

**Texas A&M University
PK-12 Educational
Administration and Leadership
Program
Educational Administration and
Human Resource
Development Department
Dissertation Handbook
for
Ph.D. Candidates**



*Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas*

Preface

This Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development's PK-12 Educational Administration and Leadership Program Dissertation Handbook is intended to assist you, the Ph.D. candidate, through the process of completing a dissertation. It is our hope that this handbook can aid you in your challenging, yet exciting research opportunity—writing your dissertation. First, the Ph.D. program is designed to prepare you for a university faculty position; therefore, your course of study and your dissertation should be designed with your advisor with that in mind. Coursework for preparation for the dissertation should be well rounded and focused in the area in which you wish to develop your expertise, in addition to leadership.

The PK-12 Educational Administration and Leadership Program has used the University's *Office of Graduate and Professional Studies' (OGAPS) Policies for Theses and Dissertations* and the *Thesis Manual* and modified it to address specific issues relating to the program Ph.D. candidates. This handbook serves as a guide and in no way provides a contract between you, TAMU and/or the PK-12 Educational Administration Program.

In addition to this handbook and the OGAPS Guidelines, you might wish to review other more in-depth *how to* books on completing a successful dissertation. Some books are as follows (not all-inclusive):

Roberts, C. M. (2010). *The dissertation journey: A practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Boyle Single, P., & Reis, R. M. (2009). *Demystifying dissertation writing: A streamlined process from choice of topic to final text*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Davis, G. B., Parker, C. A., & Straub, D. W. (2012). *Writing a doctoral dissertation: A systematic approach*. Hauppauge, NY: Barrons Educational Series, Inc.

Lunenburg, F. C., & Irby, B. J. (2007). *Writing a successful thesis or dissertation: Tips and strategies for students in the social and behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

To ensure that your dissertation from TAMU's PK-12 Educational Administration and Leadership Program reflects the importance the College and University places on it, the PK-12 Educational Administration and Leadership Program requires that you follow the rules of this handbook and strict formatting and submission guidelines as outlined by the University. By following these guidelines, you can be more confident and encounter fewer problems in the publication process with the University Thesis Office. You are

ultimately the one responsible for following the guidelines and instructions in this handbook; therefore, it is important that you read it completely and carefully.

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Dissertations Defined

Your Ph.D. dissertation is a critical capstone in your doctoral education, as well as a vital launch to your career in the academy. This capstone event is expected to make a contribution to the body of knowledge in your particular discipline of PK-12 Educational Administration and Leadership. It also demonstrates that you understand the existing published literature and that you are capable of conducting and communicating original, high-quality research.

There are differing types of dissertation structures that you may want to consider. Of course, all steps in the dissertation process, including selecting the structure, will need to be discussed and approved by your dissertation chair. The decision you will make is dependent upon how well your topic fits within one of the following structures, the view of your field regarding the dissertation structure, and the view of the academy regarding the type of dissertation.

The following are brief descriptions of potential dissertation structures:

Traditional Dissertation

Traditional dissertations typically include five chapters. Chapter I is the introductory chapter including a presentation of the problem, definitions, theoretical framework¹, purpose, significance, research questions, and limitations/delimitations/assumptions (not necessarily in that order). Chapter II is a critique of the related literature which may be a systematic review, bibliometrics, a best-evidence synthesis, a meta-analysis, a meta-synthesis, narrative review, or scoping study. There should be a critique of the existing literature based on some review technique with the technique explained as a method for the critique of literature. Chapter III contains a presentation of the methods encompassing the research design, sample, instrumentation, validity issues of the study, data collection plan, and data analysis plan (not necessarily in that order). Chapter IV is a presentation of the results, and Chapter V includes a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and a suggestion for future research. Please note that a dissertation that uses qualitative approaches may include more than five chapters.

