

# The Dissertation Proposal

## Introduction

A Dissertation is a capstone project in a student's educational program. It is the culmination of a lengthy learning process through which the student becomes expert on a highly focused topic. The process, however, is best understood as a partnership between the student and the student's Dissertation Committee with principal responsibility vested in the student's Academic Advisor and Chair of the Committee. A Dissertation consists of four essential elements:

- Conceptualization of an original research project and its relation to extant knowledge,
- Development of appropriate methodology to address the research question,
- Thorough and valid analysis of collected data, and
- Postulation of significant conclusions drawn from the research.

The responsibility of the Committee is to provide sufficient pedagogical guidance to the student to result in a dissertation of high quality. Ultimately, however, producing a high quality Dissertation is the student's responsibility. Many times the process can be viewed as an apprenticeship in which the student works closely with the Dissertation Chairperson, learning how to do research and how to present the results of that research while under careful supervision of the faculty.

When a Dissertation has been accepted and successfully defended, the signatories - the Chair and Committee members, the Dean of the College, and the Dean of the Graduate School - are affirming the originality and significance of the product for the discipline, the College and the University. In order for responsible review by the College and the Graduate School, dissertations must be submitted well in advance of the expected graduation date. The specific dates vary from semester to semester; however, this information is available on the FIU *Academic Year Calendar* and *University Graduate School* website.

The policies of the College and the University are intended to guarantee conformity to high standards. Toward this end there are specific forms that must be submitted during the process of completing a Dissertation. Some College of Nursing and Health Sciences requirements differ from the requirements of the University Graduate School. These variations are described in this document.

## Purpose of the Dissertation Proposal

The Dissertation Proposal has several functions and benefits. One function is that a clear and lucid description of a problem and a proposed method of solving it is a learning process and helps the student avoid oversights and possible mistakes. The Proposal also helps the members of the Committee to provide appropriate assistance to the students in their task.

The Proposal should explain the problem to be investigated and convince the Dissertation Chairperson and the Committee members that the problem merits investigation. It should show that the student has read the relevant and recent literature on the subject and it should contain a list of materials consulted during the preliminary stages of research.

### **Developing the Dissertation Proposal**

Although the Dissertation Committee may be formed, members should be consulted primarily on those aspects directly related to their areas of special competence. Additional faculty or resource persons may be consulted as needed. It is the joint responsibility of the student and Chairperson to make the final decisions on problem and method, even if decisions are made that one or more Committee members believe to be less than optimal. The Committee's responsibility is to act in an advisory capacity rather than as directors of the research. It is up to the student to recognize useful advice and to integrate the study into a coherent whole.

The Dissertation Proposal should identify the major substantive and methodological issues of the research problem, and be written in excellent form. Preliminary drafts of part or all of the Proposal can be very useful in individual discussions with Committee members prior to the oral Defense. Preferences regarding the format of the Dissertation Proposal may vary with the Committee members, so it is important to gain an understanding of members' expectations. The Proposal should consist of:

- An introduction to the research problem, with a statement of the research question or hypothesis;
- A review of relevant literature sufficient to provide context for the research problem as well as a review of literature focused on the specific question to be examined;
- A description of the research methods to be utilized in answering the research question, including a complete definition of the data to be collected and extant data bases that could be used; and
- A list of references.

In general, the first three parts will form the substance for the first three chapters of the Dissertation. The Proposal must be sufficient for the Committee and administrators of the College to determine the significance of the research question within the context of the existing state of knowledge and the likelihood that the proposed methods are adequate and appropriate to answer that question.

### **Proposal Defense and Approval**

Prior to filing the Proposal with the University Graduate School, the student should meet with the Dissertation Committee for an oral Defense and approval of the Proposal. After the drafts of the Proposal have been distributed to all committee members, the student arranges a meeting of the Committee to discuss the Proposal and to rule on its acceptability. Although the student is responsible for arranging the meeting and distributing copies of the Proposal, the Committee Chairperson will conduct the session(s).

The Proposal Defense should be viewed as a working session in which differences of opinion can be resolved. It is a good idea for the student to take careful notes of the issues raised and decisions are reached. Committee members' suggestions are usually intended to insure the study's feasibility as well as quality. It is to the student's advantage to consider them seriously.

The student should bring a copy of the Dissertation Proposal form to the defense in order to obtain members' signatures. To obtain a copy of the form, see **FIU Graduate Student Forms** and then **Form D-3 Doctoral Dissertation Proposal**. If the research involves animals or human subjects, this form must be accompanied by proof of approval by the appropriate committee.

The 5 page version and the student's dissertation proposal must be approved by the Dissertation Committee and submitted simultaneously. Both must be submitted to the Association Dean of CNHS Academic Programs for approval before being submitted to the Dean of the CNHS. The 5-page abstract (only) must be attached to the Doctoral Dissertation Proposal form that is submitted to the University Graduate School.

The Dissertation Proposal must be accepted by the University Graduate School at least one year prior to graduation. See the Academic Calendar for the published deadline of submitting **Form D-3 Doctoral Dissertation Proposal**. It is understood that the Dissertation may evolve in directions quite different from the Dissertation Proposal, and the Proposal is not intended to restrict the normal development of a research project. The Dissertation Proposal is in no way a contract between the University and the student. Depending on the outcome of the research, the Dissertation may require substantially more work than anticipated at the stage of the Dissertation Proposal. The termination of a line of research and the adoption of a substantially new Dissertation project will require the preparation, oral Defense, and acceptance by the University Graduate School of a new Dissertation project.