

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT *of*  
PSYCHOLOGY

PH.D. IN PSYCHOLOGY

Doctoral Dissertation Handbook  
2020-2021

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## PREFACE

The purpose of this handbook is to provide information about the dissertation process and related dissertation policies for the Ph.D. in Psychology program. The handbook is a guide for the dissertation process, the dissertation manuscript, and the proposal and final defenses. Included in the handbook are descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of the candidate and the dissertation committee, descriptions of the courses that make up the dissertation sequence, as well as templates for the dissertation prospectus, the dissertation proposal, and the final dissertation manuscript. This handbook should be used in conjunction with the Ph.D. in Psychology Program Handbook and the Graduate School Catalogue to outline all policies and procedures for graduate students in the Ph.D. in Psychology program.

The University and the Department of Psychology reserve the right to make necessary changes without further notice. The regulations, courses, personnel, and procedures described herein are subject to change after publication of this handbook through established procedures. In such cases, the Department of Psychology will attempt to communicate these changes to all students, faculty, and staff through written means. It is important that each student become familiar with the procedures described in this handbook and adhere to them.

The administration of the School of Behavioral Sciences and the Department of Psychology for Ph.D. in Psychology students are as follows:

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Liberty University is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097; 404-679-4501) to award associate, bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees.

Liberty University does not engage in unlawful discrimination or harassment because of race, color, ancestry, religion, age, sex, national origin, pregnancy or childbirth, disability or military veteran status in its educational programs and activities. Liberty University maintains its Christian character and reserves its right to discriminate on the basis of religion to the extent that applicable law respects its right to act in furtherance of its religious objectives.

## FROM THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Dear Doctoral Candidate,

It is with great joy and excitement that I welcome you to the dissertation process. I commend you for completing your coursework and for growing in your research skills, your knowledge of Psychology, and for your spiritual growth during your time in our program so far. You are about to embark on a research journey that will teach you much and will be the capstone of your doctoral program. Through multiple revisions and corrections with your committee, you will grow in your writing. Through much reading and critical analysis, you will grow in your content knowledge of your research area. And, through designing, implementing, and conducting your dissertation research, you will grow in your research skills.

Additionally, our prayer is that you will grow spiritually and in your knowledge of God through your dissertation. As you have seen through your coursework and as you will see in the description of the expectations for the dissertation, you will approach your dissertation topic from both a research perspective and a biblical perspective. As you have learned throughout your program, God offers much truth that is relevant to psychology in His Word. And, in studying the Bible with research, we can get a fuller picture of psychological phenomena than science alone can provide. In your dissertation, you will continue to do just that as you ground your study in both the empirical literature and in biblical truth. We pray this process will yield new insights that will not only contribute to the research literature, but also contribute to improving the well-being of others.

As you complete your dissertation, please know that you are being prayed for. Please know that I, as your Program Director, and your dissertation committee are here to help you and encourage you as you prepare, conduct, and write your dissertation. Please reach out to your chair and committee member when you need help. And, please know that this is a process that will require perseverance and endurance. But it is also a worthwhile process that will yield much growth in you personally, academically, and spiritually.

I look forward to reading your dissertation research and to seeing the ways that God uses your academic scholarship to impact lives for Him. May God bless you on your dissertation journey and may He do infinitely more than you can even imagine or see as you begin. I know God will do great things and we all look forward to celebrating with you at your final defense.

In Him,



Rachel L. Piferi, Ph.D.  
Program Director, Ph.D. in Psychology

# ACADEMIC POLICIES & DISSERTATION COURSE SEQUENCE

The Ph.D. in Psychology requires both coursework and completion of a dissertation in order to complete the degree. The coursework required for the student's concentration can be found on the DCP for that concentration. In addition to general and concentration specific coursework, all Ph.D. in Psychology students are required to take PSYC 870 (Dissertation Prospectus) and the dissertation course sequence (PSYC 987, 988, 989, 990). The Dissertation Prospectus course and the dissertation course sequence have been designed to guide the student through the dissertation process (from initial concept to defense).

## **Time to Completion**

The time allowed to complete the Ph.D. in Psychology program is seven (7) years, which begins the year of admission to the Ph.D. Program. Students must complete all coursework and successfully defend their dissertation within the seven (7) year requirement.

Any student who does not complete coursework and successful defense of their dissertation within the permissible time limit for any reason –including discontinued enrollment – must reapply for admission. The program director will determine if any previous courses are sufficiently time sensitive and must be repeated. Beginning with the date of readmission, the time limit for degree completion is seven (7) years.

## **Continuous Enrollment Policy**

After completion of PSYC 987, students must be continually enrolled in the program until completion of PSYC 990 (Dissertation Defense). Continuous enrollment after PSYC 987 means that the student must be enrolled in at least one dissertation course that will count toward completion of the doctoral program per semester (including summer). Failure to maintain continuous enrollment will result in removal from the program. If students wish to continue in the program at a later date, they need to reapply and, if accepted, will be subject to all requirements for the DCP for the current academic year.

If a student needs to take a leave of absence from their doctoral program once beginning the dissertation sequence, they may apply to do so to the Program Director. Request for a leave of absence must be made by email to the Program Director from the student's Liberty email account explaining why a leave of absence is necessary. Decisions on whether a temporary leave of absence is granted is up to the discretion of the Program Director.

Note: Students returning to the program after breaking enrollment for more than one year may be required to complete additional coursework or retake courses at the discretion of Program Director of the Ph.D. in Psychology program.

