



**TRIDENT
UNIVERSITY**

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

**GUIDE TO THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION RESEARCH PROCESS
AT TRIDENT UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL**

College of Education

College of Health Sciences

College of Business Administration

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Overview: Guide to Doctoral Dissertation Research

This Guide to Doctoral Dissertation Research is designed to make the process of writing proposals and dissertations rigorous yet as efficient as possible. It does not, however, constitute a contract between students and Trident University International. Nothing in this Guide is intended to alter the admission or graduation requirements of a program as published in the official University catalog. Trident University reserves the right to update or amend this guide at any time according to Trident University Ph.D. program needs, accreditation requirements, and/or ProQuest publication changes.

The dissertation is a requirement for earning a Ph.D., the highest academic degree available. It also provides a permanent record of original research. Trident University is committed to the preservation and dissemination of this research.

The first section of this guide provides a general overview of the dissertation. The subsequent sections address the dissertation committee structure, process, and components—and are much more specific—including, for example, descriptions of the various sections of the dissertation. The guidelines for writing, formatting, and publishing the dissertation are contained in the separate *Dissertation Publication Guide*.

General Degree Requirements

All requirements for the doctoral degree (including successful completion of required coursework and publishing the bound dissertation per Trident's requirements) are expected to be completed within six years or 24 sessions, and must be completed within a period not to exceed nine years or 36 sessions.

Phases of the Ph.D. Program

The Ph.D. program is divided into several distinct phases:

Core Courses: All students are required to take research methods courses and theory courses in their selected field of study. These courses provide the foundation for the elective courses which students may pursue in their specialized concentrations.

Concentration Courses: In addition to the required core courses, concentration courses (electives) are needed to complete the degree plan. Students may select one concentration from what is offered in their college. These courses are generally in the specific area of research that the student will pursue. All elective courses are valued at four credit hours.

Qualifying Examination: This requirement includes both a written and an oral component. Students will be examined on their understanding of research methods and statistical concepts related to the research process. The written portion of the exam will be completed first and submitted via TLC; it will take place only after the student has finished all of their core and concentration courses. The oral portion of the qualifying exam will be conducted via phone conference or e-conference only after the student has successfully passed the written test.

Establishing the Committee: The student is responsible for assembling the Dissertation Committee and selecting a Committee Chair. Each committee will consist of three faculty members, one of whom serves as Chair of the Committee. Either the Chairperson or one member of the committee must be external to Trident University. The Chairperson and the committee will be responsible for guiding the student during the dissertation process.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application: Pursuant to federal law and regulations, IRB review and approval is required for research involving human subjects. Accordingly, before the student may conduct research involving human subjects (including the collecting and analyzing of data), the proposed study must be reviewed and approved by Trident University International's IRB.

Dissertation Study: Through their dissertation, students must demonstrate a synthesis of their doctoral study, knowledge, and scholarship with a significant research project that contributes to general principles of knowledge in the field(s) potentially affected by the research. Following the completion of the coursework, including the Dissertation Seminar (DBA 699, DEL 699, or DHS 699), students will work on the dissertation and register in subsequent sessions in the DBA 700, DEL 700, or DHS 700 dissertation series and continuation courses.

Doctoral Dissertation Research

As students progress through the independent dissertation process, they must meet definite milestones in the dissertation series of the Ph.D. programs. The dissertation series of the program involves only DBA 700–702, DEL 700–702, and DHS 700–702; the dissertation continuation courses begin with DBA 703, DEL 703, and DHS 703, and continue to the completion of the dissertation.

- Students enrolled in the DBA 699, DEL 699, or DHS 699 Dissertation Seminar must meet specific, pre-established milestones to successfully complete the course and advance to DBA 700, DEL 700, or DHS 700.
- Dissertation series courses (DBA 700–702, DEL 700–702, and DHS 700–702) will be valued at four credit hours each and graded as “Pass”/“No Pass” courses. Two consecutive “NP” grades may result in dismissal from the program. The total number of credits needed to complete the Ph.D. program will be 56 credit hours, meaning that students will not be required to take any additional academic courses once they reach the dissertation phase. The grade received in these courses will not be considered in the overall GPA.
- Students enrolled in the 700–702 dissertation series courses must meet specific, pre-established milestones to pass each course and advance to the next.
- Dissertation continuation courses (703 and beyond) are designated as zero-credit courses. Students are expected to complete the Ph.D. program within six years or 24 sessions, and must complete the degree within a period not to exceed nine years or 36 sessions.
- Student progress reports will be monitored by Program Directors on a session-by-session basis. During each session, students must demonstrate progress, which will be documented and reported in the required progress reports.

Milestones for the 699 and 700–702 Courses in the Dissertation Phase of the Program

All Ph.D. students must achieve the milestones presented below in order to advance to the next course. Students who fail to achieve the milestones for each course may repeat the 699 and 700-702 courses up to two times. Once students achieve the milestones, they may continue to further develop their dissertation prospectus and/or dissertation proposal and advance to the dissertation proposal defense. The milestones for each course are stated below.

