

Qualifying Examination & Dissertation

A Guide for Ph.D. Students

COMMUNITY AND FAMILY HEALTH

2016-2017

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INTRODUCTION

The qualifying examination and dissertation are designed to serve as culminating experiences following nearly 20 years of formal education. Despite all of this time and effort, few students have had the opportunity to systematically examine how the relevant knowledge they have gained can be integrated into a coherent framework of thought. Qualifying exams afford the opportunity to construct such a framework. Rather than simply adding new pieces of knowledge, students are encouraged to arrange the pieces into some kind of structure. The qualifying exams are uniquely suited to the tasks of sorting and reconceptualization required for mastery of a field. On the other hand, the dissertation is an opportunity to create new knowledge in the field. Students are expected to utilize their foundational knowledge and appropriate research tools to design, implement and evaluate a research project to further enhance the selected field of study.

THE QUALIFYING EXAM

Purpose of the Qualifying Examination

The purpose of the Doctoral Qualifying Examination is for the doctoral student to demonstrate that she/he has the ability to identify, undertake, and analyze a specific substantive area (or areas) of community and family health research that would be appropriate for a dissertation topic in public health.

The timing of the Doctoral Qualifying Examination will be determined by the student's faculty advisor(s) in consultation with the doctoral committee. Typically, students will complete the qualifying exam only after completing all required coursework for the PhD. However, in some cases, the student, a student's faculty advisor or doctoral committee may determine that additional coursework is needed following the qualifying exam.

The Doctoral Qualifying Examination involves a period of significant self-preparation where the student will emerge with the ability to identify a specific focus area within community and family health, summarize and synthesize the relevant research literature, and design a sound methodology for her/his doctoral dissertation research study.

The specific goals of the qualifying exam are for the doctoral student to demonstrate the capacity to:

- a. Develop a firm knowledge related to public health in general and specific to a relevant content area;
- b. Integrate information from these areas to identify a major public health issue;
- c. Design an appropriate methodological approach to define, evaluate, and analyze a major public health issue; and
- d. Discuss the potential contribution of the proposed research study to the body of knowledge of public health theory and implications for public health practice.

Guidelines

How to Register

It is the student's responsibility to notify the faculty advisor(s) of the intention to take the examination. Notification must be made at least eight weeks prior to the scheduled examination start date. The purpose of the notification is to allow adequate time to solicit questions from members of the doctoral committee.

All doctoral students planning to take qualifying exams will need to fill out a one-page Application for the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam and submit it to the COPH Office of Academic and Student Affairs, along with an updated Plan of Study form, at least four weeks prior to the exam. Students must check the exact deadline with the Office of Academic and Student Affairs. This form will allow staff in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs to check the student's grade point average and assure that there are no outstanding requirements. Students and advisors will be notified of approval to proceed with the qualifying exam. Students must be registered for two credits the semester of the exam.

Timing and format of the Qualifying Examination

Prior to the qualifying exam, each student will develop a concept paper (see concept paper guidelines located at the end of the Sample Forms section of this document) or research plan outlining the intended topics and goal of the dissertation. When the student and her/his faculty advisor(s) determine that the concept paper/research plan is sufficiently developed, the student will present the concept paper/research plan to the student's doctoral committee.

Typically, following the presentation, a student's doctoral committee will determine the topics on which the exam will focus. At that time or following the meeting, the committee will draft and agree upon 4-5 questions on which the student will write for the exam.

A student's doctoral committee will determine the specific expectations for the qualifying exam, although certain parameters must be met, as follows:

- Each student will have 10 weeks to complete the exam from the time topics are finalized and provided to the student. Students who wish to complete the exam in less than 10 weeks may turn the exam in early.
- Each student must answer between 3 and 5 questions for the exam, totaling no more than 75 pages double-spaced in Times New Roman 12 pt font or Arial 11 pt font. This page limit does not include references.
- During the exam period, students may request clarification of the topics or questions to be addressed but drafts of the papers will not be reviewed by the committee.
- Once the exam is complete, the doctoral committee will be given at least two weeks to review the exam. Within 3 weeks of exam completion, the student will receive written feedback from the committee chair, denoting strengths and weaknesses of the exam, and providing an evaluative assessment for each question (i.e., pass, borderline, or fail; see table below).
- After a student receives a "pass" for each exam question, the committee may choose to meet with the student for a post-qualifying exam discussion, during which the committee may ask questions to further clarify statements in the exam and/or discuss future directions towards dissertation proposal development.

Content of the Doctoral Qualifying Examination

The content of the doctoral examination will be drawn from four areas:

1. Specific knowledge of the state of the literature regarding the student's focus area(s).
 - a. Evaluation will be based upon a student's ability to obtain research materials, synthesize the literature, identify knowledge gaps, and discuss the potential to make contributions to the focus area.

2. Discussion of relevant theories for pursuing the area of interest and assessment of the contribution the study will make to theory and public health practice.
 - a. Evaluation will be based upon: a) the student's review of a broad range of theories that are derived from multiple disciplines and relate to the student's focus area; b) the student's evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each reviewed theory as it relates to the student's focus area; and c) the justification made for using one or more theories to study their area of interest.
3. Research methods and evaluation, including statistical competence, particularly related to the student's specific research interests.
 - a. Evaluation will be based upon the student's review of multiple methods for researching the focus area, discussion of strengths and weaknesses of each method, and conclusion about which method(s) are best suited to studying the area of interest.
4. The broad field of public health, including community and family health.
 - a. Questions related to this topic will vary. Evaluation will be based on the extent to which the answer directly corresponds to the question.

