

University of Kentucky

Educational Leadership Studies

Guidelines for the Doctoral (PhD/EdD)
Prospectus, Qualifying Exams, Research
Proposal and Dissertation Defense

Spring 2014

Doctoral Prospectus and Qualifying Exam Guidelines

Department of Educational Leadership Studies
University of Kentucky

There are four phases of the dissertation process each student will complete. These include: 1) the Prospectus Advisement Review; 2) the Qualifying Exams; 3) the Dissertation Proposal; and 4) the Dissertation Defense or Final Exam. This document provides an overview of the process and requirements for each of these phases.

1. Prospectus Advisement Review

The purpose of the Prospectus Advisement Review is to present ideas for your dissertation research study and gain approval from your full committee to proceed toward the Qualifying Exams and to help generate potential questions for the QE. The steps in the Prospectus Advisement Review include the following.

- A. Work with your committee chair to identify your areas of interest, study topic, potential design, theoretical/conceptual framework, research questions and possible methodology.
- B. Prepare an abbreviated Research Prospectus that includes a brief paper that outlines your research interests, including the following:
 - a. significance of and need for the study,
 - b. potential theoretical/conceptual framework(s) undergirding the study topic
 - c. potential research questions, and
 - d. methodological options.
- C. Schedule a committee meeting with input from your chair. This meeting should occur during the second year of your program, generally after you have completed the first 24 to 30 hours of study (preferably before you are enrolled in EDL 792).
- D. During the Prospectus Advisement Review meeting, you will:
 - a. prepare and present a brief summary of your research interests (15 to 20 minutes);
 - b. gather input from your committee on potential study questions, frameworks and methodological approaches;
 - c. review of course work to determine gaps based on research interests and potential methodology; and
 - d. discuss format for the Qualifying Exam and potential timelines, including the time limits for the written component and timelines for the oral examination.

2. Qualifying Exams (QE)

The Qualifying Exams (QE) are completed after you have finished your coursework. You must satisfactorily complete a minimum of 42 credits of approved doctoral coursework prior sitting for your official QE. The oral examination component of the QE must be scheduled through the UK Graduate

School at least two weeks prior to the exam date. Specific timelines for scheduling the QE are provided on the Graduate School website. Students who choose to enroll in EDL 767 the semester of their QE must complete the oral examination before the end of the semester or they will be withdrawn from the class.

Written Examination

The written component of the QE includes a set of 3 to 4 questions which are developed by the student's Dissertation Committee. The questions are designed to cover leadership theory and literature covered in the EDL program as it relates to the student's topic of interest and/or specialization area. Questions are designed in such a way as to further support the student in development of a dissertation research proposal. Students are given a timeframe for which to respond to the questions (range from one to six weeks) as determined appropriate by the committee.

The steps in the written portion of the QE include the following:

- A. The Dissertation Chair will work with committee members to craft the QE questions following the prospectus meeting.
- B. The final set of questions will be provided to the student, along with the timeframe for completion of the written responses to the questions.
- C. Written responses are provided to the committee at least two weeks prior to the oral portion of the QE.
- D. Work with your committee chair to schedule your oral component of the QE.

For students who were accepted into the program as an EdD prior to 2012, the written component of the QE can be the Dissertation Research Proposal. The steps in the written portion of the QE for this option include:

- A. Work with your committee chair to more fully develop a Research Proposal based on the feedback from your committee's during the Prospectus Advisement Review. Prepare a Research Proposal that includes 1) an introduction, 2) a review of literature, and 3) research questions and/or hypotheses, methodology, and procedures (more specific detail in the next section). This is typically Chapters 1 through 3 of the dissertation.
- B. Work with your committee chair to schedule the oral portion of your QE.
- C. All members of your committee must receive your written Research Proposal at least two weeks prior to your Qualifying Exam.

Oral Examination

The oral component of the qualifying exam includes a brief presentation of the written work, followed by a discussion and questions by the student's committee members. The focus of the questions is on the written examination, however committee members may also ask questions from coursework that is related to your research topic and/or methodological approach.

