Section 1: Principles and Procedures

INTRODUCTION

Students often underestimate the time required to complete a dissertation. The process usually requires at least two years from the initial exploration of an idea to its successful completion. The following guidelines are intended to assist GSAPP students in the planning and completion of the dissertation:

1. The first step for all students should be taking the online course and exam provided by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This course is called the Human Subjects Certification Program of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. The course and exam require about four hours. Students are advised to complete this course as early as possible during their years at GSAPP.

2. From their first year in the program, many students find it helpful to begin talking to professors and other students about possible topics and ideas. Papers for courses as well as practicum experiences provide important opportunities to explore areas of interest. For some students, the dissertation is an opportunity to develop a career direction.

3. Before committing to a dissertation topic, students should choose a dissertation chairperson. (See Policy on Dissertation Chair & Committee).
Choosing a chair:

a) Students should speak with several faculty members about the faculty members’ research ideas and interests, ongoing projects, and available data. Some of the best dissertations have resulted from a student’s joining a professor’s research team.

b) Dissertation abstracts are filed in the Coordinator of Student Services office. Students should use these to identify dissertations of interest and then see the Student Services Coordinator to sign out particular dissertations.

c) In their second year, students may take one of the Dissertation Courses. They may also explore quantitative methodologies in their statistics courses, qualitative and pragmatic case designs in Dan Fishman’s courses and program evaluation in Charlie Maher’s course. Theoretical dissertations are another option that can be explored.

4. It is most expeditious if you have a Dissertation and topic and are working on your dissertation by the middle of the second semester of the second or third year. Once a Chair is chosen, the dissertation chair and the student should then collaborate in choosing the second member of the dissertation committee. Get the committee Approval Form from your Department Assistant or online at: [http://gsappweb.rutgers.edu/cstudents/forms/Dissertation%20Committee%20Form.pdf](http://gsappweb.rutgers.edu/cstudents/forms/Dissertation%20Committee%20Form.pdf) and get your committee and topic approved when you start working on your proposal.

POLICY ON DISSERTATION CHAIR & COMMITTEE MEMBER CREDENTIALS (2/1/99)

Dissertation Chair:

1. The chairperson may be any core or joint faculty member, including emeritus faculty, the director of the Center for Applied Psychology and the director of the Psychological Clinic.

2. Any visiting or non-tenured clinical faculty member who has the appropriate scholarly credentials and who has served on two or more dissertation committees as a second member may also serve as a chairperson of a dissertation committee.

3. If for reasons determined by a student’s choice of dissertation topic and the faculty member’s scholarly credentials, a faculty member outside of GSAPP or outside of Rutgers University is proposed as a chairperson, the proposed appointment must be approved by both the student’s program director and the GSAPP A&P committee.

Second Member

1. Any core, joint, visiting, or emeritus faculty member, the director of the Center for Applied Psychology and the director of the Psychological Clinic may serve as a second member of a student’s dissertation committee.
2. Any GSAPP contributing faculty member, non-GSAPP Rutgers University faculty member, or person who is a faculty member at another university may serve as a second or third dissertation committee member providing the student’s program director and the A&P Committee approve of the scholarly credentials.

3. Any person who has appropriate scholarly credentials consistent with the needs of the dissertation may serve as a second member upon approval by the dissertation committee chair, the A&P committee and the student’s program director. In the event of a discrepancy in these decisions, the director of the student’s program will have the final decision.

Third Member

1. Any core, joint or visiting faculty member, the director of the Center for Applied Psychology and the director of the Psychological Clinic may serve as a third member of a student’s dissertation committee.

2. Any GSAPP contributing faculty member, non-GSAPP Rutgers University faculty member, or person who is a faculty member at another university may serve as a second or third dissertation committee member providing the student’s program director and the A&P Committee approve of the scholarly credentials.

3. Any person with special skills that are consistent with the needs of the dissertation may serve as a third member upon approval by the dissertation committee chair and the director of the student’s program. The person need not have a history of publications, but must have a special professional skill that will contribute to the study.

DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

The faculty of the Rutgers University Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology (GSAPP) holds the doctoral dissertation to be a highly important component of the professional training of candidates for the Doctor of Psychology Degree. A wide range of topics and multiple strategies of inquiry are suitable for dissertations. The highest attainable level of quality is required. Beyond these general guidelines, the following policies and procedures are endorsed by the faculty:

1. The professional dissertation is assigned a minimum of 9 credits.

2. The dissertation committee and tentative title must be approved by the program director before a Prospectus or Proposal meeting. (Get Committee Approval Form from program administrator.)