Typically, synthesis of the pertinent research literature will be paramount to a successful response. Additionally, students may be required to identify and discuss aspects of public health, including but not limited to: core functions of public health, essential public health services, important historical milestones in public health, public health principles, and relevant theories or paradigms, and/or to apply their knowledge of the broader field to a specific scenario. Students may also be required to make recommendations for advancing the field.

Preparation of Examination Topics/Questions

Each member of the student's doctoral committee will be invited to contribute items to a pool of topics or questions for each section of the qualifying examination. The doctoral student may be invited to submit topics/questions for consideration. Topics/questions are submitted to the student's faculty advisor(s). The faculty advisor(s) has responsibility for final construction of the qualifying examination.

Evaluation and Grading

Responses to each exam question will be evaluated and scored separately by the doctoral committee chair and at least two doctoral committee members. In addition, the doctoral committee will provide appropriate written remarks regarding strengths and weaknesses of the responses to each question. A topic/question of an examination is considered "failed" only after two committee members or majority of the committee members reviewing the question (one of whom may be the chair) evaluate the questions as "failed". A "failed" question of the exam will require a rewrite. The student will have one additional opportunity to be examined on the previously failed topic(s)/question(s). Students will be allotted up to one month for rewriting each exam question. Before attempting the rewrite, the Doctoral Supervisory Committee may recommend that students complete remedial work. If so, the rewrite must be initiated within 3 months of completion of that remedial work. In no case will a student be allowed a third attempt to complete examination or individual topics/questions of the exam. Topics/questions of the examination that have been passed on the first administration are not administered a second time. Failure to pass any topic/question after two administrations of the examination may result in the

student's dismissal from the program. The doctoral committee will use the following interpretive statements for evaluating each question of the examination.

- Pass: Competent and sound work for a doctoral student. Work at this level shows signs of creativity, is thorough and well-reasoned, and demonstrates clear recognition and good understanding of the salient issues.
- Fail: Unacceptable work for a doctoral student; work at this level demonstrates neither a conceptual grasp of salient issues nor an aptitude for scholarly work. Each student will be given one opportunity to rewrite his or her response to each “failed” question.
- In rare instances, students whose performance is truly exceptional may be awarded a grade of “Pass with Distinction.” Work at this level is creative, thorough, well-reasoned, insightful, well written, and shows clear recognition and an incisive understanding of the salient issues. Work at this level is of outstanding professional quality and requires a unanimous vote of the doctoral committee.

Notification of Examination Results

As noted, the committee chair will provide the student with written feedback denoting strengths and weaknesses of the exam, and providing an evaluative assessment for each question (i.e., pass or fail). The Department Chairperson and the other committee members will receive copies of the written feedback. The student will obtain appropriate signatures on the results of the qualifying exam form and submit to the Department Academic Services Administrator for signature of the Chair or designee. The form will then be forwarded to the Office of Academic and Student Affairs, College of Public Health. Exams will be stored in student’s permanent folder in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs, College of Public Health.

ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY

Letter of Candidacy

The student receives an official Letter of Candidacy from the Office of Graduate Studies upon approval of written notification of qualifying examination results. In a semester during which a student completes the requirements for admission to candidacy, directed research credits may be counted toward fulfilling dissertation credits, with approval of the major professor.

Mandatory Enrollment

Doctoral students who have completed all degree requirements, and have been admitted to candidacy are required to register for a minimum of 2 credit hours every semester following admission to candidacy, until the degree is granted.

BEGINNING THE DISSERTATION

Dissertation Committee

The student is ready for the dissertation process after the successful completion of the qualifying examination. The membership of the dissertation committee may be the same as that of the doctoral program committee, unless the Ph.D. candidate or major professor recommends a change, and it is approved by the Department Chair and Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs.

The Doctoral Dissertation Committee will consist of at least four members, three must come from the academic area (i.e. discipline) of the student:

- at least one external member (from outside the Department, School, or equivalent, hosting the doctoral program, but may be within the academic discipline).
- The Chair and at least one other of the committee members must be ranked faculty members with an appointment in the Department.
- Faculty holding joint or adjunct appointments in the degree-granting academic unit (i.e. Department or equivalent) cannot be external members on a student's committee.

Members of the doctoral committee must be credentialed by the College of Public Health, and the Chair must be of full graduate faculty status; it is the student's responsibility to verify that each committee member is credentialed. (Note: Even though a faculty member may have "Professor" rank, this does not ensure credentialing for doctoral committees.)

Dissertation Format

A dissertation may take one of two formats. The first, the **traditional format**, has at least five chapters: Introduction, Review of the Literature, Methods, Results, and a final chapter containing Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations. The second option is the **manuscript format, which** has at least four sections. The manuscript option also requires the student's committee to approve the refereed journals that will be targeted for submission and the number of manuscripts that will be included in the dissertation.

| Table 1. Requirements for the traditional format dissertation. | | |
|---|---------|---|
| Part | Chapter | Content |
| I | | <u>Preliminary Pages</u> Title Page Note to Reader (if applicable) Dedication (optional page) Acknowledgments (optional page) Table of Contents List of Tables (if applicable) List of Figures (if applicable) Abstract |
| II | | Main Text |
| | 1 | Introduction |
| | 2 | Literature Review |
| | 3 | Methods |
| | 4 | Results of the dissertation |
| | 5 | Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations |
| III | | References/ Bibliography |
| | | Appendices Title Page |
| | | Appendix Sections (i.e., instruments, etc.; if applicable) |
| IV | | About the Author (required) |

| Table 2. Requirements for the manuscript format dissertation. | | | |
|--|---------|---|---|
| Part | Section | Content | |
| I | | <u>Preliminary Pages</u> Title Page Note to Reader (if applicable) Dedication (optional page) Acknowledgments (optional page) Table of Contents List of Tables (if applicable) List of Figures (if applicable) Abstract | |
| | II | | Main Text |
| | | 1 | Introduction including theoretical framework |
| | | 2 | First manuscript |
| | | 3 | Second manuscript ¹ |
| | 4 | Conclusions and recommendations for the entire study | |
| | III | | References/ Bibliography (comprehensive list) |
| | | Appendices Title Page | |
| | | Appendix Sections (this section <u>must</u> include a literature review, and may include instruments, etc.) | |
| IV | | About the Author (required) | |