- E. During your oral portion of the QE you will:
 - a. present a brief summary of your written work (15-20 minutes), and
 - b. defend your written work.
- F. The committee will vote on whether you have successfully defended your written work. For students who submit the research proposal as their written examination, the committee will determine needed revisions to proceed with your dissertation research and will provide a timeframe within which you must correct your full study proposal. Your chair will approve the final revision with input from other committee members as needed.
- G. You must complete the IRB process prior to beginning your independent research.

Research Proposal

All students must have an approved written research proposal outlining the dissertation study. For students who participated in the traditional QE process, a separate meeting of the committee will be conducted to give the student an opportunity to present their research proposal and get feedback from the committee. This is not an official meeting through the Graduate School so will be scheduled internally with your committee. The recommended format and content for the research proposal are provided below.

Chapter 1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to make a case for the significance of the problem to be addressed by your study, to contextualize your study, and provide a brief introduction to the study components. Sections include:

- Introduction – VERY BRIEF introduction to the following
 - purpose and focus of the study
 - significance
 - how you propose to conduct the study
 - how the study will contribute to knowledge and practice in educational leadership
- Statement of the Problem
 - Describe the issue or problem to be addressed within the broader educational context
 - BRIEF summary of the literature to substantiate the study
- Purpose and Significance of the Study
 - study purpose
 - rationale for why the study is important
 - how the study contributes to knowledge and practice in educational leadership
- Research Question and Design and presentation of hypothesis if appropriate
 - state research questions
 - brief overview of proposed methods, setting, sample
 - potential limitations and/or weaknesses of the proposed study
- Segue - information on the organization of the proposal and brief summary of the contents of the remaining two chapters

KEY POINT: BE BRIEF

Chapter 2. Literature review

The purpose of this chapter is to present your proposed study within the context of previous research. This includes a synthesis of seminal and empirical (data-based) literature using your variables of interest. It is not a bibliography! You should make sure to justify how your study addresses specific gaps or inconsistencies in the literature. If appropriate and at the direction of your committee, you can also present your theoretical or conceptual framework for the study.

Sections can include:

- Introduction
 - briefly reintroduce proposed study
 - provide an overview of the content, scope, and organization of the literature review
 - describe the strategy you used to conduct your literature search
- Present the review of literature in an organized fashion to make sure it is:
 - clearly connected to your problem statement, proposed research questions and/or hypotheses
 - include recent primary sources of empirical studies from scholarly journals
 - organize logically by theme, subtopic, or variable and/or move from broad to narrow in topic
 - synthesize findings across studies - can include a comparison/contrast by research outcomes, perspectives, or methods
 - denote specific gaps, debates or disagreements in the literature, as well as technical concerns with studies, etc.
- If appropriate, present theoretical/conceptual framework to be tested or used to frame/inform the study design
- Summary – briefly summarize what you have said
- Segue – present what will be discussed in the following chapter

Chapter 3. Research methods

This chapter presents the research methods you plan to undertake with sufficient detail so your committee can determine your level of understanding of the methods you propose to use. Sections can include:

- Introduction
 - Briefly reintroduce your study
 - Restate proposed research questions, hypotheses, and variables of interest (if relevant)
 - Present the organization of chapter
- Research design:
 - Describe research approach (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, etc.) and design you plan to use
 - Present rationale for design/approach
 - Cite appropriate methodological literature
- Research setting/context:
 - Describe proposed research setting and provide rationale
- Research sample and data sources:
 - Describe the proposed sample
 - Describe how participants will be selected

- include population, sampling frame, and sampling procedures for quantitative or mixed methods designs
- Describe how the rights of participants will be protected
- Instruments and Procedures (instruments should be included in the Appendix):
 - Quantitative and Mixed Methods:
 - Describe your proposed instrument(s)
 - Gives name/source of published instruments
 - Present instrument reliability and validity
 - Qualitative:
 - Describe instruments to be used (interview, focus group or observation protocols)
- Data collection
 - Describe proposed data collection methods and procedures
- Data analysis
 - Describe proposed methods and statistical tools (if applicable)
- Role of the Researcher
 - Describe role of the researcher in planning and conducting the study
 - Discuss researcher assumptions, beliefs, and biases (if applicable)
- Present a timeline for the study including:
 - IRB submission
 - Data collection period
 - Data analysis period
 - Proposed defense date

BACK MATTER

- Appendices:
 - Proposed Instruments
 - Additional supportive tables and figures
 - Resume, Curriculum Vita or Biographical Sketch
- References

3. Dissertation Defense

The Dissertation Defense is completed after you have completed your independent research and is the final step in your doctoral program. The steps for your Dissertation Defense include the following.