Journal-Ready Dissertation

The journal-ready dissertation will commonly include five chapters, just as the traditional dissertation; however, the format is different. Always check with your dissertation chair before determining the specifics of the chapters of this type of dissertation format. Chapter I includes the overall purpose of the dissertation, the problem identified, the structure of the dissertation and plans for each of the journal-ready manuscripts with the

¹ Another book that aids in theoretical frameworks is [The Handbook of Educational Theories](#) (Irby, Brown, Lara-Alecio, & Jackson, Editors; 2013). This too is edited by two College graduate faculty and includes several TAMU faculty authors.

research design or approach, questions, data collection and analysis, and the potential locations for respected scholarly journal submissions. Again, each of the proposed/completed three journal-ready manuscripts will be described with purposes and research questions for each. The Chapter I will be inclusive of how the three articles are intimately linked or related. In Chapter II, the first manuscript developed for publication, you will include a critique of the literature, as described previously in the traditional dissertation section, related to your topic. This critique is more than just a term paper type of review; it is an actual in-depth analysis of literature related to (a) theory, (b) practice, and (c) published research on your topic. Chapter III will be the presentation of your specific research study with all components of a published research study. Chapter IV is typically a manuscript for application of your findings to the field or a policy paper related to your work. Chapter V is the conclusion chapter. In this chapter, you will make concluding remarks overall from Chapters II, III, and IV. According to TAMU OGAPS Guidelines, this chapter includes a focus on helping the reader see how the various manuscripts, altogether, make a contribution to the field. Additionally, you will include future research recommendations.

The Program requires a copy of each journals' instructions to the author, a copy of an article published in each journal (published within the last 2 years), and a draft of the proposal and dissertation. The TAMU Thesis Office requires a copy of a journal article (published within the last 5 years) with a comprehensive reference list that contains samples of types of citations used (may provide reference lists from several journal articles, if necessary).

The dissertation should be presented as a single unit; continuity from chapter to chapter is important. Unavoidably, this will duplicate some of the introductory and concluding material in each publishable article. The dissertation will have a common abstract and reference section. The reference section will be an integrated list, not a series of lists. Appendices may be added to present information not included in the body of the dissertation. When submitting the work from the dissertation for publication, you and your chair will need to determine how each manuscript will be pulled from the dissertation for submission and how each then will not be duplicated. Also, please note that this type of dissertation in preparing such a journal-ready dissertation may take slightly longer than a traditional dissertation in getting the manuscripts readied and appropriate for publication within the dissertation.

Whenever there are differences in format and layout between the specifications of the TAMU Guidelines and the journal model, the TAMU Guidelines overrule the journal. The journal will be followed for:

- location of table titles (above or below)
- location of figure titles (above or below)
- style and format

Continuous pagination is required throughout the dissertation. The usual requirements for margins, consistency in chapter or section titles, and other mechanics as specified elsewhere in the TAMU Guidelines will apply.

The dissertation is not expected to duplicate the typographic style of the published journal; the publication and layout practices (use of double columns, extra spacing, etc.) are not to be followed. A journal's "Author's Guidelines" is not followed exactly when writing a dissertation. These instructions are for the convenience of editors and do not necessarily apply to the format of a dissertation. Individual manuscripts serving as chapters of the dissertation need not have the same internal structure. Instead, each is presented in the style appropriate to the selected journal.

The journal must be a well-known, respected, and scholarly journal in the major field (each journal article may follow a different journal format, so that will need to be noted.). The journal will be noted in both the research proposal and the thesis. (See pages 10 and 24 for specific instructions on the TAMU Thesis Manual.) A style manual such as *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* or the *Publication Manual of the APA* is not to be listed as a model.

If there is more than one journal used for the journal-ready manuscripts, please provide all information—one under the other with the related chapter noted.

Per TAMU Guidelines, you may publish material that subsequently will be used as part of the dissertation provided that the chair of your dissertation committee is notified in writing at the time you submit the paper for publication. The notification should include the article title, the journal name, the names of all authors, and the date of submission. It is recommended that you do not publish the paper without the chair's approval and assistance. The student must be the first author of each article used. The names of all authors, in journal-submitted order, and the name of the journal (with volume, page numbers, and date, if known) must be given as a footnote to the title on the first page of each manuscript chapter so as to indicate the current status of each manuscript. Evidence of permission to use articles that have been published or accepted for publication prior to completion of the dissertation must be included in the appendices. You should be aware that the agreement signed when a journal accepts an article for publication usually assigns all rights to the journal and you may no longer possess rights to the material.

Dissertation Proposal Process

Select Dissertation Committee

Once you have chosen a topic for your dissertation (we expect that you will come into the program with some ideas about what you want to research, but it is normal for this focus to evolve), you will meet with your potential chair to discuss your topic. Prior to the selection of other members of the committee, you must discuss all committee

members with the chair of your committee. The chair of the committee must approve all members of the committee. This selection should be done with care and forethought (you want a group of four faculty members who will be best able to assist you with your dissertation research). The University requires the chair be a professor in the program, an additional committee member must be from outside the department, and the other two committee members can be program faculty or other faculty inside/outside of the department.