¹ If the committee requires additional manuscripts, the section numbers will change. For example, in a dissertation with three manuscripts, the third manuscript will be labeled Section 4 and the “Conclusions and Recommendations” will be labeled Section 5. In a dissertation with four manuscripts, the fourth manuscript will be labeled Section 5 and the “Conclusions and Recommendations” will be labeled Section 6.

Writing the Dissertation –Traditional Format *

The Ph.D. candidate, with the approval of the doctoral committee, will agree upon a dissertation subject and develop a proposal, consisting of three chapters: Introduction/Statement of the Problem, Review of the Literature, and Methods. The remaining chapters will be completed before the defense of the doctoral dissertation.

Chapter 1. Introduction and Statement of the Problem

The Introduction should describe the nature and purpose of the study, and explain the significance of and justification for conducting the study. This chapter should also present the specific hypotheses or research questions to be addressed by the dissertation study, clearly relating these to lines of investigation and conjecture detailed in current literature. Terms likely to be used throughout the proposal should be defined in this chapter.

Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

Literature reviews should be thorough and systematic. Chapter 2 presents a critical analysis of prior scholarship related to the central questions of the dissertation. Although the degree of completion of the literature review at the proposal stage is a matter of deliberation with the committee, in most cases it is important that the literature review in a proposal:

1. Demonstrates thorough understanding of the subject of the dissertation, through review and analysis of previous research;
2. Identifies chief researchers and documents in the community of scholars to which the dissertation is meant to contribute;
3. Identifies areas of consensus, dispute, and ignorance in the scholarship of the field and evaluates the nature and quality of support for various contentions;
4. Draws new insights or new questions from the literature to offer a conceptual or theoretical framework in which the dissertation should be understood; and
5. Examines and weighs previous and potential methods for investigating the hypotheses or research questions to be addressed in the dissertation;
6. Prepares the reader to appreciate how the dissertation will contribute significant new understanding to this framework.

*Note: Citation of and specific credit to relevant earlier works is part of the author's scientific and scholarly responsibility. The review should focus only on literature and conclusions directly pertinent to the subject and the problem addressed in the dissertation. Adapted from: Components of the Research Proposal and Dissertation (from Gallaudet University)
<http://gradschool.gallaudet.edu/dissertation/disspart.html>

Chapter 3. Methods

This chapter is typically divided into labeled subsections. Often a subsection describing participants or subjects, including a description of the population from which they are drawn, is

followed by subsections describing data collection, testing or other measurement procedures to be undertaken with the participants and a subsection describing how the resulting variables will be analyzed to help resolve the problems stated in the Introduction. Tense should be appropriate to the situation—if methods have yet to be done, they should be written in the future tense, whereas methods that have already been completed should be written in the past tense.

- **Subjects and setting:** The characteristics of participants of the study, how they were selected, and the setting of the study should be presented in detail.
- **Instrumentation:** Any tools or instruments that might be important for readers to understand (such as, assessment instruments, surveys, interview formats, observation protocols, and data collection devices) should be described in detail. If subjects interacted with special equipment or software, or other materials, a detailed description is essential.
- **Data collection procedures:** The readers should be given a thorough description of all the steps involved in data collection. Timelines are helpful, either in outline or graphical representation. Efforts to protect the reliability of findings and the validity of inferences should be detailed.
- **Data analysis:** Regardless of the data collection method used, an analytic strategy must be applied to make sense of the observations. Chapter 3 should describe the analytic strategies employed and a rationale for their use. To the degree that readers may be unfamiliar with the strategy, greater detail may be needed. Methods of “data cleaning” and refinement, categorization schemes and how they were developed, data transformations, statistical tests, and checks on the validity and generalizability of conclusions are suitable topics.

Chapter 4. Results

The fourth chapter summarizes and analyzes the study's data with only minimal interpretation. This chapter should bring readers as close as reasonable to the original data and experiences of the study. This involvement with the data gives the reader some chance to form his or her own inferences and match them against conclusions in Chapter 5. It should begin with a brief review of the purpose of the study and the research method employed. The presentation in Chapter 5 should closely follow the guiding questions or hypotheses articulated earlier in the dissertation. The results should be presented first in their simplest form (such as simple narrative descriptions, simple counts of frequency, and descriptive statistics), and later in more complex forms (multifactor interactions and generalized patterns or inferential statistics).

Generally, interpretation of findings is reserved for Chapter 5, but if the study is complex, it may become tedious for readers to review page after page of uninterpreted results. Sometimes it is useful to highlight the most important findings both in the text and in accompanying tables and to draw some simple conclusions in anticipation of more developed discussions in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

When completing a **traditional format** dissertation, Chapter 5 will include a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for research and practice. It is, perhaps, the most crucial chapter because it presents the contribution to the research literature and some cursory readers will attend to this chapter only. Therefore, it is typical to give a brief summary of

essential points made in Chapters 1 and 3: why this topic is important, and how the study's design contributed to understanding of the topic.