3. The student must register for dissertation credits for each semester she or he is working on
the prospectus, proposal, and dissertation and consulting with the committee chair unless they are on internship. Three of the required 9 dissertation credits may be for a Dissertation course.

4. A 10-15 page written prospectus may be required by committee members.

5. A proposal or prospectus (according to the chair's specifications) is required of every student.

6. At least one pre-data collection meeting of the student's dissertation committee is required to discuss the proposal or prospectus. Individual chairs may opt for two or more meetings. After committee members approve the proposal or prospectus, a signed copy of it is given to the department assistant for the student's file.

7. Both the student and dissertation chair must take and pass the IRB course on the Protection of Human Subjects.

8. A dissertation that involves living human participants or their records requires that the student get approval from the IRB for all research procedures before collecting data.

9. If the dissertation involves no living human participants, an Exemption from the IRB or a letter so stating from Dr. Maurice Elias is required to be submitted with the dissertation.

All students must be registered for at least 3 credits (dissertation or other??) each Fall and Spring semester until graduation. The faculty member with whom they are working should give them a grade (S, U, or INC) at the end of every semester during which they signed up for Dissertation credit. The grade should be for the work they did with the faculty member during that semester. If an INC grade is assigned because the expected work is not done, the student should submit a Change of Grade form to the faculty member as soon as the work is done so that a grade is recorded. Even if all course work, internship, and 9 credits of dissertation have already been completed, nonetheless students must register for 3 credits of Dissertation Study during the October and/or March registration period for the Spring or Fall semester unless the oral defense has been scheduled. Students who use faculty time during the summer must register for dissertation credits in the summer. Also, it is important to remember that most GSAPP faculty are on 10-month contracts and their availability during the summer is uncertain. This should be discussed in advance with your dissertation chairperson.

TYPES OF DISSERTATIONS

The Dissertation in Professional Psychology may be developed in a variety of ways, depending upon the student's interests and professional work. The overriding requirements are that it be of a quality comparable to that of other dissertations in this University and related to the science or practice of psychology. The major types of dissertation that are acceptable are as follows (the order of presentation is of no significance):
1) The design in depth of a program of psychological strategy, methodology or techniques to achieve some goal consistent with contemporary principles of professional psychology. The program developed must demonstrate application of relevant theory, research, and consideration of similar programs reported in the literature in its design, and must include a detailed plan or guideline for the evaluation of the program developed, even though the evaluation will not be conducted as part of the dissertation. Suggested procedures or at least some discussion of issues and possible procedures for maintenance of the proposed program in terms of available resources once the program organizers have departed from the scene must be built into the program proposal.

2) An empirical study. Such a dissertation must conform to accepted procedures and methodology to the satisfaction of the dissertation committee. While often desirable, it is by no means essential that the process involve the generation of specific hypotheses and the empirical testing of predictions derived from these hypotheses. A well-designed exploratory study leading to the eventual development of hypotheses for future testing could also be acceptable. In this respect it might be noted that there are two major, quite different, ways of proceeding. There is the hypothetico-deductive method in which the logical and procedural flow is from theory to hypothesis to predictions to testing of predictions and then reevaluation of theory in light of ensuing data. Then there is the empirical-inductive method in which first a database is established following a carefully thought through approach of where to begin. These data can then be organized into empirical constructs from which a theoretical model may or may not be generated. Either strategy is acceptable provided that the reasons for its adoption are clearly stated. Examples of the two strategies are readily available throughout the literature. With adequate appropriate justification, an exact replication, or replication with justified modifications, of an already published study or completed dissertation could also be acceptable. This is a complex decision involving many variables and other considerations.

3) Program Evaluation: Evaluation of an ongoing or recently terminated program. Such a dissertation must conform to accepted procedures and methodology to the satisfaction of the dissertation committee.

4) An intensive and extensive survey of the literature in a specific problem area, perhaps with case illustrations but certainly including detailed conclusions and schema showing how the problem might be investigated empirically. The student must demonstrate a thorough awareness of methodology, feasibility, limitations, and special research problems in the area chosen even though the student does not necessarily intend to carry out the study him/herself.

5) A theoretical paper. Such a paper is expected to be substantive and of such a nature as to be generally acceptable to scholars in the chosen area. It must be integrative, creative, primarily nonspeculative and rigorous.

