

Liberty University
School of Music

Doctoral Thesis Handbook

**For students completing the
Doctor of Music Education**

For students on the 2020-21 DCP and following

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Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to assist students pursuing the Doctor of Music Education (DME) at Liberty University who are working toward Thesis Project Defense (MUSC 890). This manual includes details and requirements concerning the thesis. Further, this manual provides practical suggestions for each of the thesis components. The student is encouraged to review the **DME Thesis Checklist** located in [Appendix E](#) as well as the **DME Milestones** located in [Appendix F](#).

The production of an acceptable thesis represents the culminating experience of the Doctor of Music Education degree program. A thesis is an extended discourse on a research topic of significance in the student's field of study. Composing a quality doctoral thesis requires high levels of application, commitment, and rigor from the doctoral student.

As this thesis demonstrates the comprehensive nature of the DME studies and incorporates the scope of educational and professional experience, the student is encouraged to think about a topic early in the program, formulate possible thesis topics, and conduct research related to those topics.

Working on a thesis requires the ability to think constructively and carry out research that must be demonstrated in the final product. To make a worthy contribution to the greater repository of knowledge, the student should base the research of the subject on the current discussion of scholars in the field of study. Defense of this subject necessitates an exhaustive search for what others have written on the proposed topic. The student should not merely repeat what others have written but should instead make an original contribution to the subject. The final thesis must embody a well-researched position, demonstrating critical judgment and independence of thought.

Students are encouraged to use Grammarly or other editing tools. Apply tools to check grammar. Students should not use AI generation capabilities of Grammarly or other tools. The role of LU faculty is not to serve as editors; therefore, the School of Music recommends that each student employ a professional editor before their final defense. Students may select an editor of their choosing and at their own expense. Students should be aware that they may be required to re-enroll in MUSC 889 if formatting, spelling, or grammar do not meet expectations for the final submission. Students are expected to know and follow the policy on academic honesty stated in the Graduate Catalog.

A thesis is primarily an academic document demonstrating high proficiency in research and analytical skills. To accomplish this purpose, it may be necessary for the thesis writer to draw conclusions with which the faculty are not in full agreement. For this reason, it is understood that

the views expressed in a student's thesis are not necessarily those of the university, the faculty, or the specific Thesis Committee Chair and Reader who may approve the thesis. On the other hand, the student should recognize that the thesis is being written at Liberty University and for a Thesis Committee Chair and Reader who agree with the doctrinal statement of the institution. Further, students should remember that all research topics must be grounded in related research. A main part of the researcher's role is to avoid bias in methodology and eliminate bias when reporting results.

Thesis Purpose and General Description

The thesis represents the final element of formal training. As such, it should significantly contribute to the individual student, the existing body of literature, and the student's chosen field. The thesis must lend research support to a practical application of an applied approach by:

- Showing that the thesis is supported by an appropriate theoretical basis (biblical, ethical, philosophical, psychological, educational, sociological, theological).
- Describing and defending the research design and practical implementation.
- Evaluating the significance of the thesis for music education.
- Communicating fresh and original understandings of music education to peers.

The specific research design of the thesis is dependent upon the nature of the individual topic. This design shall be determined through consultation with the Thesis Committee Chair and Reader. One Thesis Committee Chair and one Reader form a committee to supervise the thesis.

The doctoral thesis should be at least 100 pages, excluding front matter, appendices, and bibliography.

General Writing Guidelines

Essential guidelines for thesis form are found in *A Manual For Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (current edition) by Kate L. Turabian and in Liberty University's [Turabian Sample Paper for all Students](#). Additional instructions as to the form and mechanics of the thesis will be given in MUSC 880 after all other coursework is complete. Accuracy in form, correct grammar, good organization, and a clear and concise English style are necessary for a successful thesis.

Students are encouraged to download and utilize the Thesis/Dissertation Template provided on the [SOM Thesis/Dissertation Handbook Website](#). The template is pre-formatted to provide proper pagination, margins, and font. It is designed with section breaks to incorporate this

formatting. Students should review the comments provided in the template to ensure they understand the importance of maintaining these section breaks which affects the formatting in the template.

Length

The minimum doctoral thesis length requirement is 100 pages, excluding front matter, appendices, and bibliography. The research method influences the length of each chapter. The Associate Dean of the School of Music must approve any exceptions to these guidelines.

Font

The thesis should be completed in Times New Roman, 12 pt. font. Exceptions are made for tables, figures, captions, footnote matter, etc. Footnotes should be written in 10 pt. font. Italics and quotation marks should be utilized for all sources as defined by Turabian guidelines. Limit the use of boldface, except for headings and subheadings.

Margins

The document should be set to 1 in. margins on all four sides of the document throughout.

Formatting/Citations

Turabian format must be utilized throughout the thesis. Footnotes should be used for all citations within the thesis. Refer to the Turabian manual for further guidelines regarding Turabian formatting in thesis documents. Footnote numbering refreshes in each new chapter of the thesis. Footnote numbers begin at 1 and continue sequentially until the next chapter begins.

Formatting/Tables and Figures

Turabian format must be utilized throughout the thesis. Tables (data) and figures (images) should be created and displayed with the correct text, size, lines, table structure, column heads, stubs, footnotes, figure numbers, and figure caption style. See Section 26 of *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian.

Pagination

Page numbers should be listed in the top, right-hand corner of the page. The Title Page should

not be numbered. Pagination should begin with the body of the paper proper on page 1. Pages before the paper body should have lowercase Roman numerals (i.e., ii, iii, etc.) listed in bottom center of the page. The title page is considered the first page (Roman Numeral i); however, no page number appears on the title page of the document.