## **Dissertation Courses**

### ***PSYC 870 (Dissertation Prospectus)***

PSYC 870 must be taken and passed before the student will be allowed to begin the dissertation course sequence. PSYC 870 is offered in one of three formats: 1-week on campus intensive, 1-week virtual intensive, and 8-week online course. In this course, students will develop their dissertation prospectus (see the template for the dissertation prospectus at the end of this

handbook). The dissertation prospectus is a concept paper in which the student outlines the basic components of their dissertation research study (i.e. background, problem statement, purpose, research questions, brief proposed methodology, among other basic components). Students will be guided by a faculty member to develop their study and to write their Prospectus (Note: the faculty member assigned to their Prospectus course may not be their eventual dissertation chair). Students will also be guided in selecting their chair and committee member during this course. Students will be eligible to proceed to the first dissertation course (PSYC 987) and begin their dissertation when they pass their prospectus course. If the student does not pass PSYC 870 with a B or better on their first attempt, they must follow the course repeat process outlined in the Ph.D. in Psychology Handbook.

### ***PSYC 987 (Dissertation I)***

PSYC 987 is the first course in the dissertation sequence. PSYC 987, 988, and 989 are all 16-week online courses. In this course, students will work with their dissertation chair to complete and orally defend their dissertation proposal (Chapters 1-3 of their dissertation). Student will earn a passing grade in this course and be permitted to advance to PSYC 988 when they earn a passing grade on the PSYC 987 Proposal Rubric (completed by the dissertation chair and committee member) and successfully defend their proposal in an oral defense. Please note that this course can be repeated one time to meet the class milestone. Also, please note that if the milestone for this course is met early in the course or repeat of the course, then the student may proceed to the work assigned in the next course in the dissertation sequence in order to maintain progress.

### ***PSYC 988 (Dissertation II)***

PSYC 988 is the second course in the dissertation sequence. Like PSYC 987, this course is a 16-week online course led by the student's chairperson. In this course, students will work with their dissertation chair and committee member to complete & submit their IRB application and complete data collection. Student will earn a passing grade in this course and be permitted to advance to PSYC 989 when they have completed their data collection for their study. Please note that this course can be repeated one time to meet the class milestone. Also, please note that if the milestone for this course is met early in the course or repeat of the course, then the student may proceed to the work assigned in the next course in the dissertation sequence in order to maintain progress.

### ***PSYC 989 (Dissertation III)***

PSYC 989 is the third course in the dissertation sequence. Like PSYC 987 and PSYC 988, this course is a 16-week online course led by the student's chairperson. In this course, students will work with their dissertation chair and committee member to analyze their data and complete their dissertation manuscript (Chapters 1-5, with Abstract, Table of Contents, and all supplementary sections). Student will earn a passing grade in this course and be permitted to advance to PSYC 990 (Dissertation Defense) when they earn a passing grade on the dissertation manuscript rubric (completed by both the dissertation chair and committee member) and when the Program Director approves their Abstract (following Committee approval of final manuscript). Please note that this course can be repeated one time to meet the class milestone.

### ***PSYC 990 (Dissertation Defense)***

PSYC 990 is a 0 credit/fee based 8-week course in which the student will orally defend their dissertation. Successful completion of this course is based on passing their dissertation oral defense. An oral defense rubric will be completed by the dissertation chairperson to indicate the student has

passed their oral defense. More information about the defense can be found in the “Oral Defense Procedures & Policies” section of this handbook.

## DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

The dissertation committee for the Ph.D. in Psychology program consists of two members: (a) a dissertation chair and (b) a committee member. One of the two, either the chair or committee member, must be knowledgeable in the method that the student will be using in their dissertation. Students should begin thinking about identifying a potential dissertation chair when they begin the program. Students are encouraged to build relationships with faculty in their courses and to reach out to faculty throughout their coursework so that they can select a chairperson during PSYC 870. Each student will officially secure a dissertation chair and a committee member by the conclusion of PSYC 870. A candidate’s dissertation committee must include the following:

1. **Dissertation Chair:** A *dissertation chair* must hold an earned doctoral degree in psychology or psychology-related field and be employed by Liberty University (residential or online). A list of faculty who have been approved to serve as dissertation chair/committee member can be found in the Doctoral Commons on Blackboard. A list of responsibilities of the dissertation chair can be found later in this handbook.
2. **Committee Member:** A *committee member* must hold an earned doctoral degree in psychology or psychology-related field and be employed by Liberty University (residential or online). A list of faculty who have been approved to serve as dissertation chair/committee member can be found in the Doctoral Commons on Blackboard. A list of responsibilities of the committee member can be found later in this handbook.

### Chair and Committee Selection (Committee Member Form)

While enrolled in PSYC 870, doctoral students will be directed to access that section of the Doctoral Commons to select a prospective chair. The student is encouraged to review research interests and research method expertise of faculty members when considering a faculty member for chair. Either the chair or the committee member must be qualified to oversee the research method the student intends to use.

Candidates should first reach out to prospective chairs one at a time. A mass email seeking a chair must never be sent to multiple faculty members. When contacting potential chairs and committee members, the student is encouraged to describe their project briefly and ask the faculty member if they would consider serving as chair. Students who need assistance selecting a prospective chair can email [PSYCDissertation@liberty.edu](mailto:PSYCDissertation@liberty.edu) with a dissertation prospectus or brief description of their study, as well as the names of any chairs already contacted, and the Psychology Dissertation Coordinator will assist them.

