



**KENNESAW STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

**PHD IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM**  
**DISSERTATION GUIDELINES AND DEFENSE PROCESS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this section of the handbook is to provide doctoral candidates in the Coles College of Business at Kennesaw State University with rules and suggestions for preparing a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the PhD in Business Administration degree. These guidelines provide a general description of the following:

- a. The written dissertation proposal and final dissertation
- b. Processes related to the oral dissertation proposal defense and final dissertation defense
- c. Formatting requirements related to both the dissertation proposal and final dissertation
- d. Requirements to prepare the final dissertation for processing through Digital Commons

Successful production and defense of a dissertation is the culminating event of the student's doctoral program. The PhD in Business Administration Program provides this guide to facilitate the substantive and technical aspects of those activities. The student's dissertation committee is responsible for facilitating thoughtful and scholarly development of dissertation content.

Each doctoral student is responsible for the production of an appropriately formatted dissertation. The signatures of the student's dissertation committee members and the PhD Program Executive Director on the Dissertation Defense Outcome Form signify their assurance that the final document and the student's defense of that document meet the college standards for excellence and scholarship. All signatures are required for student program completion.

## **OVERVIEW**

The culminating product of a student's doctoral program – the dissertation – is a substantial work of research that contributes significantly to the student's field of study. Additionally, the student must orally defend his or her dissertation to his or her committee as well as to the faculty and guests invited to the defense. The main purpose of the defense is to allow an opportunity for the faculty of the college to comment on the quality of the investigation and to judge the student's ability to defend his or her conclusions.

## **DISSERTATION ALTERNATIVES**

### **Overview**

All doctoral degree candidates are required to submit a formal, approved, written dissertation to the University via Digital Commons (see section VI). In general, two alternative approaches are acceptable for the dissertation. One is the traditional single topic dissertation and the other is the two-paper approach. Each is described below.

### **Traditional Dissertation**

The traditional dissertation is a sustained and systematic piece of research that incorporates a logical line of arguments, is supported by evidence that typically is based upon analysis of empirical data, and contains arguments and conclusions relevant to a particular topic or set of hypotheses. For quantitative studies, the dissertation should reflect a high level of theoretical conceptualization and the objective is to test the proposed theory using a scientific approach. For qualitative studies, the dissertation should reflect emerging questions and procedures. The objective is to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a human or business problem. The dissertation is usually divided into coherent chapters that link together in a logical manner. Each chapter should contribute to the advancement of the stated objective or premise of the dissertation research, and when taken together, all chapters form an integrated whole. While the length of the dissertation will vary, the usual length is between 100 and 200 pages.

### **Two-Paper Dissertation**

The two-paper dissertation is similar in many ways to the traditional dissertation. It too is a sustained and systematic piece of research conducted following the scientific method. The primary difference is the organization of the dissertation, which involves two article-length essays, each a separate study but both related to a single research idea or stream. Examples of the two-paper dissertations include:

Advertising, Cognition and Sensory Perception

Essay 1: The Effects of Advertising Copy on Sensory Thoughts

Essay 2: How and When Visual Stimuli Facilitate Sensory Experience

Do Strategic Committees Matter?

Essay 1: Predicting Strategic Committees

Essay 2: Strategic Committees and Firm Performance

## Antecedents and Outcomes of the Investment in Internal Auditing and the Moderating Role of Family Business Culture

Essay 1: Family Involvement, Investment in Internal Auditing, and the Moderating Role of Family Business Culture

Essay 2: Investment in Internal Auditing, Family Business Outcomes, and the Moderating Role of Family Business Culture

## Understanding Identity Signaling for Products

Essay1: Brand Prominence in Identity Signaling: Conspicuously vs. Inconspicuously Branded Products

Essay 2: Interactions between Signaler and Recipient: Negative Consequences of Signaling

Note that while the focus of the two-paper dissertation is on completing two or more papers on a related topic, when taken as a whole the work appears as a single, coherent document related to a single research stream. While the length of the dissertation will vary, the usual length is between 80 and 150 pages.

## General Considerations

Both traditional and two-paper dissertations should embody something original. Originality may lie in the discovery or development of material or theories not previously used, or it may lie in an extension or application of a theory, concept or method in a manner not used previously. Whatever approach is taken, the dissertation research is expected to add something new to our understanding of the particular problem studied. In essence, each dissertation completed for the PhD in Business Administration Program should make a unique contribution to knowledge.

