologies as outlined in the Dissertation Handbook.

Revised 11/5/2019
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.
- If the chair is the methodologist on the committee, he or she will also be directly responsible for ensuring that the highest standards are met regarding research methods, design, procedures, and analysis (primarily Chapters Three and Four of the dissertation).

Committee Member

Qualifications

- Approved School of Education committee member found in the Chair/Committee Member search section of the SOE Doctoral Community.
- Must hold an earned doctorate degree from a regionally accredited university. This normally means a Ph.D. or Ed.D. in an education-related field.

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 candidate in the dissertation process. All feedback on manuscripts, unless otherwise communicated to the candidate, should be provided within a two week timeframe.
- If the committee member is the methodologist on the committee, he or she will also be directly responsible for ensuring that the highest standards are met regarding research methods, design, procedures, and analysis (primarily Chapters Three and Four of the dissertation).

Revised 11/5/2019
Appendix B: Proposal and Dissertation Defense Decision Form

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Proposal and Dissertation Defense Decision Form

☐ Proposal (complete first page of this form only)

☐ Dissertation (complete all pages of this form)

Chair: After completing the form, submit the form to the committee for input and for approval. Once the committee has approved the form, email it to SOEDocReview@liberty.edu.

Date

Title

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chair</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Committee Member</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Committee Member</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Committee Decision

☐ Approved with minor or no further revisions
☐ Provisionally approved with major revisions
☐ Not approved with recommendations to revise or rewrite

Explain decision (as applicable):

List revisions needed (if applicable):

(For final dissertation defense only, please continue to the rubrics on the following pages.)

Candidate grade to be assigned for EDUC 990 (please check one):

Revised 11/5/2019
### Presentation at Dissertation Defense Rubric

(Highlight the appropriate score for each category based on the candidate’s presentation during the final defense)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advanced (3 pts)</th>
<th>Proficient (2 pts)</th>
<th>Developing (1 pt)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literature Review</strong></td>
<td>The presentation includes a complete representation of related research along with a complete written literature review to support and justify the research.</td>
<td>The presentation includes a complete representation of related research along with a complete written literature review to support and justify the research.</td>
<td>The presented literature review may be unclear or non-existent, and the written literature review does not fully justify the research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theoretical Framework</strong></td>
<td>The presentation and the written literature review include a complete theoretical framework to fully support the research question(s).</td>
<td>The presentation and the written literature review include a theoretical framework to support the research question(s).</td>
<td>There is a brief or non-existent mention of the theoretical framework during the presentation and/or the literature review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodology</strong></td>
<td>The presentation and methodology chapter is written in correct format and includes clear, understandable and justified questions, objectives and hypotheses.</td>
<td>The presentation and methodology chapter includes use of proper format, and appropriate questions, objectives and/or hypotheses.</td>
<td>The presentation and methodology chapter does not include proper formatting and/or does not include clear question, objectives, or hypotheses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Collection</strong></td>
<td>The candidate thoroughly and clearly articulates the design and related data collection procedures.</td>
<td>The candidate clearly describes the design or the data collection procedures.</td>
<td>The candidate mentions design and data collection procedures, but does neither clearly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Analysis</strong></td>
<td>The candidate clearly evaluates, synthesizes, and interprets educational research through presentation of data and findings.</td>
<td>The candidate evaluates and interprets educational research through presentation of data and findings.</td>
<td>The candidate does not clearly present findings and data analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication: Presentation</strong></td>
<td>The candidate is poised during the presentation, and clearly and fluently demonstrates effective communication in writing, and while</td>
<td>The candidate demonstrates poised and effective communication in writing, and while</td>
<td>The candidate lacks poise, and does not present information clearly and effectively.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Presentation at Dissertation Defense Rubric

(Highlight the appropriate score for each category based on the candidate’s presentation during the final defense)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Advanced (3 pts)</th>
<th>Proficient (2 pts)</th>
<th>Developing (1 pt)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>while speaking, and while listening to others.</td>
<td>speaking during the presentation.</td>
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### Written Dissertation Manuscript Rubric

(Highlight the appropriate score for each category based on the quality of the final dissertation manuscript)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Advanced (3 pts)</th>
<th>Proficient (2 pts)</th>
<th>Developing (1 pt)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>Candidate clearly articulates the nature of a research topic, including the relevant literature, the gap in research to be filled, the purpose, and the research design.</td>
<td>Candidate articulates the nature of a research topic, including the relevant literature, the purpose, and the research design.</td>
<td>Candidate is unable to articulate the nature of a research topic in an understandable fashion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review of Literature</strong></td>
<td>The candidate includes a complete representation of related research along with a complete written literature review to support and justify the research.</td>
<td>The candidate includes a representation of related research along with a written literature review to justify the research.</td>
<td>The literature review may be unclear or non-existent, and the written literature review does not fully justify the research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods/ Approach</strong></td>
<td>The methodology chapter is written in correct format and includes clear, understandable and justified questions, objectives and hypotheses.</td>
<td>The methodology chapter includes use of proper format, and appropriate questions, objectives and/or hypotheses.</td>
<td>The methodology chapter does not include proper formatting and/or does not include clear question, objectives, or hypotheses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results/ Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>The candidate clearly evaluates, synthesizes, and interprets educational research through presentation of data and findings.</td>
<td>The candidate evaluates and interprets educational research through presentation of data and findings.</td>
<td>The candidate does not clearly present findings and data analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion and Summary</strong></td>
<td>The candidate demonstrates complete ability to conduct and</td>
<td>The candidate demonstrates ability to conduct and interpret a</td>
<td>The candidate fails to demonstrate the ability to conduct and</td>
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</table>
### Written Dissertation Manuscript Rubric
(Highlight the appropriate score for each category based on the quality of the final dissertation manuscript)