If a faculty member indicates he or she is willing to serve as the dissertation chair, then the prospective chair and the candidate will complete the Committee Member Form, located in the Doctoral Commons. All committee requests must be approved by the Psychology Dissertation Coordinator. The Committee Member Form will be reviewed, and the student will be notified whether or not their chair member selection was approved. Once a chair is approved, the student

will be allowed to enroll in PSYC 987 with their dissertation chair as the instructor for the course. In PSYC 870, after the student has identified their chair, the student will also identify a committee member. Once a faculty member has agreed to serve as committee member, then the prospective committee member and the candidate will complete the Committee Member Form, located in the Doctoral Commons. This form will be reviewed, and the student will be notified of whether or not their committee member selection was approved. The student will be guided through the committee selection process while enrolled in PSYC 870.

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

## DISSERTATION GUIDELINES

Consistent with the University mission, the Ph.D. in Psychology program aims to develop Christ-centered men and women with the values, knowledge, and skills essential to impact the world. The mission of the Ph.D. in Psychology program is to train students to become highly competent researchers and thinkers in the field of psychology who can evaluate psychological research within the context of a biblical worldview to advance truth in the world. The dissertation is the capstone project of the student's doctoral education and will allow the student to demonstrate competence as a biblically based psychological researcher.

### 1. Student Responsibility

Upon admission to the Ph.D. in Psychology program, students are required to read the *Ph.D. in Psychology Program Handbook* so that they may familiarize themselves with the policies and procedures of the program. Additionally, students should read the *Ph.D. in Psychology Dissertation Handbook* to understand the requirements of the dissertation. It is the student's responsibility to be familiar with and abide by the dissertation handbook policies and guidelines.

At the beginning of each academic year, this is revised, as needed, and posted on the Liberty University Online website. When necessary, the student body will be informed of any major revisions via emails.

### 2. Dissertation Topic

Students are free to choose any topic for their dissertation as long as it meets two criteria: 1) relevant to the field of psychology and, 2) relevant to their degree concentration. Furthermore, when students are picking a topic for their dissertation, they are advised to choose a topic that can be studied well by the student and that utilizes a sample that the student will be able to obtain. Students are encouraged to review IRB guidelines for research and to choose a topic and sample that will not be delayed in IRB approval. Also,



when choosing a topic and/or sample to study, students are encouraged to explore if IRB approval from another organization will be required to study that sample as that will add additional time to the project.

Students should be thinking about their topic as they go through their coursework and are encouraged to talk to faculty about their topic in their classes so they can get guidance along the way. Students are also encouraged to be reading the research literature and developing a database of articles relevant to their topic as they go through their coursework so that they can save time in the dissertation course sequence. Papers in classes are great opportunities for doctoral students to start developing their ideas about their topic and dissertation.

### 3. Biblical Integration

A student's dissertation will be expected to be grounded in both psychological research & theory and the Bible. In PSYC 870, students will be guided to develop a biblical worldview of their topic and biblical integration is expected in the student's dissertation. This will include a section in Chapter 1 where the biblical foundations of the student's topic are discussed and a section in Chapter 5 where the results of the study are discussed biblically. What is expected in each of these sections is described more in the dissertation coursework and in the dissertation template.

### 4. Research Designs

Students may use a variety of research designs as long as the student's dissertation is rigorous and makes a unique contribution to the research literature through the collection of original data. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods are appropriate, as well as various designs within these methods (i.e. multiple case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, experimental, correlational, case-control study, etc.). The design chosen should be appropriate to the topic and research questions proposed and either the dissertation chair or the committee person must be knowledgeable in the design chosen. Meta-analyses are not allowed for the dissertation.

### 5. Dissertation Writing Style & Templates

Writing should be scholarly and follow the current edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. The APA manual is primarily designed for the submission of manuscripts to be reviewed and edited for publication or for student papers; therefore, there are several suggestions (i.e., running heads, page numbering, and spacing) that do not apply to a document like a dissertation. Students should follow the formatting outlined in this dissertation guide when they differ from APA format. Templates are provided in this dissertation guide for the expected form and style of the dissertation manuscript. Individual files of these templates (with proper margins) can be found in the dissertation courses and in the Doctoral Commons. Students are encouraged to work directly in the template provided when preparing their manuscript so that formatting and style maintain. Some of the key formatting requirements include:

- 5.1 Margins. The margins throughout the dissertation should be as follows to allow for binding if you so choose to bind your dissertation upon completion:

- 1 inch at the top
  - 1 inch at the bottom
  - 1 inch on the right side
  - 1.5 inches on the left side to accommodate the space needed for binding.
  - Left justification of the text only.
- 5.2 Font. The dissertation must be written in Times New Roman, 12-point font. Do not use bold anywhere in the dissertation (exception is with certain levels of headings). Use italics for: (a) book and journal titles; (b) APA Level 2, 3, and 4 headings; (c) anchors of scales; (d) some statistical symbols (see APA manual); and (e) foreign words not in common English usage.
- 5.3 Headings. Headings should match the heading style for the dissertation provided in the template. Please use the template for guides on the headings required for the final dissertation document.
- 5.4 Page Numbers. Page numbers should be placed on the upper right-hand side of all pages. Page numbers should be Arabic style and a page number should not be placed on the title page.