- A. The committee chair (and individual committee members as appropriate) provides guidance while you are conducting your independent research. It is your responsibility to conduct the research and notify your chair and/or other committee members of your progress and areas of need.
- B. Work with your committee chair to determine when you are ready to schedule your Dissertation Defense.
- C. You must remain continuously enrolled in a 2-credit residency course (EDL 767) until you defend your dissertation. All students must complete a minimum of two semesters of residency.
- D. The Dissertation Defense must be scheduled through the UK Graduate School at least two weeks prior to the exam date.
- E. Work with your dissertation chair and the DGS to identify potential external examiners for your Dissertation Defense.
- F. All the members of your dissertation committee must receive your written Dissertation at least two weeks prior to your exam.
- G. During your Dissertation Defense you will:
 - a. present a brief summary of your dissertation research study (15 to 20 minutes).
 - b. defend your research and subsequent findings and implications.
- H. The committee will vote on whether you have successfully defended your research study. If the committee determines there are revisions needed, you will be given a timeframe (up to 60 days but before the end of semester deadline as posted by the UK Graduate School) to correct your written Dissertation.
- I. You must work directly with the UK Graduate School for final preparation of your Dissertation. Doctoral students and candidates should review the Graduate School Bulletin each year to remain informed about their responsibilities and time limits (<http://www.research.uky.edu/gs/CurrentStudents/bulletin.html>). Information in the Bulletin is subject to change—not knowing is not an acceptable response to missed deadlines.

IMPORTANT: “All degree requirements for the doctoral must be completed with five years following the semester or summer session in which the candidate successfully completes the qualifying examination” (Graduate School Bulletin, 2011, p. 54).

A complete set of guidelines for your Dissertation are provided in the next Section.

Doctoral Dissertation Guidelines

Department of Educational Leadership Studies
University of Kentucky

Front Matter

Specific requirements for the front matter of the dissertation can be found on the graduate school website.

Chapter 1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to make a case for the significance of the problem addressed by your study, contextualize your study, and provide a brief introduction to the study components.

Sections can include:

- Introduction – briefly introduce
 - purpose and focus of the study
 - significance
 - how study was conducted
 - how it contributes to the knowledge and practice
- Statement of the Problem
 - issue or problem to be addressed within the broader educational context
 - brief summary of the literature to substantiate the study
- Purpose and Significance of the Study
 - study purpose
 - rationale for why study is important
 - how the study contributes to knowledge and practice in educational leadership (i.e., significance)
- Research Question and Design and presentation of hypothesis is appropriate
 - the research questions
 - brief overview of the methods, setting, and sample
 - potential weaknesses of the study
- Segue - information on the organization of the dissertation including brief summary of the contents of the remaining chapters

KEY POINT: BE BRIEF

Chapter 2. Literature review

The purpose of this chapter is to present your study within the context of previous research. This includes a synthesis of empirical (data-based) literature using your variables of interest. It is not a bibliography! You should make sure to justify how your study addresses specific gaps or inconsistencies in the literature. If applicable and at the direction of your committee, you can also present your theoretical or conceptual framework for the study.