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Advanced (3 pts)</th>
<th>Proficient (2 pts)</th>
<th>Developing (1 pt)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpret a Study</strong></td>
<td>interpret a study through discussion of the findings and results to conduct an independent research investigation that contributes to the literature.</td>
<td>study that may contribute to the literature.</td>
<td>interpret a study and discuss the results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing Quality</strong></td>
<td>The candidate utilizes skills in writing and other forms of communication that are consistent with professional expectations at the doctoral level, including proper use of formatting.</td>
<td>The candidate utilizes skills in writing and other forms of communication that are appropriate, including proper use of formatting.</td>
<td>The candidate does not demonstrate skills in writing and use of proper formatting for completion of a dissertation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional</strong></td>
<td>The candidate submits clear documentation (including a draft of an article) of plans and procedures for publication of the dissertation findings in a professional journal.</td>
<td>The candidate submits documentation and tentative plans for publication of the dissertation findings in a professional journal.</td>
<td>The candidate is unable to articulate plans for publication in a professional journal.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Disposition Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In your work with the doctoral candidate, has he or she displayed the following dispositions?</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (4 pts)</th>
<th>Agree (3 pts)</th>
<th>Neither Agree or Disagree (2 pts)</th>
<th>Disagree (1 pt)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (0 pt)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social Responsibility</td>
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<td>Commitment / Work Ethic</td>
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<td>Reflection</td>
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Revised 11/5/2019
<table>
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<th>Disposition Rubric</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In your work with the doctoral candidate, has he or she displayed the following dispositions?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree (4 pts)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
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</table>
Appendix C: Dissertation Approval Process

* Please consult your degree completion plan to determine your first dissertation course.

** Send email to SOEDocReview@liberty.edu
Appendix E: Qualitative Dissertation Template

The purpose of the qualitative dissertation template is to ensure that the dissertation manuscript is a quality document. This template 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. There should be two spaces after the punctuation at the end of sentences. Page numbers should all be Arabic numerals and placed in the upper right hand corner (with the page number on the first 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 TITLE PAGE: THE TITLE 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 Education or Doctor of Philosophy]

Liberty University

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 Education or 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, starting with the purpose (see template below) or rationale of the study, the research questions (or at least the central research question), 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 250 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) 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 Abstract, Copyright Page (optional), Dedication (optional), Acknowledgements (optional), List of Tables, List of Figures, CHAPTER TITLES (all caps), Level 1 headings, Level 2 headings, 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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Copyright Page (Optional) ...............................................................................................................4
Dedication (Optional) ......................................................................................................................5
Acknowledgments (Optional) ........................................................................................................6
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    Purpose Statement ...............................................................................................................16
    Significance of the Study .......................................................................................................17
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<td>Credibility</td>
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<td>Dependability and Confirmability</td>
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<td>Participants</td>
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<td>George</td>
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<td>Sally</td>
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<td>Etc.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Implications</td>
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<td>Delimitations and Limitations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 Overview must clearly and concisely describe the contents and organization of the chapter. 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 (i.e., how the problem has evolved over time), social (i.e., contexts), and theoretical (e.g., important variables, the theoretical concepts, and the principles underpinning the research) contexts for the research problem. Each of the three contexts must be specifically examined using APA Level 2 headings for each. You 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 you to articulate your motivation for conducting
the study and identify the philosophical assumptions (ontological, epistemological, rhetorical, axiological) you bring 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 researcher seeks to address (Wiersma, 1995, p. 404). It 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., five years or less since publication) literature (three to five 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. You should state: “The problem is….” In one to two focused paragraphs, convince the reader why the particular issue or problem your study is investigating needs to be done.

- Introduce the general topic needing more research, including relevant/recent statistics on the issue.
- Summarize the recent research on the topic.
- Explain how/why the current research is deficient or falls short.
- Conclude with a focused statement identifying the problem in relation to your research design.
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. You are encouraged to use the following template adapted from Creswell (2013):

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 should align 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 (i.e., 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 (including citations) 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. Note that traditional research hypotheses are not necessary or
appropriate for most qualitative studies.

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. The Summary includes a succinct restatement of the
problem and purpose of the study and provides a strong conclusion to the chapter.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter Two is often the longest chapter of the dissertation. The minimum length must 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 Level 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., five years or less since publication), though it is understood that some seminal studies published more than five years are appropriate in certain sections and discussions. The Overview must clearly and concisely describe the contents and organization of the chapter.

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 the 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, but 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 relationships 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 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 five 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 Overview may begin with a brief restatement of the nature and purpose of the study. It must clearly and concisely describe the contents and organization of the chapter. 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.

Design

In the Design section, the planned type of study (e.g., qualitative) and research design (e.g., case study, ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, or historical research) should be identified. Identify (a) why the study is qualitative, (b) why the general design is appropriate, and (c) why the specific type of design was selected. 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 rationale for your site selection. Convenience alone is not sufficient. Only important features which have 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 pool, 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. If using a published survey or questionnaire to identify or describe participants, 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. This is not considered a data collection method.
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.

**The Researcher's Role**

In this section you must clearly and thoroughly explain your role as the “human instrument” in the study. You must be straightforward about your relationship to the participants, your role in the setting or research site, and any bias or assumptions you bring to the study that may influence how you view the data or conduct your 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 only required data collection method is interviews. Others may include, but are not limited to, 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 have
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 list with an item-by-item discussion of each question and its basis in the literature. Here is an example as it must appear in your paper:

**Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions**

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another.
2. Please walk me through your worldview development timeline.
3. Of the formative experiences you identified on your timeline, which would you say were the most significant?
4. What made them significant?
5. Is there something else you would like to add to your timeline that you haven’t already written down?
6. Experts suggest that a person is often not aware of his or her worldview and its influence on his or her life and choices. On a scale from one to five, with one being very unaware and five being completely aware, how aware are you of your worldview?

7. Describe your worldview.

8. Ideally, part of becoming an adult involves the process of examining and evaluating one’s worldview. Where are you in that process?

9. How does your parents’ worldview compare to yours?

10. Think about a friend who also has a Biblical worldview. What formative experiences do you think they would want to tell me about?

11. Tell me about the struggles you’ve experienced-- since graduating high school-- as you have worked out your worldview.

12. What questions, if any, came up for you as you developed a Biblical worldview?

13. If you were a parent of a 19-year-old, how would you help her as she develops a Biblical worldview?

14. Imagine you’re being interviewed at a youth conference, in front of thousands of Christian young people. What would you want to tell them to expect to experience as they develop their worldview over the next few years?

15. I’d like to ask you a question that will prompt you to put everything together, so to speak. Reflecting on your lifetime of experience developing a Biblical worldview, what advice would you give to Christians your age as they develop their worldview?