## 6. Writing and/or Statistical and Other Consultation

Students often find it useful to employ various consultants to help with aspects of the dissertation project. Use of writing editors, data transcribers, or statistical consultants is acceptable to aid in the completion of the project. However, the student is responsible for being knowledgeable on all aspects of the research project and must be able to explain what was done. The student is answerable to the dissertation committee for their ethical behavior, analytical procedures, accuracy, interpretation, and integrity of the results. The Student must be able to describe, understand, justify, and explain all things in the dissertation to the committee. In review of the final manuscript and in the defense of dissertation, the committee must be confidently convinced that the student has a total grasp of the topic and research presented. Writing editors are recommended to ensure all form and style requirements and scholarly writing standards are met.

## 7. Academic Honesty

Liberty University considers academic honesty and academic integrity to be of utmost importance and among its highest values. In coursework and in the dissertation, students are expected to uphold this value. In the dissertation, this includes presenting a study that is original and one that is designed, conducted, and written by the student for this degree. The re-use of papers, master's theses, or doctoral research conducted elsewhere is not allowed. If a student needs to cite previous work in their dissertation they may do so as if they were citing anyone else's work, using proper and current APA guidelines and format.

A key component of academic honesty is properly citing previous work (your own or others) and students are expected to appropriately cite the work and ideas of others throughout their dissertation. This is an ethical imperative not only at Liberty University, but within the field of psychology and students are expected to properly credit all sources when writing their

dissertation. Students will be asked to submit their prospectus, their dissertation proposal, and their final dissertation to *Safe Assign* to check for plagiarism of work. Any questions about properly citing or other academic honesty issues should be directed to your dissertation chairperson. For more information on the University's policies regarding academic dishonesty, please refer to <https://www.liberty.edu/studentaffairs/communitylife/index.cfm?PID=38032>.

## 8. IRB Process

Prior to collecting data, all studies must be approved by the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University. This is a federal requirement for research that all universities conducting research must adhere to. The IRB application is completed by the student following approval and defense of the dissertation proposal (Chapters 1-3). The student will be guided by their chairperson through the IRB process in PSYC 988. All IRB applications are now accepted by the university through the Cayuse IRB system, which is found on the LU IRB webpage. The entire IRB process, with links to the Cayuse IRB system, can be reviewed at <https://www.liberty.edu/graduate/institutional-review-board/>.

Part of an IRB application is documenting the completion of the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training. This is free and instructions for completing can be found on the Liberty University IRB webpage at <https://www.liberty.edu/graduate/institutional-review-board/collaborative-institutional-training-initiative/>. Students are encouraged to complete CITI training early in their dissertation sequence so they are aware of the ethical guidelines and requirements of human subjects research.

Students are encouraged to visit the Liberty University IRB webpage (link above) as they begin their dissertation process so they can be aware of the current policies, forms, and procedures. FAQ's, as well as clear guidelines on the IRB process can be found on the IRB's webpage. Also, templates for various elements of a study (i.e. informed consent, recruitment letters, debriefing materials, etc.) can be found on the IRB webpage.

## 9. Proposal and Final Dissertation Defense

Students will participate in two oral defense meetings for their dissertation. One will occur following committee approval of their dissertation proposal document and one oral defense will occur following committee approval of their final dissertation manuscript. Both meetings will be led by the student's dissertation chairperson and will include the chair, committee member, and student. Meetings will be held via a virtual meeting software (i.e. WebEx, Microsoft Teams, etc.) and will be scheduled at a time that meets the schedule of the chair, committee member, and student. Defense meetings are open to individuals the student may like to invite and are also open to other faculty and students in the department.

Oral defense meetings will last approximately 1 hour and include the following components:

1. Brief open and welcome by chairperson.
2. Presentation of the proposal or final study by the student.
3. Question and answer session led by the chairperson where the student answers questions about their study posed by the chairperson or committee member.
4. Discussion of revisions or edits that need to be made to the study and/or manuscript for approval to be obtained.

5. Final determination of Pass/Fail of the oral defense by the dissertation committee.

Students are required to prepare a PowerPoint presentation that they will use to guide their presentation in the oral defense meetings. More information about what to include in the PowerPoint presentation can be found in the dissertation classroom.

The oral defense of the dissertation proposal will occur in PSYC 987 following approval of the dissertation proposal manuscript. Students will be permitted to advance to PSYC 988 when they have completed a successful defense of their dissertation proposal. Students will not be allowed to advance to PSYC 988 until both their dissertation proposal document and their oral defense of it have been approved by their dissertation committee. The purpose of the oral defense at the dissertation proposal stage is to give the committee an opportunity to ensure that the study is properly grounded and that the methods are appropriate to the study's purpose. The defense meeting gives the committee the opportunity to make any changes to the study before the IRB application and data collection commence. The dissertation proposal defense meeting also gives the student the opportunity to ask any question he/she may have before collecting data. Changes at this stage are not uncommon and students should welcome conversation about their projects at this stage to ensure that all is planned adequately to achieve the objectives of the research study.

The oral defense of the final dissertation will occur in PSYC 990. Students will be approved to register for PSYC 990 once they have passed PSYC 989. Successful completion of PSYC 989 includes obtaining committee approval of the final dissertation manuscript. The purpose of the final dissertation defense is to assess how well the student understands their research findings and how well he/she can discuss the study, its findings, and the implications of the findings for the larger research literature. It also gives the student an opportunity to practice presenting and defending research findings.