Text Body and Line Spacing

The main text of the thesis should be double-spaced. Block quotations and lists should be single-spaced. Main body text should be left-aligned throughout except in the case of headings. The first line of each new paragraph should be indented by 0.5 inches. Footnote entries should also be single-spaced, with an extra space between each consecutive footnote. Individual bibliography entries should be single-spaced with an additional single space between sources.

Liberty University recommends adding an extra single-spaced line before each subheading, so the total space between the end of one section and the next subheading should be the equivalent of three single-spaced lines (one and a half double-spaced lines).

There should only be one space after periods and other punctuation at the end of each sentence before beginning a new sentence.

Students should refer to the Turabian Manual and Turabian Resources at the [Turabian Format Quick Guide](#) for assistance in formatting their thesis.

Building a Scholarly Work

The student should utilize the following steps in completing their thesis for the Doctor of Music Education:

Step 1: Research Topic Development

The student applies broad inquiry and research to develop a research topic in MUSC 880. After receiving initial approval of the research topic from their instructor in MUSC 880, the student creates documents in MUSC 880 (**Second Chapter One Draft** and **Proposal Excerpts** assignments) to assist in the development of the Thesis Proposal in MUSC 888 (Chapters 1-3). The instructor of MUSC 880 determines whether the documents created in MUSC 880 are sufficient for the student to move to MUSC 888.

The **Proposal Excerpts** assignment developed in MUSC 880 must include the following headings and subheadings:

Abstract
 Research Questions
 Significance of the Research Questions
 Core Concepts
 Working Hypotheses
 Methodology
 Research Method
 Research Design
 Research Plan
 IRB
 Sampling Method
 Instrumentation/Data Collection Plan
 Procedures
 Proposed Data Analysis
 Bibliography

A link to the **Proposal Excerpts Assignment Template** is available on the Thesis Handbook Website, in MUSC 880, and the Thesis section of the Student Communications Center (SCC) for required headings and additional content information.

Step 2: Thesis Proposal Approval

In MUSC 888, the Committee determines the sufficiency of the Thesis Proposal (Chapters 1-3) to support a decision to conduct the study (See [Appendix C](#)). In Module 1 of MUSC 888, the student must submit the **Second Chapter One Draft** and the **Proposal Excerpts** assignments created in MUSC 880 to provide an overview of the proposed study for the Thesis Committee Chair to review.

Note: After Module 1 of MUSC 888, use the term Chapter One or Chapter One: Introduction instead of **Second Chapter One Draft**. **Second Chapter One Draft** refers to a specific assignment in MUSC 880. The term is not relevant in MUSC 889 or MUSC 890.

The student will then revise the **Second Chapter One Draft** as the Thesis Committee Chair deems necessary. Following the revision of the **Second Chapter One Draft**, students are now writing the Thesis Proposal, which comprises the first three chapters of the doctoral thesis: Chapter One: Introduction, Chapter Two: Literature Review, and Chapter Three: Methodology. See [Step 6](#) for individual chapter requirements. Each chapter must adhere to the prescribed Turabian writing style (see the [Turabian Format Quick Guide](#)). Following a Doctoral Thesis Proposal Decision of Full Approval (See [Appendix C](#)), the student may submit an application for

Instructional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct research with human subjects (See [Step 4](#)).

Note: Students are encouraged to download and utilize the Thesis/Dissertation Template provided on the [SOM Thesis/Dissertation Handbook Website](#) to compose the Thesis Proposal (Chapters 1-3) with approved formatting (See [General Writing Guidelines](#)).

Students should prepare a **PowerPoint** to share with their Committee during the Doctoral Thesis Proposal Decision presentation with one slide for each of the nine items listed below. The bullet points presented in the PowerPoint should "unpack" the ideas and highlight salient features of the proposed thesis so that committee members are well informed of the purpose and intent.

- Title Slide – Display the thesis title, your name, semester, and year.
- Background – Discuss the sources and elements that indicate a need for study.
- Problem – Describe the problem that must be addressed.
- Purpose – Describe what you intend to do in your study (not prove).
- Research questions – State the research question or questions you plan to ask to guide the purpose of your study (must match research design).
- Framework – Describe, if any, the theories or concepts that "frame" your study.
- Significance of Study – Describe without bias how your study may benefit music education and contribute to the body of scholarly literature.
- Research Plan – State the chosen research method, the chosen research design/approach, and list the precise steps you plan to use in your research plan.
- Bibliography – Include the bibliography of sources that you have used in your PowerPoint. Do not include your entire bibliography for study, only the sources used in the PowerPoint. You may cite sources parenthetically instead of using footnotes throughout this presentation.

Step 3: Thesis Proposal Decision

The Committee renders a decision regarding the Proposal, and the Thesis Committee Chair communicates one of the three following outcomes:

1. **Full Approval** to proceed with no proposal revisions. When this decision is rendered, the student may fully engage the research and writing process according to the established timeline. **Upon full approval, the student may apply for IRB approval, if applicable** (see [Step 4](#) concerning IRB approval process).
2. **Provisional Approval** to proceed with Proposal pending cited revisions. (This is the most common decision). All revisions must be resubmitted to the Thesis Committee Chair according to the established timeline, and the Thesis Committee Chair indicates the

Committee's evaluation of the required revisions. **The student may NOT apply for IRB approval until full approval is granted.**

3. **Redirection of Proposal.** This decision is rendered in cases when minor revisions will not meet the Committee's expectations for the thesis. Possible reasons for this decision may include: The presence of a poorly constructed research plan, a scope of study that is too large or too small, a study focus that does not contribute a meaningful extension of the existing research, or a presentation that lacks demonstration of a practical application. Further instructions should be clarified and communicated by the student's Thesis Committee Chair. **The student may NOT apply for IRB approval.**

See [Appendix D](#) for the Doctoral Thesis Proposal Decision Form.

