DISSERTATION MANUAL

Ph.D. in Criminal Justice
Ph.D. in Public Policy
Doctorate in Public Administration

Revised February 2021
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Dear Doctoral Candidate:

Congratulations on reaching this final stage of your doctoral journey! You began this journey several years ago and, step after step, completed all of your coursework and developed your research concept. Now you face the capstone of the Doctor of Philosophy program: the dissertation.

Even before doctoral students arrive at the dissertation stage, they have many questions about the dissertation and the process by which they complete one. To address these overarching issues, the Helms School of Government developed this dissertation guide. This guide relies on the experience of its authors, and on the policies and procedures employed in other colleges within Liberty University. The authors owe a particular debt of gratitude to Dr. Kurt Michael and other esteemed colleagues in the College of Education.

It is our hope that this process will prepare you for a lifetime of meaningful research and scholarship that not only evidences the knowledge and skills you have ascertained in this program, but, more importantly, reflects the heart of Christ for seeking both justice and mercy in a fallen world.

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

Dr. Joel Cox, Chair of Criminal Justice, Helms School of Government Online
Dr. Timothy P. O’Brien, Public Policy Program Director
Dr. Doug Orr, Criminal Justice Program Director
Dr. Harry McGinnis, Public Administration Program Director
Dr. Jason Ross, Department Chair, Helms School of Government Online
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to assist students in the doctoral programs within the Helms School of Government at Liberty University in completing their dissertation. The best academic tradition and professional practice requires the University to prepare doctoral students to conduct Doctoral dissertation research that suits them for a lifetime of meaningful empirical and scholarly endeavors that impact society. Because the completed dissertation is a publication of Liberty University, the Helms School of Government must maintain high standards concerning the form and appearance of dissertations and require that all work by each student conforms to those standards.

This guide sets forth those standards and provides a set of directives for doctoral students as they journey through the dissertation process. This guide is also intended to serve as an aid to faculty involved in chairing candidate’s dissertations. It provides an overview of the dissertation process and describes, in broad terms, the roles and responsibilities of the Student, Chair, and Reader(s).

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

B. The Authority of this Dissertation Manual

This version of the dissertation guide supersedes all previous editions of the dissertation manual. Students who are in the process of writing their final chapters, however, may continue under the former guidelines.
II. OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION PROCESS

A. Background to the Dissertation

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

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

Regardless of the underlying assumption, the dissertation should address an important problem that is feasibly studied within the student's field. The dissertation study must be carried out through the application of accepted methods and procedures appropriate to the stated problem. The dissertation is not just descriptive; it must be of a sound extant basis or a well-developed conceptual basis that leads to the question(s) under investigation. This basis serves as the origin for conclusions and inferences that lead to further research, for enhanced theoretical understanding, and for recommendations for organizational improvement.

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

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

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

manuscript of appropriate format. There are many aids to this process available to the Student, but in the final analysis the doctoral student is ultimately responsible for successfully completing all steps of the dissertation process.

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

**B. History of the Dissertation**

The tradition of writing a dissertation as part of doctoral study dates back to the late Middle Ages in European universities that were at the forefront of academic and scientific thought. Many of their traditions surrounding dissertation writing are still respected today. The dissertation as a genre emerged from the oral culture of medieval graduate education which emphasized mastery of ancient philosophies and evolved into a public recognition of original scientific investigation in pre-World War I Germany. University scholars enlisted graduate students to facilitate and record their research. Modeled from the original research report, the dissertation became a *sine qua non*, an essential element, for acquiring the Doctoral degree.

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

Among the two million dissertations written since Whiton’s, the structure and expectation of the dissertation remains an instantiation of the scientific method: background, method, analysis, and conclusions.
C. Dissertation Outline & Criteria

1. Chapter One. Introduction
   - The introduction adequately establishes the background and context of the study;
   - The problem statement is adequately articulated, supported with research, and amenable to the investigation;
   - The justification of purpose and significance is integrated with the problem statement and makes an adequate case for conducting the research;
   - The nature of the research design adequately describes and is appropriate to the stated problem;
   - The research questions and/or hypotheses are stated in answerable or testable form and are appropriate to the stated problem;
   - The relevant assumptions and limitations have been identified;
   - All technical terms have been adequately defined and explained, and
   - Summary.

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

3. Chapter Three. Methods
   - The research design is adequately described and justified;
   - The relationships between the problem, the research questions/hypotheses, design and methods are defended;
   - The description of the population/sample and/or participant selection procedures is adequate;
   - All the constructs involved are operationalized;
   - The data processing and analysis procedures are appropriate in light of the study’s design and hypotheses; and
   - Summary.