The remainder of the chapter teases out the implications of the study's findings. These implications can be grouped into: theory or generalization, public health practice, and future research. Theoretical implications involve interpretation of the dissertation findings in terms of the questions and hypotheses that guided the study.

It is appropriate to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the work, including the degree to which conclusions are credible given the method and data. It also should provide a critical retrospective examination of the framework presented in the literature review in light of the dissertation's findings.

Practice implications should delineate applications of new insights derived from the dissertation to solve real and significant public health problems.

Two kinds of implications for future research are possible: one based on the study's actual findings and the other based on its limitations. Generally, future research could look at different settings, interventions with new protocols or dependent measures, or new theoretical issues that emerged from the study. It is appropriate to suggest which of these possibilities are likely to be most fruitful.

The last words should give the "take home message," the enduring ideas or conclusions. This should be presented in the simplest possible form, being sure to preserve the conditional nature of the insights.

Writing the Dissertation –Manuscript Format

The Ph.D. candidate, with the approval of the doctoral committee, will agree upon a dissertation subject and develop a proposal, consisting of three or four sections, depending on whether two or three manuscripts will be in the dissertation. After careful consideration and approval of committee members, candidates will select a minimum of two scientific journals (one primary and one secondary) where they will plan to submit each manuscript for publication. Listed below are essential points to consider:

- Please review the previous traditional format's description of each chapter, as this will give guidance as to the expectations for each section.
- This version of the dissertation is formatted in sections instead of chapters. Section 1 is the introduction that includes the statement of the problem and theoretical framework. The Introduction should describe the nature and purpose of the study, and explain the significance of and justification for conducting the study. This section should also present the specific hypotheses or research questions to be addressed by the dissertation study, clearly relating these to lines of investigation and conjecture detailed in current literature. Terms likely to be used throughout the proposal should be defined in this section. A thorough review of the conceptual/theoretical framework(s) or models to be used is expected.
- Prior to approval of the proposal, the committee may decide that three or more

publications are needed to report results adequately. At least two of the manuscripts must report on the research data. A systematic review of the literature may be considered as a third publication if there is an appropriate scholarly journal that publishes systematic reviews.

- In preparation for the proposal defense, manuscripts will be Sections 2 and 3. If the committee requires more than two manuscripts, those manuscripts will be Sections 4 (for third manuscript) and 5 (for fourth manuscript). Each proposed manuscript will follow the specific manuscript guidelines, and will include the introduction and statement of the problem, literature review, and methods. It is recommended that a copy of the journal's instructions for authors be available to each committee member.
- At the oral defense of the proposal, the student is expected to present items in Section 1, a comprehensive review of the literature,² as well as an overview of each manuscript's research questions/hypotheses, specific methods, and rationale for each journal selection. The manuscripts are to cover the entire dissertation research.
- The final dissertation will include Section 1 (introduction and framework), a section for each completed manuscript (including all components required by the specific journal guidelines), final conclusion and recommendation section, references, and appendices. The last section focuses on conclusions and implications of the entire dissertation. Additionally, it is necessary for this section to cover the items below **if not** covered in the manuscripts.
 - ❖ Theoretical implications involved in interpretation of the dissertation findings and in terms of the questions and hypotheses that guided the study. It also should include a critical, retrospective examination of the framework presented in Section 1 in light of the dissertation's findings.
 - ❖ An evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the work, and the degree to which conclusions are credible given the methods and data.
 - ❖ Practical implications and new insights derived from the dissertation to solve real and significant public health problems.
 - ❖ Implications for future research based on the study's actual findings and the study's limitations. Generally, future research could look at different settings, interventions with new protocols or dependent measures, or new theoretical issues that emerged from the study. It is appropriate to suggest which of these possibilities are likely to be most fruitful.
 - ❖ A "take home message," the enduring ideas or conclusions that readers need to keep when they are done. This should be presented in the simplest possible form, being sure to preserve the conditional nature of the insights.
- The entire dissertation must conform to basic format requirements as required by the Office of Graduate Studies. (See) <http://www.grad.usf.edu/ETD-res-main.php>. Each manuscript in the dissertation will follow *journal* requirements/standards as to page length, abstract format, and general structural guidelines. Although co-authors will need to be identified for manuscript submission, co-author's names should not be included in the dissertation itself. All appendices will be at the end of the dissertation.

² The student must present a comprehensive review of the literature in the appendices.

- There may be situations in which the original publication plan or manuscript structure is not well suited to the dissertation findings. In those cases, students can work with their Major Professor or Co-Major Professor to modify the publication plan prior to the dissertation defense.
- The acceptance of any of the manuscripts for publication is not a requirement for graduation although it is strongly encouraged the manuscripts be submitted for publication before graduation. The student and committee should agree to authorship of the publications before the defense of the doctoral proposal and reconfirm prior to the dissertation defense.
- In the unlikely situation that a manuscript needs to be published before the dissertation is submitted (e.g., there is a submission deadline for a special issue), the committee must review and approve in writing that the manuscript is ready for publication.

Standard Writing Style

Research is discovery to be shared, and the USF Office of Graduate Studies sets guidelines to help you display your research results in a consistent, professional manner. As researcher and author, the graduate student has full responsibility for the form and substance of the dissertation. The major professor and the members of the committee are a panel of advisors to oversee the substance, direction, and writing of the research, in addition to providing guidance for the format of the document. The Office of Graduate Studies offers workshops to assist graduate students in meeting the goal of consistent and professional presentation. See <http://www.grad.usf.edu/ETD-res-main.php>

Choice of Style Manual

The Office of Graduate Studies does not prescribe any single style for dissertations as formats differ across disciplines. Students should select a style manual established by their department or committee and consistently follow the guidelines of that manual throughout the entire manuscript (not only for the reference/bibliography sections).