DBA 699, DEL 699, or DHS 699

Students enrolled in DBA 699, DEL 699, or DHS 699 must meet the following milestones to successfully complete the course and advance to DBA 700, DEL 700, or DHS 700:

1. Define a topic for doctoral dissertation research that addresses an issue, a concept, a problem statement, or a research question relevant to their program outcomes and/or their profession.
2. Describe the design of the doctoral dissertation research.
3. Develop a conceptual framework for their study.
4. Submit a Session Long Project for preliminary dissertation topic approval.

DBA 699, DEL 699, and DHS 699: Students meeting the above milestones will receive a grade of “B” or above. Students who fail to receive a grade of “B” or above must repeat the course and earn a grade of B or above to be allowed to advance to DBA 700, DEL 700, or DHS 700. Students may pre-register for a 700 course; however, registration will not be approved until the passing grade is assigned for the 699 course. If a student fails the 699 course, then the student must repeat it before enrolling in a 700 course.

Students may repeat DBA 699, DEL 699, or DHS 699 twice. Failure to pass the course after three attempts *will* result in the student’s academic disqualification by the University.

DBA 700, DEL 700, or DHS 700

A student enrolled in DBA 700, DEL 700, or DHS 700 must meet the following milestones to successfully complete the course and advance to DBA 701, DEL 701, or DHS 701:

1. Prepare for and successfully pass the written and oral qualifying examination.
2. Form a Dissertation Committee.

As a result of their satisfactory completion of the DBA 700, DEL 700, or DHS 700 milestones, students are permitted to enroll in DBA 701, DEL 701, or DHS 701.

Students continue to work on their prospectus and/or dissertation proposal depending on their progress made to date.

A student who meets the above milestones will receive a “P” grade. Students who fail to meet the milestones for the course will receive an “NP” grade and will have to repeat the course. Students are allowed to repeat the course only twice. Failure to pass the course after three attempts *will* result in the student’s academic disqualification by the University.

DBA 701, DEL 701, or DHS 701

A student enrolled in DBA 701, DEL 701, or DHS 701 must make substantial progress toward the following milestones to successfully complete the course and advance to DBA 702, DEL 702, or DHS 702:

1. Develop the initial sections of a proposal that include: a concise statement of the issue, concept, and problem statement, and the rationale or purpose of the proposed research.
2. Develop key terms and operational definitions; research questions; hypotheses.
3. Research the background of the selected topic area so that findings can be evaluated in the context of the wider body of knowledge and practice.
4. Critically evaluate prior research that serves as a foundation for the proposed research.
5. Conduct a review of literature and information sources related to the proposed research.
6. Complete a conceptual framework including a graphic model.
7. Compile a reference list related to the proposed research.

As a result of a student's satisfactory completion of the DBA 701, DEL 701, or DHS 701 milestones, students are permitted to enroll in the next corresponding course—DBA 702, DEL 702, or DHS 702.

A student who meets the above milestones will receive a "P" grade. Students who fail to meet the milestones for the course will receive an "NP" grade and will have to repeat the course. Students are allowed to repeat the course no more than twice. Failure to pass the course after three attempts *will* result in the student's academic disqualification by the University.

DBA 702, DEL 702, or DHS 702 (4 Semester Units)

As a result of their satisfactory completion of DBA 701, DEL 701, or DHS 701, students may enroll in DBA 702, DEL 702, or DHS 702 and must make substantial progress toward one or more of the following milestones to complete the course and the program:

1. Develop the proposal.
2. Successfully complete and defend the proposal.
3. Conduct data collection and analysis.
4. Complete the dissertation.
5. Successfully defend the dissertation.

The student's Dissertation Mentor will verify that one or more of these requirements have been met.

A student making satisfactory progress on the DBA 702, DEL 702, or DHS 702 milestones will receive a "P" grade and then be permitted to enroll in DBA 703, DEL 703, or DHS 703 and continue to work on their prospectus and/or dissertation proposal or dissertation depending on the progress made to date.

Students who fail to show satisfactory progress on the DBA 702, DEL 702, or DHS 702 milestones will receive an "NP" grade. Students who do not pass this course will be required to repeat the course. Students may repeat DBA 702, DEL 702, or DHS 702 no more than twice. Failure to pass the course after three attempts *will* result in the student's academic disqualification by the University.

DBA 703, DEL 703, DHS 703, and above

Dissertation Continuation

As a result of their satisfactory progress in a 702 course (DBA, DEL, or DHS), candidates will be permitted to enroll in the corresponding 703 course (DBA, DEL, or DHS) and progress to higher-numbered dissertation continuation courses. As long as students show satisfactory progress, they will receive grades of "P" and be permitted to enroll in the subsequent dissertation continuation course (e.g., 703, 704, etc.) until the completion and successful defense of the dissertation.

Satisfactory progress may be shown through any one of the following:

1. Developing the proposal.
2. Successfully defending the proposal.
3. Completing and submitting an IRB application.
4. Conducting the research after receiving IRB approval.
5. Analyzing data, interpreting data, and drawing conclusions based on results.
6. Recording results.
7. Writing the discussion, conclusions, and implications and recommendations sections of the dissertation.
8. Completing the final doctoral dissertation research document, including the appendices, reference list, acknowledgments, dedication, and table of contents.
9. Preparing for the oral dissertation defense.
10. Successfully defending the doctoral dissertation research.
11. Revising the document per the committee's recommendations.
12. Submitting the final version for approval.

