

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON | EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership & Policy Studies Program

Manuscript-Based Dissertation Guidelines

The Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership & Policy Studies (HELPS) program provides two options students can choose from to fulfill the dissertation requirement: the ‘traditional’ format, and the manuscript-based (three journal article) format. The purpose of this document is to outline the difference between these two formats and provide guidelines for students who wish to complete a manuscript-based dissertation.

The decision regarding which dissertation format to follow should be informed by the student’s scholarly and professional goals. Accordingly, **before beginning their dissertation work it is imperative that each student make this decision in close consultation with the chair of their dissertation committee. Students must receive approval from their dissertation chair to conduct a manuscript-based dissertation.**

The ‘Traditional’ Dissertation Format

The traditional dissertation format is typically to write a five-chapter study, followed by a complete list of references, with the following sections:

Chapter 1: Introduction (statement of the problem; introduction of the topic; research questions; data sources, methods of analysis, contribution to the literature)

Chapter 2: Literature Review (review of the *empirical* literature related to the topic; identification of a conceptual or theoretical framework and discussion of how it is used to inform data collection, analysis, interpretation of findings)

Chapter 3: Methods of Analysis (data, analytic plan, limitations of the study)

Chapter 4: Findings (results of data analysis; interpretation of findings; discussion of the ways that the findings address the research questions)

Chapter 5: Conclusion (explanation of the ways that the study responds to the introductory problem statement; contributions of the study to theory; considerations for the ways the study builds on prior literature; future research directions; implications for practice)

The traditional dissertation proposal consists of the first three chapters. At the final dissertation defense a doctoral candidate presents penultimate versions of all five chapters. After the defense, the doctoral candidate revises the dissertation based on feedback from the dissertation

committee. When the final dissertation is submitted, it must be fully formatted to the University of Houston College of Education's formatting guidelines.¹

Within the traditional dissertation format, doctoral candidates—in consultation with their dissertation committee chair—may adopt variations, such as adding a sixth chapter. For example, a mixed-methods dissertation project may contain two separate findings chapters for quantitative findings and qualitative findings. However, the sections are typically kept separate, unlike a scholarly journal article.

The Manuscript-Based Dissertation Format

This first subsection below describes when it may be appropriate for a doctoral student to use the manuscript-based (three journal article) format. The second subsection describes the format of a manuscript-based dissertation and compares that format with the 'traditional' format described above. The third subsection provides guidance about proposing and defending a manuscript-based dissertation project.

When Is the Three-Paper Format Appropriate?

The three-paper format provides an alternative to the traditional format for students who wish to expedite the process of moving their research to publication. This format is appropriate when both the doctoral student and dissertation chair agree that the dissertation project can be completed using a series of empirical papers that would each be of appropriate length and quality for publication in peer-reviewed academic journals in educational or related fields. By the time of the dissertation proposal defense, the doctoral candidate (in close consultation with the dissertation chair) should have identified target journals for each of the three manuscripts.

The three-paper format should be used to address a series of related research questions that 'fit together' under a common topic. The three-papers may be appropriate for analyzing data using research methods that would be suitable for target journals in the field of education or a closely related field (e.g., economics of education; educational law; history of education; sociology of education). The papers may use different methodological approaches or techniques (e.g., one paper may use qualitative methods and the other two papers may use quantitative methods).

With formal approval from the dissertation chair, a student may submit no more than two of their dissertation manuscripts to a journal prior to the final dissertation defense. The third manuscript should not be submitted for publication prior to the final defense. However, submitting a paper—or having a paper accepted—to a journal does not eliminate the responsibility to respond to feedback from the members of the dissertation committee (including cases of major revision). Apart from any feedback received from journal editors and reviewers, the dissertation committee makes the final determination regarding when the student has successfully completed the Ph.D. program's dissertation requirement (e.g., following the successful final defense of the dissertation project).

¹ <http://www.uh.edu/education/student-services/technology-services/training-library/http://www.coe.uh.edu/cite/training/tutorials/office/SampleDissertation.pdf>

Each of the three manuscripts is expected to be of publication quality and make a “stand-alone” contribution to the literature. “Stand-alone” contributions may include empirical data-based studies, systematic or critical reviews of literature, meta-analyses of extant literature, or other types of scholarly work suitable for publication in peer-reviewed academic journals (e.g., descriptive studies; historical, legal, or policy analyses). The student should identify the targeted peer-reviewed journals for the three papers in consultation with their dissertation chair.

In considering the manuscript-based formatting guidelines below, it is important to recognize that expectations and requirements for the three-paper format may vary at the dissertation chair’s discretion. For example, a student needs the dissertation chair’s approval to (a) use the candidacy research paper as one of three dissertation manuscripts; (b) submit dissertation papers (no more than two) to academic journals for publication prior to the final dissertation defense; (c) incorporate any previous solo-authored written work within the three-paper format. Accordingly, students should regularly consult and discuss the guidelines in this document with their dissertation chairs during the process of conducting their research.