4. Chapter Four. Data Analysis and Results:
   - The data have been analyzed using the appropriate techniques as described in the methods chapter;
   - The analyses are performed and presented correctly;
   - The results address the hypotheses and/or questions; and
   - Summary.
5. *Chapter Five. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations:*

- The findings are discussed in terms of research problem, conceptual framework, and research questions/hypotheses;
- All the relevant conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis are identified;
- Findings are clearly placed within the context of the current literature;
- The recommendations for future research directions and practice are identified and justified;
- The general conclusions are warranted in light of the results and current literature;
- The ramifications and implications for practice are appropriate; and,
- Summary.
D. The Dissertation and Degree Completion Plan

Below is an overview of how the dissertation process fits within the student's degree completion plan.

(Note: Students whose degree completion plan calls for them to begin the dissertation sequence with the 980: Dissertation Prospectus course should consult the FAQ page in the Helms School of Government Doctoral Community page, available to all doctoral students as a non-term course in Blackboard.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CJUS/PADM/PLCY 885</td>
<td>Research Concept</td>
<td>In this course the student completes a comprehensive review of the program's academic content and writes a “Research Concept” paper which serves as a preliminary version of a dissertation proposal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJUS/PADM/PLCY 987</td>
<td>Dissertation I Proposal (Chapters 1-2)</td>
<td>This course is the first step for doctoral candidates in the process of developing and completing their research study and dissertation. Doctoral candidates will develop Section 1, which includes the foundation of the study, to include a detailed literature review relevant to the proposed research study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJUS/PADM/PLCY 988</td>
<td>Dissertation II Chapter 3 &amp; Proposal</td>
<td>This course is the second step for doctoral candidates to develop and complete their dissertation. Doctoral candidates will develop Section 2, which includes their methodology for conducting the study, and combine it with Section 1 into a single document. Candidates will also complete and submit their IRB package to complete their proposal defense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJUS/PADM/PLCY 989</td>
<td>Dissertation III Chapters 4-5</td>
<td>This course is the final step in developing the dissertation manuscript. Doctoral candidates will conduct their field study, analyze their data, and present their findings and develop Section 3 of their dissertation. Candidates will combine all three sections into their completed dissertation manuscript in preparation for their dissertation defense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJUS/PADM/PLCY 990</td>
<td>Dissertation IV Dissertation Defense</td>
<td>This course is the last step in the doctoral program. Doctoral candidates will defend their dissertation and finalize their dissertation manuscript for publication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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III. PLANNING THE DISSERTATION PROCESS

A. Guiding Thoughts

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

Managing time appropriately is important if doctoral candidates want to graduate on a certain date. A written detailed project plan is highly encouraged. In planning a timeline for the completion of the dissertation, students should consider their personal time limitations and the time constraints of Committee members. Normally, a Committee member requires at least two weeks to adequately review student submissions. This timeline, however, can be influenced by a number of events. In other words, it is important to keep faculty schedules in mind when submitting materials for review. The student shall solicit chair and reader approval with respect to review turnaround times. Both parties shall agree to the timeline.

Students should submit chapters as they are completed to allow the Chair or Reader(s) to provide timely feedback. While waiting, the student can continue to work on subsequent chapters. Ultimately, the Committee will decide when the document is complete and ready to defend. Their decision is based on the quality of each part of the manuscript as well as the entirety of the design itself. No other deadlines or priorities will supersede this responsibility.

B. The Use of Assistance in the Dissertation Process

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

Many doctoral students find it helpful to employ a research methodologist consultant at various points throughout their research and dissertation. These consultants can assist students with the research questions, design, data collection procedures, and statistical procedures necessary for the dissertation proposal. Statistical consultants can also assist students in statistical analysis and interpretation. If students wish to use a consultant, they should discuss this with their Committee Chair. Whether or not a consultant is used, students must understand that they must be able to explain and defend their chosen methodologies as part of their proposal and defense. The consultant will not be available as a resource in either the proposal or final dissertation defense; moreover, students must be prepared to answer detailed questions about methodological approaches. Failure to demonstrate sufficient awareness and understanding of methodology will
delay the approval process.

One consultant students must employ is a professional editor who is also an expert in the formatting style currently adopted as the standard in the program in which the student is enrolled. Committee Members should be able to review your work without being distracted by spelling, grammar, and writing errors. Remember that the dissertation will be published in the student’s name but will also include the names of Committee members. Each person’s reputation is inextricably tied to the quality of the completed dissertation. Students are responsible to pay for this service. The use of an editor will be money well spent in order to ensure that the dissertation is both well-written and consistent with the appropriate format writing standards. Students are free to select an editor of their choice. However, the final dissertation product shall have a ready-for-publication appearance.