Step 4: Apply for IRB Approval

The School of Music strongly recommends that all studies involve a human element and, therefore, IRB Approval. A student may identify a problem, develop a topic, and apply a methodology that does not require IRB approval. However, avoiding the IRB should not be a driving force in methodology.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University exists to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research studies being conducted by or with Liberty faculty, staff, and students. One of the ways the IRB protects participants' rights and welfare is to require students conducting research involving people or information about people to submit an application to the IRB prior to enrolling participants in or collecting data for their research. The IRB then reviews, requests revisions of, and approves the application once it meets the standards for approval as set forth by the Office for Human Research Protections (a branch of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services).

There may be cases in which IRB review and approval are not applicable to the research, but only the IRB may determine this. Students are encouraged to explore the [IRB webpage](#) and download available resources prior to composing Chapter Three: Methodology of their study. Doing so will inform methodology, strengthen the initial IRB application, and help to reduce the number of elements requiring adaptation.

It is crucial for students to consider the approval timeline for the Institutional Review Board as they construct the Thesis Timeline, knowing that anonymous, minimal risk studies are often approved within four weeks, while more complicated studies may take six to eight weeks. These approval timelines depend on the quality of the application, the IRB's current application load, and the length of time it takes the student to submit revisions to the IRB. For more information about the IRB, the application process, and to access the application, please visit the [IRB](#)

[webpage](#). Remember that the IRB application must be approved prior to conducting surveys, interviews, etc., and moving on to writing Chapters 4-5 of the thesis, and that a Thesis Proposal is not reviewed in place of the IRB Application.

Submit draft copies of research instruments and IRB application. The IRB homepage on Liberty University's website includes samples of these materials with a copy of any cover letters. The Thesis Committee Chair must approve all research methods and instruments before they are used. If these documents are flawed, then the research may be meaningless. These drafts and an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application are done through the Cayuse system.

Once the application is submitted to the Institutional Review Board, the student must work directly with the IRB to modify it until it is approved. **Save the approval letter because it is one of the required appendices for the Thesis.**

Step 5: Use Scholarly Sources

Students should research their topic thoroughly and **make notes with citations**. Much time and frustration can be saved by keeping a running list of related quotes, statistics, and studies. Students should further develop categories and tag citations within categories, and seek to identify emerging themes.

Students will also need to ensure that they are using scholarly sources. Citations **MUST** be from scholarly sources. Read the following paragraphs carefully **BEFORE** beginning research to ensure that **scholarly** sources (as defined below) make up most of the sources. Students are encouraged to review the information in [Appendix A: Introduction to the Jerry Falwell Library](#) to aid in their search for scholarly sources.

Definition of "Scholarly"

In general, a "scholarly" source is **one that is written or edited by a "scholar"** – that is, a person who has earned a graduate degree in the field of interest. Having such a degree (usually a doctorate) means the author has proved mastery in the field to be considered an expert. This expertise does not mean that the person's interpretation of their field is beyond question or debate; instead, it means that they know enough about the field to have an **INFORMED** interpretation (in other words, one that others ought at least to consider).

"What is scholarly information, and how can you find it?" Most scholarly sources of information are "peer-reviewed" or "juried" and have the following elements:

- Lengthy articles (i.e., **more than seven pages**) or **texts written by experts or scholars for an expert or academic audience** (faculty, graduate students, researchers) in a

particular field.

- **Employ a formal, scholarly, or technical writing style utilizing a vocabulary that requires some degree of subject knowledge.**
- The author's expertise is usually given near the beginning or at the end of the article or book, and **an abstract is included with journal articles.**
- Sources are **cited in footnotes and bibliography.**
- They are often reviewed by an author's peers (hence the term "**peer-reviewed**") before publication. It is important to note that the peers referred to here are other scholars or academic experts studying the same academic subject as the author.
- The purpose of the publication is to share information within the subject field. Articles and books are based on original research and experimentation in science or social science or are the writings, criticism, and reviews of scholars in the humanities.
- **Published by academic presses, professional associations, or universities.** Any advertisements are usually for books, journals, or conferences.

Step 6: Write Your Thesis

The following components should appear in the final document. The Thesis Committee Chair retains the final authority on the nature, scope, and organization of the thesis. The thesis should include the following:

Front Matter

1. Title Page
2. Thesis Defense Decision Signatures
3. Acknowledgments (optional)
4. Abstract (250 words or less)
5. Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction (suggested min. 15 pages)

In Chapter One, the student identifies the topic, scope, and research question of the study, establishing the context for the entire document. The following sections should be included:

- Background
- Statement of the Problem
- Statement of the Purpose
- Significance of the Study
- Research Question and Sub-Questions
- Hypotheses (quantitative studies)

- Definition of Terms/Theoretical Framework/Conceptual Framework (heading based on methodology)
- Summary

Chapter One should give the reader an introductory foundation of the subject and what the researcher plans to accomplish through the academic and applied research process. Students should clearly introduce the topic and highlight the purpose of the study. Chapter One should transition smoothly into the next chapter. This is an opportunity to use and cite bibliography sources.

Chapter Two: Literature Review (suggested min. 30 pages)

In Chapter Two, students should summarize and evaluate relevant sources of information related to their topic. The majority of their references should be from scholarly sources. This focus places the topic in context with other research in the area. As the student researches, sub-topics may emerge. The student should discuss these sub-topics with their Thesis Committee Chair and then group information together in a logical flow that helps further define the topic. Use section headings to separate sources.

Chapter Three: Methodology (suggested min. 10 pages)

In Chapter Three, students will describe how they investigated the research questions. They must describe their research method (type of data observed) and research design (approach) here in such a manner as to allow someone to duplicate the exact study.