16. This next question is unique in that it will invite you to look ahead. How do you expect your worldview to change or develop over the next several years?
17. We’ve covered a lot of ground in our conversation, and I so appreciate the time you’ve
given to this. One final question… What else do you think would be important for me to
know about the development of your worldview?

Questions one through five are knowledge questions (Patton, 2015), and are designed as
follow-up questions to the worldview development timelines that will have been previously
created and submitted by the participants. These questions are intended to be relatively
straightforward and non-threatening, and will ideally serve to help develop rapport between the
participant and me (Patton, 2015). The questions will be adjusted as necessary for each
participant, based on the data included on each individual timeline.

Fowler (1981) suggested that for adolescents, the formation of complex systems of values
and beliefs is primarily a subconscious task. Only after one progresses out of synthetic-
conventional faith does a person begin to develop a deep awareness of one’s faith. With this new
awareness comes the capacity to consciously reflect on one’s faith and to make intentional
choices about what to include in a workable system of meaning. Furthermore, Sire (2015)
concluded that components of a person’s worldview may be consciously or unconsciously held.
Therefore, it is important to ask questions that will help participants reflect on their level of
awareness of their own worldview and on the progress they have made in examining and
evaluating their worldview. Questions six through eight are designed for these purposes.

Question nine invites the participant to reflect on his or her worldview as compared to his
or her parents’ worldview. Several studies suggest that there is a strong correlation between an
individual’s worldview and that of his or her parents (Brickhill, 2010; Kimball, Boyatzis, Cook,
Leonard, & Flanagan, 2013; Perkins, 2007). Probing about parent worldviews will help to
discover a more complete picture of influences on worldview development. Since research
suggests that family is such a significant factor in worldview development, it is likely that participants will mention their parents in some way in the context of their timeline. If participants have already discussed parental influence, this question may not need to be asked.

The tenth question invites the participant to take another person’s perspective, which is often helpful in gaining new insights (Patton, 2015). It is also a non-threatening question, allowing the participants to talk more in-depth about the phenomenon of worldview development, without requiring them to be highly vulnerable. However, it is hoped that the question will lead to keeping the interview moving along in an engaging fashion and yielding valuable data. This is particularly important given the nature of the question that follows.

Question 11 is the first question that will likely require a relatively high degree of vulnerability, and for this reason, I chose to not ask it until the interview is well underway. Ideally by this time in the interview, a good rapport will have been established (Patton, 2015), and therefore the participant will be willing to share more intimate details about his or her struggles in developing a Biblical worldview. For several researchers, personal struggle is an important component of worldview development (Bryant, 2011; Fowler, 1981; Mayhew, 2012; Mayhew, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2012).

Questioning truth seems to be a key element of the passage from an adolescent faith to an adult faith (Fowler, 1981; King, Clardy, & Ramos, 2014). Question 12 is designed to elicit some of the questions participants may have asked as part of the process of developing their worldview. I will be particularly attentive to the concept of cognitive dissonance that such questions can cause (Bryant, 2011; Ciarrochi & Heaven, 2012; Fowler, 1981). I will also be prepared to probe further with the participants in order to gain additional data about how they felt
about and how they responded to questions that were suggested by becoming exposed to alternate worldviews held by others (Mayhew, 2012; Mayhew, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2012).

Questions 13 and 14 are designed to put participants into role-playing contexts, which can help the participants to think more deeply about their own worldview development by inviting them to step outside of themselves and become an observer, or co-researcher (Patton, 2015; Creswell, 2013). Questions 15 and 16 put the participant in the role of expert on worldview development, which is yet another way to elicit different and valuable data. To encourage maximum value from these questions, I have crafted them to include prefatory statements, which will help to transition the participants into the role of expert (Patton, 2015). Question number 17 is a one-shot question (Patton, 2015), designed to give the participant one further opportunity to offer valuable insight. This one-shot question also serves as the closing question (Patton, 2015), giving the participant freedom to add to what has already been said, keeping him or her in the role of expert on his or her own life and story. From my experience in asking thousands of such questions as a life coach, I have found that these one-shot, parting questions often yield a tremendous amount of valuable information, when the interview or discussion could very easily have been otherwise shut down.

--- End example---

By explaining in detail the purpose of each question, 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.

**Surveys/Questionnaires**

All surveys and questionnaires must elicit qualitative, not quantitative data. If using a published survey or questionnaire, be sure to gain permission to use it 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. Identify and describe the specific documents collected. Provide a specific rationale for why each type of document was selected.

**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. Focus group questions must be developed and reported using the same format as interview questions (see Interview section above).

**Observations**

If conducting observations, 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
(e.g., 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 APA Level 2 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). Methods for increasing trustworthiness include, but are not limited to, triangulation, member checks, prolonged engagement, negative case analysis, peer/expert review, external audit, etc.

**Credibility**

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 and Confirmability**

Dependability and confirmability are similar to reliability in quantitative studies and deal with consistency, which is addressed through the provision of rich detail about the context and setting of the study.

**Transferability**

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.
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. The Summary provides a strong conclusion to the chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of Chapter Four 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. The Overview must clearly and concisely describe the contents and organization of 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 Three (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 must be organized thematically and according to research questions, using two APA Level 2 sub-headings. Theme Development (or some such name) under its own heading, must reflect the steps for data analysis described by the candidate in Chapter Three. Theme development must be supported using appropriate narrative and data from each data collection method, especially through the use of participant quotes. Do not simply list a series of participant quotes detached from any narrative. Unexpected codes and/or 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 or appendices demonstrating how they were organized to inform themes.

Research Question Responses (or some such name), under its own heading, must supply narrative answers to each of the research questions using data collected, but primarily the themes developed in the previous section. Select participant quotes are appropriate to support the responses to the research questions.

Summary

Provide a chapter summary. The Summary includes a succinct conclusion to the chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

Begin the Overview section with a brief restatement of the purpose of the study. The Overview must clearly and concisely describe the contents and organization of the chapter. Chapter Five is unique in that you are expected to use your 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 delimitations and limitations, and (f) recommendations for future research. Note: This chapter is not part of the plan, prospectus, or proposal.