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IV. THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

A. The Purpose of the Dissertation Committee

The academic project depends upon continual contributions to an accumulated body of knowledge. The validity of those contributions depends upon the rigor of the research being done, and upon the testing of those contributions under the peer review process. The dissertation process serves both as a training ground and test of the rigor of the doctoral candidate’s research question and design, and as a peer review of the candidate’s research findings.

The Dissertation Committee plays a dual role with respect to the candidate’s dissertation research. The Committee provides advice, feedback, and encouragement to the candidate with regard to the formulation of the research question, the identification and design of relevant research strategies, and the execution and analysis of original research, all with the goal of helping the student complete the dissertation. In this way, the Committee members still operate as teachers, with the candidates still operating as students.

But the Committee also tests and challenges the candidate’s hypotheses, methods, and conclusions, all with the goal of ensuring that the student’s dissertation makes a legitimate contribution to a body of scholarly knowledge. In this way, the Committee members operate as peer reviewers, with the candidates operating as scholars.

It is vital that students and Committee members understand and respect the dual nature of the Committee’s role.

The dissertation Committee should include faculty with substantive and methodological expertise relevant to the topic under investigation and the methods proposed. The Committee members are available to students throughout the dissertation process to provide counsel relevant to the study and consistent with their expertise via email. At the discretion of the Committee, a phone conference or webinar may be scheduled. The Committee evaluates the dissertation proposal and manuscript to ensure that the work meets rigorous academic standards for quality and that the student meets the guidelines for ethical research, academic honesty, and academic writing and presentation.

B. The Composition of the Dissertation Committee

The standard dissertation Committee consists of two members, a Chair and a Reader. The responsibilities and selection criteria for the Committee are detailed below.

In some circumstances, one or more outside readers can be added to the standard dissertation Committee. Outside readers are not compensated by the University.
C. Dissertation Chair's Role

Dissertation Chairs are vitally important to the success of Students working on their dissertation. The Chair of the Dissertation Committee is the liaison for the Student, Committee, and the school.

The Chair guides and supports the Doctoral Candidate as he or she develops and demonstrates competencies in critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, and integration of relevant theories and research. The Chair reviews the ideas of the student, guides and supports the Student through the Candidacy Exam, supervises the design and research, and oversees the completion of the dissertation manuscript. The Chair provides feedback on the Student’s writing and research skills and refers the Student to additional support and resources within the University when those skills need further development. The Chair also ensures the student’s compliance with relevant departmental policies and processes.

During the dissertation process, the Student and Chair will be engaged in collaborative efforts involving the communication skills of writing and discussing. The Chair must ensure that the Proposal and the completed dissertation comply with all criteria used to evaluate acceptable scholar-practitioner work at the Doctoral level. This includes, but is not limited to the content, structure, format, style, and ethical guidelines. The Chair is the focal point for communication between the Committee Member and the Student and facilitates the pace and flow of all meetings. The Chair should clearly communicate to the Student, all University and HSOG expectations concerning procedures for completing the dissertation research project and the Doctoral degree. The primary form of communication shall be email. However, the Chair should set up several regular phone conferences as appropriate. It is recommended that phone conversations/webinars be summarized via email to ensure shared understanding.

D. Chair Eligibility & Duties

A Chair is a residential or online LU employee who has earned a relevant doctoral degree. The Dissertation Chair mentors the doctoral candidate through the scientific peer review process involved in dissertations in the social and behavioral sciences. Peer review is an essential component for any doctoral study that could potentially be published in a scholarly journal in these fields. Specifically, the Chair mentors the doctoral candidate in the following ways:

1. Instructs on the development of a proposal document.
   a. Reviews drafts.
   b. Provides feedback until an acceptable document for a proposal defense is developed.
2. Consults with the Reader regarding the proposal document in order to obtain feedback (peer review).
3. Prepares the candidate for the proposal defense.
4. Directs the dissertation committee questioning process during the proposal defense.
5. Provides feedback on any needed adjustments to the candidate’s study design or literature review following the proposal defense.
6. Gives feedback on ethical aspects and final approval of the candidate’s IRB application.
7. Addresses any student questions or issues that arise during the student’s study implementation.
a. Reviews drafts.
   b. Provides feedback until an acceptable document for a dissertation defense is developed.

9. Consults with the Reader regarding the dissertation document to obtain feedback (peer review).
10. Prepares the candidate for the dissertation defense.
11. Directs the dissertation committee questioning process during the dissertation defense.
12. Determines, along with the Reader (peer review), whether the candidate’s work is sufficient to pass the dissertation defense.
13. Provides feedback on any needed adjustments to the candidate’s interpretation of study findings.
14. Oversees the final manuscript submission process to the library.
15. When appropriate, assists the student in developing an article submission to a scholarly journal.