For the final dissertation defense, following the presentation of the study and when the questioning is completed, the doctoral candidate and observers will be excused so that the dissertation committee can deliberate privately. The committee may give one of three possible results of the oral defense:

1. The candidate passes with no revision required.
2. The candidate is provisionally passed pending the submission of changes, review, and approval by the candidate's committee.
3. The candidate is not passed. In this case, the chairperson and committee member (with help from the Program Director, if necessary) will develop a plan for resubmission of documents and subsequent repeat of the oral defense meeting.

Once the student has successfully defended the dissertation and all relevant edits are approved, each committee member will sign the signature page, which indicates that their work has been completed. Committee members should use black ink when signing the signature page of the original copy of the dissertation.

## 10. Approval of Dissertation Manuscript and Approval to Advance to Defense

Prior to advancing to PSYC 990 and defense of the dissertation, two approvals are required:

1. Committee approval of final dissertation manuscript
2. Program Director approval of Abstract

Committee approval of the final dissertation manuscript will occur in PSYC 989 through the use of the Final Dissertation Rubric. Once committee approval of the dissertation is obtained, the dissertation chairperson will forward the title page and Abstract of the dissertation to the Program Director for Abstract approval. Approval of the Abstract will be granted on the “Program Director Approval of Abstract” form. If revisions are required to the Abstract before approval can be granted, they will be noted on that form. Resubmission may be required to obtain Abstract approval. Once the student has obtained “Program Director Approval of Abstract,” the student will be granted a passing grade in PSYC 989 and will be permitted to advance to PSYC 990.

## 11. Publication of the Dissertation

Following successful defense of the dissertation and after obtaining committee signatures on the signature page, all students are required to submit an electronic copy of their successfully defended dissertation to the Jerry Falwell Library Scholarly Communications Department. Instructions and guidelines for submitting can be found at <https://www.liberty.edu/library/submitting-Dissertations-and-theses/>.

Following submission of their dissertation to the Jerry Falwell Library Scholarly Communications Department, students may also choose to submit their dissertation to ProQuest. This is not required, but instructions for submission to ProQuest can be found at the above link. Furthermore, students are encouraged to present their dissertation research at national conferences and publish their research in academic journals following the completion of their dissertation at Liberty University. Requirements for each vary by organization and medium pursued.

In addition to submitting a final copy of the dissertation to the Jerry Falwell Library Scholarly Communications Department, students are required to submit a final copy of the dissertation with signatures to the Department of Psychology.

## 12. Overview of Dissertation Steps

As stated previously, students are guided through the dissertation process in PSYC 987, 988, 989, and 990. Each course has its own milestone for successful completion, and each has been designed to help students progress through the dissertation process efficiently and with clear guidance. The following provides a succinct overview of steps towards completion of the dissertation. Each is more thoroughly explained in PSYC 987, 988, 989, and 990.

1. Complete all doctoral coursework, including PSYC 870. It is recommended that students take PSYC 870 in the term before they intend to enroll in the first dissertation course. The reason for this is that PSYC 870 has been designed to help the student think through different elements of their dissertation research

in a way that leads right into PSYC 987. Also, the student will pick their dissertation committee in PSYC 870.

2. Complete the dissertation proposal (PSYC 987).
3. Pass the oral defense of the dissertation proposal (PSYC 987).
4. Submit IRB application & receive approval (PSYC 988).
5. Complete data collection (PSYC 988).
6. Analyze data and write up Chapters 4 & 5 (PSYC 989).
7. Complete & obtain approval of the final dissertation manuscript from the committee (PSYC 989).
8. Obtain Program Director approval of the final Abstract (PSYC 989).
9. Pass the oral defense of the final dissertation (PSYC 990).
10. Obtain committee signatures for the final Dissertation manuscript (PSYC 990).
11. Submit electronic copy of the final manuscript with signatures to the Jerry Falwell Library Scholarly Communications Department and to the Department of Psychology.

### 13. Overview of Dissertation Components & Chapters

The dissertation for the Ph.D. in Psychology at Liberty University is a 5-chapter dissertation with supporting sections. The page-by-page components are listed below and can be seen on the dissertation template. In this section, the chapters and required subsections are listed; a description of what is expected in each section can be found on the dissertation template. More specific evaluation criteria can be found in the chapter rubrics.

13.1 Title page

13.2 Signature page

13.3 Abstract. The Abstract follows the Title Page in the proposal and the signature page in the final dissertation and is required to be less than one page and includes a concise overview of the study (background, problem statement, purpose, participants, data collection strategy, findings, and implications).

13.4 Copyright page (optional)

13.5 Dedication page (optional)

13.6 Acknowledgements page (optional)

13.7 Table of Contents. Only Chapter headings, Level 1, and Level 2 headings should appear in the Table of Contents. All entries in the Table of Contents should be made in precisely the same wording as the headings appear in the text.