Both the traditional and two-paper alternatives are acceptable. The choice of a particular alternative is based upon discussions between the student and his or her dissertation committee. Topics for the dissertation research should be selected and pursued after entering the PhD Program. Prior studies are not considered acceptable for the dissertation topic research, although a student may build upon or extend a previous area of interest.

A final consideration is that data for dissertation research must be collected during the program after a sound theoretical foundation has been established. Students may not proceed with data-collection efforts or execute any aspect of their study until they have a formally approved dissertation proposal.

## **DISSERTATION STRUCTURE**

All dissertation formats will have the same front sections as indicated below, except where noted:

- Title Page
- Copyright Page
- Signature Page (1 page as placeholder)
- Dedication/Acknowledgments (optional as desired)
- Abstract (Required for all dissertation styles. For two-paper dissertations this should summarize both papers)
- Table of Contents
- List of Tables and/or List of Figures
- Chapter structure as noted below for the particular dissertation style

### **Structure for the Traditional Dissertation**

The following chapter contents represent minimal expectations. Further specifications are to be provided by the dissertation committee.

Chapter 1 – Introduction – Clear statement of the problem being investigated, the background that explains the problem, and the reasons for conducting the research. These arguments should be supported by relevant extant research to provide context and a discussion of how the work differs from previous studies. A brief summary of the research design and general methods used should also be provided.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review – A comprehensive review of the relevant research on which the dissertation is based. This should include the identification of research questions, introduction of theory supporting model and hypothesis development.

Chapter 3 – Methodology – A detailed description of how the problem was studied, what procedures, variables and measures were used, and what data were employed.

Chapter 4 – Data Analysis and Findings – An objective presentation of the findings and explanation of what was found. The section should follow a logical sequence supported by tables and figures that best present the findings that answer the question or hypotheses under investigation.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research – An interpretation of what the results mean, specifically in the context of what was already known about the topic. It is

important to link this interpretation back to the Introduction and Literature Review by way of the question(s) or hypotheses posed. Indicate how the results relate to prior research (i.e., do they confirm, extend or contradict previous findings). Most significantly, the discussion should explain how the research has advanced the extant body of knowledge in the area. Practical applications of the results are desirable. It is also important to acknowledge the limitations of the research and suggest avenues for future exploration.

References

Appendices

### **Structure for the Two-paper Dissertation**

The general content of the two-paper dissertation should be similar to that of the traditional dissertation. Please refer to the minimal requirements above, with the following specifications.

\*Chapter 1 – Introduction/Literature Review – A comprehensive review of the relevant research on which the dissertation is based. This should include the identification of research questions that motivate the two essays. This review should introduce both essays and summarize the relationship between paper 1 and paper 2 and provide a summary of the contribution to the research area.

Chapter 2 – (Paper 1) Abstract for paper 1, specific literature review, theory, model and hypotheses, methodology, data analysis, and findings, discussion, limitations, future research, conclusion, and references.

Chapter 3 – (Paper 2) Abstract for paper 2, specific literature review, theory, model and hypotheses, methodology, data analysis, and findings, discussion, limitations, future research, conclusion, and references.

\* The extent of the literature review provided in this section may vary based on committee preference. If a comprehensive literature review is not provided, the literature review provided in each paper should be substantive. Regardless of the extent of the literature review, this section must at a minimum identify the research questions that motivate the two essays and summarize the relationship between paper 1 and paper 2.

*Note: Students may also choose a qualitative research design or a mixed methods design, in which case the research strategy and outline would differ.*

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL**

### **Role of the Dissertation Committee**

The dissertation committee guides the student throughout the dissertation proposal process and is the key arbitrator for the proposal prior to the oral defense. The dissertation committee typically consists of three members: 1) the dissertation chair, 2) the second supervisor, and 3) the reader. The dissertation chair and second supervisor are expected to provide significant mentoring, including timely written and verbal guidance to the student during the preparation for the proposal defense.