Time to completion of the Ph.D. Program

Students are expected to complete the Ph.D. program within six years or 24 sessions, and must complete the degree within a period not to exceed nine years or 36 sessions.

Academic Achievement Plan

When students are enrolled in DBA 703, DEL 703, or DHS 703, they will be required to have an Academic Achievement Plan (AAP) on file in order to proceed in the program. The Academic Achievement Plan requirement at the 703 level ensures that students stay on track toward completion of the dissertation.

The Academic Achievement Plan must be developed under the direction of the Program Director in consultation with the Dissertation Mentor for each student. However, it is the student's responsibility to complete the AAP and submit it to the Program Director for approval prior to enrollment in the next course.

The AAP will identify and clarify the steps necessary for each student to complete the Ph.D. program within established timelines.

The AAP must provide for reasonable progress for the student to complete the dissertation given the student's personal circumstances as the research is conducted and the dissertation is written.

Should a student's progress be hindered by the faculty mentor (internal or external), it is the responsibility of the Program Director to intercede on behalf of the student/candidate as deemed appropriate to have the matter resolved in the interest of the student and the academic standards of the University.

If there is a change in conditions or a research situation that could hinder the completion of the dissertation in accordance with the approved AAP, students must contact the Ph.D. Program Director immediately. The Director of the Ph.D. Program may approve changes to the AAP if such changes are warranted and in the best interests of the student and proper research protocol.

The Doctoral Dissertation Committee

Committee Selection Process

The student is responsible for assembling the Dissertation Committee and selecting a Committee Chair. Committee members may be selected for either content or research expertise, or both, depending on the subject of the dissertation and the student's needs. All committees will have at least one full-time Trident University faculty member serving either as Chair or as a committee member. If a committee is to be chaired by an external member, a full-time Trident University faculty member will be appointed as a member at the same time as the Chair. The Trident University faculty member will serve as a standing liaison to facilitate communication and resource exchanges among all parties as needed, and to provide a point of accountability for the committee.

The Chair, proposed by the student, is formally appointed by the Program Director. Considerations in the recommendation include the interests of the student, research expertise available among the faculty, and existing dissertation supervision loads. In general, the Committee Chair will be a full-time Trident faculty member. However, under special circumstances, such as a need for a specific expertise, an approved external doctoral faculty mentor may be selected as Committee Chair. The term of appointment of an external Chairperson corresponds to the term of the nominating student's enrollment in dissertation continuation courses (DHS 700, DEL 700, or DBA 700 series).

After consultation with the Ph.D. Program Director, a student may suggest an external expert in the student's area of interest to serve as a doctoral faculty mentor. The external expert may serve as the Chairperson or as a committee member. The student must ensure that the nominated individual(s) submits a curriculum vitae (CV) and supporting documentation of research in refereed journals in the area of the student's doctoral research. The required supporting documentation must be provided to the Ph.D. Program Director for consideration.

The nominated member must meet the criteria for appointment (an earned Ph.D. with a record of scholarly research; experience supervising student research; and evident expertise in the field under consideration). In addition, the nominee must have neither a personal or professional conflict of interest with the student nor an organizational conflict of interest with Trident University.

No more than two members of the committee can be external to Trident University. The external Committee Chair or member must be approved by the Program Director and the College Dean.

The committee members must meet the following criteria:

- a. The Chair of the Committee must hold a Ph.D. degree or equivalent terminal degree with a research background and a record of publications.
- b. The Chair and one other committee member must have an academic background related to the student's field of study.
- c. All members of the committee must have at least three years of postgraduate research experience and a publication record.
- d. It is necessary for all members of the committee to have been active in their field of scholarship within the five-year period preceding their participation in the committee.

While Trident University International committee members serve without pay, they receive an appointment as Doctoral Faculty Mentor.

Committee/Chair Duties and Responsibilities

All Ph.D. Committee Chairs are subject to a quarterly assessment of student progress and committee activities conducted by the Program Director. The student-Chair-committee relationship is one that can take many forms—there is no single pattern that uniquely characterizes successful relationships. Like all relationships, this one has ups and downs; thus, a summative evaluation of the relationship at some random point in time is neither possible nor helpful. The issue is much more one of *formative* evaluation and the key is creating a set of procedures whereby the parties themselves are encouraged to remain continually aware of what is and is not working and communicate about needed improvements.

While the responsibility for progress and completion of the dissertation is that of the student, the Chairperson will have the following specific responsibilities:

- Provide guidance and supervision during the entire dissertation process.
- Provide timely first reviews of all elements of the research process.
- Communicate about the Dissertation through the Learning Management System (TLC). Topics of communication include:
 - When the dissertation proposal or dissertation is ready for review.
 - When an element is unacceptable and should be returned to the student without forwarding to the members.
 - Specific constructive critique by the Chairperson, including inquiry into lack of acceptable progress.
- Forward committee member comments to the student. Only the Chair communicates directly with the student. Committee members may not communicate directly with the student.
- Make logistical arrangements for the defenses of the proposal and completed dissertation, and forward copies of each document to the relevant parties.
- Serve as Chair for the proposal and completed dissertation defenses.