Summary of Findings

Provide a concise summary of the study findings, briefly answering each research question. Do not merely cut and paste from the Chapter Four Results section.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss the study findings in relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The empirical and theoretical literature discussions must be written under their own APA Level 2 headings. 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? How does your study extend or shed new light on theory informing the topic?

Implications

The purpose of this section is to address the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study. The theoretical, empirical, and practical implications must be written
under their own APA Level 2 headings. Depending on the topic, it may be appropriate to include specific recommendations for various stakeholders, such as policy makers, administrators, teachers, parents, etc.

**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.).

**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. Include an argument for what topics and populations should be studied, along with specific types of designs that should be employed.

**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, bold, and centered.
The Appendix must include a variety of artifacts. The appendix must 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. Each appendix must be addressed in the narrative text. The appendix title should be capitalized, bold, and centered.
Appendix D: Quantitative Dissertation Template

The purpose of the quantitative dissertation template is to ensure that the dissertation manuscript is a quality document. This template 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 all be Arabic numerals and placed in the upper right hand corner (with the page number on the first 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 TITLE PAGE: THE TITLE 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 Education or Doctor of Philosophy]

Liberty University

Year
A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree

[Doctor of Education or 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 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 or citations. The word “ABSTRACT” should be in all caps, bold, and centered. 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.
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 Abstract, Copyright Page (optional), Dedication (optional), Acknowledgements (optional), List of Tables, List of Figures, CHAPTER TITLES (all caps), Level 1 headings, Level 2 headings, 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

Start Chapter One with a brief, introductory statement (one short paragraph). This should orient the reader to the contents of the chapter.

Background

The Background section educates the reader regarding the topic. Start this section by catching the reader’s attention. Use recent evidence from at least three to four scholarly journal articles published within the last five years. The Background section then moves into an overview of the most relevant literature regarding the issue and provides a historical, social, and theoretical context regarding the issue. Remember that this is just an overview. You will go into more depth in Chapter Two.

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 five to seven scholarly journal articles or books. Some sources may be older than five years old for this section.

A conceptual and/or theoretical background overview relates the issue to similar studies and discusses the theories that drive them. The background’s theory discussion should be supported by at least three to five scholarly journal articles and/or books. Some sources may be older than five years old for this section. Conclude the Background section by summarizing the information and preparing the reader for the problem. The Background section is approximately three to five pages long.
Problem Statement

The problem statement discusses how the literature may not have completely addressed the issue. For example, there may be controversy regarding mixed results from other studies, unexamined populations, lack of new testing instruments, etc. In other words, convince the reader that there is not enough research available to bring the issue to closure. 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 one to three scholarly journal articles published within the last five years. The problem statement ends with a declarative statement: “The problem is …” which is clearly supported by current literature. The Problem Statement section is approximately one 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). 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.

Significance of the Study

At this point, the reader should be convinced 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. 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 includes 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 the sample being studied. References are very important here, as they lend additional credence and support for your study. All assertions in this section need to be well-supported by the literature; at least three to five scholarly journal articles published within the last five years. The Significance of the Study section is approximately one page long.

**Research Question(s)**

The proposed research questions need to be derived from the problem and purpose statements. A well-formulated research question (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) identifies 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 as compared to 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 as compared to those who use synchronous on-line learning system?

**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. Italicize terms to be defined. 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

Overview

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) an overview, (b) a theoretical or conceptual framework section, (c) the related literature section, and (d) a summary.

The overview should provide a general explanation and overview of the chapter with links to the purpose of the study. This should be done in a short paragraph.

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

The conceptual or theoretical background section should provide the reader with a direct connection to the 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.
Related Literature

The purpose of the Related Literature section is to provide a tight synthesis (not simply a study-by-study summary) of the existing general 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. Subheadings at Level 2 and Level 3 are often necessary. Often 1,000 to 2,000 articles are reviewed and at least 100 to 200 are integrated in the construction of this chapter. The majority of the literature cited in the chapter needs to be current (i.e., five years or less since publication).

Summary

Provide a chapter summary. The Summary provides a strong conclusion to the chapter.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Start Chapter Three with a brief, introductory statement (one short paragraph). This should orient the reader to the contents of the chapter.

Design

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 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.

Research Question(s)

The proposed research questions need to be derived from the problem and purpose statements. A well-formulated research question (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) identifies 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 as compared to 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 as compared to those who use synchronous on-line learning system?

### Hypothesis(es)

Every research question will normally 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 the planned analysis method. Well-formulated hypotheses are based on the following criteria: (a) the hypothesis states the expected relationship/differences between variables, (b) the hypothesis is testable, (c) the hypothesis is stated as 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 directly influence the statistical procedures used. It is recommended that hypotheses be written in the null form, mainly because that is how they will be treated in the statistical analyses. If hypotheses are written in directional form (directional research hypotheses), there must be a firm basis in the literature for doing so. 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 as compared to those who use a synchronous on-line learning system as shown by (the instrument name).

**H02**: 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 as compared to those who use a synchronous on-line learning system as shown by (the instrument name).

**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, including references to research texts, must be provided to demonstrate the adequate sample size. Then, describe where the sample came from. For example, “… the sample came from three different 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. At this point, write this section in future tense. It will be changed to past tense in the final version.

**Instrumentation**

In the instrumentation section, the instruments that are used to measure each variable need 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 an instrument was used. This will help with its credibility. For example, “the instrument was used in numerous studies (e.g., Jackson, 2014; Jones, 2013; Smith, 2009).” 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…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. State that permission was granted to use the instrument(s). All documents related to the instrument should be included as appendices. The instrument itself should only be included if written permission was granted to do so.

Procedures

The procedure section is similar to a “cookbook.” It should contain enough detail that another researcher can read your procedures 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 to 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) should be included in the appendices.

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 the research questions, hypotheses, and the type of data collected. In other words, why is the chosen analysis the most appropriate choice to test the hypotheses? The rationale needs to be
supported by your research textbooks. For each identified analysis, be sure to discuss 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. 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

Overview

A short introductory paragraph is appropriate for this chapter. It should orient the reader to the contents of the chapter. After the introductory paragraph, include the research question(s) and hypothesis(es), as shown below.

Research Question(s)

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

Null Hypothesis(es)

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 as compared to those who use a synchronous on-line learning system as shown by (the instrument name).