If a person is requested to be on a committee who is not a member of the TAMU graduate faculty, then a request must be initiated by you and your chair of the dissertation committee to the Department Head to be added as a special appointment. This person cannot be one of the four required members. Such appointments are accomplished by completion of a Special Appointment form from the Department Head through the CEHD Associate Dean for Graduate Studies to the Dean of the Office of Graduate Studies with the individual's resume attached. The academic advising office will assist in this submission.

Degree Plan

By the end of your fifth semester of coursework or before completing 36 credit hours, you are required to file a degree plan. You will be required to file the degree plan online from the Office of Graduate & Professional Studies Website. The degree plan is a list of the courses, both what you've taken and what you plan to take, that will make up the 72 hours required for the Ph.D. You are urged to take a dissertation proposal preparation course in the Department. In filing your degree plan, you will identify your dissertation committee.

Preliminary Examination

At the end of your coursework (excluding EDAD 691), you must take the preliminary examination (prelims). This consists of written questions from the members of your committee and an oral examination. At least 2 weeks prior to the confirmed date and time, you must contact the academic advising staff to schedule the exam. Notification will be sent out to the committee members and a copy will be sent to you.

Guidance about this process will be provided by your chair. Upon completion of the written examination, you will meet with your committee for an oral examination. The intent of prelims is to assure that you have a command of the knowledge-base of the field of education. Students who fail prelims have one opportunity to retake the exam; if they cannot continue in the doctoral program, their coursework may be applied towards a second Master's degree.

Proposal Hearing

After the preliminary exams, while working on the dissertation, you must remember to complete all remaining departmental requirements, as well as to *register continuously*

for the dissertation hours. You must be enrolled in dissertation hours to hold a proposal hearing.

The student will work with the dissertation committee chair to develop a proposal. The *proposal* is a document that outlines the background of the topic, what specific question the research will answer, how the student proposes to study this topic, and what the study will contribute to the knowledge-base in this area. The *dissertation proposal hearing* is an oral examination of the proposed study by the entire committee. It is a time in which potential problems in the proposal are noted, discussed, and addressed.

The student must contact the committee and confirm a date and time for the proposal meeting. Once all members have confirmed, you must contact the Academic Advising office to schedule a room. Notification will be sent out to the committee members and a copy will be sent to you.

Three (3) weeks prior to the date of the proposal meeting, you must provide the proposal to your committee members. The committee members have two (2) weeks to review the proposal and provide feedback to the student. Please meet with your chair regarding how to proceed with the committee's feedback. Some chairs will ask the student to incorporate the corrections into the proposal and bring a revised copy to the proposal meeting for each committee member.

At the proposal hearing, you will present your proposal, and the committee will work with you to strengthen it. Typically, your chair will require a computer presentation to accompany your proposal. The presentation is no more than thirty (30) minutes in length with a thirty (30) minute discussion that follows. Afterward, you will likely meet with your chair for another thirty (30) minutes. The time allocated is typically between one (1) to one-and-a-half (1.5) hours.

You need to bring the Proposal Approval Page form for your committee to sign. The committee must approve the proposal prior to the student initiating the study. Your committee members are likely to have some ideas for revision of your proposed dissertation. It is possible that the dissertation committee may request a second dissertation proposal hearing if there are substantial revisions to be made after the initial proposal hearing; however, most meetings end in approval of the dissertation proposal with revisions documented by the student and the committee chair.

Once the committee approves your proposal, then the proposal, the IRB approval, and the signed committee approval form should be forwarded to the academic advising office, who will submit your packet to OGAPS to formally admit you as a Ph.D. candidate.

Dissertation Proposal Structures

The Traditional Dissertation Proposal

The proposal for the five-chapter traditional dissertation is typically the first three chapters. The first (1st) chapter, Introduction (though it may be altered for a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods study), generally follows this outline:

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study
Statement of the Problem
Purpose of the Study
Significance of the Study
Definitions of Terms
Theoretical Framework
Research Questions (or Hypotheses)
Limitations
Delimitations
Assumptions
Organization of the Study

You may wish to review the Lunenburg and Irby (2008) text for a description of these sections.

