

Dissertation Manual

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“Writing a doctoral dissertation can and should be an achievement of a lifetime. It challenges the student to explore creatively, research comprehensively, think holistically, and write authoritatively. A successful dissertation places its author in the stream of human exploration, a stream in which he or she has added one more drop, one more nuance, one more insight into our most fundamental quest: to know ourselves and the mystery of the universe. This is the perennial wisdom.”

--Jim Garrison, President, Ubiquity University

I. Overview

The choice of dissertation topic is intensely personal, usually reflecting a student's passionate interest in a field of study and his or her deep desire to make a significant contribution to that field. Successful dissertations can range from pure qualitative research to an original philosophical argument to a description of an innovative creative project. The process of narrowing one's ideas to a specific topic or question requires both intuition and critical thinking, and often necessitates months, if not years, of incubation and refinement.

One distinguishing characteristic of a Wisdom School dissertation is the expectation of a synthesis of the objective with the subjective. Just as the pedagogy of the Wisdom School honors both intellectual and creative/artistic learning, the successful dissertation demonstrates rigorous critical thinking along with insights regarding the interior journey. The capacity to combine an objective grasp of the material under consideration with the introspective work of discerning how the material actually affects one's inner life and soul-growth: that, in our view, is the mark of wisdom.

II. Basic Elements

The *Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Dissertation* must demonstrate thorough knowledge of the field in question and offer an *original* contribution to that field. Most students base their study on two foundations: their existing knowledge and experience in a particular field, and their grounding in a spiritual perspective or Wisdom tradition. The dissertation may be a qualitative research inquiry or a theoretical/philosophical argument. It should state clearly and authoritatively what you know, describe your field, define your question and method of inquiry, and demonstrate what you learned in the process.

The *Doctor of Ministry (DMin) dissertation* must demonstrate thorough knowledge of the field in question and offer a substantive contribution to that field. In general, the nature of the contribution is more applied than theoretical, though either is possible. It may also be a deeply personal exploration. In any case, the work is grounded within a spiritual framework of a Wisdom Tradition. Substantive contributions may reflect a wide range of topics and media, and may include creative or educational projects.

All Wisdom School dissertations include the following elements (or address the following questions):

1. Identification of a primary field of knowledge (or perhaps the intersection of two or three), which provides the foundation for the work. (What body of knowledge forms the foundation for your work?)
2. Identification of an underlying spiritual framework or Wisdom Tradition informing the process. (Whether as part of the body of the work or part of one's subjective experience, what traditions or principles guide this journey?)

3. A review of the literature that relates to the dissertation topic, including both primary and secondary sources. (What is known and not known in the field? Where does your topic fit?)
4. A clear question or statement of a thesis that guides the process. (What do you want to know, discover, research, experience, share? and, What is the scope of your project?)
5. A statement of your investigation's relevance and significance. (Why will answering this question or developing this idea be of value to the field?)
6. A clear approach: that is, a consistent method of inquiry, research design, or logical development of a thesis argument or, if a DMin project, a framework for presentation. (What is the approach?)
7. A description of your subjective experience of the dissertation journey (either in a separate chapter, epilogue, or woven throughout the document). (What is it about your life experience that called forth this project? How were you transformed by the experience?)
8. Conclusions and implications. (What did you learn and why does it matter?)

The importance of a Literature Review and careful articulation of the subject of study cannot be overstated. It is essential for a doctoral dissertation that the student be familiar with the history and development of the subject at hand; otherwise, there is no grounding upon which to build an argument or investigation. Without a comprehensive review of the literature, there is no way for you or the reader to know where your contribution fits into the overall field or whether that contribution is original. The Literature Review is not something to be tacked on after other parts are complete. On the contrary, its primary purpose is to shape the research and link it to the larger field of study.

Equally important is a careful delineation of the parameters of the dissertation itself. The more clearly defined it is, the more effective will be the research and the writing. Though it is important to read widely, eventually establishing clear boundaries to the scope of the work is one important key to a successful dissertation.

For dissertations focused on answering a question using research design, a thorough understanding of the chosen methodology is essential. One chapter should be devoted to explaining the method, why it was chosen, and how it was applied. Any ethical issues should also be addressed.

III. The Pathway

The following lists the steps in the process for both DMin and PhD degrees. Numbers 9-11 and 18, in *italics*, apply only to PhD students.

