The Dissertation Proposal

For students entering the PhD program with a Bachelor's degree, a written dissertation proposal is normally handed in after successful completion of the Candidacy Exam, some time after the first year and no later than the end of the third year in the program. For students entering the PhD program with an external Master's degree, the written dissertation proposal is normally handed in after successful completion of the Candidacy Exam, and no later than the end of the second year in the program. Adherence to this timeline will enable students to maintain excellent progress in the program (see Graduate Student Evaluation Procedures). At the discretion of the Supervisory Committee the dissertation proposal may be written prior to or concurrently with the Candidacy Exam.

The proposal may be as short or as lengthy as the student, supervisor, and Supervisory Committee agree upon; this may vary between areas and within areas. The dissertation proposal may take the form of a relatively lengthy literature review, followed by the proposed experiments, or, the dissertation proposal may take the form of a grant proposal which, of course, also includes the proposed experiments. In general, however, the proposal should not exceed 50 double-spaced pages in length.

It is essential that the student and Supervisory Committee be aware of current copyright issues, agreements, and laws when developing the dissertation proposal. For example, if a submitted, in press, or published study is proposed as part of the dissertation, important copyright issues are raised. The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) document on Thesis Format Specifications allows for a "mixed format thesis" in which there is a "blending of published and as-yet unpublished research" requiring the full approval of the supervisor. Excerpts from this document include:

- In conformity with the Copyright Act, there must be no substantial amount of copyrighted material in the thesis

- Under the Copyright Act, a reasonable extract of another person's work can be included in a student's thesis, provided that the source is documented. Students using a substantial amount of copyrighted material in their theses must include, with the thesis, letters of permission from the person(s) or publishing company holding the copyright

- The student must provide a footnote for any or all chapters that have been submitted for publication, accepted for publication, or published. In order to avoid copyright problems, the following format for wording in the footnote should be used:

  A version of this chapter has been submitted for publication/accepted for publication/published. Jones 1984. Journal of Data. 48: 206-215.

- Students who wish to submit a revised version of their thesis (or part of it) for publication should contact the potential publisher to see if access in the collections of University of Alberta Libraries and Library Archives Canada will prevent future publication.

In addition to FGSR's Thesis Format Specifications document, the University's Copyright and Licensing Office is another useful resource.

The Supervisory Committee and the student are required to meet and discuss the proposal, and agree on its specifics. When there is a final version that is agreed upon by all parties, they sign the Supervisory Committee Approval of Dissertation Proposal form, and the proposal and signature sheet will be placed in the student's file.

Revision History

Approved September, 1999

Editorial Revision April, 2003

Signature sheet appended, December, 2004

Editorial Revision November 2008

Revision approved in Council October 19, 2011

Supervisory Committee Approval of Dissertation Proposal

Date: _____

The supervisory committee for: _____

agrees that the proposal entitled:

_____

_____

outlines a research project that should constitute a suitable basis for a defensible PhD dissertation in the Department of Psychology.

Signatures

_____
Supervisor

_____
Committee Member

_____
Committee Member

_____
Committee Member