13.8 List of Tables (optional as needed)

13.9 List of Figures (optional as needed)

- 13.10 Chapter 1. Chapter 1 introduces the study and provides the following sections to explain key elements of the dissertation:
  - 13.1.1 Introduction
  - 13.1.2 Background
  - 13.1.3 Problem Statement
  - 13.1.4 Purpose of the Study
  - 13.1.5 Research Questions and Hypotheses (if relevant)
  - 13.1.6 Assumptions & Limitations of the Study
  - 13.1.7 Theoretical Foundations of the Study
  - 13.1.8 Definition of Terms
  - 13.1.9 Significance of the Study
  - 13.1.10 Summary
  
- 13.2 Chapter 2. Chapter 2 provides an integrative review of the research literature and biblical foundations for the study.
  - 13.2.1 Overview
  - 13.2.2 Description of Search Strategy
  - 13.2.3 Review of Literature
  - 13.2.4 Biblical Foundations of the Study
  - 13.2.5 Summary
  
- 13.3 Chapter 3. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology for the study.
  - 13.3.1 Overview
  - 13.3.2 Research Questions and Hypotheses (if applicable)
  - 13.3.3 Research Design
  - 13.3.4 Participants
  - 13.3.5 Study Procedures
  - 13.3.6 Instrumentation and Measurement
  - 13.3.7 Operationalization of Variables (if quantitative study)
  - 13.3.8 Data Analysis
  - 13.3.9 Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations
  - 13.3.10 Summary
  
- 13.4 Chapter 4. Chapter 4 provides the data analysis and results of the study.
  - 13.4.1 Overview
  - 13.4.2 Descriptive Results
  - 13.4.3 Study Findings
  - 13.4.4 Summary
  
- 13.5 Chapter 5. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings and comparison to the research literature.
  - 13.5.1 Overview
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  - 13.5.4 Implications
  - 13.5.5 Limitations
  - 13.5.6 Recommendations for Future Research
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- 13.6 References. List all references in alphabetical order and in current APA style.
- 13.7 Appendices. All study materials and relevant documents are included in the Appendices.

The above sections outline the completed final dissertation manuscript. Please note that the dissertation proposal includes the following sections: Title Page, Abstract, Table of Contents, List of Tables (if applicable), List of Figures (if applicable), Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3, References and Appendices. Chapters 1-3 should be written in future tense in the dissertation proposal as it is being presented as a proposed study; for the final dissertation, Chapters 1-3 should be changed to past tense.

#### 14. Appendices

Please see the Appendices that follow for the prospectus template and the dissertation template.



## APPENDIX A: Prospectus Template

On the following pages is the prospectus template which is to be followed when preparing the prospectus document. All students will write their prospectus in PSYC 870 under the guidance of a faculty member in the Department of Psychology. It is recommended that the student prepare their prospectus by typing directly into the prospectus template, which can be found as a separate Word document in the PSYC 870 classroom and in the Doctoral Commons.

[TITLE OF DISSERTATION IN ALL CAPS]

by

[Student Name]

Liberty University

A Prospectus Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

[Month, Year]

**Abstract**

[Insert 150-250 word abstract.]

### **Introduction and Background of the Study**

[This section introduces your topic and provides the background of the study. The background should include both scientific research on your topic **and** biblical research on your topic. This section should be 3-5 pages in length and provide a clear research and biblical foundation for the proposed study.]

### **Problem Statement**

[This section describes the research problem in 300-500 words. It should begin with a clear indication of what is known on your topic (with citations) and lead into the gap in the research that your study will address. A clear and logical justification for your study must be present and should lead into the Purpose statement.]

### **Purpose of the Study**

[This section describes the design and method of the study as well as the relationships or constructs being studied. It should be 1-2 sentences and be a succinct and clear statement of the purpose. It should read similar to the following examples:

The purpose of this quantitative survey study is to examine how gender moderates the relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being in middle-aged adults.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore high school teachers' perceptions of and experience with the use of social media to facilitate instruction among high school students.]

### **Research Question(s)**

[This section includes the research questions guiding the study. Just the questions are listed in this section. Include as many as are pertinent to your study. Please use the following format:

RQ1: Write first research question.

RQ 2: Write second research question.

RQ 3: Write third research question.]

### **Brief Description of Method**

[This section includes a brief description of the methodology that will be used to collect data for the study. Include a description of participants that will be recruited and how they will be recruited, measures/instruments that will be used for data collection, and a brief overview of the data collection protocol. This section should be approximately 1-2 pages in length.]

### **Potential Limitations or Challenges of the Study**

[This section includes a brief description of the limitations in the proposed methodology and discussion of challenges that could arise in recruitment or data collection. This section should be approximately 1 page in length.]

### **Significance of the Study**

[This section describes the significance of the study proposed. This should include how the findings will contribute to the research and theory on your topic, as well as a discussion of possible practice implications (if relevant). This section should be approximately 1-2 paragraphs in length.]

### **Conclusion**

[This section concludes the prospectus. This section should be approximately 1-2 paragraphs in length.]

### **References**

[Include all references in current APA format that were used in the Prospectus. A minimum of 50 references are required for the Prospectus with at least 80% being from the past 5 years.]

## APPENDIX B: Dissertation Template

On the following pages is the dissertation template which is to be followed when preparing the dissertation proposal and the final dissertation. The dissertation proposal consists of the first three chapters of the dissertation manuscript plus the Title page, Abstract, Table of Contents, List of Tables, List of Figures, References, and Appendices. It is recommended that the student prepare both their dissertation proposal and dissertation by typing directly into the template to maintain formatting, margins, etc. The dissertation template can be found as a separate Word document in the PSYC 987, 988, 989 classrooms and in the Doctoral Commons.



[TITLE OF DISSERTATION IN ALL CAPS]

by

[Student Name]

Liberty University

A Dissertation [Proposal] Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

[Month, Year]

[TITLE OF DISSERTATION IN ALL CAPS]

by

[Student Name]

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

[Month, Year]

APPROVED BY:

---

Name and degree, Committee Chair

---

Name and degree, Committee Member

## ABSTRACT

[Insert 150-250 word abstract. Not to exceed 1 page.]

