Dissertation Process Guidelines

The dissertation process begins after the student has passed the qualifying exam paper and has been admitted to candidacy for the PhD. However, the early steps in the process may be completed before the examination requirement has been fully completed.

1. **The candidate discusses a topic with a faculty member who is a potential committee chair.** The dissertation committee chair must be a core faculty member in the Gerontology PhD Program. (A list of the core faculty may be obtained from the GPD.)

2. After consultation with and agreement by the faculty member, **the acting chair is selected by the student.** The acting chair does not become the official chair of the dissertation committee until after the concept paper is successfully completed.

3. **The candidate prepares a concept paper** that includes the following:
   1. An introduction which includes the underlying policy and/or theoretical questions and the aims of the research;
   2. An indication of how the study will build upon previous research (with reference to the literature);
   3. Identification of how the study will build upon previous knowledge;
   4. An overview of the methodology that includes analytic strategies to be used; and
   5. A work plan that identifies needed resources, indicates how they will be obtained, and presents a realistic time frame for completing the project.

Typically, the concept paper should not exceed ten pages in length. The concept paper is reviewed with the acting committee chair and is revised to address concerns of the potential chair.

4. The dissertation committee consists of at least three members, including the chair of the committee. The size of the committee may be larger than three when additional expertise is required. At least half (a minimum of two) of the members must be core faculty from the Gerontology Ph.D. Program. The committee must include at least one person who is not a member of the Gerontology Ph.D. Program. This will ensure that, in both appearance and in reality, the outside person maintains an "arms-length" relationship with the Gerontology Ph.D. Program. The outside member, who is a full voting member of the committee, need not have an appointment at the University but must have achieved the highest degree in his or her field of expertise. Ph.D. candidates, with the assent of the acting chair will suggest one or more outside members.

5. **With the advice of the committee chair, the candidate identifies potential committee members.** The candidate or chair then informs the GPD of the proposed committee and project topic for review. With the approval of the chair and the GPD, the candidate approaches the potential committee members to request their participation. **Candidates invite the potential committee members to review the concept paper** before they commit themselves regarding their participation. By university rule, committee members from outside the university
must submit a CV to the GPD upon agreeing to participate as a committee member. The dissertation committee must also be approved by the Graduate Dean prior to the formal defense of the dissertation proposal.

6. **The candidate prepares the formal dissertation proposal.** The proposal expands upon the concept paper. Prior to the dissertation proposal defense, the student must seek Institutional Review Board approval for their project. This requires submitting the appropriate forms to the IRB office and completing the required IRB training courses (CITI). This course may be completed by going to the following web site:

   [http://www.umb.edu/irb/Trainingandeducation.html](http://www.umb.edu/irb/Trainingandeducation.html)

**The dissertation proposal includes the following elements:**

1. An introduction that includes the underlying policy and/or theoretical questions and the aims of the research. It should specify the major research questions to be answered and/or hypotheses to be address;
2. A literature review that identifies the key studies upon which the research will be based. This section should identify the topics that will be covered within the literature review section of the dissertation;
3. A statement of the hypotheses to be tested or the research questions to be addressed;
4. A well-developed presentation of the research methods to be used that includes research design, measurement, data sources, and data analysis;
5. A work plan that identifies needed resources, indicates how they will be obtained, and presents a realistic time frame for completing the project; and
6. A plan for addressing any potential issues regarding rights of research subjects.

Under some circumstances, a proposal may serve as the foundation for the initial chapters of the dissertation. However, it is not necessary for candidates to achieve this ideal at the proposal stage.

7. When the chair is satisfied that the proposal is ready for committee review, the candidate circulates the proposal to other committee members. The proposal is circulated at least two weeks before the committee holds a meeting to review the proposal. If the committee's approval of the proposal is conditional, the candidate with the assistance of the chair prepares a memorandum for the committee regarding the steps that will be taken to address the problems. If necessary, a second meeting may be held to discuss a revised proposal. A form is signed by the committee members to indicate formal approval of the proposal. The form is attached to the proposal. The chair informs the GPD that the proposal has been approved. The GPD assures that the record of approval and the proposal are in the student's file.
8. The composition of the committee may change over time. If the candidate seeks to replace the committee chair, approval of the GPD is necessary. Other changes in membership require the approval of the chair of the committee.

9. The candidate asks the chair to review the completed dissertation in draft form. The candidate is strongly encouraged to seek informal review from other committee members prior to the defense.

10. **The defense is scheduled at the discretion of the candidate and the committee.** The student must be in compliance with all procedures, deadlines, and requirements established by the Graduate Studies Office. The candidate must provide committee members with a copy of the completed dissertation at least two weeks prior to the defense. However, it is advisable that students receive feedback from committee members before scheduling the defense. The defense is open to the public. Notice of the defense must be posted within the Gerontology Department and publicized in accordance with University policies at least four weeks prior to the defense. The deliberations of the committee regarding the adequacy of the dissertation are conducted in executive session.

The committee has the following options regarding approval or disapproval of the dissertation:

1. Approval of the dissertation presented;
2. Approval of the dissertation with minor modifications whose adequacy is to be judged by the chair;
3. Approval of the dissertation with more substantial modifications requiring approval of one or more committee members in addition to the chair;
4. Deferral of a decision, reconsideration upon submission and defense of a substantially revised dissertation; or
5. Disapproval

Approval of the dissertation requires a majority vote of committee members. Generally, the chair will seek a consensus among committee members. If modifications are required, the chair will provide the candidate with a statement in writing regarding the revisions.

11. **The chair informs the GPD regarding the outcome of the defense.** The GPD informs the program administrator and the Office of Graduate Studies. Appropriate forms must be filed with the Graduate Studies Office to facilitate recording of the outcome.

12. The dissertation must comply with the editorial standards established by the Dean of Graduate Studies and the Department of Gerontology.

13. **The candidate should provide the department with a bound copy of the final version** of her/his dissertation for archival purposes.

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