E. Committee Member/Reader Role & Responsibilities

A Dissertation Reader is typically a residential or online LU faculty member with a relevant doctoral degree. With program chair approval, a specialized subject expert not employed by Liberty University may be considered. A non-Liberty University employee may also be considered in the case of workflow needs.

Readers provide content, technical, organizational, ethical, and administrative guidance for the Student in the dissertation process. The dissertation Readers work collaboratively with the Committee Chairs to guide students in the development and advancement of academic skills. Once the Committee Members have been approved by the dissertation Committee Chair and the Members have agreed to participate on the Committee, the Student will need to complete the process. This process will be completed in our online dissertation portal, where further instructions are provided.

A Reader assists in the scientific peer review process involved in dissertations in the following ways:

1. Reviews carefully the proposal document to assess whether the doctoral candidate is ready to defend the proposal.
   a. Provides feedback to the student and Chair regarding the proposal.
   b. Informs the Chair when there are critical issues that must be resolved before the proposal defense to prevent a potential failure.

2. Participates in the proposal defense as a scientific peer reviewer.
   a. Asks questions in the proposal defense to assess the student’s competency and the merits of moving forward with the study.
   b. Provides the student and Chair feedback on any needed adjustments to the candidate’s study design or literature review.
   c. Discusses with the Chair (often privately when the candidate is asked to leave the room) any concerns about passing the doctoral candidate in the proposal defense.
   d. Officially votes whether to pass, pass with modifications, or not pass the doctoral candidate.
3. Assists the Chair (when appropriate) in addressing any student questions or issues that arise during the student’s study implementation.

4. Reviews carefully the dissertation document to assess whether the doctoral candidate is ready to defend the dissertation.
   a. Provides feedback to the student and Chair regarding the dissertation.
   b. Informs the Chair when there are critical issues that must be resolved before the dissertation defense to prevent a potential failure.

5. Participates in the dissertation defense as a scientific peer reviewer.
   a. Asks questions in the dissertation defense to assess the student’s accuracy and competency in analyzing the results and interpreting the findings of the study.
   b. Provides the student and Chair feedback on any needed adjustments to the candidate’s analyses or interpretation of the findings.
   c. Discusses with the Chair (often privately when the candidate is asked to leave the room) any concerns about passing the doctoral candidate in the dissertation defense.
   d. Officially votes whether to pass, pass with modifications, or not pass the doctoral candidate.

6. When appropriate, assists the student and Chair in developing an article submission to a scholarly journal.

F. Chair and Reader Removal and Replacement

Students should exercise care and discernment in inviting faculty members to serve as Chair or Reader. In particular, students should remember the dual role of the Committee in the dissertation process and should weigh each faculty member’s ability to play both roles. Not all faculty members are well-suited to serve as Chair or Reader of all dissertations. Thus, in addition to selecting faculty for these roles based on their substantive and methodological credentials, students should also consider how faculty’s personal traits and temperament would fit with the student’s own personal traits and temperament.

The Committee’s role as peer reviewers is necessarily and unavoidably to challenge the assumptions, hypotheses, research, and analysis being done. Such challenges should not be taken personally, nor should they be seen as grounds for severing the relationship with a Committee member.

The Committee’s role as advisors of the dissertation process is necessarily and unavoidably to encourage, cajole, challenge, and prod the student to complete the steps necessary to complete the dissertation. Such challenges should not be taken personally, nor should they be seen as grounds for severing the relationship with a Committee member.

In the event that it becomes necessary to consider the removal of a Committee member, the following guidelines are established. None of the policies listed below should supersede any governing federal, state, and university policies with respect to anti-discrimination policies or related policies. Also, both students and Committee members should keep in mind that there may be monetary implications and/or course implications to the removal of a Committee member. These implications may impact the Committee member and/or the student.
1. **Student Requested Removal**

- If a student wishes to have a Chair or Reader removed from the Committee, the student shall, in the case of the reader, discuss the situation and reason(s) with the Dissertation Chair. The Chair should make reasonable efforts to facilitate a dialogue that would preserve the present Committee makeup.
- In the event that the student request for reader removal or the student requests removal of the Dissertation Chair, the request shall be forwarded by the student to the appropriate Program Director. The Program Director and HSOG administrative leadership shall confer and make a final decision.
- Typically requests for removal are for extreme circumstances that would prevent a positive and ongoing dialog among the Committee and student.