H02: 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 as compared to those who use a synchronous on-line learning system as shown by (the instrument name).

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**

**Hypothesis(es)**

It is useful to organize the Results section according to each of the hypotheses. That is, describe the null hypothesis, and then identify the corresponding statistical test with the hypothesis. Include assumption tests, analysis, alpha level, effect size, and whether you rejected or failed to reject the null. Once you have finished analysis of the first hypothesis, state the second hypothesis and adhere to the same stringent level of analysis and reporting. Repeat this process until all the hypotheses 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 this case, consider using a heading labeled Assumption Tests.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Start Chapter Five with a brief, introductory statement (one short paragraph). This should orient the reader to the contents of the chapter.

Discussion

Begin this section with the purpose of the study and a brief overview. The purpose of the study should be presented as a one sentence declarative statement. It is then useful to organize the Discussion section according to each research question. Each question should be restated and discussed in light of the results, literature, other studies, and theory. The Discussion should examine whether the results support or contradict other studies and theories. The Discussion section relies heavily on your review of literature. Keep in mind that the main purpose of this important section is to compare and contrast the results of the present study with findings from earlier studies. This should be the longest section in chapter five.

Implications

The implications of the study help convince the reader that the study added to the existing body of knowledge and theory and helped improve the conditions, lives, work environment, etc. of others. In many ways, this section allows you to present the meaning of the findings beyond the empirical findings. In other words, it gives you an opportunity to say what you really think about the study and the results.

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. Every study has limitations, so do not discount the importance of this section.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for further research need to addressed and discussed. It is normally most efficient to provide these recommendations as a numbered list rather than as a narrative. Consider different populations, testing instrumentation, theoretical constructs, and limitations. Recommendations for future research should be thought of as ways to further increase knowledge in the field of study.
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 all capitalized, bold, 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 (with written permission only), 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, bold, and centered.
Appendix F: Applied Dissertation Template

Revised 3/12/19

The purpose of this template is to ensure that the dissertation manuscript is a quality document. This template 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 all be Arabic numerals and placed in the upper right-hand corner (with the page number on the first page suppressed). All manuscripts should follow the latest version of the APA style manual.

Below is the Applied 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
ABSTRACT

The abstract summarizes the contents of the manuscript, starting with the purpose (see template below) or rationale of the study, the research questions (or at least the central research question), the methods, and the results. The first sentence is not indented. Descriptions of the methods should include the design, the sample, setting, and data collection and analysis methods.

Approximately 250 words or less is recommended. It is written in 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. Author-date citations and direct quotes are not included. The abstract should include results of the study but should not include statistics, discussion of, or reference to, the literature review. The word “ABSTRACT” should be in all caps and a Level 1 heading, centered, but not bold. As an outline for your abstract, we recommend the template adapted from Creswell (1994, 2003):

The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of ______________ (identify the problem of practice) for ____________ (identify site/setting and stakeholders) and to design ____________ (identify the project - curriculum, intervention, training, etc.) to address the problem. Briefly introduce proposed data collection and data analysis strategies designed to describe the problem, followed by a general description of the project (curriculum, training, program, etc.) that will be developed to address the problem.

Keywords: This is a list of 4-7 words (separated by commas) relevant 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 Abstract, Copyright Page (optional), Dedication (optional), Acknowledgements (optional), List of Tables, List of Figures, CHAPTER TITLES (all caps), Level 1 headings, Level 2 headings, 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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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 Overview must clearly and concisely describe the contents and organization of the chapter. Chapter One may vary in length from 10-15 pages for the final dissertation.

Background

The Background section educates the reader regarding the topic. The Background section provides a historical, social, and theoretical context related to the problem (thus, you may want to organize this section using these three Level 2 headings). For example, say that the problem is teacher retention. What does the literature say about teacher retention from a historical, social, and theoretical perspective? For an applied dissertation, the emphasis is on solving an existing problem of practice. In order to do this, you must rely heavily on existing research and explore what other scholars and practitioners are saying about the problem in general. The background should be well cited and approximately five pages in length.

Problem Statement

The Problem Statement identifies the general educational problem, the specific educational problem, the focus of the research, the educational or organizational setting, population and stakeholders. This section provides you the opportunity to show that the proposed research is needed and is relevant to the organization being studied. Focus on the problem to be examined. The problem statement draws from the background section; it includes current (i.e.,
five years or less since publication) literature (at least five citations) to show that the proposed research is empirically significant and relevant to the field. The problem should be stated clearly and unambiguously in one to two paragraphs. You should state: “The problem is…. ” In one to two focused paragraphs, convince the reader why the particular issue or problem your study is investigating needs to be conducted.

- Introduce the general problem needing research, including relevant/recent statistics on the issue.
- Summarize the recent research on the problem.
- Explain how/why the current research is deficient or falls short to address the problem.
- Conclude with a focused statement identifying the problem in relation to a multimethod research design.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose statement should flow from the problem statement and clearly and succinctly state the focus and intentions of the proposed research. The purpose statement should begin with the following statement: “The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of…. ” It foreshadows the research question(s), and the statement must be used consistently throughout the dissertation.

You are encouraged to use the following template:

“The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of ______________ (identify the problem of practice) for __________ (identify site/setting and stakeholders) and to formulate a solution to address the problem. A multimethod design was used consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The first approach was structured interviews with ____________. The second approach was (documents; records; archival data; survey; focus group;
Although brief in nature, the problem of the study and the purpose statement are two very important aspects of the manuscript. These statements identify the goal of the research and support the importance of the study. All preceding writing within the manuscript should funnel into the problem and purpose statements, and all proceeding aspects of the manuscript should align with, support, and further expand upon the problem and purpose statements.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study section begins with a description of the practical contributions that the study makes to the organization being studied; why it is important to the location, organization, population, or stakeholders 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 effect change to help a wider group of people or the organization as a whole?). Identify the specific stakeholders who will find the study significant for each section. 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 applied studies, research questions are most often pragmatic in nature and include key terms of the study (e.g., retention, graduation rates, job satisfaction, etc...). Applied research questions are usually broader and become more specific as you move into the actual data collection/analysis process. It
is expected that research questions may be revised as more information pertaining to the study is discovered. To begin your study, begin with one main central question and at least three sub-questions, understanding that it may be necessary to revise the number and kind of questions asked based on further research. The subsequent questions are called sub-questions and must be numbered. Remember that each research question will need to be addressed in the data collection, data analysis, project design, and discussion sections of later chapters. Be sure these questions do not elicit simple yes/no responses.