**Copyright Page**

(Optional; centered horizontally and vertically on the page)

## **Dedication**

The page is a page in which the candidate dedicates the dissertation manuscript.

This page is optional.

## **Acknowledgments**

This page provides the opportunity for the candidate to acknowledge individuals who influenced the completing and writing of the Dissertation.

(This page is optional.)

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### **Introduction**

[The dissertation begins with a clear, concise description of the research topic to introduce the topic of study. This should be 1-2 paragraphs.]

### **Background**

[The Background section should provide a summary of the background research that sets the foundation for the study. This section should also integrate the biblical foundations for the study as a way of providing a comprehensive foundation for the study's purpose. This section is expected to be at least 3-4 pages, but its length should be determined by adequacy of providing an overview of the background research.]

### **Problem Statement**

[This section describes the research problem in 300-500 words. It should begin with a clear indication of what is known on your topic (with citations) and leads into the gap in the research that your study will address. A clear and logical justification for your study and how your study will fill the stated gap in the research literature must be present. This section should make a strong argument for studying what is proposed and demonstrate a clear need to study it. This section should lead into the stated Purpose of the Study and Research Questions.]

### **Purpose of the Study**

[This section describes the design and method of the study as well as the relationships or constructs being studied. It should be 1-2 sentences and be a succinct and clear statement of the purpose. It should include the method and design and read similar to the following examples:

The purpose of this quantitative survey study is to examine how gender moderates the relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being in middle-age adults.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore high school teachers' perceptions of and experience with the use of social media to facilitate instruction among high school students.]

This section is succinct but is very important and central to Chapter 1 and your study. It should follow directly from the gap identified in the Problem Statement.

### **Research Question(s) and Hypotheses**

[This section includes the research questions guiding the study. Just the questions are listed in this section. Include as many as are pertinent to your study. Please use the following format:

#### **Research Questions**

RQ1: Write first research question.

RQ 2: Write second research question.

RQ 3: Write third research question.]

[For quantitative studies, Hypotheses are included following the Research Questions. Please use the following format:

## **Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1: List the hypothesis that corresponds to RQ 1.

Hypothesis 2: List the hypothesis that corresponds to RQ 2.

Hypothesis 3: List the hypothesis that corresponds to RQ 3.]

## **Assumptions and Limitations of the Study**

[This section describes the assumptions and limitations of the study. This section discusses the factors that may influence the research outcome. The significance of this section is that it deals with the internal validity of the study and the generalizability of the study's findings.

Assumptions refer to anything that the researcher assumes are true in the collection of data.

Only assumptions that are relevant to the outcomes of the study should be included. Limitations refer to factors related to the design or procedure that are unavoidable and may compromise the validity of the results. Examples of assumptions include participants answering honestly or having the knowledge to answer. Examples of limitations include methodological weaknesses, social desirability issues, or other factors.]

## **Theoretical Foundations of the Study**

[This section starts with a description of the research theory that guides the project with citations to relevant sources that describe the theory. This section also includes a brief discussion of the biblical perspective on the constructs of focus in the study that provides the biblical foundation for the study.]

### **Definition of Terms**

[This section includes a list of all terms relevant to the study. Each is formatted as follows, presented in alphabetical order, and includes a clear definition and citation for each definition. It is recommended that the following phrase be used to introduce this section.

The following is a list of definitions of terms that are used in this study.

**Term One** – Term one is defined as and put the definition here (citation in APA style).

**Term Two** – Term two refers to and give the definitions (citation in APA style).

**Term Three** – Terms three is defined as and put the definition here (citation in APA style).

### **Significance of the Study**

[This section describes the significance of the study. This should include how the findings will contribute to the research and theory on your topic, as well as a discussion of possible practice implications (if relevant). The purpose of this study is to explain the impact that this study will have on both theory and practice. This section should be at least 2-3 paragraphs in length.]

### **Summary**

[This section concludes Chapter 1. This section should be approximately 1-2 paragraphs in length. Each chapter should have a summary to conclude the information presented in the present chapter and to transition to the next chapter.]

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Overview**

[Chapter 2 is a comprehensive, integrative review of the research literature on your topic. It should review all relevant research so it is clear to the reader what the state of the research literature on your topic is. The majority of your reviewed studies should be no more than 5 years old. In addition to a review of the research on your topic, the Biblical Foundations of the Study section will review a biblical understanding of constructs being explored in your study. Use of Scripture references is required as you review what the Bible says about your topic or related constructs.

The Overview section introduces the chapter and provides an overview of the contents of the chapter. This section should be 1-2 paragraphs.]

### **Description of Search Strategy**

[This section describes the literature search strategy. The databases used to search for research, as well as the search terms utilized and any delimitations put on the literature search should be described. Furthermore, how the biblical research was conducted should be include with a description of relevant procedures employed (i.e. word study).]

### **Review of Literature**

[In this section and necessary subsections, the research on your topic is reviewed. This section should be structured in a way that shows the reader what is known on your topic and the relevant subtopics within your research focus. Level 2 headings should be used to guide the flow of



research reviewed. After reading this section, a reader should have a good understanding of the state of knowledge on your topic. It should be written in such a way that leads up to the study presented herein.

### **Biblical Foundations of the Study**

[This section describes how the Bible instructs on all relevant constructs in your study. Use of Scripture is expected as you make an argument for a biblical perspective on your study.]