6) A dissertation including aspects of one or more of the above but which does not conform closely to the descriptions given. Such idiosyncratic proposals must have the written approval
of the program director in addition to the approval of the committee members. It is anticipated that this type of proposal will be rare and subject to searching scrutiny prior to approval. It does, however, leave the door open for the student who feels that he or she has something unique and "different" to contribute which does not fall readily into any of the categories outlined above but is nevertheless of scholarly value.

STRATEGIES TO PREPARE TO CHOOSE A TOPIC

One possible strategy to prepare for the dissertation is by working with a co-operative faculty member on one or more faculty research projects early in the student’s program. Often, related research questions will develop that can be pursued as dissertations. This is desirable for both students and faculty because it tends to prevent the dissertation from becoming an isolated academic exercise. Instead, the dissertation becomes part of a more comprehensive program of research that adds to knowledge in our field more than many individual projects could. It also means that instruments and relevant literature are likely to be available. Furthermore, there are advantages to several students working on related topics: they can "brainstorm" solutions to obstacles as they occur and share references and resources.

Even if you do not wish to develop a spin-off study into a dissertation, "getting your feet wet" by working on someone else's project will show you how research is done. This "insider" information could be useful in avoiding common misconceptions about research, and specifically, dissertation research. You will be "clued in" in advance to potential pitfalls.

BROWSE THROUGH PREVIOUS GSAPP DISSERTATIONS in areas that seem to be of interest. Abstracts of all completed dissertations are available in Room A309, grouped by year of completion. The GSAPP Thesis Library, located on the 2nd floor of GSAPP has a set of all dissertations completed by PsyD students (last 15 years). Please contact the Coordinator of Student Services to sign them out. Dissertations are also available through Rutgers Library: [http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/indexes/search_guides/digital_diss.shtml](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/indexes/search_guides/digital_diss.shtml)

Current students are able to borrow copies. It is also appropriate to discuss possibilities with advisers, fellow students, faculty at large or anyone else whose input into the dissertation-quest process might be germane. However, it cannot be stressed too strongly that program research in which the student works with a faculty member or a group of faculty members and perhaps other students is usually preferable to the perusal by the student of an isolated topic which is unrelated or minimally related to the area of expertise and interest of any faculty member at all.

All students are strongly urged to attend one or more dissertation defenses. For obvious reasons pertaining both to information about procedure and allaying understandable anxieties, attendance at least one dissertation defense is strongly encouraged. Concerns, issues and questions can then be discussed with the student's dissertation committee and adviser, as need be.

In so doing, it is important to remember that the dissertation is a 9-credit project and should be
capable of completion in 18-24 months.

THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

The Professional Dissertation Committee is selected by the candidate in consultation with his/her advisor and must be approved by the program director. The two committee members must be other than those on the student’s Oral Specialty Comprehensive Committee. It is the responsibility of the chairperson to ensure the appropriateness of the proposed methodology and its implementation either directly or through recourse to other individuals, committee members or others.

STEPS TO COMPLETE DIFFERENT TYPES OF DISSERTATIONS

A. For empirical studies, including needs analyses, surveys of available services, technical studies of assessment or intervention procedures, studies of client populations, program evaluations, and experimental or quasi-experimental studies:

(1) Definition of a Prospectus: Prior to writing the full literature review, IRB approval, and data collection, the student can provide each committee member with a 10-15 page prospectus that includes the statement of the problem, rationale for studying the problem, and clearly explicates the design and methodology. A reference section containing any material cited in the prospectus is to be included.

Explicit attention is needed at the prospectus or pre-proposal stage to:

- Determining how the population of interest will be identified and sampled.
- Consideration of adequacy of the sample size in terms of statistical power. This necessitates knowing what statistical tests will be applied.
- Ensuring reliability and validity of instruments that will measure the constructs under study.
- Pilot-testing and revising any instruments that will be developed by the student.
- If qualitative data will be collected, describing how reliability of any classifications or interpretations will be demonstrated; likewise, if observational data will be collected, how reliability will be assessed.
- If severe constraints on sample size are anticipated or if no suitable measures of the constructs can be identified, there must be careful consideration as to whether the project should be pursued. In addition, if the statistical analyses anticipated/planned are beyond the student’s competence, then the student should indicate plans to take coursework in the area, or again re-evaluate the feasibility of the project.

(2) Definition of a Proposal: Where is definition?? (consult your dissertation chair for specific requirements) This may include a more complete literature review, a references section and copies of any instruments that will be used. At this point, the student should know what dependent variables will be analyzed and what statistical procedures will be used. Before or
after committee approval of the proposal, the student needs to seek approval of the Institutional Review Board (human subjects approval). The IRB meets once a month during the academic year and twice during the summer.