The second (2nd) chapter contains the review of literature. In this review of literature chapter, Lunenburg and Irby (2008) have suggested that you critique the literature and synthesize it by considering its (a) historical context, (b) gaps, (c) approaches, (d) trends and themes, (e) practical significance reported in studies, (f) reconciliation of conflicting theories, and (g) inconsistent findings. Tables are suggested in compiling the review. There are essentially five types of literature you will find: (a) theoretical, (b) personal or expert opinion, (c) government documents, (d) evaluation reports, and (e) studies (qualitative and quantitative). You may choose to conduct a best-evidence synthesis or a meta-analysis and/or a meta-synthesis for the chapter critique of the literature. You may also conduct a systematic review.

The third (3rd) chapter is used to present your proposed methods. The sections suggested for this chapter basically include:

CHAPTER III METHODS

Research Design or Research Approach
Context of the Study
Participants of the Study

Instrumentation
Data Collection
Data Analysis.

Remember that for the dissertation, the proposal is written in future tense, but the dissertation is written in past tense as your study will have been completed.

The Journal-Ready Dissertation Proposal

This type of proposal is slightly different from the five-chapter traditional dissertation proposal. This proposal will likely consist of about 20 pages. *This does not mean that it is an easier proposal or has less rigor.* The journal-ready proposal will become chapter one of the dissertation. There are typically five chapters within this dissertation as well:

Chapter I INTRODUCTION
Chapter II CRITIQUE OF THE LITERATURE (One of the Manuscripts)
Chapter III MAIN STUDY (One of the Manuscripts)
Chapter IV APPLICATION TO THE FIELD (One of the Manuscripts), and
Chapter V SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, AND NEXT STEPS.

In the end of this type dissertation, you will have three manuscripts deemed publishable by your committee. They do not have to be published, only deemed publishable in high-quality journals as determined by your department. All three manuscripts *must be on related topics* which fall under an overarching problem.

The outline of the journal-ready proposal is noted in the TAMU Thesis Guidelines. For the purposes of the PK-12 Educational Administration and Leadership Program, the following guidelines are recommended:

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

- A. Introduction and Statement of the Problem (includes literature)
- B. Statement of the Purpose of Each of the Types of Studies to be Included:
 - 1. CHAPTER 2 Critique of the Literature (purpose of the critique of the literature and type of critique detailed)
 - 2. CHAPTER 3 Main Study (purpose of the main study and the methods components included as proposed)
 - 3. CHAPTER 4 Application to the Field (purpose of the application manuscript – implications for practice or policy paper)

- C. Significance of the Work to be Completed (this may also be divided by types of manuscripts)
- D. Definitions of Terms
- E. Theoretical Framework
- F. Research Questions (per type of study within the dissertation)
- G. Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions (per type of study within the dissertation)
- H. Organization of the Dissertation

Dissertation Completion Process

You will need to schedule regular meetings with your committee chair to ensure appropriate progression in the dissertation.

Continuous Enrollment & Total Number of Years

You are expected to finish a Ph.D. within 3 to 5 years. Doctoral students have 10 years from the time of enrollment to graduation. After all coursework is completed and prelims are passed, you must continuously enroll in dissertation hours until graduation. Should you not receive your degree within the 10-year time limit, you will be required to submit a petition to request a time extension. The academic advising office will guide you through this process.

As indicated, per TAMU Policy, continuous enrollment in dissertation hours is required. A total of 12 hours of dissertation credit is required. If you successfully defend your dissertation prior to the beginning of a semester, but you do not meet the graduation deadlines, you must pay for dissertation hours that following semester; no waivers will be provided by the TAMU OGAPS.

IRB Approval

The first action step after you receive committee proposal approval is to complete your request to the Institutional Review Board to begin your research. You should already have a certificate on file for compliance purposes. The actual IRB Application can be completed online. *Once you receive approval from the IRB, you may begin your data collection (with approval from your chair of the dissertation).* It is advised that the candidate, with consultation of the dissertation chair, establish timelines for data collection and analysis. Unanticipated events or IRB requirements may require changes in the study methods of the original proposal. If such changes are required, the candidate must secure approval of all committee members. Any committee member may request that the committee meet again with you to discuss the changes. You and

the dissertation chair are responsible for resolving any conflicting points of view among committee members regarding the dissertation. Any change in methods must be approved by the TAMU IRB.

Dissertation Defense

Your ***dissertation defense*** will be an oral presentation and discussion of the written dissertation. In the defense, you will share the results of the study and demonstrate to the committee members that you have completed a quality product of research and that it is worthy of the bestowing of a doctoral degree. Typically, this defense is in an open forum with other doctoral students and other faculty members invited.