1. Begin a dissertation journal to chronicle the experience. Include relevant ideas, dreams, inspirations, quotations, conversations, etc. This will foster incubation for topic selection, and then serve as reference for writing about the subjective aspects of the dissertation experience.
2. Select a general field of knowledge and general topic. Begin reading widely on the topic. (Note: it is very helpful to understand and use from the beginning your operating system for entering citations. In Word, see "References" and "Insert Citation," and enter "APA Sixth Edition" into the "Style" box.)
3. Select a Major Advisor who is familiar with your field. Confer with the Dean of Students as needed for guidance. (Most students begin this step between their third and fifth Intensives.)
4. Complete the Major Advising agreement and submit it to the Registrar. Pay associated fees.
5. Schedule and complete a Candidate Review with the Dean of Doctoral Studies and the Dean of Students, once the following are complete:
 - a. At least 3 Wisdom University courses
 - b. Any incomplete post-papers
 - c. Submission of Major Advising agreement
 - d. Payment of associated fees
 - e. Submission of a project statement or Abstract to the Dean of Doctoral Studies. The statement should consist of two or three paragraphs about the field of knowledge and area of inquiry or question selected.
6. Refine the question(s) or thesis or project. Explore methods of inquiry or frameworks appropriate to your question. Read widely within chosen method.
7. Develop peer support relationships as needed to support your work and progress.
8. Submit a 3-5 page Overview of your proposed project to Major Advisor for review. This should include:
 - a. Background information about the topic with brief commentary on pertinent literature
 - b. Statement of purpose
 - c. Research question(s) or thesis or description of project
 - d. Appropriate Methodology or Framework
9. *(For PhD students only) Complete a Dissertation Proposal of 10-15 pages and submit to the Dean of Doctoral Studies and Dean of Students for review. If human participants will be involved in the study, complete an ethical review form. The Proposal may be written in the future or past tense, and should include:*
 - a. *Title and one paragraph summary*

- b. *Introduction, including a Statement of Purpose and why this would be an original and substantive contribution*
 - c. *Literature Review of prior work on the topic. This can be either a draft of a chapter or in outline form.*
 - d. *Conceptual Framework*
 - e. *Research Question/Thesis*
 - f. *Research Method (or approach to arguing for your Thesis)*
 - g. *Research Process including how participants (if any) will be identified and recruited, how data will be gathered, how data will be analyzed*
 - h. *Ethical considerations (or complete form for Ethical Review if research participants are involved)*
 - i. *Bibliography*
10. *Choose a Content Specialist if desired/needed.*
 11. *Once the Proposal is accepted and the Ethical Review is passed, proceed with the study.*
 12. *Submit periodic drafts of completed chapters to Major Advisor (and to the Content Specialist if you have one). Engage an editor if needed.*
 13. *Submit final draft to Major Advisor for Approval.*
 14. *When approved by Major Advisor, submit to the Dean of Doctoral Studies for approval.*
 15. *Dean of Doctoral Studies (DDS) and Dean of the Graduate School confer. DDS notifies student of approval or revisions needed.*
 16. *If revisions are required, complete and re-submit to the Dean of Doctoral Studies for University approval.*
 17. *Once final approval is received from the University, obtain title page signatures from the Major Advisor and Dean of Doctoral Studies.*
 18. *PhD students prepare for, and participate in, the Dissertation Defense. (See Section XI.)*
 19. *Submit your approved dissertation electronically to the Dean of Doctoral Studies.*

IV. Timeline and Deadlines

It is not uncommon for students to spend 12-24 months in the proposal incubation phase. In fact, this phase of the dissertation may involve the most communication between the student and the Major Advisor. This is the time when the student reads widely among the major authors in the chosen field and seeks to define and narrow the topic. Through the process of reviewing the literature, new perspectives are gained and the topic refined.

Setting timing goals for each step of the process can facilitate staying on track. The Major Advisor can be a helpful ally in accountability, as can self-organized peer support groups.

The final draft of the dissertation should be submitted to the Major Advisor by early December of the year prior to the year of desired graduation, in order to allow adequate time for reading and revising as

needed. A thorough review of the work to correct errors can take several days, or even weeks, **so the target completion should be well ahead of December.** *Please allow plenty of time; the proofreading process is a time-consuming and necessary step.*

The due date for the submission of the dissertation to the University is January 5th of the year of desired graduation. Please contact the Dean of Doctoral Studies for the mailing information.