2. **Committee Requested Removal**

- If a Chair or Reader wishes to be removed from a Dissertation Committee, they should address the issue with the Program Director.
- The Program Director will confer with HSOG administrative leadership for final disposition.
V. STEPS IN THE DISSERTATION PROCESS

A. Overview

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

- It is helpful not to think of the dissertation as one enormous journey, but to consider it as a series of smaller steps.
- In planning your series of smaller steps, you are encouraged to use a detailed project plan like the one presented earlier in this guide.
- Finally, as you conduct your literature review, research, analysis, and writing, please do not wait for inspiration to appear! Instead, create your own inspiration by doing a bit of work each day. Some days will be a struggle, but other days will feel like breakthroughs. You can’t have the breakthrough without the struggle.

For practical purposes, HSOG conceptualizes the dissertation process as having the following steps:

1. Select a topic.
   a. Before you enroll in the Ph.D. program:
      i. Think about areas within your academic and professional interests and expertise that you may like to research in more detail.
      ii. Identify key lines of thinking in your academic and professional sphere and consider where there may be new directions or gaps in these conversations.
      iii. Explore the overlaps between your interests and existing conversations.
   b. During your Ph.D. coursework:
      i. Consult the resources in the Helms School of Government’s Doctoral Community in Blackboard.
      ii. Deepen your knowledge in your areas of interest by becoming more familiar with scholars who are publishing in those areas, and with the most important academic works in those areas.
      iii. Broaden your understanding of your areas of interest by considering how they fit into other research programs within your academic discipline.
      iv. Learn the range of research methods employed in your discipline and consider which of them seems most relevant to your area of interest.
      v. Read like a scholar! Pay attention to other scholars’ literature reviews, research questions, methods, and analyses. Scrutinize them. Critique them. Ask what you would do differently if you were approaching their topic.
      vi. Keep detailed notes on everything you read. Identify a good citation management system, and document everything you read, so you can easily access the body of knowledge you are creating.
      vii. Consider opportunities in each course to narrow your research question, to get feedback from faculty about your research question, and to identify
faculty who may be well-suited to serving as Chair and/or Reader for your dissertation.

viii. Invite faculty members to serve in roles as Dissertation Chair and Reader (see the Helms School of Government Doctoral Community in Blackboard for more details).

ix. Complete Liberty University's Dissertation Pairing Tool form to request your Chair and Reader, and to request enrollment in the dissertation sequence, beginning with the 885 course.

c. Before and during the 885: Research Concept course

i. Review your course materials to this point and use them as the starting point for a literature review for your Research Concept paper.

ii. Develop a clear and concise research question.

iii. Conceive of an appropriate research methodology, including narrowing the content or population of your study, devising a data collection process, identifying appropriate analytical methods or techniques, and making plans for any necessary permissions you will need to run your study.

iv. Gain approval of your Chair and Reader(s) for your Research Concept paper.

v. If not already done, complete “Registration Override (ROVER) form” through Beacon

2. Prepare a dissertation proposal.

a. Enroll in 987: Dissertation I course

i. Develop Chapter 1 of the dissertation, including your problem statement, justification for the study, and research question/hypothesis.

ii. Develop Chapter 2 of the dissertation, including the literature review.

iii. Gain the approval of your Chair and Reader(s) for Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

iv. Work with Chair and departmental administration to enroll in 988: Dissertation II course.

b. Enroll in 988: Dissertation II course

i. Develop Chapter 3 of the dissertation, including research method, description of population or data sampling procedure, and explanation of data processing and analysis procedures.

ii. Work with your Chair to secure any necessary IRB approvals.

iii. Gain the approval of your Chair and Reader(s) for your Dissertation Proposal (consisting of Chapters 1-3).

iv. Work with Chair and departmental administration to enroll in 989: Dissertation III course.


a. Enroll in 989: Dissertation III course

i. Conduct your research.

ii. Analyze data and write out findings and conclusions in Chapters 4 and 5.

iii. Gain the approval of your Chair and Reader(s) to proceed to your dissertation defense.

iv. Work with Chair and departmental administration to enroll in 990: Dissertation Defense course.

b. Enroll in 990: Dissertation Defense course

i. Complete any final steps necessary to finalize your dissertation for presentation and publication.
ii. Work with your Chair to schedule a date for your defense.

iii. Conduct your defense.

iv. Complete any necessary revisions to your dissertation.

**B. Step 1: Select a Topic**

Without a doubt, selecting a topic is one of the most difficult aspects of the dissertation process. The key, in this regard, is choosing a topic that will sustain the Student's interest and attention. Moreover, topics should not be too broad, too vague, too grand, or too global. Once a topic is selected, the Student will create a one-page, succinct summary of the research question and method to present to a potential Chair. Finally, topics should be relevant to the field of counseling with the goal of extending the empirical literature in meaningful ways that impact real people, policies, organizations, and society at large.