The reader, who serves as an external evaluator, is also a voting member of the committee and is appointed by the PhD Program Executive Director at the point of dissertation proposal submission, in consultation with the discipline Department Chair/School Director and Discipline Lead. The dissertation committee, including the reader, must agree that the proposal meets the written proposal guidelines and that the topic and approach are appropriate to earn the award of a doctoral degree in business and the student's academic discipline.

### **Evaluation of the Dissertation Proposal**

The evaluation of the dissertation proposal begins with the written proposal being assessed by the dissertation chair and second supervisor in terms of its readiness to go forward as the basis of an oral defense. The approved written proposal and accompanying iThenticate report are then provided by the Program Executive Director to the reader for her/his evaluation of its readiness for an oral defense. Lastly, a public defense is held where the candidate defends the proposal and the full committee determines whether the proposal meets Program requirements. Details pertaining to the evaluation process are below.

### **Written Dissertation Proposal Evaluation**

The proposal must contain a review of the research stream and a clear discussion of the research questions to be addressed in the dissertation. Quantitative proposals should include specific hypotheses and the theoretical rationale for those hypotheses. Quantitative and Qualitative proposals must provide a detailed discussion of the methods to be used in conducting the study. This should be provided at the level of detail such that another scholar would be able to conduct the study using the information provided in the proposal. This should include a discussion of the sample to be used and the sample size needed to ensure the study's validity. For quantitative dissertations, this should include a presentation of all variables used together with their proposed operationalization/measurement. All proposals should also discuss the potential contributions of the research to both the academic and practitioner

communities. If writing a two-paper dissertation, the above information must be included for each paper.

A written proposal for both the traditional and two-paper dissertations comprises the draft introduction sections, to include “hooks”, research questions, conceptual model and hypotheses, and methods chosen, as well as a description of where the data are to be obtained (also include references and tables).

### **Proposal Submission Process**

- The dissertation committee chair and second supervisor will make the decision as to when the proposal is ready to proceed to the reader. While there is no required length, a typical dissertation proposal will be between 35 and 50 pages long and must cover all of the issues discussed above.
- Upon determination that the dissertation is ready to be sent to a reader, the dissertation chair forwards a copy of the written proposal to the PhD Program Executive Director and requests appointment of the reader.
- When submitting the dissertation proposal for reader review, the manuscript must be accompanied by a similarity report from iThenticate (or similar plagiarism software such as Turn-It-In).
- The reader serves as a voting member of the dissertation committee for the proposal defense and maintains that role for the final dissertation defense. The reader represents the Program as an objective evaluator of whether the written proposal is of acceptable quality and provides the student constructive feedback. Revisions are specified in writing and sent to the student.
- Once the revisions are completed to the satisfaction of the dissertation committee, including the reader, and a formal response to the reader has been prepared, the dissertation chair emails the PhD Program Executive Director stating the student’s readiness to defend, and attaches the committee approved dissertation proposal. The committee chair then proceeds with scheduling the oral defense and works with the committee, the student and the PhD Program to identify a defense date.
- After a defense date is identified, the written proposal will be made available to Coles College of Business faculty and PhD students at least two weeks prior to the oral proposal defense.
- Prior to conducting the study, students must complete the appropriate forms and submit them to the Institutional Review Board at Kennesaw State University to achieve approval for the study or a waiver for their study.

## **Institutional Review Board Training**

All KSU researchers (faculty, staff, and students) are required to undergo training in the ethics of research with human subjects as recommended by the Office of Human Research Protections. The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) online training program has been chosen as the official certification program for KSU-affiliated personnel. All researchers working with research participants, data, or specimens must be listed on the IRB application and must have a current CITI certificate on file in the IRB office at the time the study is submitted for review (even for studies submitted for an exemption classification).

Faculty advisors are also required to have a current certificate on file in order to supervise student research, including the research of doctoral candidates. Collaborative researchers not affiliated with KSU may submit a copy of a certificate earned at the home institution. Faculty advisors must submit a Faculty Advisor Routing Sheet, along with the student's application materials to [irb@kennesaw.edu](mailto:irb@kennesaw.edu).

Information on which training course is most appropriate for you may be found at [https://www.citiprogram.org/citidocuments/Kennesaw/Kennesaw\\_CITI\\_Instructions.htm](https://www.citiprogram.org/citidocuments/Kennesaw/Kennesaw_CITI_Instructions.htm). See <https://www.citiprogram.org> to register for the training. Certificates must be renewed every three years. Contact the IRB Administrator at [irb@kennesaw.edu](mailto:irb@kennesaw.edu), or by phone at (470) 578-2268 with questions.