Deadlines for Graduation

January 5. Submit dissertation to the University.

February 1. Submit Petition to Graduate and Filing Fee. Email the Registrar, requesting a review of your financial file, to assure that all financial obligations are met. **NO DISSERTATION WILL RECEIVE FINAL APPROVAL UNTIL ALL FEES ARE PAID.**

April 1. All course work must be complete, including all post-papers.

May 15. A copy of the approved dissertation is to be received in PDF format, stored digitally in our University's server.

Checklist for Graduation

- All fees paid and financial file reviewed by Registrar by February 1.
- Petition to Graduate Form submitted to Registrar by February 1.
- All coursework complete and grades recorded by April 1.
- All required revisions to dissertation complete.
 - Title page with signatures complete.
 - Copy of approved dissertation submitted to the Dean of Doctoral Studies and by May 15.

V. Advising

It is the student's responsibility to contact a prospective Major Advisor. Once an agreement has been reached, the student completes the Advising Agreement form, obtains the Advisor's signature, and submits the form to the Registrar's office, along with appropriate fees.

Faculty who hold the doctoral degree you are seeking may serve as a Major Advisor. Other individuals (non-faculty or those not holding the degree you are seeking) with appropriate academic background and specific expertise in the area of your topic may also serve as a Major Advisor with the approval of the Dean of Doctoral Studies and the Dean of Students.

If the Major Advisor is not an expert in a particular aspect of the content, and the student desires to engage a Content Specialist in the dissertation process, s/he may do so. Any financial agreements made

as part of this process are the responsibility of the student. This is also true for enlisting the services of an editor, if desired. The Dean of Students or Dean of Doctoral Studies may be helpful in finding a qualified editor.

VI. Roles and responsibilities

The Dean of Students will:

- Give initial guidance to the student in clarifying the inquiry and general direction of the dissertation.
- Help the student with choosing a Major Advisor, and give written approval for the inclusion of the Major Advisor in the student's project.
- Be available to meet by phone with the student and the Major Advisor in the eventuality that a problem arises. Can call meetings in addition to those called by the candidate.
- Will participate in the Candidate Review process.

The Dean of Doctoral Studies will:

- Confer with the student and/or the Dean of Students, if needed, regarding the selection of a Major Advisor.
- Convene a Candidate Review when the student indicates readiness.
- Be available to respond to questions regarding the dissertation.
- Evaluate dissertations submitted to the University and make recommendations for revisions, if needed.
- (For DMin dissertations) Recommend approval to the Dean of the School when revisions are complete.
- (For PhD dissertations) Select an External Examiner and convene a phone meeting for the Dissertation Defense. After a successful Defense, will recommend approval to the Dean of the School.

The Major Advisor will:

- Help the student clarify his/her statement of thesis or question of inquiry
- Approve a preliminary outline and subsequent proposal.
- Support the student in meeting the timeline as outlined in the Dissertation Manual and Student Handbook.
- Assess whether the student has demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the subject matter and bibliographical resources.
- Review each draft.
- (For PhD students) Participate in the Dissertation Defense.

- Sign the title page of the completed dissertation.

The Student will:

- Confer with the Dean of Students as to initial ideas and selection of a Major Advisor.
- Approach the potential Major Advisor to discuss and request advising.
- If the advisor is not a WSGS faculty member, present the credentials of the Major Advisor to the Dean of Students, including his/her curriculum vitae, for final approval.
- Complete, sign and submit the DMin or PhD Advising Agreement form to the Registrar. Copies of this form are to be retained by the student, the Major Advisor, the Dean of Students, and the Dean of Doctoral Studies.
- Work under the direction of the Major Advisor in order to develop an initial outline and proposal.
- Contact the Dean of Doctoral Studies when ready to engage in a Candidate Review.
- Be available for regular meetings with the Major Advisor.
- Adhere to the citation guidelines in the *Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA)*.
- Respond conscientiously to the feedback and advice of the Major Advisor.
- On completion of the dissertation and final approval from the Major Advisor, make formal submission of the dissertation to WSGS.
- (For PhD Students) Participate in a Dissertation Defense process. Complete all the graduation requirements and pay all fees as outlined in the Student Handbook.