**C. Step 2: Obtain a Dissertation Committee**

The second step in the dissertation process is for dissertation Committee assignments (if not already done). The Doctoral Dissertation Committee is comprised of two Members: the Dissertation Chair (not to be confused with the Department Chair) and one faculty Reader. It is the responsibility of the student to acquire a Chair and Reader for their dissertation. Students may use the Faculty Reader/Chair Roster to research prospective committee members.

Once a student has identified a potential Chair and Reader, the student should reach out to them directly to discuss the faculty's availability and the student’s topic. The research interests of the student should overlap with the research interest of the potential Chair and Reader. After a student’s prospective committee members agree to participate, the student will then complete the dissertation assignment tool, explained further in Chapter V: Steps in the Dissertation Process (Section A, Part 1B).

**D. Step 3: Complete the Proposal**

The process of completing the dissertation leading to Committee approval is an iterative process that culminates in the dissertation defense. This iterative process typically takes place for each chapter and involves the Chairperson’s initial endorsement of each submission before distribution to other Committee Members. This entire process begins with the dissertation proposal.

Typically, a dissertation proposal is comprised of Chapters One and Two (e.g., Introduction and Review of the Literature) of the entire dissertation. The Chapters, References, and Appendixes may be updated throughout the dissertation process, but should be written with a completed draft in mind. The submission of the proposal should include the Title Page, Abstract, Table of Contents, References, and Appendices. The actual format of the dissertation, however, will be determined by the nature of the research and in collaboration with the Committee.

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

E. Step 4: Defend the Proposal

Although it is preferable for the proposal defense to take place face-to-face with the Committee, due to the geographic dispersion of the University’s Student body, a teleconference or webinar defense will most likely be the best choice. The student, working with the Chair, shall ensure the defense is formal and professional. Additionally, the Chair shall ensure the student’s presentation material is professional and free of errors and, if applicable, that the student is familiar with the webinar presentation software.

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

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

Three possible outcomes may result from the dissertation proposal defense. First, the Committee may approve the Candidate’s proposal. If the proposal is successfully defended, the Committee will sign the cover page of the proposal and it will be placed in the Candidate’s electronic file. A shared file should be created when a student starts the dissertation process. This file should be created by the dissertation coordinator. The Candidate will be given permission to begin Step Five of the dissertation process.

Second, the Committee may accept the proposal with modifications. The Committee will not approve the proposal until such changes are made. The Candidate should submit these modifications to the Chair for review.

Third, the Committee may not approve the proposal. Rescheduling and recommendations for a second attempt will be determined on a case-by-case basis by each Committee. A successful proposal defense must be accomplished before the Candidate can move forward with any aspect of conducting the research or evaluation.
F. Step 5: Obtain Approval by the Institutional Review Board

The federal government requires that all institutions, whether university, company, or agency ensure that all state and federal regulations are observed by researchers in their community. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) examines all research to ensure that the welfare of human research participants is protected. Data collection cannot begin until IRB approval has been obtained. The IRB’s current guidelines and application forms can be found on the Graduate Center for Research and Evaluation (GCRE) webpage. The Student’s Doctoral Committee Chair serves as the faculty sponsor and works with the Student to ensure that proper ethical standards are applied to the project and that informed consent is used when appropriate. Consider the following guidelines in obtaining IRB approval.

1. First, determine which IRB application form to use (see the Guidelines and Forms the IRB website). If the project involves minimal risk, the exempt research application is appropriate. Guidelines for expedited and full research are also found under the Guidelines and Forms link.

2. Once the appropriate form has been chosen, view the “avoiding pitfalls section” of the IRB homepage. This section provides application hints based upon the study’s design. Many times, simple modifications to a design can prevent delay (or the need for resubmittal) in the application process.

3. Once the Student is aware of the particular issues his or her design might pose for approval, he or she should proceed with completing the application form. The form will require the Student’s signature as Primary Investigator and the Faculty Sponsor’s signature in order to be considered complete. Prior to submission to the IRB, the Student's Chair must review and approve the application.

The Student should submit the appropriate and completed IRB application form to the IRB after obtaining review and permission from the Chair to submit the approved application form. For exempt or expedited submissions, the IRB should render a decision within two weeks. For full review submissions, which require a more thorough review process, the IRB should be able to render a decision within one month. No IRB application can be submitted without Chair review and approval. No data can be collected without IRB approval. If a student wishes to collect and analyze archived or public use data, the student guided by the Dissertation Chair shall inquire with IRB the efficacy of collecting these data and make note of the IRB’s decision.

G. Step 6: Conduct the Research

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

H. Step 7: Complete Final Chapters

In the approved research Proposal, the Candidate typically has completed Chapters One through
Three. After the research is completed and Chapters Four and Five are being written, the first three chapters should reflect past tense (reflecting completed action). The remaining chapters present the results, summarize and interpret the data, draw conclusions, discuss practical implications, and make recommendations for future research. Further, the Candidate must complete the entire dissertation document (e.g., Abstract, Appendixes, Table of Contents, Transition Paragraphs, etc).