- Report results of the proposal and completed dissertation defenses to the Program Director.
- Schedule and serve as Chairperson for all meetings of the full Dissertation Committee.

The Dissertation Committee members will have the following responsibilities:

- Provide assistance and advice as needed to the Committee Chairperson.
- Review all dissertation elements forwarded by the Chair and respond with a constructive critique. The “Discuss with committee only” option in the Learning Management System (TLC) must be used.
- Attend and participate in the proposal and completed dissertation defenses, conducted as conference calls.

The Doctoral Dissertation Research Process

While there is no single set of steps which characterizes all dissertations, there are elements and procedures that are common to most Ph.D. programs. These include the following:

Choosing the Dissertation Topic

Perhaps the most difficult part of the dissertation for most students is choosing a topic. Ideally, a dissertation should be the logical culmination of the courses and experiences which constitute the Ph.D. program. Usually a topic is finalized during the dissertation seminar, and a draft of the dissertation prospectus is completed by the end of the seminar. Students will be encouraged to consider their dissertation topic early and consult their instructors during the course stage. The Dissertation topic must be in the area of the student’s prospective college (Health, Education, or Business) and it should lend itself to a quantitative analysis. Students who wish to conduct qualitative analysis will be required to add a quantitative component to their dissertation, and the quantitative component must involve inferential statistics. Purely qualitative research will be accepted in the program of Ph.D. Educational Leadership (see Appendix B). Many students seek admission to a Ph.D. program with a dissertation topic firmly in mind. Frequently this topic is an extension of a completed master’s-level thesis. But a dissertation is much different in nature, much more extensive in scope, and more rigorous than a master’s thesis or even than any other terminal degree. Potential and admitted students should realize that a successful dissertation topic must involve a substantial element of theory, not just a review of practices or a basic survey or evaluation study. The dissertation must be clearly set within a context of theory and research in the relevant domain. The literature review that forms a significant part of the proposal and the dissertation is intended to establish this context and to place the student’s work clearly in relationship to the body of knowledge.

The nature of the research can take many forms as long as it is rigorous, well formulated according to the rules of the research mode in question, and well adapted to the nature of the research topic and questions. Again, the Trident University faculty has the full capability to support any research within this range. The nature of the research may vary with the intended career paths of the candidates.

Regardless of the nature of the research, the ultimate test of a successful dissertation research project is whether or not the research adds meaningful information to the established body of knowledge surrounding the issue or problem area. The expectation is that all dissertations will make some contribution, however slight, to collective knowledge and theory. Trident University expects the dissertation to be of high quality and rigor, as the dissertation is the ultimate learning outcome of the Ph.D. program.

Qualifying Examination

Students need to take a qualifying exam at the 700 (DBA, DEL, or DHS) level. The qualifying exam includes both written and oral exams. Students will be examined via phone conference or e-conference on their understanding of theory development, research methods, statistical concepts, and other issues related to the research process.

Completing the Dissertation Proposal Draft

The student should work closely with the Committee Chair in preparing the dissertation proposal following the proposal rubric (see Appendix A).

At minimum, the proposal should include the following elements:

- An Abstract.
- An introduction with a clear definition of the general topic area to be studied.
- A Problem Statement, which is a description of the specific issue or problem to be studied. (The most likely way for the student to identify such an issue or problem is to review the relevant academic literature. The literature is expected to describe areas where further research is indicated, or the candidate may discover published research in which the methodology or underlying elements of the research can be improved.)
- The research question(s).
- A literature review that demonstrates that the candidate has thoroughly researched the current status and historical standing of the issue or problem.
- A conceptual framework: A theory or theories, theoretical models, or mechanisms that have been identified as relevant to the research questions and associations under study.
 - The concepts and the relationships among the constructs/variables must be presented clearly and logically.
 - The dependent variables and independent variables must be clearly assigned in the conceptual framework, and there should be clarity of directionality.
 - There must be a clear graphical presentation.
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- A formal hypothesis or set of hypotheses where appropriate (the student must show that the hypothesis is derived from the literature); a proposed methodology to test the hypotheses. This section should include the specific steps to be followed in the research including sufficient detail to allow the committee to fully evaluate the methodology.
- How the methodology will fully test the hypotheses and address the research issue or problem.
 - A detailed description of any data to be gathered and how that data will be gathered.
 - A full description of any instruments (e.g., questionnaires) or other tools to be used in the research. If indicated, a preliminary test and/or validation of any instruments should be conducted and described.
 - A detailed description of any testing and/or other analysis of the data, including specific statistical or other quantitative tests to be performed along with a justification for the selection of those tests.

To help students in completing an acceptable dissertation proposal, there are various models in the literature. Some models work better with dissertations than others. It should be emphasized that there is a wide range of possible models. Whatever form it takes, the purpose of the proposal is to describe in sufficient detail and clarity what the student intends to do so that the faculty on the Dissertation Committee, the Doctoral Program Director, and the Provost can make an informed decision as to the acceptability of the proposed work. The dissertation proposal should represent the level of rigor and quality that is appropriate for a Ph.D. program.