## **Oral Dissertation Proposal Defense**

The purpose of the oral dissertation proposal defense is to ensure that, in the opinion of the dissertation committee, the student is prepared to proceed with conducting the study as proposed and that the study, if conducted consistent with the proposal, would meet the requirements of the PhD in Business Administration Program. The oral proposal defense, as a collegial academic event, can be expected to generate new insights and opportunities that may be advanced within the research. Faculty members and doctoral students are encouraged to attend. Only members of the committee and the Program Executive Director (or his/her appointed representative) may be present for the evaluation and vote at the conclusion of an oral defense.

The Executive Director will introduce the committee members, including the dissertation chair who will moderate the oral proposal defense. The moderator will determine the general procedures governing questioning. Normally the dissertation defense process should include a formal student presentation of their proposal, questions from the dissertation committee, as well as from the PhD faculty present for the defense. Subsequently, faculty and students in the audience should be allowed to ask questions and participate in a discussion of the proposal.

The PhD Program Executive Director and dissertation chair will serve to control the questioning and discussion, as necessary, for the conduct of a fair and professional defense.

Once the oral proposal defense is completed, the dissertation committee and the PhD Program Executive Director will adjourn to discuss the student's oral defense performance. The chair of the dissertation committee considers the categories (see below) governing the examination and leads a discussion of the student's performance. If needed, the committee can provide specific feedback and or requirements to modify the proposal on the evaluation form. This feedback becomes a formal part of the requirements for the student's dissertation. Once all committee members and the PhD Executive Director have agreed upon the category into which the student's written and oral performance falls, each person will sign the Oral Dissertation Proposal Defense Evaluation Form. At such time the candidate will be invited to join the committee where the results of the oral defense are reported by the chair.

### **Evaluation Categories**

The oral examination is an evaluation of the written dissertation proposal and the candidate's presentation and discussion of the proposal during the oral defense. The options for evaluation are:

- Pass
- Delay

A "Pass" indicates that the student has completed a satisfactory oral defense, including any additional requirements as documented on the evaluation form. A "Delay" indicates that additional work is necessary in order for the student to pass. The committee will specify in writing on the evaluation form the work required to complete the dissertation proposal examination process. In cases where the proposal examination receives a "Delay," a full vote of the committee is required to change the vote to a pass. In cases where a substantive change to the original proposal is required, a second oral defense may need to be scheduled. This decision is made by the committee with the concurrence of the PhD Executive Director to ensure continuity across the Program.

NOTE: The defense date for dissertation proposals submitted after December 1<sup>st</sup> will be scheduled the following Spring semester. Defenses are ideally scheduled between the Academic Calendar's "First Day of the Classes" and "Last Day of Classes."

## **GUIDELINES FOR DEFENSE OF THE FINAL DISSERTATION**

### **Role of the Dissertation Committee**

The dissertation chair and the second supervisor mentor the student throughout the dissertation process and are the key arbitrators of when the dissertation is ready to defend. The reader's role is, again, to be an external evaluator of the final product, as was done at the proposal defense stage. The reader should only be involved in the dissertation process once the committee has determined that the final product is ready for review. However, the reader should be consulted when a modification of the dissertation study as proposed is required. Any modifications to the study agreed to by each committee member must be provided to the PhD Program Executive Director and added to the student's record.

### **Evaluation of the Final Dissertation**

The evaluation of the dissertation begins with the written dissertation being assessed by the dissertation chair and second supervisor in terms of its readiness to go forward as the basis of an oral defense. The approved written dissertation is then provided by the PhD Program Executive Director to the reader for her/his evaluation of its readiness for an oral defense. Lastly, a public defense is held where the candidate defends the final dissertation and the full committee determines whether the dissertation meets program requirements. Details pertaining to the evaluation process are below.