I. Step 8: Submit the Entire Dissertation for Defense

Once the Doctoral Student has completed the final draft of the dissertation, it should be submitted to the Committee. Typically, the Committee will provide feedback to the Candidate within 30 days. Any required changes to the document should be made and resubmitted to the Committee. This process will continue until all of the Committee Members approve the document. At that time, the Student and the Committee should schedule the dissertation defense. The defense will be scheduled no sooner than 30 days following approval of the final draft. The Student must create a dissertation announcement via the Dissertation Portal.

J. Step 9: Defend the Dissertation

1. Purpose of the Dissertation Defense

The oral defense of the dissertation is open to members of the Liberty University academic community. It should be approached seriously and with dignity because it is the culminating event of a Student’s Doctoral degree. Members of the Committee will evaluate the Student’s ability to present his or her research in a scholarly manner. Committee Members will assess the Student on his or her ability to:

- Share knowledge with the academic community,
- Be innovative and creative in the applications of scholarship and practice,
- Interact with the academic community, and
- Logically and adequately present ideas during a critical review or constructive exchange.

The Student’s Chair coordinates the meeting and the procedures for conducting the defense. If the Candidate wishes to graduate at the upcoming commencement, he or she must schedule the defense early in the semester. Each Committee member must approve the final draft before the defense can be scheduled. The defense may be scheduled 30 or more days following final acceptance of the document by all Committee Members.

The elements of the defense should be negotiated with the Student’s Committee Chair prior to the defense meeting. Some Chairs may wish for the Student to develop a PowerPoint presentation and handouts that reviews the study and results. Just as in the proposal defense, the student, working with the Chair shall ensure the defense is formal and professional. Additionally, the Chair shall ensure the student’s PowerPoint, videos, supporting material is professional and free of errors and, if applicable, that the student is familiar with the webinar presentation software.

2. The Defense Proper
While presentations may vary in length, most reviews can be accomplished in approximately 20 minutes. Following the presentation, questions will be addressed to the Doctoral Student. Questions may relate directly to the research, its theoretical underpinnings, or be of a more general nature to test the qualifications of the Student to receive the Doctoral degree. Following a period of questioning by Committee Members, other attendees may question the Candidate. Keep in mind that attendees will most likely refer to “virtual attendees.”

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

1. The Candidate passes, though minor editing changes may be necessary and the Committee Members, except the Chair sign the signature page. The Chair will sign the signature page once the changes have been completed.
2. The Candidate is provisionally passed pending the submission of changes, review, and approval by the Candidate’s Committee. The Committee Members will not sign the signature page until all changes have been approved. The Candidate will not be required to defend again.
3. The Student is not passed. In this case the Candidate must meet with the Chair (or Committee) to develop a plan to be completed before the resubmission of the document and the rescheduling of a defense.

The successful defense of the dissertation concludes the work of the Committee. Each Committee Member must sign a signature page for the student to submit separately into the ETD Submission Form as proof of completion for university records. Scholarly Communications will not post signatures in Scholars Crossing.

Committee Members should use black ink when signing the signature page of the original copy of the dissertation. The work of the Chair and the Student is not completed until all changes have been made, all signatures are present, and all documents are delivered to their appropriate sources.

K. Step 10: Obtain a Professional Editor to Review the Dissertation for Form and Style

- After the successful defense of the dissertation, the Student will make corrections as required by the Committee.
- If the Student has not done so already, he or she needs to carefully review the dissertation guide for compliance with the HSOG form and style.
- **All Students are required to obtain an editor to have their dissertation carefully reviewed to ensure excellence in style, format, grammar, spelling, syntax, and appropriate rules in the required style guide.**
- The Student will be required to make all the necessary changes and resubmit the corrected dissertation for review.
- **The Student is responsible for the costs associated with obtaining the editor.**

L. Step 11: Submit the Final Dissertation

Once compliance has been verified, the Student is then ready to submit the dissertation for publication. The submission guidelines must be strictly followed and can be reviewed in more detail.
on the Submitting Dissertations and Theses website.