Sections can include:

- Introduction

- overview of the content, scope, and organization of the literature review
- the strategy you used to conduct your literature search
- Present the Review of Literature in an organized fashion to make sure to address the following
 - clearly connect problem statement, research questions and/or hypotheses
 - include seminal work in the area of study along with recent primary sources of empirical studies from scholarly journals
 - historical perspective on the development of thought in the field as appropriate
 - organize information logically by theme, subtopic, or variable and/or move from broad to narrow in topic (e.g., think funnel)
 - synthesize findings from across studies (can include comparison/contrast by research outcomes, perspectives, or methods)
 - denote specific gaps, debates or disagreements in the literature, as well as technical concerns with studies, etc.
- Present the theoretical/conceptual framework being tested or used to frame/inform the study design
- Summary of what you have said
- Segue - what will be discussed in the following chapters

Chapter 3. Research methods

This chapter presents the research methods you undertook in such a way that another person can replicate the study. Sections can include:

- Introduction - Brief
 - reintroduce study
 - restate research questions, hypotheses, and variables (if relevant)
 - present the organization of chapter
- Research design
 - research approach used in the study
 - rationale for the design/approach
 - cite appropriate methodological literature
- Research setting/context
 - research setting and rationale
 - background information on program, school, district, etc.
- Research sample and data sources
 - type of sample used
 - how participants were selected
 - include population, sampling frame, and sampling procedures for quantitative or mixed methods designs
 - characteristics and size of sample (all)
 - quantitative/mixed methods
 - how the rights of participants were protected (reference research ethics and the IRB)
- Instruments and Procedures (all instruments should be included in the Appendix)
 - Quantitative*
 - type of instrument(s)
 - name/source of published instruments

- for self-developed measures, information on how it was developed and tested (e.g., cognitive testing, field testing)
- concepts measured
- calculation of scores/values
- pilot or field test of study components and results
- instrument reliability and validity
- Qualitative*
 - instruments used (interview, focus group or observation protocols)
 - how instruments were developed including the conceptual grounding for those instruments
- *Mixed Methods studies must include appropriate components listed within the Quantitative and Qualitative sections above
- Data collection
 - data collection methods and procedures
 - details related to how, when, where, and by whom
 - details on reliability process if multiple data collectors are used
- Data analysis
 - methods and statistical tools (if applicable)
 - measures taken to address reliability and validity
 - results of field test, if applicable
- Role of the Researcher
 - role of the researcher in planning and conducting the study
 - researcher assumptions, beliefs, and biases (if applicable)
- Summary of what you have said
- Segue - what will be discussed in the following chapters

Chapter 4¹. Findings (In Qualitative Studies) or results (In Quantitative or Mixed Method Studies)

This chapter presents a summarization and analysis of the data from the study. It includes the presentation of findings/results of statistical and/or narrative data. Sections can include:

- Introduction
 - reintroduce your study
 - restate research questions, hypotheses if appropriate
 - summary of how data were analyzed, including appropriate rationale
 - organization of chapter; the chapter should be organized in a way that matches research questions and hypothesis
- Quantitative
 - measures, including reliability and validity
 - results from simple (descriptive, non-parametric) to complex (parametric, regression models)
 - tables and figures as appropriate

¹ It is possible that results may be presented in more than one chapter, particularly if you have multiple components of a study.

- Qualitative
 - present findings in a way that builds on problem, research questions, and design and/or according to research questions, themes, or other appropriate organizational scheme
 - present “narrative” data in the form of quotes, stories, and “thick description” present connections and synthesis of data via text or visual displays
- Summary of what you have said
- Segue - what will be discussed in the following chapters

CHAPTER 5: Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter provides an interpretation of the findings/results and presents implications for policy and practice, such as action planning for educational improvement.

- Introduction:
 - reintroduce study
 - restate research questions, hypotheses
 - present organization of chapter; the chapter should be organized in a way that matches research questions and hypothesis
- Summary of the study
 - provide a brief description of the study including overview of the problem, purpose statement, research questions/hypotheses, methodology, and summary of major findings
- Discussion
 - provide in-depth interpretation, analysis, and synthesis of the results/findings
 - relate results/findings to the larger body of literature and the conceptual/theoretical framework for your study
 - present interpretive themes or patterns from analysis (qualitative)
 - information on contribution of the study to field
 - limitations of the study and generalizability of the findings (if applicable)
- Implications:
 - provide recommendations related to policy and practice
 - provide recommendations for future research including topics for further closer examination
- Concluding statement:
 - brief summary and final “take-away message”

BACK MATTER

- Appendices:
 - Instruments
 - IRB approval
 - Additional supportive tables and figures
 - Curriculum Vita, Resume or Biographical Sketch
- References