(3) After obtaining the IRB approval, collect data

(4) Analyze the data, and write up the dissertation.

B. For Conceptual Analyses of theoretical, meta-theoretical, methodological, and axiological issues, and illustrative case studies related to conceptual issues:

(1) Definition of a Prospectus: Prior to writing the full literature review, the student can provide each committee member with a 5-10 page prospectus that outlines the area or issue to be explored including identifying the relevant literature and sub-issues. Attention should be given at this stage to identifying the arenas of relevant literature, and defining the focal issue.

(2) Submit full proposal for committee approval

(3) Write the dissertation.

C. When the committee chair decides that the student has completed the terms of the dissertation proposal and the current draft of the dissertation is suitable quality, the chair will request a first abstract for review and signature. At this stage the abstract approval is for the purpose of circulation to the GSAPP faculty. Changes may be required for a final version of the abstract.

REMEMBER THAT THE ABSTRACT WILL BE READ OVER THE YEARS BY FAR MORE SCHOLARS THAN WILL READ THE DISSERTATION.

The student may then determine when the other committee member(s) can meet and schedule the defense date. After the defense, the final version of the dissertation and abstract must be approved in writing. Celebrations at the time of the oral defense are discouraged; a more appropriate time might be when the final copies of the dissertation are approved and turned in.

Finally, attention is drawn to the possibility that faculty may expect that an acceptable article for journal submission be one outcome of the dissertation process. There is even the possibility of a journal quality manuscript, together with appropriate Appendices, substituting for the traditional dissertation format. These are matters to be carefully discussed with your advisor and dissertation chairperson well before hand.

SUGGESTED GUIDE FOR THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

The following suggested outline of content may be departed from in whatever way is required for effective presentation of a particular set of materials, as long as the dissertation committee
chairperson explicitly approves the proposed alternative. This proposed format is essentially the one, which will be used for the dissertation itself, with expansion of major sections. Part II, A will need to be modified accordingly if the thesis does not involve specific hypotheses and derived predictions. In that case, Part II, B, will not apply.

I. PROPOSAL COVER SHEET

A) Include title, the word Proposal, student’s name, lines where committee members may sign, with their names typed underneath and date.

II. INTRODUCTION (CHAPTER I)

A) Background of the problem to be investigated

This first section of the proposal usually indicates the relation of this study to the developing stream of thinking about the problem being investigated. This statement, rarely much more than 1,000 words long, discusses such issues as prior studies in the same area, field situations to which the study relates, and/or the conceptual framework out of which the study arises. This section should make clear how the study contributes to professional psychology. It should make clear what light has already been thrown upon the issues under investigation and what doubtful points remain to be investigated. If the study is to involve, hypotheses, it is in this section that the relationship between current knowledge and these specific hypotheses be made explicit. There should be a smooth flow from general background to specific theoretical formulation to the generation of specific hypotheses. It is important to explain why these particular hypotheses are selected. Irrelevant theoretical discourse and reference citations should be avoided.

B) Statement of Specific Hypotheses and Predictions

In this section, the specific hypotheses are to be clearly and precisely stated. There may be one or more. Each hypothesis should lead to one or more specific, clearly stated predictions. All crucial terms should be operationally defined. The predictions should be clearly explained and justified in terms of the hypotheses and any other relevant considerations.

III. METHOD (CHAPTER II)

This section explains precisely how the predictions are to be tested. Inevitably, some aspects of the procedure will need to be modified or developed as the study proceeds, but this statement should be as specific as possible at this time. The following points usually need to be considered:

A) Participants
What persons, documents, or other sources are to be used in gathering data for the study. The discussion should point out any sampling assumptions and any characteristics of the groups selected which limit the applicability of the findings to other groups. The proposal should discuss what generalizations are possible from a sample of the type used.

B) Procedures

The proposal should describe in detail the procedures to be used to obtain data. The discussion should point out what precautions are being taken to ensure objectivity, reliability, and validity, and the protection of the rights of subjects. Any study of reliability or validity or agreement of judges is part of the procedures and should be recorded. The study should discuss reliability and validity of tests, techniques and sources of data, especially those that depart from standard usage.