Research questions should be listed, each on a separate line. You are encouraged to use the following format. Example:

**Central Question:** How can the problem of teacher burnout be solved at XYZ high school located in central Georgia?

**Sub-question 1:** How would administrators in an interview solve the problem of teacher burnout at XYZ high school located in central Georgia?

**Sub-question 2:** How would educators in a focus group solve the problem of teacher burnout at XYZ high school located in central Georgia?

**Sub-question 3:** How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of teacher burnout at XYZ high school located in central Georgia?

**Definitions**

Terms pertinent to the study should be listed and defined in this section. All definitions need to be supported by the literature, thus citations are needed. Include terms that use abbreviations. 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. The Summary includes a succinct restatement of the problem and purpose of the study and provides a strong conclusion to the chapter.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter Two is often the longest chapter of the dissertation. The minimum length is 30 pages, but most are longer. In this chapter you will provide a context for the present research and demonstrate its importance based on related 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 Level 3 are often necessary. Often 1,000–2,000 articles are read and around 100–200 integrated in the construction of this chapter. The majority of the literature cited in the chapter should be current (i.e., five years or less since publication), though it is understood that some seminal studies published more than five years ago are appropriate in certain sections and discussions. The Overview must clearly and concisely describe the contents and organization of the chapter.

Theoretical or Conceptual 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 the study.

**Related Literature**

The purpose of this section is to provide a tight synthesis of the existing knowledge on this topic and link this existing knowledge to the proposed study. This is *not* simply a study-by-study summary. The majority of the Literature Review will be established in this section. As you read the literature, the information relevant to your study will need to be categorized into major themes which will be presented using headings arranged in a logical order in this section. 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 your study can 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 the problem. This should be a concise summary of the information presented in this chapter.

**General notes:**

It is important to remember that Chapter Two is not a summary of facts or summaries of relevant research, but 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 relationships 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 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 100-200.

4. **Be a skillful researcher.** Use primarily seminal articles and articles that are no more than five 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 and practical value.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The Overview may begin with a brief restatement of the nature and purpose of the study. You will then clearly and concisely describe the contents and organization of the chapter. The purpose of Chapter Three is for you to present the research design, procedures, and analysis for the present research study. Provide 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.

Note: After data are collected and analyzed, Chapter Three should be changed from future tense to past tense.

Design

Begin this section by identifying the research design. You will use a multimethod design, which incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009), “different scholars have used different terms (integrative, combined, blended, mixed methods, multimethod, multistrategy, etc.) to identify studies that attempt such integration” (p. 283). For a Liberty University SOE applied dissertation, use the term multimethod to describe your design. For example, it would be appropriate to state that “a multimethod research design was used for this applied study.” In addition to identifying the design, you will need to provide a rationale for why the design is most appropriate for the study. This rationale needs to be supported by scholarly sources. In other words, what is the purpose of the design? 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
In the Design section, you must also discuss, in general terms, the specific approaches you will use in your multimethod study. Three data collection approaches are required for an applied dissertation. The first approach must be qualitative, in the form of interviews. The second approach can be qualitative or quantitative. The third approach must be quantitative. Some examples of qualitative data collection approaches include interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and observations. Some examples of quantitative data collection include quantitative surveys and archival data (e.g., test scores, attendance records, referral records, etc.). In an applied study, surveys are usually created by the researcher to elicit pertinent information for solving the problem of practice.

Note: For Liberty University applied research dissertations you will use a multimethod design. Other designs will need to be approved by the Director of Applied Research.

**Research Questions**

**Central Question:** How can the problem of teacher burnout be solved at XYZ high school located in central Georgia?

**Sub-question 1:** How would administrators in an interview solve the problem of teacher burnout at XYZ high school located in central Georgia?

**Sub-question 2:** How would educators in a focus group solve the problem of teacher burnout at XYZ high school located in central Georgia?

**Sub-question 3:** How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of teacher burnout at XYZ high school located in central Georgia?

**Setting**

You may choose to title this section “Site” or “Setting.” In this section, the setting (or the
site) of the study should be described in detail (e.g., geographic location, school system, the
course, etc.), while protecting location confidentiality. Just as you should purposefully select
your participants for an applied study, it is also important to provide a rationale for your site
selection. Only important features which have bearing on the present study should be included.
The following questions should be addressed: How and why was this setting (site) chosen for
this study? What does the organization look like with regards to leadership, organizational
structure, population, etc.? Describe it with details. Pseudonyms for both individuals and
institutions should be provided in this section.

**Participants**

In the Participants section, the sample pool, the sample size, type of sample, and
sampling procedures (e.g., convenience, snowball sample, maximum variation, etc.) should be
clearly explained and each decision should be supported by research citations. Describe the pool
of potential participants from which the participants will be drawn. Participants must be
stakeholders directly involved with the problem identified in Chapter One. Demographic
information (age, ethnicity, gender, etc.) should be described in narrative or tabular form. Given
the nature of applied research, pseudonyms should be provided. Support all practices from
research literature with citations.

For the interview portion of the study, the number of participants will most often range
from 5-10, and no fewer than 5 participants will be acceptable without approval from the
administrative team of Doctoral Programs and Research (School of Education). For example,
“Four teachers and one principal will be interviewed for this study . . . etc.” For the quantitative
portion of the study, you may choose to administer a survey. The number of participants will
most often range from 13 to 30, and no fewer that 13 participants will be acceptable without
approval from the administrative team of Doctoral Programs and Research (School of Education). The minimum number of participants for the survey may include the participants who participated in the interviews. Make sure your survey includes sample size, sample demographic information regarding the age, ethnicity, gender, grade level, etc. of your sample. Also, make sure your survey sample is large enough to make a reasonable interpretation of the data. If using a survey as an approach, it may be helpful to plug in “place holders” for the participant information. For example, “The survey will be sent to 000 teachers. The sample will consist of 00 males and 00 female teachers from the XYZ high school . . . etc.” After data are collected and analyzed, return to this section and update tables along with a general, narrative description of the participants. Remember to change this section from future tense to past tense for the final dissertation.