Students should identify the kind of research design/approach used, such as:

Applied – a research method in which the researcher seeks to offer practical solutions for various problems in a setting. The setting can be site-specific. Applied research guides data collection procedures, data analysis, and the development of recommendations. Applied research is an effective research method to foster improvement in music education (See Claxton and Mott, 2023; Claxton and Michael, 2021, in Recommend Reading).

Case Study – a qualitative research design in which detailed consideration is given to the experiences of participants in real life, which can be studied to learn about practices or concepts within a bounded case (See Algozzine and Hancock, 2017, in Recommended Reading).

Correlational – a quantitative research design that measures both the strength (r) and direction (positive or negative) between two variables to consider potential relationships. However, a statistically significant correlation does not equal causation (See Claxton and Mott, 2023, in Recommend Reading).

Descriptive – a quantitative research design that gathers relevant numeric information by observing elements such as characteristics, frequencies, and trends of phenomena or groups of interest (See Claxton and Mott, 2023, in Recommend Reading).

Ethnographic – a qualitative research design in which systematic investigation of a culture's situation or problem generates new knowledge or validation of existing knowledge. This research design requires an in-depth study of members of the particular culture for the systematic collection, description, and analysis of data with the chief end of the development of theories of cultural behavior. (See Giampietro and Molle, 2017, in Recommend Reading).

Experimental – a [true] experimental design (in contrast to a quasi-experimental design) seeks to determine cause-and-effect relationships between variables *by randomly assigning participants* to experimental and control groups (See Creswell and Creswell, 2023, in Recommend Reading).

Quasi-Experimental – a quasi-experimental design (in contrast to a true experimental design) seeks to determine cause-and-effect relationships between variables *without randomly assigning participants* to experimental and control groups (See Creswell and Creswell, 2023, in Recommend Reading).

Grounded Theory – a quantitative research design that seeks to generate or discover a theory regarding a process or action (See Chamaz, 2014, in Recommend Reading).

Historical – a quantitative research design that presents a systematic examination of past events to give an account of what has happened in the past. This must include implications that are practical. This research design must focus on interpreting historical events to predict future ones. This type of research is NOT merely a recounting of historical events (See Claxton and Mott, 2023, in Recommend Reading).

Narrative – a qualitative research design that delves deeply into the aspects of a small group of participants or an individual, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of their experiences (See Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, in Recommend Reading).

Phenomenology – a qualitative research design that seeks to discover, understand, and describe the lived experiences of participants (See Peoples, 2021, in Recommend Reading).

Survey – a research design (qualitative or quantitative) that facilitates fast and easy data collection from a large number of participants. However, survey design results and findings often lack the depth and contextual relevance possible through other research designs (See Claxton and

Mott, 2023, in Recommend Reading).

All research methods must include information about the participants in the study (when working with human subjects), data collection, and how the researcher plans to validate and analyze data.

Chapter Four: Results (suggested min. 25 pages)

Chapter Four reports the results of the research. The student will supply an overview of the findings through tables (data) and figures (graphs, charts, pictures, for example). Please keep in mind that an entire survey cannot be included in this chapter; rather, this chapter should highlight the main focus of a survey and place the survey, questionnaires, etc., in the appendices. For example, if a survey includes 20 questions, students may highlight a minimum of 10 most relevant findings. The following sections must be included:

- Introduction
- Results (or Findings)
- Summary

Chapter Five: Conclusion/Discussion (suggested min. 20 pages)

Chapter Five serves as the conclusion to the thesis. The following sections must be included:

- Summary of Study: What was the purpose of your study? What significant (statistical or practical) findings did you uncover and report in the results chapter?
- Summary of Findings and Previous Research: What does the data mean? How do findings answer (or not answer) the research questions introduced in Chapter One? Do theoretical findings exist (grounded theory, for example)? Indicate how the results fit in with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.
- Limitations: All research has limitations. Explain the unavoidable factors encountered while gathering data that may have limited the results and findings of your study.
- Recommendations for Future Study: What recommendations, applications, or actions should be taken from your research and others (literature review) in the field?
- Implications for Practice: What are the most important results of your study? How do they relate to other researchers in the field? How can findings be applied to enhance teaching and learning in music?
- Summary: Write a concise conclusion to Chapter Five that traces from the beginning of your entire thesis.

Back Matter

- Appendices: This section can include supporting documentation as required by the Thesis Committee Chair (blackout signatures and personal data).

- Bibliography: A listing of all source material quoted, summarized, or footnoted in the thesis. Consult the latest edition of Turabian for further instructions.
- IRB Approval (1 page): An official email/memo or documentation from the IRB.

Step 7: Submit a Complete Draft of the Thesis

Upon the Thesis Committee Chair's permission, the student must submit a completed draft of his or her thesis in MUSC 889. Note that the completed draft may be submitted at any point within the semester when deemed ready by the Thesis Committee Chair (i.e., if the draft is ready in Module 6, it will be submitted in Module 6 and no further uploads will be necessary, unless requested by the Thesis Committee Chair). **Please use a proofreading/Turabian editing service before submitting the final draft of the thesis (recommended).** Once reviewed by the Thesis Committee Chair, it will be sent to the Reader for suggested edits.

Step 8: Thesis Defense

The Thesis Committee Chair should request registration for MUSC 890 on behalf of the student once the final thesis has been submitted in Canvas and approved by the Thesis Committee Chair and Reader. The defense occurs before the Thesis Committee Chair, Reader, and other faculty who desire to attend. The candidate must be able to answer questions such as the following:

- What is the background of the study?
- Why did you choose the topic?
- What methodology did you use and why?
- What did you learn in research?
- What is the significance of the study?
- What are the limitations of the study?
- How did the findings impact you personally?
- How do you plan to utilize the information?