Final Dissertation Proposal and Proposal Defense

The Dissertation Committee Chair will advise the student on the preparation of the proposal. All committee members will have input on the proposal in its various stages as deemed appropriate by the Chair of the committee. The student will prepare a formal dissertation proposal and post it on TLC for review by the Chair (and committee members as the Chair sees fit). All communications regarding the dissertation proposal should be via TLC for documentation.

The committee will review the student's dissertation proposal to ascertain if the student's knowledge, skills, and conceptual framework are sufficient for undertaking rigorous inquiry into the student's designated field. If the Chair decides that the proposal is ready for defense, all committee members will review the dissertation proposal, and a time will be scheduled for the student to defend the proposal.

The Chair of the committee will send a formal email to the student, committee members, and the Doctoral Program Director indicating that the proposal is ready for defense. The Doctoral Program Director reviews the proposal and sends their comments to the Chair. The Chair is responsible for communicating these corrections and suggestions to the student. Once the student has revised the dissertation proposal, the Chair ensures that the revision addresses all of the Program Director's comments. This process continues until the Program Director approves the proposal and allows the scheduling of the defense. Students may not schedule their proposal defense in the last two weeks of the session (the week of Module 6 and the following session break). If there is a special situation, an exception may be made at the discretion of the Program Director.

A PowerPoint presentation describing the study and the issues covered in the proposal will be assembled by the student and sent to the committee members two weeks prior to the defense. This will serve as the basis and skeleton for the oral presentation.

After the defense of the proposal by the student, the committee will meet and reach one of four conclusions:

- The proposal is approved by the committee as presented (with minor adjustments only).
- The proposal is approved but with major adjustments. These adjustments must be reviewed and approved by all committee members.
- The proposal will be approved only after significant restructuring. The proposal must be defended again after the restructuring; in this case, the second defense will take place no sooner than two months after the first defense.
- The proposal is not accepted and the committee will assist the student in preparing another proposal; a second defense will be scheduled. In this case, the second defense will be scheduled no sooner than three months after the first defense.

Upon successful defense of the dissertation proposal, the committee will recommend to the Doctoral Program Director that the student be advanced to candidacy. The committee is not to inform the student of the decision of advancement to candidacy; this can be done only by the Doctoral Program Director. (Note: If corrections are needed, they must be made within 30 days of the date of defense and posted again for review by the Dissertation Chair. If the changes are not submitted within 30 days, the student must defend the proposal again.) Proposal review by the Doctoral Program Director will be completed within 21 work days of the Chair recommendation.

A dissertation proposal may be defended a total of three times. Students who fail the third defense must leave the program.

Advancement to Candidacy

All Ph.D. students should be aware of the following standard academic protocols. These protocols are respected and rigorously observed at Trident University.

- Prior to formal admission to candidacy, students should not refer to themselves as “doctoral candidates” or “Ph.D. candidates.” In a Ph.D. program, the term “candidate” has a very specific meaning and students should be careful when using the term to refer to themselves.
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- Candidacy means that the student has completed all requirements for the degree except for the

research dissertation itself; it means that the dissertation proposal has been successfully defended.

- Admission to candidacy follows the completion and approval of the dissertation proposal (see above for its structure and content). DHS 699, DEL 699, or DBA 699 Dissertation Seminar is always taken in the last session prior to beginning the dissertation series course DHS 700, DEL 700, or DBA 700. The seminar provides in-depth support for the preparation of a proposal draft, drawing on Internet and print resources, faculty advice, and collegial interaction. Enrollment in the seminar ends when a student completes a dissertation proposal draft.
- No Ph.D. student or candidate should ever use the initials Ph.D. after his/her name until all degree requirements have been met and the student is notified by the University that the degree has been conferred. The same is true for using the title “Dr.” or “Doctor.”
- Students are encouraged to include their studies at Trident University in preparing resumes and curricula vitae.
 - Students who have been admitted to candidacy should refer to themselves as “Ph.D. Candidate in Health Sciences (or Education or Business Administration), Trident University, expected date of completion 20xx.”
- Students should not refer to themselves as “ABD” (“all but dissertation”) until they have been formally admitted to candidacy.

Institutional Review Board

Trident has a standing committee known as the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This board exists for the protection of human subjects in research and requires students and faculty conducting research involving human subjects to submit their research proposals for review. Among other responsibilities, the charge of the IRB is to ensure adherence to federal, state, and local regulations as well as established ethical principles, including beneficence, justice, and respect for persons as enunciated by the Belmont Report issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Beneficence: Beneficence regarding research is concerned with protecting subjects from harm and acting in the best interests of research subjects. In order to prevent harm, the IRB requires researchers to carefully consider and analyze the risks and benefits of their study and then formally address them individually. The IRB Committee then has the responsibility to determine if these potential risks and benefits are clearly spelled out both for the IRB and potential subjects; and whether the research can be approved based on the listed risks-and-benefits analysis.