VII. Standards of Writing

The dissertation, as well as all papers submitted to the University, must show competence in the use of grammar and sentence structure, and must follow the style of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA)* for citations, quotations, footnotes, and reference lists. This is the resource to be used for all questions of form not covered in this Dissertation Manual.

Plagiarism. The Wisdom School is fertile ground for creativity. In this environment we nurture original thinking and feeling, and the birthing of new ideas. Using someone else's expressions, including words, thoughts, and artistic expressions without proper recognition, is cheating—cheating yourself and the other. Be honest and acknowledge the use of another's creativity. **No plagiarism will be tolerated.**

Organization. The development of ideas should be logical and clear.

Definitions. Terms or concepts that would be unfamiliar to a reader outside the field of knowledge should be defined. Each person mentioned within the dissertation needs to be referenced by way of footnotes that clearly indicate: full name, date of birth, occupation and any other relevant information.

Inclusive language. Language that discriminates against gender, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic identity, age or disabilities is to be avoided. Preferences of appropriate descriptions can change often, so be sensitively specific and if possible, ask participants their preference. If you are referring to humanity as a whole, choose words that are non-gender/inclusive: humankind, human race, humanity, people, family, ancestors, and so forth.

Punctuation. This manual is not the place for a comprehensive guide to punctuation, and it is the responsibility of the student to be familiar with punctuation rules. However, the following conventions are so commonly subjects of confusion that they are worth addressing here:

Use only a single space after a period/punctuation at the end of the sentence.

Periods and commas go inside quotation marks; other punctuation is outside.

Block quotes do not require quotation marks.

Emphasis. General guidelines for academic writing recommend that you do not use capital letters as a style of emphasis. The preferred style is to use italics, or if needed, lower case letters in bold. Also, avoid overuse of exclamation marks or superfluous punctuation.

Length. The actual overall length varies depending on a number of factors, including the nature of the dissertation. The important consideration is that all the necessary elements be included, without adding unnecessarily to the length. It is more common to err on the side of too much than too little.

VIII. Citations and Formatting

The *Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th edition)* is the source for guidelines regarding the **citation** of all references within the document, as well as the list of references at the end. These guidelines must be carefully and consistently followed. The American Psychological Association (APA) has a web site with tutorials www.apastyle.org, as do some universities. The Purdue University web tutorial has been particularly popular with students:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/02/>

The guidelines to be followed for the **formatting** of the final copy of your dissertation are below. These supersede the formatting guidelines of the APA. The written record of your project, your dissertation, needs to have its pages formatted (laid out) in a particular fashion that will serve as the legitimate record of the completion of your degree at the Wisdom School of Graduate Studies. This final copy on a CD or on a Thumb-Drive will be kept at the Administrative Center. The format is designed to do a number of things: 1) provide a uniform format for the abstract, so that it can be catalogued as a dissertation, and 2) assure that all sources that have significantly influenced your writing be cited in a way that allows the reader to find the cited sources and that excludes the possibility of plagiarism.

1. **Preliminary pages.** These include the Title page, the Abstract, Dedication page (optional), Acknowledgements (optional), and Table of Contents, in that order.
2. **Pagination.** Page numbering should begin with the Title page and continue through to the last page of the document, using Arabic numerals (1,2,3,4...) in the upper right corner of each page.
3. **Table of Contents.** In Microsoft Word, under the Reference tab, there is the option of having the program create the Table of Contents for you, based on your headings and sub-headings. See a sample in the next section.
4. **Margins.** The following should be strictly observed in order: Left margins are to be 1½ inches wide. The top, right, and bottom margins are to be at least 1 inch wide. These specifications apply to all pages, including tables, figures, illustrations, poetry, drawings, or quotes.
5. **Spacing.** Double spacing is required for the main body of the work. Single spacing should be used for indented block quotations, for poetry, footnotes, and any places where conventional usage would call for single spacing. The Reference list has single spacing within citations and double spacing between.
6. **Typeface.** Your dissertation should use 12-point font. You may use a different type and spacing for charts, drawings, tables, or special inserted text.
7. **Illustrative Material.** Illustrations larger than 8-1/2 by 11 inches should be legibly reduced to fit the page.
8. **Tables, figures, poems, etc.** If you find it helpful to include charts, tables, poems, etc. in your text, they should be placed in the body of the dissertation, not at the end. These pages should follow the text reference to them as closely as possible, without any awkward division of the chart, etc. A listing of figures is to be included in the Table of Contents. If there are a significant number of them, that list should constitute a separate page.
9. **Appendices.** Depending on the content of the appendix, single spacing may be acceptable, and type size and face may differ from that used elsewhere. For the dissertation, the appendix can be a creative way to include a non-traditional text without being bound by formatting requirements. However, margin specifications still apply. Appendices should be included in the Table of Contents by letter and title and should be paginated along with the rest of the text of the dissertation. Appendices should include a title page with identifying information about the appended material. Both the title page and the Appendix itself should contain the following information:
 - a. The letter sequence (i.e., Appendix A, Appendix B. . .)
 - b. A title that identifies the nature of the material contained therein

