

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
SCHOOL OF NURSING

ACADEMIC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE  
GRADUATE PROGRAM

**TITLE OF POLICY:** DISSERTATION DEVELOPMENT AND COMPLETION

**ORIGINAL DATE:** DECEMBER 1983

**LAST REVIEWED/REVISED:** MARCH 2021

**POLICY:** "The doctoral dissertation is the final and most important component of the series of academic experiences which culminate in the awarding of the Ph.D. degree. Three major functions are fulfilled by the dissertation experience: (1) It is a work of original research or scholarship which makes a contribution to existing knowledge; (2) It is an educational experience which demonstrates the candidate's mastery of research methods and tools of the specialized field; and (3) It demonstrates the student's ability to address a major intellectual problem and arrive at a successful conclusion."<sup>1</sup>

Characteristics that a dissertation should demonstrate are: the establishment of a historical context for the presentation of an innovative and creative approach to the problem analysis and solution; a clear understanding of the problem area as revealed by analysis and synthesis of a broad literature base; a well-defined research design; clarity in composition and careful documentation; results of sufficient merit to be published in refereed journals or to form the basis of a book or monograph; sufficient detail so that other scholars can build on it in subsequent work."<sup>2</sup>

If the dissertation is the result of a collaborative research effort, the project should be structured in such a way that the student's dissertation results from one clearly identified piece of work in which the student has supplied the unquestionably major effort. The contributions of the student and the other collaborators must be clearly identified.

The student may elect to write the dissertation using the traditional format or the manuscript format.

Published articles or papers that are ready for publication authored by the student and based on research conducted for the dissertation study may be included in the dissertation. In any case, the published work must be logically connected and integrated into the dissertation in a coherent manner, and sufficient detail must be presented to satisfy the characteristics of a dissertation. The student should be the sole or primary author of the published work. If the published articles were co-authored, the contribution of the student must be clearly delineated in the introduction so the committee can ascertain that the student's own work satisfies the requirements of a dissertation."<sup>3</sup>

Requirements for admission to candidacy are in accordance with those established by the University Council on Graduate Study. To qualify for admission to candidacy for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the student must have:

- satisfactorily completed the preliminary examination
- completed formal course work with a minimum grade point average of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale
- passed the comprehensive examination
- received approval of the research proposal from the dissertation committee selected for this purpose

The form and style of the dissertation must be in accord with the specifications outlined in the Electronic Thesis and Dissertations (ETD) Format Guidelines Manual and the most recent edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA). If the content of the APA Manual differs from the ETD Format Guidelines Manual, the latter shall take precedence.

**PROCEDURE:** 1. The student selects a qualified nursing faculty member with expertise in the area of research focus to guide the research and chair the dissertation committee.

<sup>1</sup>Requirements for the Ph.D. A Policy Statement. (1979). Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools in the United States. (pp.7-8).

<sup>2</sup>Regulations Governing Graduate Study at the University of Pittsburgh. (Nov. 1995). (p. 39)

<sup>3</sup>Regulations Governing Graduate Study at the University of Pittsburgh. (Nov. 1995) (p. 40)

2. During the research proposal development stage the student may seek consultation from any member of the University faculty who he/she believes can be of help.
3. In consultation with the committee chair, the student selects a minimum of three faculty members in addition to the committee chair to serve as dissertation committee members. Three of the members including the chair must have a faculty appointment in the School of Nursing. One member must be from a school or department outside of the School of Nursing. The majority of the committee, including the major advisor, must be full or adjunct members of the Graduate Faculty of the University of Pittsburgh.
4. The committee chair submits the names of the committee member nominees to the PhD Program Director and the Dean for approval; when approval has been obtained the student contacts the nominees and asks them to serve on the committee.
5. If the student desires to use the manuscript format, the committee and student need to review the requirements and establish the approach for writing the specific dissertation. Refer to "Guidelines for use of a Manuscript Format for Dissertation".
6. As the student proceeds with the research he/she has the privilege and responsibility to seek guidance from the committee members. The committee is responsible for:
  - a. advising the student through the research process
  - b. ensuring high quality research
  - c. ensuring that the dissertation meets acceptable standard, Committee members may request revision of any part of the dissertation at any stage.
  - d. meeting with the PhD student/candidate at least annually from the time the committee is formed.
7. The committee chair informs the student when he/she is satisfied that the research proposal is ready for overview consideration by the committee.
8. The student is responsible for contacting committee members for feasible dates for the overview meeting and conveying the information to the committee chair who finalizes the date and time. The student then notifies the committee members.
9. The student must submit a copy of the dissertation proposal to each member of the committee at least two weeks prior to the scheduled date for the overview meeting.
10. At the overview meeting committee members have the opportunity and responsibility to obtain clarification as needed and recommend changes in the proposal as indicated.
11. At the conclusion of the overview meeting the committee chair is responsible for informing the student of the decision and recommendations of the committee, and for completing the "Record of Overview for Dissertation" and ensuring that it is signed by all committee members. The original form is given to the Administrative Assistant of the PhD program who forwards a copy to Student Affairs and Alumni Relations for filing in the student's record (Policy #235). A copy of the form is also forwarded to the student's academic advisor.