Justice: The ethical principle of justice requires that people be treated fairly. Subjects have the right to be aware of the potential risks of research when they are asked to participate. This principle also requires the researcher to consider who or which group will benefit from the proposed research. The researcher needs to ensure that potential risks are not being taken by only one segment of the population for the benefit of another segment of the population.

Respect for Persons: The ethical principle of respect for persons includes the requirement to recognize persons as independent beings capable of voluntarily deciding whether or not to choose to participate in research. The IRB also addresses the issues of safeguarding individuals unable to make informed decisions, such as children or those not competent to understand the benefits or risks resulting from research. The IRB also considers procedures to ensure the confidentiality of subjects. In research involving children, federal guidelines mandate the use of parental consent forms, and assent forms for the minor.

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IRB Review Process

Before collecting or analyzing data on human subjects, students must receive IRB approval. The student's dissertation proposal must be approved by the Ph.D. Program Director before the student can submit an IRB application. Starting in Fall 2015, all students submitting IRB applications will be required to include an IRB training certificate from NIH. The IRB training is accessible at <https://phrp.nihtraining.com>.

Candidates must complete the entire IRB application and submit relevant supporting documents as outlined in the application. Supporting documents include, but are not limited to, prior or external IRB approvals, written permission (on their department letterhead) from appropriate administrators at the study site, participant consent form(s), research protocol, data collection instrument(s), documents used to recruit participants (e.g., contact letters, flyers, advertisements), a statement concerning the financial interests of the researcher, and written proof of consent or compliance with requirements of foreign jurisdictions. The informed consent should include the title of the study; the name and credentials (e.g., doctoral candidate) of the principal researcher; a description of the study (including risks and benefits to subjects); a description of the financial benefit to the subjects or the student; a description of the voluntary nature of the study and the participants' right to withdraw; contact information for the principal researcher, Committee Chair, and IRB Chair; and spaces for the signature(s) of the research participant and/or legal representative (if applicable).

Items Required for IRB Review

- Completion of all sections of IRB application
- Prior or external IRB approvals (if applicable)
- Written permission (on their department letterhead) from appropriate administrators at the study site
- Participant consent form
 - Title of study
 - Name and credentials of principal researcher (e.g., doctoral candidate)
 - Description of the study (including risks and benefits to subjects)
 - Statement concerning financial interests of the researcher
 - Description of voluntary nature of the study and the right to withdraw
 - Current contact information for principal researcher, Committee Chair, and IRB Chair
 - Spaces for signature(s) of research participant and/or legal representative (if applicable)
- Participant assent form (if applicable, for children under 18)
- Copy of research protocol/methodology section of dissertation proposal
- Data collection instruments (e.g., survey, interview form, data extraction form, etc.)
- Documents used to recruit participants (e.g., contact letters, flyers, advertisements)
- HIPAA waiver (if applicable)
- IRB training certificate (Fall 2015 and beyond)

The timetable for review will vary depending on the nature of the study and issues of concern as well as the extent to which supporting documents have been provided. In order to reduce delays, candidates are urged to ensure that the application form is fully completed and all relevant supporting documentation is submitted.

Reviews

The decision whether or not a research project is exempt or subject to IRB review following the aforementioned criteria shall be made by the IRB Chair or IRB Chair designee. The Chair of the IRB will keep on file all decisions concerning IRB referrals or exemptions.

The IRB Chair or IRB Chair designee may perform expedited reviews. When the IRB Chair determines that a full review is required, the IRB will conduct the review at its next available regularly scheduled meeting. An IRB quorum (three members) is required to convene an IRB meeting. Based on majority vote, the IRB may recommend approval or approval with amendments, a request for further information,

or denial. All recommendations by the IRB including minutes (where appropriate) from the meetings shall be communicated to the applicant and retained by the IRB Chair.

Dissertation Research

The student will complete the dissertation as approved in the proposal. During this period, the Committee Chair will provide supervision and assistance to the student. The other committee members will be available for feedback, but only through the Chair. In each session, the Chair will report to the Doctoral Program Director on the progress of the dissertation. The Doctoral Program Director will maintain a list of all active dissertations, which will be updated each session.

When the student and the Committee Chair are satisfied that the research is complete, the Chair will schedule a final oral defense for the dissertation.

Philosophy of the Oral Defense

The purpose of the oral defense is fourfold:

- To demonstrate that the dissertation is commensurate with the standards for original research in the field.
- To demonstrate that the ethics and standards governing research in the field have been followed.
- To demonstrate the candidate's mastery of the research and the appropriate methodology.
- To demonstrate the candidate understands the relationship of this work to the broader field in which it is lodged.
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Procedures for the Proposal and the Dissertation Oral Defense

Students admitted to the Ph.D. program beginning in the Winter 2013 session must meet the program requirement of 56 credit hours before becoming eligible to defend their dissertation. A student may not defend his or her dissertation prior to taking DBA 702, DHS 702, or DEL 702. An oral defense of a dissertation normally takes from 60 to 90 minutes. The defense will take place through teleconferencing. In consultation with the student, the Dissertation Chair will work to find a day and time when it is possible for all members of the Dissertation Committee to participate. Students may not schedule their dissertation defense in the last two weeks of the session (the week of Module 6 and the following session break). If there is a special situation, an exception may be approved at the discretion of the Program Director.