PRESENTING YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The proposal is presented in a formal meeting to the doctoral committee. This meeting is open to other faculty, other Ph.D. students and other students. At the discretion of the student and the Committee, guests of the student and the general public may be invited. The proposal date is scheduled by common agreement of the student and the doctoral committee members. The Department Chairperson approves this date. Proposals may only be scheduled during the regular fall semester, spring semester, or summer C session. Semester dates are posted on the Academic Calendar located on the Office of the Registrar's web page.

Summary of Steps in the Presentation of the Research Proposal Process

1. The student has the option of scheduling a final committee meeting prior to distributing the research proposal that will be presented. At this meeting, the student and committee should finalize any changes needed to prepare the proposal for presentation. After this meeting, the student will make the recommended changes. If a meeting is not scheduled, committee members must receive the draft proposal at least four weeks prior to the anticipated defense date. Committee members are permitted two weeks to review the

proposal and discuss changes prior to signing the *Request for the Dissertation Proposal* form.

2. All committee members sign the *Request for the Dissertation Proposal* indicating that they have read the proposal and approve it for presentation. This form is available from the Office of Academic and Student Affairs' web page.
 - Submit the *Request for the Dissertation Proposal* and a copy of the announcement (*PhD Proposal Announcement Form*) to the Department Chairperson at least 12 calendar days prior to the presentation.
 - The *PhD Proposal Announcement* must be posted at least 10 calendar days prior to the proposal presentation. Once approved, the Academic Services Administrator will e-mail the announcement to the COPH faculty, students, and staff via the COPH listserv.
5. A final copy of the research proposal is given to the committee members and the Department Chairperson 7 days prior to the defense. **No further changes may be made to the research proposal until after the presentation.** Approval for presentation is not an endorsement of the proposal as a completed research plan.
6. All forms are placed in the student's advising file.

Presentation of the Research Proposal

The purpose of the dissertation proposal presentation is to provide students with the opportunity to present their plans for research, and if appropriate, refine the methods, and gather further information and suggestions from the audience at-large. Following the proposal presentation, the committee members convene to make final determination of the appropriateness of the research being proposed and to deliberate recommendations for changes in the proposal.

The purpose of this meeting is not to determine if the student's presentation was satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Rather the purpose is to decide what, if any, proposal changes are needed before proceeding with the research. Committee members sign the *Approval of Research Proposal* only after the corrections, additions or changes have been made in writing and the corrected final copy has been distributed to the committee and Department Chairperson. At their discretion, committee members may sign this form prior to the changes being made with the understanding that the Dissertation Committee Chairperson will supervise the requested revisions. This form is available on the CFH Student Resources web page.

Acceptance of the proposal in its final form constitutes the following:

1. Traditional format- Chapters 1- 3.
2. Manuscript format
 - a. If two manuscripts proposed- Sections 1- 3.
 - b. If three manuscripts are proposed- Sections 1-4.
 - c. If four manuscripts are proposed- Sections 1-5.

This acceptance does not preclude the committee from requiring modifications to the data analysis plan or review of literature at a later date. The committee must approve changes in the proposal or the conduct of the study initiated by the student. The committee may require that a proposal be presented for a second time before being approved if actions after the initial proposal

meeting indicate that substantive modifications in the proposal are necessary. Students are advised not to collect data for their dissertation until the doctoral committee completes final approval of the proposal. When the committee approves the proposal as an appropriate dissertation study, the major professor sends formal notification (*Approval of Research Proposal* form) to the Department Chair that the proposal has been presented and approved. The major professor keeps this form in the student's advising file.

Format of Proposal Presentation

The proposal presentation is conducted in the following format:

Introduction by proposal moderator. The Doctoral Proposal Presentation Defense shall be presided by an external committee member from outside the Department, School, or equivalent, hosting the doctoral program, but may be within the academic discipline; OR a non-committee member (a.k.a. Outside Chair). If the Chair is from another institution, this individual must be approved for Affiliate Graduate Faculty status.

- Oral presentation of the research proposal by student not to exceed 35 minutes.
- First round of questions by committee members.
- Second round and subsequent rounds of questions by committee members.
- One round of questions by attending non-committee faculty members.
- Questions from non-faculty members in attendance beginning with Ph.D. students, other students, and other attendees.
- Final round of questions by committee if desired.

CONDUCTING YOUR DISSERTATION RESEARCH

Preparation and distribution of preliminary copies of the dissertation are the responsibility of the student. Students are encouraged to meet individually with doctoral committee members, in addition to the major professor, as needed.

Institutional Review Board Approval (IRB)

All research investigators at USF are responsible for making the initial determination as to whether their research will involve human subjects as defined in the *Quick Start Guide for Investigators* (2004), available online at <http://www.research.usf.edu/cs/quickstart.htm> . When it is not clear whether the research involves human subjects, research investigators must seek assistance from the USF Office of Research. If it is determined that human subjects are involved, the investigator is responsible for applying for review by the appropriate IRB. This task is accomplished by research investigators preparing a protocol giving a complete description of the proposed research, a detailed application and, when appropriate, a sample of the proposed informed consent form. All forms can be found online at <http://www.research.usf.edu/dric/>

As a part of the application process, the investigator should ensure that the Department Chair or designee certifies on the application form that adequate scientific review of the research study has been performed. Normally in the Department of Community and Family Health, student research contains the student's signature, the major professor's signature, the signature of the Chair of the Department's Research Committee (or representative), and the signature of the Department Chair or designee before the IRB form is forwarded. *All doctoral students must*

complete the IRB credentialing process and HIPAA training during their first semester following admission. IRB training courses are available online at <http://www.research.usf.edu/dric/>

ORAL DEFENSE PRESENTATION OF YOUR DISSERTATION

Scheduling of the oral presentation of the dissertation is by mutual agreement of the student and the doctoral committee. The Department Chairperson approves this date. Dissertation presentations may only be scheduled during the regular fall semester, spring semester, or summer C session.