The dissertation committee must unanimously approve the dissertation topic and the research plan before the student may be recommended for PhD candidacy.

12. The PhD Program Director or designee informs the Dean that the student is recommended for candidacy. Students are informed of admission to candidacy by written notification from the Dean (Policy # 235).
13. If the dissertation proposal is approved and does not require human or animal subject clearance, the student can proceed with the research. If the proposed study involves use of human subjects, approval from the appropriate University IRB and the agency where the data will be gathered must be obtained prior to initiation of the study. If the research involves animals, IACUC approval must be obtained prior to initiation of the study. The student obtains the guidelines from the appropriate IRB and the agency where data will be collected or from IACUC and prepares and submits a proposal to them after obtaining the approval of the committee chair.
14. The Dissertation Committee Chair notifies the PhD Program Director of the student's dissertation focus by submitting the student's name, dissertation title, committee members, and an abstract of the dissertation for posting on Pitt Box and for listing on the next PhD Council meetings' agenda.

15. As the student proceeds with the research he/she is responsible for consulting with the chair and committee members. After completion of the research the student will submit a draft of the dissertation to the chair for review and approval.
16. When, in the opinion of the chair, the dissertation is ready for examination by the committee the student is responsible for contacting the committee members for feasible dates for the oral defense, and conveying this information to the chair. The chair finalizes the date of the defense and the student notifies the committee members.
17. The student submits a completed Announcement of Final Dissertation Defense form to the Administrative Assistant of the PhD Program who notifies the University Times and Pitt Chronicle and posts flyers advertising the defense throughout Victoria Building.
18. The student must submit a copy of the dissertation to each member of the committee at least two weeks prior to the scheduled oral defense meeting.
19. The date, time, and place of the oral defense is published in the University Times and Pitt Chronicle well in advance of the scheduled date. Any member of the University community and student-invited guests may attend and the defense and participate in the question and answer session.
20. During the oral defense meeting, any member of the dissertation committee can request that the student revise any portion of the dissertation that does not meet with his/her approval.
21. If revisions are required, committee members may (a) request to again review the dissertation before signing the "Record of Defense for Dissertation" or (b) may sign the form and defer responsibility for the revisions to the committee chair. In either event, the dissertation committee chair has the responsibility for ensuring that the dissertation is in acceptable final form and that all signatures of committee members have been obtained on both the Record of Defense for Dissertation form and the Committee Signature Form before the student submits the electronic version of the dissertation to Student Affairs and Alumni Relations.
22. If the decision of the committee on passing the candidate is not unanimous, the case is referred to the Dean for resolution.
23. Upon completion of the dissertation the student is responsible for submitting to Student Affairs and Alumni Relations
  - a. one copy of the electronic dissertation via the ETD Online System
  - b. if material copyrighted by others is included in the dissertation, the copyright permission letter(s) from the copyright owner(s) must be attached.
  - c. If the dissertation contains executable software owned by another party, the letter from the owner of the software license granting permission to use it must be attached.
  - d. The doctoral candidate is required to execute an agreement with ProQuest Information and Learning/UMI for the publication of the dissertation on microform and for the publication of the dissertation abstract in Dissertation Abstracts. If the chair of the committee and the student agree, the dissertation can be indexed in CINAHL by submitting the student's name, thesis title, degree, university name, and abstract tocinahl@cinahl.com.
  - e. Completed "Survey of Earned Doctorate" form
24. Following the dissertation defense, the committee chair is responsible for completing and sending the following to the Administrative Assistant of the PhD Program who will forward the documents to Student Affairs and Alumni Relations:
  - a. Record of Defense for Dissertation
  - b. Committee Signature Form/ETD Approval Form
  - c. Change of Status form (for final oral defense)
  - d. Change of grade cards

Approved by Graduate Faculty Organization: 12/83

Reviewed: 91-92, 04-0508-09, 11-12, 16-17; 17-18, 18-19, 19-20, 20-21

Revisions Approved by Faculty: 5/92, 11/01, 02/09. 10/19