1. **Order of parts.**

- c. Title/signature page
- d. Abstract
- e. Dedication page (optional)
- f. Acknowledgements (optional)
- g. Table of Contents
- h. Lists (if any), such as Lists of Tables, Illustrations, Poetry, etc.
- i. Body of the work
- j. Appendices
- k. Endnotes (if any). In most circumstances, it is preferable to have explanatory footnotes in the body of the text rather than endnotes.
- l. References (works cited)
- m. Bibliography (optional addition of works not cited but important to the author in framing the dissertation)

IX. Sample Formatting

1. **Signature/Title Page (mandatory Wisdom School format)**

The Title of My Dissertation:
The Subtitle of My Dissertation
(Five single-spaces)
Your Name as it will Appear on Your Diploma
(Five single-spaces)
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The Doctor of Ministry Degree or The Doctor of Philosophy Degree
(Three single-spaces)
Wisdom School of Graduate Studies
Ubiquity University
(Three single-spaces)
Date of Completed Dissertation Submission
(Three single-spaces)

(Advisors name and credentials)
Major Advisor

Gyorgyi Szabo, PhD
Dean of Doctoral Studies

2. Abstract

Abstract

This paragraph is written showing the format in which your abstract is written. The title “Abstract” is typed centered, on the first line, in 12-point font. Double-space before the text of the abstract and continue double-spacing throughout the body. Use the same margin format as the dissertation (1.5 inches left margin, 1 inch on top, bottom and right side). The abstract is not the same as the proposal. It is a description (of no more than 150 words) of what your dissertation covers. It is usually written in the present or past tense.

3. Dedication

The (optional) Dedication page begins ten single-space lines from the top of the page. If you have text for the dedication, it should be double-spaced and will look something like the following:

To

My Sister, Dr. Joni Seager

Whose unwavering support has uplifted me during many stormy nights.

4. Table of Contents

Depending on the number of subheadings within each chapter, the Table of Contents will include more or less detail. The following offers an example of structure.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION	1
A. Defining Personality	3
B. Emergence of the “Big Five” Taxonomy	5
C. Applied Personality Research	10
1. Organizational research	10
2. Aviation research	11
a. Birds	12
b. Planes	13

X. Dissertation Submission

You are responsible for having your dissertation electronically delivered to Dean of Doctoral Studies no later than one month prior to the date of graduation.

XI. Dissertation Defense for PhD Candidates

In defending your dissertation, you are presenting yourself as a scholar in the field of knowledge and an authority on your subject. The Defense is your opportunity to present your work to others in the field and to your peers. You will be expected to explain your approach and argument cogently and clearly and to delineate how your work fits in with other research and scholarship in the field. This is a conversation among equals; if others disagree with one or more of your ideas, you should be able to defend your position.

You will be expected to give a 10-15 minute presentation that summarizes your work: the topic/research question/ or problem that led to your research; your thesis/main idea; your method; your findings, and the significant applications and implications. This should be done without notes. This will be followed by dialogue with the External Examiner, the Major Advisor, and the Dean of Doctoral Studies. You will likely be asked to reflect upon your personal development through your project and your future direction in related pursuits.

Passage of the Dissertation Defense will be determined by consensus of the participating evaluators. In the unlikely event that a student fails to receive that consensus, s/he will receive a written description of the issues that need to be addressed in order to successfully pass. The student will have three months within which to meet those expectations.