C) Treatment of data

In some studies, where treatment follows routine and well-known methods, this section may be brief: in other studies the student will need to explain at length how she/he intends to precede from the data to his/her conclusions. Any assumptions made in the study should be made clear. It is not important to list a large number of conventional assumptions, but the student should indicate what assumptions about education, human nature, or the data used are necessary and critical in interpreting the data and in accepting the findings of the study.

IV. A reference list should be included. APA reference style should be used.

PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH

If you are going to be conducting research with living humans as subjects or their records, the University and the GSAPP insist you must file the form "Request for Review and Clearance of a Project Involving Human Subjects." It must be submitted to the University-wide Committee on Human Research at the address stated on the form, and must be approved by them before you start gathering data. Allow about a month to hear the initial response to your proposal. Allow a second month for you to revise your proposal and obtain final approval. Students who are planning to initiate research involving human subjects in one of the exempt categories are required to complete and submit a form entitled "Request for Exemption from IRB Review." Students must receive approval of the request for exemption before collecting data. If the student and committee members determine that the dissertation does not involve research with human subjects, then they must submit a letter declaring this fact from Dr. Elias with the dissertation.

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL APPROVAL MEETING

The plan and/or design for the dissertation must be approved by all members of the dissertation committee at a meeting with the student before proceeding to carry out the
This meeting is scheduled by the student when, in the opinion of the Dissertation Chair, the proposal is sufficiently developed to be used as the basic plan for an acceptable dissertation. At the proposal meeting, the student is expected to defend the proposal before the two committee members and to demonstrate knowledge and background sufficient to justify undertaking the dissertation as it has been proposed. The signed dissertation proposal is viewed as documented evidence that the student is authorized to develop the dissertation as proposed. CLINICAL students give one complete copy of the Dissertation Proposal, with original signatures of all committee members, and the submitted or waiver of the IRB application form to the Dept. Assistant. Do this by October 15 of the year you apply for internship. Keep one signed copy for yourself. Signatures must be on each copy; this is your assurance that you will not be asked to do more than stipulated in the Proposal. The Dept. Assistant will send an official letter of approval to the Associate Dean’s Office and to the student, with a copy kept in the student’s file.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND SCHOOL students give one copy of the Dissertation Proposal signature page (with original signatures), the Dissertation Proposal Successfully Defended form (with original signature), and the IRB approval/exemption letter to the Department Assistant. Each Student must also give one complete copy of the Dissertation Proposal to their Dissertation Committee members—the student is urged to keep a copy of the proposal for their files. Upon receipt of the required forms and IRP approval/exemption letter, the Department Assistant will send an official letter of approval to the Student Services Coordinator and to the student, with a copy kept in the student’s file.

THE DISSERTATION DEFENSE

The oral defense of the dissertation is a scholarly public hearing; the dissertation is a public document. Any member of the GSAPP community or of the University may review the dissertation and attend the defense. Student and faculty attendance is encouraged. The Oral Defense is conducted by the Dissertation Committee and scheduled by the student through the Coordinator of Student Services Office after arranging the day and hour with Committee members. School Psychology and Organizational students must pass the Oral Specialty Comprehensive Exam before scheduling the Dissertation Defense. Clinical Psychology students must complete the Oral Specialty Comprehensive Exam before the actual Dissertation Defense.

The defense must be held at the University during hours when interested individuals might reasonably attend. The room/office to be used will be scheduled by the Coordinator of Student Services at the time the Defense Announcement is circulated. The student is responsible for placing one copy of the dissertation in the Coordinator of Student Services Office, and delivering one copy to each of the committee members a minimum of a fortnight (2 weeks) prior to the desired date of the oral defense. Failure to observe this requirement will result in postponement of the oral defense. 30 copies of the abstract, approved and signed by the committee chair, typed in the announcement format shown in Section 2 of the style guide, must also be submitted when you submit your defense copy. This announcement will be distributed...
A penultimate draft acceptable to the Chair may be used for the oral defense to minimize retyping costs. Each copy is to include an abstract of less than 350 words, the maximum acceptable by Dissertation Abstracts Index. Draft copies must conform to dissertation style and context requirements. Save yourself grief; the more closely the defense draft approximates the required format, the less likely is the necessity for extensive format changes after the defense. (See Section 2 of Dissertation Manual for style requirements.) Content revisions may be required after the Oral Defense. It is the decision of committee members as to which changes must be implemented, how, and whether the oral defense has been completed successfully by the student. The chairperson is finally responsible for ensuring the correctness of the content. Signing of the dissertation by the committee follows satisfactory completion of the oral defense and any changes required.