Members of the doctoral committee sign the *Request for the Dissertation Defense* form prior to the oral presentation of the dissertation indicating that they have read the dissertation and approve it for presentation. Copies of the dissertation must be distributed to committee members four weeks prior to the anticipated defense date. Committee members are permitted two weeks to read the dissertation and provide feedback prior to signing the form. Approval does not preclude changes in the final form of the dissertation, which may be suggested during or after the oral presentation. The format for the oral presentation is consistent with policies of the College of Public Health and the Office of Graduate Studies but as much as possible, is governed by the mutual wishes of the student and the doctoral committee.

The signed *Request for the Dissertation Defense* and the *Ph.D. Defense Announcement form* must be submitted to the Department Chair for approval **12 calendar days** prior to the defense date. Once approved and at least **10 calendar days** prior to the scheduled date, the Academic Services Administrator will post and distribute the announcement to the COPH faculty, students, and staff.

The student, in consultation with the major professor, selects the outside chair or moderator of the dissertation meeting. The Doctoral Dissertation Defense (Final Oral Examination) shall be presided by an external committee member from outside the Department, School, or equivalent, hosting the doctoral program, but may be within the academic discipline; OR a non-committee member (a.k.a. Outside Chair). If the Chair is from another institution, this individual must be approved for Affiliate Graduate Faculty status.

The student provides a final copy of the dissertation for each committee member and the moderator at least **7 days** prior to the scheduled oral presentation date. The student also provides a copy of the dissertation to the Department Chairperson. **No changes should be made to the document after this date.**

Successful completion of the oral examination is the culminating step of the doctoral program. This defense is the student's opportunity to present the dissertation in a public forum where faculty, other students, and guests are invited.

Summary of Steps for the Final Oral Presentation of the Dissertation

3. The student has the option of scheduling a final committee meeting prior to distributing the dissertation that will be presented. At this meeting, the student and committee should

finalize any changes needed to prepare the dissertation for presentation. After this meeting, the student will make the recommended changes. If a meeting is not scheduled, committee members and the Department Administrator must receive the draft proposal no later than the semester's graduation application deadline date and at least four weeks prior to the anticipated defense date. Committee members are permitted two weeks to review the proposal and discuss changes prior to signing the *Request for the Dissertation Defense* form. This submission should not be the first time that the dissertation committee is seeing the draft since committee members and the student should be working together on an ongoing basis. **Committees may provide earlier deadlines, especially if students are submitting one chapter at a time. Generally, the major professor and committee members should, within 2 weeks of receipt, review the dissertation and provide feedback before the final defense. A final copy of the dissertation is given to the committee members, Department Chairperson, and moderator at least 7 days prior to the presentation. No further changes may be made until after the presentation.** Approval for presentation is not an endorsement of the dissertation as a completed research project.

4. This time period will allow for a thorough review by the committee and time for the student to make changes before and after the defense and for submission to the Office of Graduate Studies. **Therefore, complete dissertation drafts need to be submitted to the Department Administrator and committee no later than the USF graduation application due date for the fall and spring semesters. For the summer semester, drafts must be submitted during the first week before the start of classes so there is time for all processing before graduation. Consult the academic calendar for each semester's graduation application deadline date.**
5. All committee members sign the *Request for the Dissertation Defense* form indicating that they have read the proposal and approve it for presentation. These forms are available from the College of Public Health Office of Academic and Student Affairs web page (see Forms).
6. The *Request for the Dissertation Defense* form and a copy of the announcement (*Ph.D. Defense Announcement Form*) must be submitted to the Department Chairperson for approval at least 12 calendar days prior to the presentation. Once approved, the Academic Services Administrator will e-mail the announcement to the COPH faculty, students, and staff via the COPH listserv at least 10 calendar days before the presentation. A copy of the announcement should be sent to the Office of Graduate Studies, preferably two weeks in advance of the defense date.
7. All forms are placed in the student file.

Format of the Final Oral Presentation of the Dissertation

The oral presentation will be conducted in the following format:

1. Introduction by dissertation presentation moderator.
2. An oral presentation of the research by the student (not to exceed 30 minutes).
3. First round of questions by committee members.
4. Second round and subsequent rounds of questions by committee members.
5. One round of questions by attending non-committee faculty members.
6. Questions from non-faculty members in the attendance, beginning with Ph.D. students, other students, and finally, other attendees.
7. Final round of questions by committee if desired.
8. The entire oral examination process normally should not exceed 3 hours in duration.
9. It is expected that students will be asked challenging questions during a defense but this should be done in a respectful and collegial manner.

The student's doctoral committee has final approval of the oral examination and the written product. Following the dissertation presentation, the doctoral committee convenes without the student present to assess the student's performance in presenting the dissertation research. The doctoral committee may require modifications of the dissertation following the examination and before granting its final approval. If the modifications are extensive, the committee may ask the student to undergo another formal presentation.