### **Written Dissertation Evaluation**

The evaluation of the dissertation begins with the written manuscript being assessed by the dissertation chair and second supervisor in terms of its readiness to go forward as the basis of an oral defense. The approved written dissertation and accompanying iThenticate report are then provided by the Program Executive Director to the reader for her/his evaluation of its readiness for an oral defense. Lastly, a public defense is held where the candidate defends the final dissertation and the full committee determines whether the dissertation meets Program requirements. Details pertaining to the evaluation process are below. The final dissertation submitted for defense must be complete and formatted consistent with the guidelines provided.

### **Dissertation Submission Process**

- The dissertation committee chair and second supervisor will make the decision as to when the final document is ready to proceed to the reader. Their review should ensure that the dissertation complies with all requirements provided in this document in terms of content and formatting.

- Upon determination that the dissertation is ready to be sent to a reader, the dissertation chair forwards a copy of the written document to the PhD Program Executive Director.
- When submitting the final dissertation for reader review, the manuscript must be accompanied by a similarity report from iThenticate (or similar plagiarism software such as Turn-It-In).
- The reader, again, serves as a voting member of the dissertation committee for the final dissertation defense and represents the Program as an objective evaluator of whether the final dissertation is of acceptable quality. As with the proposal, the reader provides the student constructive feedback. Required revisions are specified in writing and sent to the student.
- Once the revisions are completed to the satisfaction of the dissertation committee and the reader, the dissertation chair emails the PhD Program Executive Director stating the student's readiness to defend, and attaches the formal response to reader comments and the committee-approved final dissertation. The dissertation committee chair then proceeds with scheduling the oral defense and works with the committee, the student and the PhD Program to identify a defense date.
- After a defense date is identified, the written final dissertation will be made available to Coles College of Business faculty and PhD students at least two weeks prior to the final oral defense.

### **Oral Final Dissertation Defense**

The purpose of the final dissertation defense is to ensure that, in the opinion of the dissertation committee, the student's dissertation meets the Program and University requirements for the dissertation portion of the doctoral program. The oral defense is a collegial academic event and can be expected to generate new insights and opportunities that may be considered as the student prepares the dissertation work for subsequent publication. Only members of the committee and the PhD Program Executive Director (or his/her appointed representative) may be present for the evaluation and vote at the conclusion of an oral defense.

The PhD Program Executive Director will introduce the committee members, including the dissertation chair who will moderate the oral defense. The moderator will determine the general procedures governing questioning. Normally the dissertation defense process should include a formal student presentation of their research and questions from the dissertation committee, as well as from the PhD faculty present for the defense. Subsequently, faculty and students in the audience should be allowed to ask questions and participate in the discussion. The PhD Program Executive Director and dissertation chair will serve to control the questioning and discussion as necessary for the conduct of a fair and professional defense.

Once the final oral defense is completed, the dissertation committee and the PhD Program Executive Director will adjourn to discuss the student's oral defense performance. The chair of the dissertation committee considers whether the final dissertation product meets the Program requirements. If additional work is needed, the committee can provide specific feedback and/or requirements to modify the final dissertation in writing. Once all committee members and the PhD Program Executive Director have agreed upon the evaluation, the candidate will be invited to join the committee, where the results of the oral defense are reported by the chair. If the committee determines that additional work is required to achieve a satisfactory dissertation a second oral defense may need to be scheduled. This decision is made by the committee with the concurrence of the PhD Program Executive Director to ensure continuity across the Program. A unanimous vote is required of all committee members and the PhD Program Executive Director prior to completing the final signature form required for graduation.

### **Additional Guidelines**

Three additional guidelines concerning authorship and data for dissertations, as well as the oral defense, are found below.

#### Authorship

In accordance with AACSB International guidelines for doctoral level degrees, the PhD in Business Administration Program expects the majority of work for the doctoral dissertation to be performed by the student. It is understood that data and ideas can come from many sources and that students will seek guidance and feedback from faculty members; however work done on the dissertation should to be completed primarily by the student. Therefore, the student should be first author on any publications that come directly from the dissertation.

#### Data

All empirical dissertation research should be analyzed by the student in conjunction with input from their dissertation committee. Exceptions must be approved by the PhD Program Executive Director.

#### Defense Presentation

As the proposal and final defense presentations are considered formal academic events, students are expected to dress professionally and display proper presentation skills. The format of the PowerPoint presentation is at the discretion of the student in agreement with his/her dissertation committee. While the length of the presentations will vary, the usual length is 30 to 40 minutes.