**The Researcher’s Role**

In this section, clearly and thoroughly explain your motivation for conducting the study. Through bracketing, you must identify your relationship to the participants, your role in the setting or research site, and any bias or assumptions you bring to the study that may influence how you collect and analyze the data. The role of the researcher must also be articulated in light of the multimethod design and the implications of this role on the data collection and data analysis procedures must be addressed.

**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. Include in your Procedures section wording similar to the following: “Permission from the IRB
will be obtained (see Appendix A for IRB approval). Written permission to conduct the study will be obtained from the superintendent, principal of the participating school, the key gatekeepers at any site, etc. (see Appendix B for permission request letter and permissions).” All procedural materials (e.g., IRB permission, school permission, consent forms, assent forms, protocol, training manual, and any other pertinent information) should be included in the appendices.

Note: Data CANNOT be collected until after the proposal is defended and Liberty University IRB permission to conduct the research has been granted. If data are collected or accessed prior to obtaining all necessary and full IRB approvals, the candidate will be removed from the program. Except in rare and unusual circumstances, investigators should not enroll employees under their direct supervision into their research studies that involve greater than minimal risk without the prospect of direct benefit.

Data Collection and Analysis

Three data collection approaches are required for an applied dissertation. The first approach must be qualitative, in the form of interviews. The second approach may be qualitative or quantitative. The third approach must be quantitative. Organize this section with Level 2 headings according to the approach you choose. For example, your first Level 2 heading would be “Interviews” (see example below).

Interviews

(This is a required approach for all applied dissertations)

Begin by restating sub-question one in statement form. For example, “The first sub-question for this study explored how administrators in an interview would solve the problem of teacher burnout at XYZ high school located in central Georgia.” For applied research at Liberty University, interviews are a required data collection approach. No fewer than five participants
will be acceptable without approval from the administrative team of Doctoral Programs and Research (School of Education). Interview data collection procedures should follow the recommendations of established researchers in the field (e.g., Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980, 1990, etc.). Interviews must be conducted synchronously: face-to-face, individual phone call or e-conference, or in-person focus groups. All interviews must be transcribed for data analysis.

Identify the data collection strategy (e.g., structured, semi-structured, etc.), fully define it in the context of applied 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 data will be collected, recorded, etc.) and explicate which of your research questions will be answered by this data collection strategy. It is important to demonstrate that your interview questions are generated from and supported by in the literature on your topic and will address all research questions. Your interview questions should be included in a numbered list with an item-by-item discussion of each question, their basis in the literature, and how they align with the research questions. By explaining in detail the purpose of each interview question, 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. This approach should include enough detail that another researcher could duplicate your study in another setting. The procedures should be described in chronological, step-by-step format.

Finish this section by telling the reader how you plan to analyze the qualitative data. For example, the sentence could begin: “Interview data will be analyzed…” Clearly identify the data analysis procedures and provide a concise rationale for the analysis. Be sure that your analysis procedures are aligned with your research approach. For qualitative data analysis, interviews
must be transcribed in order to code and categorize information into themes. Tell the reader which of these tools you will use to analyze the data. Fully define each tool you will use (with appropriate citations), and explain why these are appropriate choices for the qualitative data analysis for your study.

**Focus Group**

Begin by restating sub-question two in statement form. For example, “The second sub-question for this study explored educators in a focus group would solve the problem of teacher burnout at XYZ high school located in central Georgia.” Focus groups are a qualitative data collection strategy that attempts to obtain information on a phenomenon through an involved discussion consisting of various research participants who have gathered in one location at a specified time. Focus groups are common within applied research due to the efficiency that it brings concerning data collection. A focus group will also minimize reflexivity that might occur between the researcher and a single participant.

Finish this section by telling the reader how you plan to analyze the qualitative data. For example, the sentence could begin: “Focus group data will be analyzed…” Clearly identify the data analysis procedures and provide a concise rationale for the analysis. Be sure that your analysis procedures are aligned with your research approach. For qualitative data analysis, focus group data must be transcribed in order to code and categorize information into themes. Tell the reader which of these tools you will use to analyze the data. Fully define each tool you will use (with appropriate citations), and explain why these are appropriate choices for the qualitative data analysis for your study.

**Survey**
Begin by restating sub-question three in statement form. For example, “The third sub-question for this study explored how quantitative survey data would inform the problem of teacher burnout at XYZ high school located in central Georgia.” In this section, tell the reader how you plan to collect the quantitative data. One option would be to administer a survey. Develop the survey questions based on the literature. The survey must be in quantitative format (e.g., Likert scale, semantic differential scale, forced rank scale, etc.). Discuss any logistics (when/where/how/with to whom the survey will be sent out to, how the data will be collected, recorded, etc.) and explicate which of your research questions will be answered by this data collection strategy. This approach should include enough detail that another researcher could duplicate your study in another setting. The procedures should be described in chronological, step-by-step format.

Finish this section by telling the reader how you plan to analyze the qualitative data. Clearly identify the data analysis procedures and provide a concise rationale for the analysis. Be sure that your analysis procedures are aligned with your research approach. For example, the sentence could begin: “Survey data will be analyzed…” Use descriptive statistics such as means and/or frequency counts. Include the type of figures that will be used such as trend charts, bar charts, pie graphs, 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. The Summary provides a strong conclusion to the chapter.

Note: The proposal defense includes Chapter One, Two, and Three. Following an approved proposal defense, the candidate conducts the research necessary to complete Chapters Four and Five.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of Chapter Four is to present the results of the data collection and analysis. This chapter is reserved for findings and discussion of results. The chapter should begin with a brief overview of the chapter content. The Overview should also include a brief restatement of the purpose of the study. The purpose of Chapter Four is to present the data in the form of themes (narrative). Include charts, graphs, tables, and/or models in this section. Data should be presented in the order in which the research questions were stated and according to themes generated. The research questions should be answered before concluding the chapter. The Overview must clearly and concisely describe the contents and organization of the chapter.

Note: This chapter is not part of the prospectus or proposal. It should be written in past tense.

Results

This section must be organized both thematically and according to research questions. Begin with a Level 1 Results heading. Under the Results heading, begin with a paragraph that generally restates the data collection procedures.