The student must prepare and use a PowerPoint presentation (10 to 15 minutes) that overviews the thesis. The PowerPoint should provide an overview of the thesis, its scope, methodology, basis of research, results, limitations, and recommendations for future study. The student must be prepared to answer detailed questions about the contents of his or her thesis and PowerPoint presentation.

Upon completion of the defense, the thesis may receive full approval, provisional approval, or be redirected for significant modification. If the faculty Thesis Committee Chair and Reader grant full approval of the thesis, the Thesis Committee Chair and Reader submit final comments and a

completed rubric to the Grade Center. The final grade is posted in Canvas only after the student makes any edits requested by the Thesis Committee Chair and Reader and submits the final draft of the thesis to the Jerry Falwell Library Scholars Crossing.

See [Appendix D](#) for Doctoral Thesis Defense Decision form.

Step 9: Submit to The Jerry Falwell Library

Once students have successfully defended and completed all revisions, they will submit their thesis to [Scholars Crossing](#). Students should review the appropriate Library webpage to get complete updated policies for submitting their thesis. All graduate theses and dissertations must be electronically submitted to the Jerry Falwell Library as a graduation requirement. The Jerry Falwell Library no longer requires a bound copy. Please visit the [Submitting Thesis and Dissertation Website](#) for specific instructions.

Commencement

***If your goal is to participate in the graduation ceremony, usually held in May, you must have completed all courses on your Doctor of Music Education DCP, with grades posted, and your thesis accepted by the LU Library Digital Commons by the deadline established by the university, usually in the first week of April.**

Students must email commencement@liberty.edu as soon as their final defense course registration has been processed so Commencement can approve the student's request to attend (pending verification that the student has successfully met all degree requirements).

Please note that the Thesis Committee Chair and Reader cannot predict a Doctoral Thesis Defense Approval before the completion of the doctoral thesis. Thus, it is inadvisable for students to make travel arrangements to attend Commencement before a successful Doctoral Thesis Defense and the Jerry Falwell Library accepts the Doctoral Thesis for publication.

Please call (800) 424-9596 (Graduate, Post-Graduate, and Doctoral Advising) for additional information and guidance.

Thesis Courses

The following courses are part of the DME degree:

[MUSC 880](#) – Introduction to Thesis Writing Project

[MUSC 888](#) – Thesis Project Proposal & Research I

[MUSC 889*](#) – Thesis Project Proposal & Research II

[MUSC 890](#)** – Thesis Project Defense

[MUSC 892](#)*** – Comprehensive Exam

*Students may be required to repeat MUSC 889, Thesis Proposal and Research, to gain Committee approval for enrollment in MUSC 890. Students must receive approval from the School of Music administration for enrollment beyond three repetitions of MUSC 889.

** Students may not enroll in MUSC 890 themselves. Chair will request enrollment in MUSC 890 when the student is ready to defend, possibly in the middle of a semester.

***Students in the DME program are required to complete MUSC 892, Comprehensive Exam, which should be taken in the same semester as MUSC 888.

MUSC 880

Introduction to Thesis Writing Project, MUSC 880, prepares the student to develop a study for a doctoral thesis. The student must develop a research topic, receive preliminary research topic approval from the instructor, and compose **Second Chapter One Draft** and **Proposal Excerpts** assignments. The **Second Chapter One Draft** and **Proposal Excerpts** assignments provide the foundation for the Thesis Proposal to be developed in MUSC 888 (Chapters 1-3).

When writing their thesis title, students should consider the following:

- a. What is the subject to be researched?
- b. The subtitle should answer the "so what" question; in other words, what will the research accomplish to improve the music education delivered by the student and his or her peers? What significant improvements in music education could be suggested and implemented based on this thesis? The title should not exceed 15 words.

Students also prepare an abstract, which should be limited to 250 words, and answer the following questions:

- a. What is the description of the topic?
- b. What is the rationale for the topic choice?
- c. What is the research approach (method and design)?
- d. What is the potential value of the topic in music education?

Students prepare two related documents in MUSC 880 in preparation for MUSC 888, the **Proposal Excerpts** and the **Second Chapter One Draft**. The **Proposal Excerpts** contributes to the development of the first three chapters of a doctoral thesis. **Second Chapter One Draft** outlines and develops sections found in Chapter One of a typical doctoral thesis.

Many of the core concepts introduced in the **Proposal Excerpts** become headings for the Chapter Two literature review discussion. The research plan section of **Proposal Excerpts** helps define the methodology in Chapter Three. Students must determine both a research method (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) and a research design (i.e., historical, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, descriptive, correlational, experimental, quasi-experimental, survey, case study, or program evaluation) in the research plan of their **Proposal Excerpts**.

These and other pre-coursework for MUSC 880 may guide the student to delve deeply into the selected topic of interest to gather the academic resources necessary to conduct preliminary research. This preliminary research should help the student examine the current literature to determine the available research on the topic and the relevancy of the topic from a practical standpoint.