A student is recommended for the doctorate only if ALL members of the committee judge both the dissertation and the performance of the student in oral examination to be satisfactory. If unanimous agreement cannot be reached, the Doctoral Dissertation Defense Chair notifies the Department Chair (or appropriate equivalent) who will endeavor to resolve the dispute in an expedient fashion. Approval of the dissertation is indicated by signature on the ***Successful Defense of the Ph.D. Dissertation*** form. The student has sole responsibility for assuring that all forms related to the proposal and dissertation are completed, and that all work related to the dissertation conforms to the accepted style and format of the USF Office of Graduate Studies.

Read the USF Office of Graduate Studies' information for preparing for your final semester. It includes the Doctoral Dissertation Process Checklist with information on what to do at the beginning of the final semester, submitting surveys and the certificate of approval, uploading the committee-approved Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) to the USF ProQuest website, and what to expect after the ETD has been submitted. (www.grad.usf.edu/inc/linked-files/dissertationprocesschecklist.pdf).

OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES DURING THE FINAL SEMESTER

1. Provide a bound copy of the final approved dissertation to the major professor.
2. Bound copies for other members of the dissertation committee may be provided at your discretion. Bound copies may be purchased through the USF Bookstore at your own expense.
3. Purchase your cap and gown at the USF Bookstore at least two weeks prior to commencement
4. Celebrate that you have completed your Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health!

RESOURCES

Dissertation Writing Resources:

Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2012). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Boyle Single, P. (2010). *Demystifying dissertation writing*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Galvan, J. L. (2012). *Writing literature reviews: A guide for students of the social and behavioral sciences* (5th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Pyrczak.

Locke, L., W. Spirduso, & S. J. Silverman (2013). *Proposals that work: A guide for planning dissertations and grant proposals* (6th ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Miller, A. B. (2012). *Finish your dissertation once and for all: How to overcome psychological barriers, gets results, and move on with your life*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Roberts, C. M. (2010). *The dissertation journey: A practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rudestam, K. E. & Newton, R. R. (2014). *Surviving your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process* (4th ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Additional Online Sources:

Writing and Presenting Your Thesis or Dissertation (from Michigan State University)

<http://www.learnerassociates.net/dissthes/>

Thesis Whisperer blog:

<http://thesiswhisperer.com/>

Other Resources

CFH Academic Services Administrator: Contact the Department of Community and Family Health

CFH Student Resources Website <http://publichealth.usf.edu/cfh/student.html>

COPH Academic and Student Affairs Website <http://publichealth.usf.edu/academicaffairs/>

Office of Graduate Studies Thesis & Dissertation Website <http://www.grad.usf.edu/ETD-res-main.php>.

IRB Website <http://www.research.usf.edu/dric/>

CHECKLIST FOR THE Ph.D. PROCESS

Refer to the guideline text for more specific detail of each checklist item.

- ✓ Qualifying Examination
- ✓ Register for at least 2 credit hours
- ✓ Notify major professor 8 weeks prior to scheduled examination date
- ✓ ***Application for Ph.D. Qualifying Exam***
- ✓ Notification of results within 3 weeks
- ✓ Complete ***Admission to Candidacy for Doctoral Degree***
- ✓ Receive Letter of Candidacy from the Graduate School
- ✓ Evaluation of Doctoral Program Committee for Dissertation Research

Use ***Changes to the Graduate Student Supervisory Committee Form*** if necessary

Request for Presentation of Research Proposal

4 weeks before anticipated presentation date.

12 calendar days before presentation

Submit signed Request for Presentation of Research Proposal and announcement to Department Chair for approval.

10 calendar days before presentation

Announcement will be posted by the Academic Services Administrator.

7 days before presentation

Distribute final copies of proposal to committee members, moderator, and Department Chair (no changes should be made after this date).

Approval of Research Proposal

Dissertation Research Institutional Review Board signature form
(***Application for Initial Review***)

Student signature

Major Professor Signature

Chair of Dept. Research Committee signature

Department Chairperson signature

Approval from Sponsored Research

Apply for graduation

Dissertation Presentation and Timeline

At least 4 weeks before anticipated presentation date

Submit draft to committee and to the Department Administrator **by the USF graduation application date for fall and spring semesters and during the first week before classes start for the summer semester.** Distribute copies to committee members for review and make changes.

12 calendar days before presentation

Request for the Dissertation Defense form and announcement submitted to Department Chair for approval.

10 calendar days before presentation

Announcement posted by Academic Services Administrator.

7 days before presentation

Submit final draft to committee members, moderator and Department Chair.

Successful Defense of the Ph.D. Dissertation

Follow the Doctoral Dissertation Process Checklist from the Office of Graduate Studies

SAMPLE FORMS

The most updated version of the forms will be found on the CFH Department, COPH Academic and Student Affairs, or Office of Graduate Studies websites. Forms and information on the websites will supersede those in this handbook once changes are made.