Who May Attend the Oral Defense? Attendance at the defense is limited to members of the Dissertation Committee, the student, and members of the Trident University academic community.

Who Must Attend the Oral Defense? All members of the Dissertation Committee must be present for the defense unless exceptions are approved by the Doctoral Program Director or the Director's designee. Absent members of the Dissertation Committee must still participate in the defense through, for example, the submission of written comments and questions. No more than one member of the Dissertation Committee can be absent from the defense.

What Happens at the Oral Defense?

The outcome of the oral defense is decided by an open vote of the Dissertation Committee. The decision of the Committee (Pass or Fail) is determined by a majority of the committee members. At the oral defense, only the members of the Dissertation Committee have the authority to decide whether the candidate passes or fails. Both the dissertation itself and the candidate's performance in the oral defense are grounds for the Committee's decision to pass or fail.

Doctoral candidates may pass the oral defense but still be required to revise their dissertation. It is the responsibility of the Committee Chair to review and approve minor revisions to the dissertation. Dissertations that require either major revisions, minor revisions, or no revisions must be submitted to the Doctoral Program Director in final form within four weeks of the concluded defense. If the dissertation is not received within four weeks of the oral defense, that defense is nullified and a new oral defense must be scheduled.

When major revisions are required, the defense should be suspended until the majority of the members of the Doctoral Committee agree that the dissertation has been sufficiently revised and is now defensible. The time between the first defense and the second defense should be no less than three months, to allow the candidate time for thorough revision and preparation for the second defense. At this point, the oral defense should be reconvened. All scheduled defenses, including reconvened defenses, must be announced in writing at least 10 working days in advance.

Appendix A: Proposal Rubric

Title Page

- Clearly identifies main constructs
- Lists committee members

Abstract

- A concise, brief, rational statement of what will be done in the study (no more than 350 words)

Introduction

- Presents the context and the knowledge gap, the study purpose, what will be done in the study, and how it will fill the knowledge gap
- Should be brief, clear, and specific to the topic
- Includes study feasibility

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Problem statement

- Identifies the study as novel and significant
- Clearly identifies the problem; addresses the knowledge gap, study significance, and novelty
- Study purpose and aims stem clearly from the problem statement and knowledge gap
- Must be clearly presented, focused, specific, and theory-based

Research questions should:

- Be clear, articulated, and specific, corresponding exactly to the study purpose
- Provide original insights to the issues
- Be thought-provoking
- Provide clear and compelling promise of contribution to discipline and/or communities
- Clearly address the knowledge gap
- Include main and sub questions, and be comprehensive in scope
- Refer to the main constructs and their relationships (relationships to be investigated in the study)

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Literature review

- There is a relevant synthesis of empirical and theoretical literature.
- Critical understanding of literature is evident in style, organization, and content.
- Mastery of appropriate canon is evident. Sources cited are rich and diverse.
- Recent publications are utilized.
- The knowledge gap is clearly identified and discussed.
- The review is comprehensive in scope.
- Key issues are included. All the components of the research question(s) (main constructs and their associations) are addressed.
- Multiple citations from diverse literature are cogently woven together.
- The existing controversies or issues in the literature are reframed in novel terms.

Conceptual framework

- The theory, theories, theoretical models, or mechanisms have been identified and are relevant to the research questions and associations under study.
- The concepts and the relationships among the constructs/variables are presented clearly and logically.
- The dependent variables and independent variables are clearly assigned in the conceptual framework, and there is clarity of directionality.
- A clear graphical presentation is provided.

Hypotheses

- Correspond to the research questions.
- Are relevant and flow logically from the theory used.
- Are accurately stated.
- Are testable based on operationalized variables.

Methodology

Research Design

- Is accurately identified and described.
- Answers the study's hypotheses and is appropriate.
- Includes sufficient protection for human subjects.

Study Population

- Populations have been identified and described (i.e., their identity, location, accessibility, etc.).
- Recruiting and sampling procedures have been identified.
- Power analysis and effect size have been calculated and are sufficient and correctly presented.

Data Collection Tools

- Measurement instrument and other appropriate tools are valid, reliable, and correctly presented.
- Plan for data collection and analysis is appropriate.
- Measures exist for all variables.

Variables—Independent and Dependent Variables

- Operationalized variables are identified and discussed.
- Each variable is described based on type (nominal, continuous, etc.) and role in the analysis (Independent Variable / Dependent Variable).

Statistical Analysis

- There is a correspondence between the research questions, measures, variables, and analysis.
- Multivariate statistics is required and description must be specific to the type of dependent variables and independent variables.
- The study is feasible (in terms of cost, time, resources, approvals, etc.).

Limitations, delimitations, and significance

- Limitations and delimitations are detailed.
- Potential biases are detailed.
- Potentially confounding factors are described, and methods to address impact are discussed.
- Methods for missing data are detailed.
- How the study will advance the field is discussed.

Additional Information

- Confidentiality and privacy are discussed.
- References and timetable of research activities are presented.
- The proposal should be 35–45 pages.