For example:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers from XYZ high school in order to find themes related to their experiences teaching at this school. Several themes emerged from the qualitative analysis. The qualitative analysis also led to the development of a questionnaire that quantitatively measured teacher satisfaction and was used to help support the themes.

Organize this section according to your research questions and corresponding themes. For example:
Central Question

How can the problem of teacher burnout be solved at XYZ high school located in central Georgia?

**Theme #1.** Theme development must be supported using appropriate narrative and data from each data collection method, especially through the use of participant quotes. Do not simply list a series of participant quotes detached from any of your own narrative. You should also present any unexpected codes and/or themes that do not correlate to your specific research questions. Data must be clearly and meaningfully integrated into theme development. Codes and categories must be presented in meaningful quotes, and reinforced with tables, charts, graphs, descriptive statistics, or appendices derived from the quantitative data.

**Theme #2.** The theme should be specified, and participant quotes should be included that support theme development. If appropriate, include tables, charts, or descriptive statistics to reinforce the themes. See Central Question Theme #1 above for more detail.

**Theme #3.** The theme should be specified, and participant quotes should be included that support theme development. If appropriate, include tables, charts, or descriptive statistics to reinforce the themes. See Central Question Theme #1 above for more detail.

**Sub-question 1**

Sub-question one for this study was, “How would administrators in an interview solve the problem of teacher burnout at XYZ high school located in central Georgia?". Interviews were conducted with administrators from XYZ high school in order to find themes related to teacher burnout at their school. The themes uncovered in the qualitative analysis were … [expand on the themes] …etc… In addition to the narrative presentation of the data, you must also present the data in the form of qualitative tables such as those including (1) open codes and themes and (2)
frequency codes across qualitative data points.

**Theme #1.** The theme should be specified, and participant quotes should be included that support theme development. See Central Question Theme #1 above for more detail.

**Theme #2.** The theme should be specified, and participant quotes should be included that support theme development. See Central Question Theme #1 above for more detail.

**Sub-question 2**

Sub-question two for this study was, “How would educators in a focus group solve the problem of teacher burnout at XYZ high school located in central Georgia? A focus group was conducted with teachers from XYZ high school in order to find themes related to their experiences teaching at this school. The themes uncovered in the qualitative analysis were… [expand on the themes]… etc….

**Theme #1.** The theme should be specified, and participant quotes should be included that support theme development. See Central Question Theme #1 above for more detail.

**Theme #2.** The theme should be specified, and participant quotes should be included that support theme development. See Central Question Theme #1 above for more detail.

**Sub-question 3**

Sub-question three for this study was, “How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of teacher burnout at XYZ high school located in central Georgia?” A survey was conducted with teachers from XYZ high school in order to collect quantitative data related to educators’ experiences teaching at this school. In addition to the narrative presentation of the data, you must also present the data in the form of a bar chart, pie chart, and/or trend chart.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this section is to discuss the study findings in relationship to the empirical
and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. This is a critical section where you present yourself as an emerging scholar among your peers. This section should be a detailed examination of all major topics covered in Chapter Two, and you should position your own findings alongside those of existing perspectives and studies. The empirical and theoretical literature discussions must be written under their own APA Level 2 headings. How does your study confirm or corroborate previous research? How does your study diverge from or extend on previous research? How does your study extend or shed new light on solving the problem?

**Summary**

Provide a chapter summary. The Summary includes a succinct conclusion to the chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

Begin the Overview section with a brief restatement of the problem the study was designed to address. The Overview must clearly and concisely describe the contents and organization of the chapter.

Note: This chapter is not part of the prospectus or proposal.

Restatement of the Problem

In a concise paragraph, restate the problem. Be sure to make any changes to the problem statement based on new knowledge gained during data collection and analysis.

Proposed Solution

In this section, provide a detailed solution for the problem. The section must include a description of the solution itself, the goals of the solution, a scholarly rationale of why the solution was chosen, including considerations of the literature from Chapter Two, and a scholarly rationale of how the problem will be addressed through the solution.

Resources Needed

Describe the resources needed to generate the solution. Include possible means of procuring the needed resources and potential barriers.

Funds Needed

Describe the funds needed to generate the solution. Include possible sources of revenue and potential barriers to those resources.

Roles and Responsibilities

Describe the various roles needed to lead and implement the solution. Include possible personnel implications (new hires, training/retraining, certifications, etc.). Describe specific
responsibilities assigned to each role. For example: “In order to help with retention of teachers at XYZ high school, it is recommended that additional support staff be hired. Additional support staff would include… etc… and their primary function would be to… etc.”

**Timeline**

Provide both a general narrative overview and a bulleted list of a timeline needed to resolve the problem. The bulleted list can be placed as an appendix.

**Solution Implications**

The purpose of this section is to provide a clear explanation of both positive and negative implications of the solution. Examine and explain potential benefits and pitfalls of all aspects of the chapter content (resources, funds, roles/responsibilities, timeline, etc.). Include specific recommendations for various stakeholders, such as policy makers, administrators, teachers, parents, etc., to address the implications.

**Evaluation Plan**

Provide a detailed plan to assess the effectiveness of the solution to the problem. Describe the type of evaluation that will be conducted (goal-based, outcomes-based, formative or summative). The plan must provide justification for using this type of evaluation. Include who is responsible for this assessment, how it will be conducted, and what criterion or standards will be used. Evaluation plans should also include delimitations and limitations related to the research. Delimitations are purposeful decisions the researcher makes to limit or define the boundaries of the study. 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, etc.). In consideration of the study findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on the study,
provide multiple recommendations and directions for future research to help solve the problem.

**Summary**

Provide a summary of the study. From your Solution 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). If your project was implemented prior to your dissertation defense, include an epilogue including the impact, execution, etc., of the research.
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 page title should be capitalized, bold, and centered.
APPENDIX or APPENDICES

The Appendix must include a variety of artifacts. The appendix must 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 an audit trail. Any identifying or personal information (names, schools, districts, phone numbers, email addresses) should be eliminated. All documents pertinent to the implementation of the project should also be included. Each artifact should have a section labeled as Appendix A, Appendix B, etc. Each appendix must be addressed in the narrative text. The appendix title should be capitalized, bold, and centered.