PhD Student Supervisory Committee Appointment Form

After a student is accepted into the doctoral program in the Department of Community and Family Health, a doctoral committee is constituted. Names of the members are to be listed along with the Department and Graduate Faculty Status of each member. After the student obtains the committee signatures, the form is given to the Department Chair for approval. Then the student takes the form to the COPH Office of Academic and Student Affairs where one copy will be placed in the student's file. Any changes to the doctoral committee must be documented and approved on the ***Changes to the PhD Student Supervisory Committee Form***. **Both forms are located on the COPH Academic Affairs forms website.**

PhD Plan of Study for Community and Family Health

After a student is accepted into the doctoral program and a doctoral committee is constituted, a plan of study is formulated. The list of required and recommended courses is created. After the student obtains the committee signatures, the form is given to the Department Chair for approval. Then the student takes the form to the COPH Office of Academic and Student Affairs. One copy will be placed in the student's file. **This form is obtained from the COPH Academic Affairs forms website.**

Application for the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam

All students planning to take the qualifying exam must submit this form to the College of Public Health Office of Academics by the appropriate deadline. The form will enable the staff to check the student's grade point average and assure that there are no unfilled requirements. Students and their advisors will be notified of approval to proceed with conducting the exam. **This form is obtained from the COPH Academic Affairs forms website.**

Admission to Doctoral Candidacy

After the student has passed the qualifying examination and obtains all committee members signatures, this form is submitted to the Department Chair. Then the student takes the form to the COPH Office of Academic and Student Affairs. **This form is obtained from the COPH Academic Affairs forms website or from the Office of Graduate Studies website.**

Request for the Dissertation Proposal

After the doctoral committee has reviewed the research proposal and agreed to its presentation, all committee members must sign this form. Two copies are required. The form is sent to the Department Chair for approval. One copy will be returned to the student and one copy will be placed in the student's file. This form must be filed with the Department Chair ***at least 12 calendar days before the presentation of the proposal.*** Failure to meet this deadline will delay the presentation. **This form is obtained from the COPH forms website.**

Research Proposal Announcement

After the doctoral committee has approved the research proposal for presentation, the student creates the announcement and submits it electronically to the Department Chair for approval (12 calendar days before the presentation). Once approved, the Department Administrator will send the announcement via the COPH listserv. The announcement must be distributed **at least 10 calendar days before the date of the presentation.** Flyers will be posted around the College of Public Health and announcements may be made via the COPH listserv. **A template may be obtained from the COPH forms website.**

Approval of Research Proposal

This form is submitted in duplicate to the Department Chair with one copy of the approved research proposal. The research proposal and one of the approval forms are then forwarded to the Dean's office. The second copy of the approval form is filed in the candidate's folder. **This form is obtained from the Department of Community and Family Health forms website.**

IRB Application for Initial Review

This form is required of all researchers who will be using human subjects. The Quick Start Guide for Investigators and your major professor will help you determine whether IRB approval is necessary. The Application is available on the IRB website. The signature form must be complete before the application will be accepted by IRB. IRB approval **MUST** be obtained prior to conducting any research.

Request for the Dissertation Defense

After the doctoral committee has reviewed the final draft of the dissertation and agreed to its presentation, all committee members must sign this form. Two copies are required. Both copies

are to be forwarded to the Department Chair. One copy will be returned to the student and one copy will be placed in the student's permanent file. This form must be completed and submitted with the Department Chair *at least 12 calendar days before the dissertation*. **The form is obtained from the COPH forms website.**

Ph.D. Dissertation Defense (Final Oral Presentation) Announcement.

After the doctoral committee has approved the research proposal for presentation, the student creates the announcement and submits it electronically to the Department Chair for approval (12 calendar days before the presentation). Once approved, the Department Administrator will send the announcement via the COPH listserv. The announcement must be distributed **at least 10 calendar days before the date of the presentation**. **A template may be obtained from the from the COPH forms website.**

Successful Defense of the PhD Dissertation

This form is to be completed by the student prior to the oral presentation and given to the major professor. Once the final presentation has been completed successfully, each member of the candidate's committee signs the form, verifying that the dissertation is ready to submit to Graduate Studies pending revisions. **The form is obtained from the COPH forms website.**

Thesis/Dissertation Submission Form

The major professor signs this form after all corrections and modifications have been completed satisfactorily. It is submitted with a copy of the dissertation submitted electronically to Graduate Studies. **This form is available from the COPH forms website.**

The Concept Paper for PhD Students

The concept paper is a succinct document that summarizes the to-be-proposed dissertation study so that the doctoral committee and the student can determine whether the student is ready to advance to the step of taking the qualifying examination. While the structure of the concept paper can vary, the following elements should be included:

Title – the name of the proposed research study

Study Purpose – what is the broad purpose of the proposed study?

Research Question – a one-sentence statement of the overarching research question the study seeks to answer. The remainder of the concept paper should link the research question to current and previous research, and outline the proposed study design and methods to answer this question.

Problem Statement – several sentences to several paragraphs that make the case for the importance of research question and place it in a broader theoretical/conceptual framework. This will demonstrate the significance and public health relevance of the proposed research and include a focused literature review.

Study Design and Study Methods – a description of how the researcher intends to address the research question. This would typically include:

- What study design will be used? Discuss choice, and limitations or advantages of proposed study design.
- What data will be collected and/or used? What are the operational definitions for key variables? How will the data be collected?
- How will these data be analyzed? What assumptions are required?
- How will these analyses answer the research question?
- What ethical issues may arise in the conduct of the study and how will these be addressed?

Study Strengths and Limitations – why will the proposed study add to knowledge? What cannot be discovered with this approach? What intrinsic and extrinsic threats to internal validity might be challenges? Will the study results be externally generalizable?

Feasibility – how long might it take to collect and analyze the data for the proposed dissertation?

Public Health Impact – how will the study results increase knowledge and affect public health practice?

Planned Dissertation Format – will the proposed dissertation be in traditional format, manuscript format, or not known at this time?

References – list of references and sources cited

The concept paper should not be an exhaustive, comprehensive document. Rather, it should be in the form of a prospectus in which the proposed dissertation topic, rationale and methods are briefly outlined. The focus should be on explaining what the research will investigate, why this research is important, and how the study will be conducted. The concept paper should be no more than 5 typed pages, double-spaced, not including references or title page.