Securing a Thesis Committee Chair and Reader

In MUSC 880, the student also completes the **Capstone Planning Assignment** and submits the Thesis or Dissertation Planning Form that describes the planned topic and research methodology for their research. Based on the information provided in the form, the School of Music staff will assist the student in confirming a Thesis Committee Chair and Reader. Upon completion of MUSC 880, if the student has completed most other courses in the degree, the student may submit a registration request for MUSC 888 to begin the thesis writing process. The requirements for the Chair and Reader can be found in [Appendix B](#). **Note: Students must complete the Capstone Planning Assignment, including the Thesis or Dissertation Planning Form, or they cannot enroll in MUSC 888.**

Throughout the thesis process, the student will submit all drafts and documentation in Canvas. When the Thesis Committee Chair deems that documents are ready for review, the Chair will provide a copy to the Reader. **The student should not contact the Reader directly to request a review of their work.**

MUSC 888

MUSC 888 is the initial course for doctoral candidates who are developing a research study for their doctoral thesis. Students should register for MUSC 888 after completing core coursework for the DME, including MUSC 880. Towards the end of MUSC 880, preliminary research topic approval occurs in preparation for research and writing in MUSC 888. In Module 1 (Week 1) of MUSC 888, students must submit the **Second Chapter One Draft** and **Proposal Excerpt** assignments developed in MUSC 880 to provide an overview of the proposed study for the

Thesis Committee Chair to review. Following this, the student will revise the **Second Chapter One Draft** as deemed necessary by the Thesis Committee Chair. After the revision of the **Second Chapter One Draft**, students will then proceed to write the Thesis Proposal, which includes the first three chapters of the doctoral thesis: Chapter One: Introduction, Chapter Two: Literature Review, and Chapter Three: Methodology. Please refer to [Step 6](#) for individual chapter requirements.

The student must present Chapters 1-3 to defend their Thesis Proposal and receive a Doctoral Thesis Proposal Decision of Full Approval (See [Step 2](#), [Step 3](#), and [Appendix C](#)).

Following a Doctoral Thesis Proposal Decision of Full Approval, the student may apply for Instructional Review Board (IRB) approval (see [Step 4](#)).

MUSC 889

Upon Thesis Committee Chair and Reader approval of Chapter One (Introduction), Chapter Two (Literature Review), and Chapter Three (Methodology), the student then moves to MUSC 889 and is required to be continuously enrolled in MUSC 889 until deemed ready to defend the thesis. This means that the student must register for MUSC 889 every semester until ready for the final defense with the approval of the Thesis Committee Chair and Reader (See [Step 8](#)). If a student does not stay continuously enrolled in MUSC 889 until approved to defend the Thesis, enrollment is broken, and the student must apply for re-admission into the Doctor of Music Education program. If reaccepted, the student is required to complete the degree requirements that are in effect at the time of re-admittance. Students must receive approval from the School of Music administration for enrollment beyond three repetitions of MUSC 889.

MUSC 890

In this course, students defend the thesis that began in MUSC 880 and was completed in MUSC 888 and 889. The thesis is a comprehensive paper written on a specific Music Education topic selected in consultation between the student and approved faculty. It should illustrate a thorough understanding and mastery of research techniques and demonstrate a level of original discovery suitable for work on the doctoral level. The Thesis Committee Chair determines when the student is ready to defend and requests enrollment on behalf of the student. Students may not be enrolled in this class until the last semester of graduate work and until all other course requirements for the degree have been completed. Students complete a presentation and oral defense of the written doctoral thesis.

See [Appendix D](#) for the Doctor of Music Education Thesis Defense Decision form.

MUSC 892

This course is a Comprehensive Exam Course for students enrolled in the DME program. It should be taken in the same semester as MUSC 888. Once enrolled, the student selects the date to complete the exam. On the date selected, the student will download and view the four questions and have five days to research and respond with a research-based essay in response to each of the four questions. All students will be required to answer a question about biblical worldview and education. The three remaining questions are downloaded from a pool of questions and require insight on Curriculum Design, Philosophy of Music Education, and General Education. Turabian formatting is required for the written portion of the exam, and footnotes and bibliography should be included. Following submission of the Written Exam, the student completes an Oral Exam via Teams or Zoom with their Thesis Committee Chair and Reader. In this meeting, the student and committee discuss the responses provided in the written portion of the comp exam.

Recommended Reading

- Algozzine, Bob, and Dawson R. Hancock. *Doing Case Study Research: A Practical Guide for Beginning Researchers*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-0807758137
- Badke, William. *Research Strategies: Finding Your Way through the Information Fog*. Bloomington, IN: Universe, 2011.
- Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, and William T. Fitzgerald. *The Craft of Research*. 4th ed. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Burkholder, Gary J., Kimberly A. Cox, Linda M. Crawford, and John H. Hitchcock. *Research Design and Methods: An Applied Guide for the Scholar-Practitioner*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2020. ISBN: 9781544342382
- Charmaz, Kathy. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014. ISBN: 978-0857029140
- Clandinin, D. Jean, and F. Michael Connelly. *Narrative Inquiry: Experience the Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2000. ISBN: 978-0787972769
- Claxton, Bunnie L., and Kurt Y. Michael. *A Step-by-Step Guide to Conducting Applied Research in Education*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2021.
- Claxton, Bunnie L., and Robert K Mott. *A Step-by-Step Introduction to Research Methods: Qualitative, Quantitative, Mixed-Methods, Applied*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt, 2023.

- Claxton, B. L., and Dolan, C. L. *A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing a Literature Review in Education Research*. Kendall Hunt, 2021. eBook: 9781792466052, Print book: 9781792466069
- Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Current Edition. ISBN: 978-1506330204
- Creswell, John W., and J. David Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods*. 6th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2023. ISBN: 978107181940
- Creswell, John W., and Timothy C. Guetterman. *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. 6th Ed. New York: Pearson, 2019. ISBN 9780134519364
- Gobo, Giampietro, and Andrea Molle. *Doing Ethnography*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2017. ISBN: 9781412962261
- Guest, Greg, Kathleen M. MacQueen, and Emily E. Namey. *Applied Thematic Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Current Edition. ISBN: 978-1412971676
- Mann, Thomas. *The Oxford Guide to Library Research*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. ISBN: 9780199931064
- Morgan, Susan E., Tom Reichert, and Tyler R. Harrison. *From Numbers to Words: Reporting Statistical Results for the Social Sciences*. New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, Current Edition. ISBN: 978-1138638082
- Peoples, Katarzuna. *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation: A Step-by-Step Guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2021. ISBN: 9781544328362
- Roberts, Carol, and Laura Hyatt. *The Dissertation Journey: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing, and Defending Your Dissertation*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2024. ISBN: 978107189285
- Rubin, Herbert J., and Irene S. Rubin. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012. ISBN: 9781412978378
- Saldana, Johnny. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Current Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2021. ISBN: 9781529731743
- Sensing, Tim. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011.
- Tucker, Dennis C. *Research Techniques for Scholars and Students in Religion and Theology*.