1. Ensure that all required pages are present: Signature Page, Cover Page, Table of Contents, Abstract, List of Tables, and List of Figures.
2. Ensure accuracy with all page numbering and reference list.
3. Ensure that reprinted material conforms to all governmental copyright regulations. Failure to comply with copyright regulations will prevent the dissertation from being accepted.
4. Liberty University has adopted the Microsoft® Office software bundle as the standard for its operations. The dissertation must be submitted in Microsoft® Office Word. It is important that the dissertation template found in the dissertation guide’s appendices be followed to prevent problems from converting the dissertation to a PDF format.
5. Each Student will need to upload the completed and approved dissertation to the ETD Submission Form. Instructions for submission can be found on the Submitting Dissertations and Theses website. Once the dissertation has been received by Scholarly Communications, the Student will receive an email stating that the submission has been received for review. This does not mean the Student work has been accepted. Scholarly Communications will review the work to make sure it is ready for publication. When the work has been accepted for publication, Scholarly Communications will send the Student a congratulatory email.
6. Once approval has been obtained from the Scholarly Communications, the dissertation must be submitted for binding. Since the University no longer binds dissertations, it is the Student’s responsibility to provide a bound copy for the Department. If you wish additional copies, you may also order them. The binding company recommended by Scholarly Communications can be found on the Submitting Dissertations and Theses website: Additional bound copies might be requested by the Student’s Committee member. Of course, most Students also choose to have a bound copy for themselves. The cost of binding these copies is the responsibility of the Student.
7. Once the bound copies are received, the Student should forward them to the HSOG for signatures. The Student is responsible for any costs associated with mailing.

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APPENDIX A: COMPONENTS OF THE COMPLETED DISSERTATION

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

A. Preliminary Pages

Preliminary pages must appear in the order described below. These pages are numbered with lower case roman numerals.

- **Title Page**: Each copy of the dissertation must include a title page prepared exactly in accordance with the EXAMPLE. This is the only page among the preliminary pages that does not bear a page number; it is page “i” but the “i” is not printed on the page. The Student’s full legal name should be used on the title page.
- **Signature/Approval Page**: All copies must include a signature page that has been signed in black ink by each Committee member. The page number appears on the bottom of this page as “ii.” The author may include a copyright statement on the signature page. It should be centered and appear after the author’s full legal name as follows: © Copyright, YEAR.
- **Abstract**: (If style guide requires): All dissertations must have an abstract that briefly describes the problem, purpose, methods, and summary of findings.
- **Dedication** (Optional): The Student may wish to include a dedication.
- **Acknowledgement** (Optional): Many authors include an acknowledgement page to express their appreciation to those who have assisted in the dissertation.
- **Table of Contents**: consistent with relevant style guide.

B. Text, References and Appendices Sections

All dissertations by Students in the Helms School of Government program shall comply with the writing format of the most recent version of appropriate style guide.

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APPENDIX B: FORMATTING & STYLE

A. Basics

- The margins for all chapters of the dissertation are: 1 inch at the top and bottom, 1 inch on the right side, and 1.5 inches on the left side. Text should be Times New Roman, 12-point font.
- Text within the body of the manuscript should be left justified and double spaced throughout the document with page numbers in the upper right-hand corner.
- Page numbering should be Arabic, with no number on the title page.
- All manuscripts should follow the latest version of the appropriate style manual. For further information consult the Thesis and Dissertation and Publishing Guides.
- Students are responsible to give one bound copy of their dissertation to the Helms School of government. Information about binding and publication is via the Library site.

B. Style, Additional

- Broadly speaking, the dissertation is a scholarly document written for professionals in their specific field of study.
- A dissertation typically ranges from 125 to 200 pages of text with some exceeding 400 pages and contains a thorough literature review that is typically 30 to 75 pages in length depending on the topic and amount of previous research.
- The dissertation should follow the most recent edition of the appropriate style guide. However, the formatting guidelines and the templates for the dissertation outlined in this handbook need to be followed where specified.
- It is highly recommended that candidates retain their textbooks and software from their previous statistics and research methods courses as these can be very useful guides in the development of their project and identification of appropriate statistical analyses to use.

C. Academic Honesty

Liberty University considers academic honesty and integrity to be one of its highest values. The dissertation should represent an original contribution to the knowledge base of the Student’s field of study. Students are accountable for conducting original research that leads to the discovery of new information that informs policy or theoretical improvement. Thus, they are expected to submit original work. The reuse of previously published materials, including master’s theses or Doctoral research conducted elsewhere, is prohibited except if cited like any other scholarly work.

Students must cite the ideas and work of others appropriately, using the citation style currently adopted by the program in which they are enrolled. Properly crediting others’ scholarly work is an ethical imperative for all academics and one that demonstrates an author’s own integrity. The same principles that guide expectations of academic honestly and integrity in coursework hold true for the dissertation.

The Chair of the Doctoral Committee may require a student to submit his/ her dissertation at any
stage of the writing process through plagiarism detection software. The consequences of apparent academic dishonesty are given to the Doctoral Committee Chair and the Committee for their discretion. For more information on the University’s policies regarding academic dishonesty, please refer to the student honor code and plagiarism/academic integrity policies found here.