Appendix B: Qualitative Dissertation in the Program of Ph.D.

Educational Leadership

Previously, our Ph.D. program has accepted only quantitative or mixed-study-approach dissertations. However, a review of other WASC-accredited Ph.D. education programs shows that other programs in Education allow both quantitative and qualitative dissertation formats. Therefore, based on the results of benchmarking and an external reviewer's recommendation, Trident University has added qualitative methodology to the current allowable dissertation formats. This change has been prompted by the highly specialized work of some of the students in the Ph.D. E.L. Program, including special education. Students in the special education field and other areas may have difficulty obtaining the large sample sizes necessary for quantitative research, but have access to a unique population that may lend itself to high-quality qualitative research. The modification to our dissertation requirement will enrich our students' learning experience and increase student success without sacrificing quality.

Methodology in Qualitative Study

Designing qualitative studies is quite different from designing quantitative studies. Qualitative research is defined as research devoted to developing an understanding of human systems, be they small (such as one or a small group of students/classrooms), or large (such as a cultural system). Qualitative research studies typically include ethnographies, case studies, and generally descriptive studies. Of the qualitative methodologies, currently only the case study is accepted in the Ph.D. E.L. program.

Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships (Soy 2006). The case study will be an individual or group studied for a specific period of time. Usually the study includes interviews (individual/group), data, and observations to triangulate conclusions and answer research questions.

Primary Goal of Your Dissertation

The primary goal of the dissertation is to make an original and significant contribution to the body of knowledge with practical applications.

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

- The research provides views that reality is constructed and supported by individuals interacting with their social worlds.
- The researcher decides the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
- The research usually involves fieldwork.
- The study primarily employs an inductive research strategy.
- The product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive.
- In most cases, the design is emergent, flexible, and responsive to changing conditions of the study.

Methodology

Development of Methodology

- I. Process used to bring about the product, and the design of the product
- II. How was the process validated? By experts? During field testing? Or by employing evaluation methodology of the results?

Evaluation of Methodology

- I. Process of identifying if a product is doing what it is supposed to be doing—reaching its goals and/or objectives
- II. Sources are experts, and statistical procedures are appropriate.

Analysis of Qualitative Methods

New technologies to analyze qualitative data and to report findings of qualitative studies include Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis programs:

1. NVivo 8: <http://download.qsrinternational.com/Document/NVivo8/NVivo8-Introducing-NVivo.htm>
2. Transana: <http://www.transana.org/about/Tour/index.htm>

Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

- Validity
 - Internal validity vs. credibility
 - External validity vs. transferability
- Reliability vs. dependability
 - Explanation, triangulation, and audit trails
- Ethics
 - Autonomy, beneficence, and justice

Six Steps of Conducting a Qualitative Study

1. Determine and define the research questions.
2. Select the cases and determine data gathering and analysis techniques.
3. Prepare to collect the data.
4. Collect data in the field.
5. Evaluate and analyze the data.
6. Prepare the report.

Criteria for Evaluating Qualitative Studies (AECT, 2001)

- Is the problem clearly stated? Does it have theoretical value and currency? Does it have practical value?

- Is the problem or topic situated in a theoretical framework? Is the framework clear and accessible? Does the document contain competing epistemologies or other basic assumptions that might invalidate claims?
- Is the literature review a critique or simply a repetition? Is it relevant? Does it appear accurate and sufficiently comprehensive?
- Are the theses stated in a clear and coherent fashion? Are they sufficiently demonstrated in an accessible manner? Are there credible warrants to claims made about the theses?
- Does the method fit the problem, and is it an appropriate one given the theoretical framework?
- Do the data collected adequately address the problem? Do they make explicit the researcher's role and perspective? Are the data collection techniques a "good fit" with the method and theory?
- Are the data aggregates and analysis clearly reported? Do they make explicit the interpretive and reasoning process of the researcher?
- Does the discussion provide meaningful and warranted interpretations and conclusions?

Qualitative Dissertation Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction

- Background of the Problem
- Statement of the Problem
- Purpose of the Study
- Research Questions
- Importance of the Study
- Scope of the Study
- Definition of Terms
- Delimitations and Limitations

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Chapter 3: Research Methods

- The Qualitative Paradigm
- Qualitative Methods
- The Researcher's Role
- Data Sources
- Data Collection
- Data Analysis
- Verification
- Ethical Considerations
- Plan for Narrative *or* Pilot Study Results

Chapter 4: Research Findings**Chapter 5: Conclusions, Discussion, and Suggestions for Future Research**

- Summary
- Conclusions
- Discussion
- Suggestions for Future Research

Recommended References

AECT (The Association for Educational Communications and Technology) (2001). *Qualitative research issues and methods: An introduction for educational technologists*. Retrieved January 9, 2014, from <http://www.aect.org/edtech/ed1/pdf/40.pdf>.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.) (2005). *The SAGE Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

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Recommended Database:

ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (PQDT) database: Log in to the Trident University Portal at <https://mytlc.trident.edu/> and enter the "Online Library" portal . Select "ProQuest Central" database and once inside ProQuest, you can search the "Dissertations & Theses" database to find Trident and other dissertations approved by UMI/ProQuest.