### **Summary**

[This section concludes Chapter 2. This section should conclude the information presented in this chapter with a special focus on integrating what is known from research and Scripture on your topic. This should be written in such a way to transition to the next chapter.]

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

### **Overview**

[Chapter 3 is a comprehensive, description of the procedures of the study. In this first section of Chapter 3, the chapter is introduced with an overview of what will be described in this chapter.]

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses (if applicable)**

[In this section, all Research Questions and Hypotheses (for quantitative studies) should be restated. They can be formatted as they were in Chapter 1.]

### **Research Design**

[In this section, the researcher describes the specific design used in the study. Justification for the choice of design, with a focus on how it will fulfill the purpose of the study, should be included.]

### **Participants**

[This describes the characteristics of the participants who will be (or were) recruited for the study. Any relevant inclusion/exclusions criteria should be included. How participants will be (were) recruited should be explained with relevant recruitment materials included in the Appendix. Permissions to recruit, as needed, should also be stated in this section and included in the Appendix. Justification for sample size must also be included with reference to saturation for qualitative research and a power analysis run for quantitative analysis.]

### **Study Procedures**

[This section provides an overview of all procedures employed in the study. It should begin with the recruitment of participants and discuss all points of contact with the participants. The description of protocol should be detailed enough to be replicable by another researcher. All supporting materials should be included in the Appendix.]

### **Instrumentation and Measurement**

[In this section, all questionnaires, tests, surveys, interview questions, observational protocols, or any measures used in the study are described. Each measure should be presented in its own subheading with a clear description of the measure, its content, and its purpose. For quantitative measures, all relevant reliability and validity data should be included as well as citations to the original scale development articles. For qualitative interviews or other qualitative measures, discussion of qualitative reliability/validity should be discussed to include a discussion of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. All instruments created for this study should be included in the Appendix. Level 2 and 3 subheadings should be added to guide the flow of this section.]

### **Operationalization of Variables**

[This section is only included for quantitative studies and describes how each variable is operationalized. It should be formatted as follows and include a clear description of the type of variable it is and how each variables is measured.

**Variable One** – this variable is a ratio variable and will be measured by total score on the Example Questionnaire (citation).

**Variable Two** – Variable Two is a nominal variable that will be measured by the researcher created demographic questionnaire asking participants to select the category they fall within.]

### **Data Analysis**

[In this section, the data analysis procedure employed should be described (or in the Proposal, the proposed data analysis strategy should be described. For quantitative studies, the exact statistical test[s] that are conducted are described. For qualitative studies, the process of transcription, coding, and analysis are described. Justification for the analysis strategy chosen should also be included.]

### **Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations**

[This section should discuss the delimitations, assumptions, and limitations of the study. Delimitations refer to deliberate boundaries you have placed on your study and refer to the choices you have made to study a certain population or a certain segment of behavior. They should be stated and justified. Assumptions refer to anything that the researcher assumes are true in the collection of data. Only assumptions that are relevant to the outcomes of the study should be included. Limitations refer to factors related to the design or procedure that are unavoidable and may compromise the validity of the results. Examples of assumptions include participants

answering honestly or having the knowledge to answer. Examples of limitations include methodological weaknesses, social desirability issues, or other factors.]

### **Summary**

[This section concludes Chapter 3. This section should be approximately 1-2 paragraphs in length. Each chapter should have a summary to conclude the information presented in the present chapter and to transition to the next chapter.]

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### **Overview**

[This chapter and this section begin with a restatement of the study's purpose and brief overview of the data collection process and research questions that guided the study. This section provides an overview of the chapter.]

### **Descriptive Results**

[In this section, all descriptive results are presented. The demographics of the sample, as well as any relevant means to questionnaires, are presented. Any relevant descriptive results are outlined in this section.]

### **Study Findings**

[This section is organized by research question and presents the research findings. For qualitative studies, the analytical process should be briefly described again, followed by all relevant codes that organized the data and then all themes presented by research question. For quantitative studies, all relevant statistics, tables, and statistical comparisons should be presented.]

### **Summary**

[This section concludes Chapter 4. This section should be approximately 1-2 paragraphs in length and summarize the key results. Each chapter should have a summary to conclude the information presented in the present chapter and to transition to the next chapter.]

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### **Overview**

[This chapter and this section begin with a restatement of the study's purpose and brief introduction to the chapter.]

### **Summary of Findings**

[This section briefly summarizes all key findings from the study.]

### **Discussion of Findings**

[This section discusses what the findings mean and how they compare to the research literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Furthermore, a discussion of how this study contributes to our understanding of the theory of your constructs and how it fits into the biblical foundations laid in Chapter 2 is presented. This section focuses on what we should take away from the findings of this study.]

### **Implications**

[This section discusses the implications of the findings for theory and practice. How these findings can be used and the impact they can have in the scientific community, in psychological practice/consulting, and/or in the church or other organizations should be presented.]

### **Limitations**

[This section summarizes all relevant limitations of the study. Those stated previously should be restated as well as any new limitations discovered in the completion of the study.]



### **Recommendations for Future Research**

[This section discusses recommendations for future research that emerge from the findings of the current study.]

### **Summary**

[This section concludes Chapter 5 and the dissertation. This section should be approximately 1-2 paragraphs in length and summarize the key results and implications of the study. This section concludes the dissertation.]

## REFERENCES

[Include all references in current APA format. References are expected to be current, with at least 80% being from the past 5 years.]

APPENDIX A: NAME OF APPENDIX

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