Your dissertation chair will not allow you to schedule your defense until your dissertation document is written with quality and edited well. Please do not be disappointed when this process may require numerous revisions and an editor. You will be able to defend your dissertation with ease by the time you have completed it—you will be the expert on your topic. Your committee members will have read it and given you feedback as well. The first draft will only be the beginning to fine tune the ultimate performance event—your dissertation— in your doctoral studies. Make certain that the dissertation follows all of the TAMU Guidelines.

The defense must be scheduled by the OGAPS deadlines for the intended semester of graduation. A calendar of deadlines can be found on the [OGAPS website](#) and on the Thesis Office Facebook page. As soon as your dissertation is in an almost complete stage, you will need to schedule the defense with the academic advising office and the room will be scheduled for you, along with any special accommodations. Notification will be sent out to the committee members and a copy will be sent to you. You must confirm date and time will all committee members prior to contacting the academic advising office.

Your completed dissertation will need to be to your chair in time for the chair to review it and approve it to get the final document to your committee at least three (3) weeks prior to the defense. Your committee members will be able to respond to you with their corrections within two (2) weeks of your submission of the final document so that you will be prepared to defend any questions the members might have at the defense. Additionally, your chair might want all revisions corrected and those pages brought to the defense. Be certain to check with your chair.

The format of the presentation will be discussed with you by your chair. Usually, the chair welcomes the guests and thanks the committee members. The purpose of the defense is to ensure that you can speak academically about what you have written. You should stand when presenting and should use a professional computer presentation. Most of the time, the questions are reserved until you have completed your presentation. However, the chair will be in control of the meeting and will share at the beginning how the questions will be handled. The types of questions you will receive are

those that require you to (a) discuss further your methods, findings, theoretical framework, or interpretations, (b) share what you know more in-depth on your topic, (c) interpret the so *what* (the significance) of your study, and/or (d) specify clarifications at certain points in the written dissertation document. The guests are allowed to ask questions as well.

Your presentation at the defense will likely last approximately thirty (30) minutes. The remainder of the time, which will likely be around 30-45 minutes, will be taken in discussion.

Once your defense has been completed, all guests will be asked to leave. After any further discussion with you and the committee, you will be asked to leave the room. After the committee discusses any changes amongst themselves and agrees to those, they will determine whether you have passed the defense. Sometimes, committees will say you have passed the oral exam, but the written component of the dissertation needs additional edits. Some committee members will want to see their revisions you made returned (with their notes on the document), while others will defer to you and your chair to be responsible for making the edits requested. Once all is in order, the committee members will sign the Approval Page for the dissertation. After all is complete with revisions, the dissertation will be forwarded for a final review by the OGAPS Thesis Office. The Thesis Office reviews each electronic thesis, dissertation and record of study (ETD) for uniformity, consistency, and adherence to University guidelines for quality.

Helpful Tips

Support Writing and Editing

It is recommended that you retain an editor to assist in the editing process of the proposal and dissertation. The TAMU Writing Center has many resources for writing dissertations. The TAMU Writing Center does not function as an editing or a proofreading service, but the Center personnel can help you locate professional editors, or they can help you develop the skills you need to proofread and edit your own work. The TAMU Writing Center hosts retreats and workshops to help students in the writing process.

As part of OGAPS, the *Thesis Office is available to help students manage the process and smooth the road to completion.* Templates and workshops are available through the Thesis Office. In addition to guiding students through the process of preparing theses and dissertations, the Thesis Office receives, reviews and approves the required electronic file of each dissertation when it is complete. **Note: Texas A&M University requires that your name on your electronic file be an exact match to your University records.**

The TAMU Writing Center includes information on plagiarism and special requirements and procedures for submitting the dissertation. There is a template online as well in the Thesis Office information.

Copyright is an important element that is shared in the TAMU Policies. If a part of the dissertation has been published prior to the dissertation being finalized, you will need to get a permission letter from the copyright holder to use your publication as part of the dissertation; otherwise, it would violate copyright and become a plagiarism issue as well. Also, any figure or chart that is used from another source would have to have permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Authorship on Future Manuscripts from the Dissertation

Authorship of any future publications from your dissertation should be discussed with your chair early, even during the proposal process. It is expected that you will invite committee members, particularly your chair, to participate in authoring and/or acknowledge their expertise in the writing of any publishable articles. It is expected that the authors in co-authored articles take full responsibility to work with you and the chair in terms of the substance and editing of the manuscript. Authorship in terms of first, second, third, etc., must follow ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association.

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