Medford, NJ: Information Today, 2000.

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Current ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Vyhmeister, Nancy J. *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.

Appendix A: Introduction to the Jerry Falwell Library

Liberty University's Jerry Falwell Library collections are available for use by all doctoral students in the School of Music. The Jerry Falwell Library is centrally located on the main campus.

The [Jerry Falwell Library](#) provides a wide range of materials and services, employs a group of well-qualified personnel consisting of professional librarians and trained support staff, and maintains membership in local, state, regional, and national library cooperative ventures. The library provides over 317,000 physical items (books, journals, audio-visual items, microforms), more than 176,000 e-items (eBooks, musical scores, plays, e-audio-visual recordings), and 400-plus electronic databases. Through these resources, students have print or electronic access to over 67,000 unique periodicals, over 1.2 million dissertations and theses, and thousands of other historical documents.

Access to the electronic materials is available worldwide to Liberty students and faculty via the Internet. Students can also obtain journal articles from libraries across the United States through interlibrary loan services. The library ships books from our collection upon request, although students are responsible for return postage charges. As Liberty University Online (LUO) students, graduate students have direct toll-free telephone and email access to library personnel. LUO library services include assistance with computer research, document delivery, and book delivery. Electronic access is authenticated using your student username and password. The LU Online Librarian is available at (434) 582-2821 for questions.

Students may search the [Jerry Falwell Library Catalog](#) for books. In the Jerry Falwell Library, the most frequently used and most recent books are on the shelves. Older materials are stored in a robotic retrieval system. Requesting that a book be retrieved from the robotic storage system means that a physical copy comes to the Customer Service Desk in the Jerry Falwell Library. This does not mean that the title is shipped to you. In order to request that Liberty-owned books be shipped to your home, you must create an account and request a title through the ILLiad interlibrary loan and document delivery system. Note that many of our titles are available electronically and the full text may be accessed off campus. Books owned by Liberty may be checked out by doctoral students under the current circulation policies in place for graduate online students. See the Library Research Portal for these details. Protect yourself by using a traceable carrier to return materials.

Because of time constraints, the library does not borrow books from other libraries for doctoral candidates who live outside the Lynchburg area. Students can use [WorldCat](#) to find books in libraries near them. Many academic and seminary libraries allow non-students to use materials

on their campus or pay a small fee for a community borrower's card to allow them to check out materials.

The library has a number of multi-disciplinary and subject specific journal databases that are available from the library research portal. These include the ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, Christian Periodical Index, ProQuest Religion, Old Testament Thesis Project Topics, New Testament Thesis Project Topics, Theological Journal Library, etc.

Appendix B: Thesis Committee Requirements

Thesis Committee Chair Qualifications and Responsibilities

The Thesis Committee Chair works closely with the student to assist him or her in completing an acceptable MUSC 888 and 889 Thesis.

Duties

- Approve each thesis assignment and provide detailed feedback both via email and within the learning management system.
- Approve all research (i.e., surveys, questionnaires, etc.) and provide signature for IRB application within 7 days of submission.
- Respond to emails within 36 hours.
- Uphold all submission dates.
- Provide approval for enrollment in MUSC 890 before scheduling a defense.
- Receive thesis submission JFL documentation before posting final grade.
- Post attendance in the learning management system.

Qualifications

- An earned Doctoral degree from an accredited institution
- Faculty member at the Liberty University School of Music
- Approved by the Associate Dean of the School of Music
- Extensive knowledge in the subject area of the thesis
- A thorough knowledge of Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*

Reader Qualifications and Responsibilities

The Reader works with the doctoral candidate to assist in completing an acceptable MUSC 888 and 889 Thesis. The Reader reports to the Thesis Committee Chair.

Duties

- Review and read the Thesis at each step when the Thesis Committee Chair deems it ready.
- Provide comments regarding content and Turabian formatting.
- Participate in the student's oral defense and provide noted revisions.

Qualifications

- An earned Doctoral degree from an accredited institution and/or a recognized specialist in

a related field

- Faculty member at Liberty University
- Approved by the Associate Dean of the School of Music
- Extensive knowledge in the subject area of the thesis
- A thorough knowledge of Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*

Appendix C: Doctoral Thesis Proposal Decision

The Thesis Committee Chair and Reader have rendered the following decision
concerning the proposal status for
(Student's Name)
on the research topic title of
(Title of Paper)
as submitted on (Date)

Full Approval to proceed with no proposal revisions.

The student may fully engage the research and writing process according to the established the timeline. Upon full approval, the student may apply for IRB approval, if applicable (see STEP 4 concerning IRB approval process).

Provisional Approval to proceed with Proposal pending cited revisions.

This is the most common decision. The student must resubmit the Proposal with cited revisions according to the established timeline. The Thesis Committee Chair should indicate the Committee's status on your response to the required revisions. The student may NOT apply for IRB approval until full approval is granted.

Redirection of Proposal

The student is being redirected to develop a new proposal, as minor revisions will not meet the expectations for the thesis. The student may NOT apply for IRB approval.