Formatting Guidelines

The three-paper or manuscript-based dissertation format will also contain five chapters, but the content of the chapters will vary significantly from the traditional format. Unlike the traditional format which separates various sections (e.g., review of prior scholarly work; discussion of the data; findings), each dissertation paper will be an independent chapter and include abbreviated sections that fulfill the same purposes as the various chapters in the traditionally formatted dissertation. The three papers will be preceded by an abstract and an introductory chapter. The three chapters should also be followed by a concluding chapter. Dissertation chairs will advise students about the suggested page length for the introductory and concluding chapters. The three-paper or manuscript format should be implemented within the University of Houston College of Education’s formatting guidelines.²

Chapter 1: Introduction (introduce the broad area of literature to which the dissertation contributes; presents the overall goal of the project, as well as the particular goals of each individual study; explain the need for the three papers and describe how they fit together as part of a single, coherent research project; references)

Chapter 2: Research Paper 1 (statement of the problem; thesis statement; research question(s); review of the *empirical* literature related to the research question(s); identification of a conceptual or theoretical framework and discussion of how it is used; data sources; data analysis; interpretation of findings; acknowledgment of limitations; implications for theory; additional implications or discussion; references)

Chapter 3: Research Paper 2 (statement of the problem; thesis statement; research question(s); review of the *empirical* literature related to the research question(s); identification of a conceptual or theoretical framework and discussion of how it is used;

² <http://www.uh.edu/education/student-services/technology-services/training-library/http://www.coe.uh.edu/cite/training/tutorials/office/SampleDissertation.pdf>

data sources; data analysis; interpretation of findings; acknowledgment of limitations; implications for theory; additional implications or discussion; references)

Chapter 4: Research Paper 3 (statement of the problem; thesis statement; research question(s); review of the *empirical* literature related to the research question(s); identification of a conceptual or theoretical framework and discussion of how it is used; data sources; data analysis; interpretation of findings; acknowledgment of limitations; implications for theory; additional implications or discussion; references)

Chapter 5: Conclusion (summary of the three research papers that connects the findings of the manuscripts to the final contribution of the overall study; synthesize the overarching contributions of the three papers to the research literature and academic community; identify future related research areas—that is, articulate the doctoral candidate’s future research agenda; references)

The doctoral candidate’s candidacy research paper may be used as the first research paper (Chapter 2) **if** the dissertation committee agrees that the candidacy research paper is written at dissertation quality; **if** the doctoral candidate can show that substantive revisions were made to incorporate feedback from candidacy committee members during the candidacy defense; **if** the candidacy research paper is directly related to the topic of the second and third dissertation papers; and **if** the qualifying paper identifies directions for future, related research, which the doctoral candidate may undertake as the second and third research papers (Chapters 3 and 4, respectively). *The second and third research papers must reflect work that was carried out **after** the completion of the candidacy research project.*

Proposing and Defending a Manuscript-Based Dissertation Project

As with the traditional dissertation format, students conducting a manuscript-based dissertation must orally defend their dissertation proposal, as well as their completed dissertation project. The college policies regarding the dissertation (including information about the oral defense of the proposal and final dissertation) are presented in the Doctoral Policies, Procedures, and Program Guide and in the College of Education Thesis and Dissertation Guide. **It is the student’s responsibility to be aware of college rules and regulations, including those concerning the doctoral dissertation.**

There are differences in the organizational structure and formatting of the manuscript-based dissertation, compared to the traditional dissertation. Consequently, for students conducting a manuscript-based dissertation, the work product orally defended before the committee at the dissertation proposal defense, and the dissertation final defense, takes a different form. The following paragraphs provide guidance related to proposing and defending a manuscript-based dissertation. In addition to these guidelines, students should remain in close consultation with their dissertation chair as they prepare to propose and defend their dissertation project.

For the **dissertation proposal defense**, students must provide the dissertation committee with a clear understanding of the overall project goals and a detailed plan for carrying out the studies

that will comprise their dissertation. Accordingly, the dissertation proposal should include the following in a single document:

- a) Chapter 1: Introduction of the dissertation, that includes a description of how the 3 manuscripts fit together as a part of a single, coherent research project.
- b) A minimum 6-8 page double-spaced proposal for each of the 3 manuscripts that will comprise the dissertation. Each proposal should include the following sections: introduction and statement of the problem; purpose of the study and research questions; literature review; theoretical or conceptual framework; data sources, sampling, analysis – to include careful description of the variables/constructs of interest and analytic techniques; limitations; possible implications and contributions of the work; references.
 - a. Note: if the student has received approval from their dissertation chair to use the candidacy paper as Chapter 2: Paper 1 of the dissertation, a 6-8 page proposal is not required for this manuscript. However, during the oral defense, the student should be prepared to discuss the current status of the manuscript (e.g., how revisions and suggested edits were handled following the candidacy paper final defense; if the paper was submitted for publication, how the feedback/revisions from the journal are being addressed).
- c) Appendix A: A memo describing the targeted peer-review journal for each of the 3 manuscripts. Students should demonstrate familiarity with the submission guidelines for the targeted journals, and be able to articulate why these journals are appropriate outlets for their work.
- d) Appendix B: A memo describing the proposed timeline for completion of each manuscript, as well as the full dissertation project. As appropriate, the timeline should include information about the IRB process, access to research sites for data collection, and/or access to datasets required to carry out the research.

For the **final dissertation defense**, students will defend the completed dissertation that includes all five chapters (i.e., the three separate manuscripts, as well as the Introduction and Conclusion chapters). The student will present the findings of all three studies during the oral defense (note: students using their candidacy paper as Chapter 2 will primarily focus on their second and third manuscripts). Students should further describe how their dissertation papers, individually and taken as a whole, have contributed to new understandings of the topic, and discuss the implications of their findings for practice, policy, and future research. Students should also provide updates on the status of any dissertation manuscripts submitted for publication, and explain how their dissertation research will inform their future work as a scholar and/or scholar-practitioner.