Print Name of Thesis Committee Chair	Signature	Date
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Print Name of Reader	Signature	Date
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Appendix D: Thesis Defense Decision Form

Doctor of Music Education

Thesis Defense Decision

The Thesis Committee Chair and Reader have rendered the following decision concerning the defense for

(Name of Student)

on the Thesis

(Title)

as submitted on (Date)

Full approval to proceed with no proposal revisions.

The document should be prepared for submission to the Jerry Falwell Library.

Provisional approval pending cited revisions.

The student must resubmit the thesis with cited revisions according to the established timeline.

Redirection of thesis.

The student is being redirected to take MUSC 889 again, as minor revisions will not meet the expectations for the thesis.

Print Name of Thesis Committee Chair	Signature	Date
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Print Name of Reader	Signature	Date
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Appendix E: Thesis Checklist

THESIS COMPONENTS	COMPLETED
Student has been registered for MUSC 888	
Student has been registered for MUSC 889	
IRB Approval secured by student, if applicable	
Thesis Proposal contains:	
Front matter with a title of 15 words or less	
Chapter One: Introduction (suggested min. 10 pages)	
Chapter Two: Literature Review (suggested min. 30 pages)	
Chapter Three: Methodology (suggested min. 10 pages)	
Bibliography	
PowerPoint Presentation (10-15 minutes)	
The final version of the Thesis contains the following elements:	
Title page	
Copyright page (optional)	
Abstract	
Acknowledgments (optional)	
Table of Contents	
List of Tables (optional)	
List of Figures (optional)	
List of Abbreviations (optional)	
The Main Body of the Thesis Contains:	
Chapter One: Introduction	
Chapter Two: Literature Review	
Chapter Three: Methodology	
Chapter Four: Research Findings	
Chapter Five: Conclusions	
The back matter of the thesis contains:	
Appendices	
Bibliography (min. 30 sources cited)	
IRB Approval/ Waiver Page (if required)	
Thesis has been checked for spelling, grammar, sentence structure, and formatting	
The student has posted all assignments in the online class.	
The Oral Defense was completed and passed	
The student has made all changes required by Thesis Committee Chair	
The Thesis Committee Chair and Reader have signed the Signature Page	
The student has submitted the thesis to the Jerry Falwell Library <i>Scholars Crossing</i>	
The student's grade has been posted in Canvas	

Appendix F: DME Milestones

Milestone 1: In MUSC 880, students develop a research topic, receive a preliminary research topic approval from the instructor, compose a Chapter One assignment (Second Chapter One Draft), and compose a research methodology assignment (Proposal Excerpts). These documents serve as the foundation for the Thesis Proposal to be developed in MUSC 888 (Chapters 1-3).

Milestone 2a: Students are required to:

1. Enroll in MUSC 888 and MUSC 892.
2. Submit the Chapter One and Research Methodology assignments completed in MUSC 880 in the first module of MUSC 888 to provide a prospectus view of the proposed study.
3. Revise Chapter One as deemed necessary by the Thesis Committee Chair.
4. Compose Chapters 2-3.
5. Begin the IRB application process (do not submit).
6. Successfully defend the "Proposal" (Chapters 1-3).
7. Apply for IRB approval (submit with Committee consent and after CITI training).

All of these steps, in order, constitute the successful completion of MUSC 888. This does not require IRB approval to pass MUSC 888. Students will repeat MUSC 888 until these steps are complete. If students complete the milestone prior to the end of the term, they may begin Milestone 3.

Milestone 2b: Complete the written and oral comprehensive exam (MUSC 892).

Milestone 3: Students are required to:

1. Enroll in MUSC 889.
2. Develop Chapters 1-3.
3. Revise and resubmit the IRB application until approval.
4. Collect data:
 - a. Students may conduct quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, or applied research designs.
 - b. Data collection procedures may last as long as necessary but must include at least 8 weeks.
 - c. Data may originate from the student's work location.
 - d. Data may include ex post facto.
 - e. Quantitative data collection instruments must be statistically valid and reliable.
 - f. Qualitative data collection procedures must include at least two forms of data collection, preferably one written-based (i.e., journaling, questionnaire) and one researcher-based (i.e., interviews, focus groups, observations).
 - g. Mixed methods data collection procedures must implement at least one quantitative and two qualitative data collection procedures and apply either a convergent, explanatory sequential, or exploratory sequential design.
 - h. Applied research data collection procedures must implement at least one quantitative (does not require statistical validity and reliability), qualitative, and researcher-designed intervention strategy (i.e., curriculum, control/treatment group experiment, etc.).
 - i. Quantitative data analysis may include non-parametric, t-tests, and basic correlations.
 - j. Qualitative data analysis procedures must include measures of trustworthiness, coding, and thematic and/or discourse analysis.
5. Write Chapters 4-5.
6. Employ a professional editing service and apply comments to improve Chapters 1-5 (recommended).
 - i. The student may choose an editor at their expense.
 - ii. Consider time for professional review and revision in relation to the reader and defense deadlines set by the School of Music.

7. The Thesis Committee Chair will send the completed thesis to the Reader after the Thesis Committee Chair deems the project ready for review.

All of these steps, in order, constitute the successful completion of MUSC 889. Students will repeat MUSC 889 until these steps are complete. If students complete the milestone prior to the end of the term, they may be enrolled in MUSC 890.

Milestone 4: Students are required to:

1. Enroll in MUSC 890 (request for student enrollment in MUSC 890 initiated by the Thesis Committee Chair).
2. Successfully defend the DME thesis.
3. Make final revisions required by the Committee to the DME Thesis.
4. Publish the thesis in Scholar's Crossing, obtaining a notice of publication from the Jerry Falwell Library.

All of these steps, in order, constitute the successful completion of MUSC 890.