Guidelines for Developing the Research Proposal and Dissertation

2015
SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION

The dissertation is the culminating experience for the doctoral Associate. In addition to the usual expectation of a lengthy, complex and sophisticated product, at WCIU we expect a dissertation that will have a practical and useful application for your NGO. In that sense, your dissertation will be consistent with the overall purpose of WCIU’s program, which is the improvement of the effectiveness of NGOs in their involvement in International Development.

The dissertation is a kind of book based on a major research project requiring a variety of skills, including synthesis and analysis, logical reasoning and an appropriate writing style. The writing of a dissertation is considerably more demanding than any previous writing assignments you may have had. Ideally, a dissertation presented to WCIU sets forth a proposed solution to an important problem in the Associate’s work setting within an NGO, leading to the improvement of practice.

The dissertation topic should be a selection from a prioritized list of research problems or needs that has been developed from the Associate’s experience, the Major Advisor’s area of interest, and the needs or problems found within the NGO. Since the degree will be in International Development, it is essential that the chosen topic be within a specialization recognized in the academic study of International Development.

Getting Started

To accomplish this, begin thinking about your dissertation continuously through your first months in the program. Read a few dissertations related to your interests, and systematically read current issues of two or more journals. You should also pay particular attention to the research literature cited in the textbooks and reference books used in your courses. Take notes on the research literature that appears interesting or important to you.

When taking notes from the literature, be certain to obtain a complete bibliographic citation. Keep such notes on index cards or in a computer program so that you can refer to them and, if needed, to return easily to the original source. Such a set of notes will be invaluable, not only when you officially begin the dissertation process, but also for the preparation of other assignments.

When reviewing research, it is best to pay particular attention to how the author(s) went about stating the purpose or problem, developing the conceptual framework, reviewing the literature, formulating research questions, developing a methodology, and presenting findings and conclusions. One should pay special attention to the recommendations for further research and the improvement of practice. Remember, while the outcome of your dissertation (e.g., improved delivery system, process, policy, procedure) must be of practical value, your approach and conceptualization of your problem must also be theoretically sound.

Roles of Your Committee Members

You should expect to act as the facilitator for your own dissertation committee, communicating frequently to achieve the greatest amount of help and advice from the
members. It is especially important that the dissertation committee be kept informed of all developments as your project is conceptualized, designed, and carried out.

As a general rule, all committee members should be committed to a two-week turn-around on dissertation documents. This means that an oral or written response will be communicated to the Associate within two weeks of the date the document was received by the committee member. This does not mean two weeks from when it was mailed. Associates should wait three to four weeks before calling the addressee to determine the whereabouts of the response. In particularly busy times, at the end of a term or when a committee member has been out of town or has been ill, turn-around time may be longer. Associates are asked to be understanding of these circumstances.

Other sources of assistance that may be useful are WCIU contacts in other countries. The international network implicit in the University structure may have resource people, especially those whose field of expertise is related to the dissertation topic or chosen methodology, in many parts of the world.

**Selecting a Topic**

The first challenge in selecting a topic is to define a problem that has sufficient scope and depth to constitute a major research project. A potential problem for some Associates is that they carry over notions of appropriate topics from their successful experiences with term papers, or even a baccalaureate or masters thesis. While the process is similar (problem, proposal, conduct of project, write up the project), a dissertation is almost always longer, more comprehensive, and more significant than previous papers. While it is possible that a dissertation can grow out of a previously explored topic, it is a much more involved and extensive research project than any of these previous efforts.

The topic should involve a substantial and recognized problem that stems from a recognized and fully conceptualized need for improvement in development practice in the Associate’s work setting. In other words, we prefer that it be related to your own NGO. It should indicate the development of an explicit plan for implementation and evaluation of the outcome and/or recommendations for action. The gathering of data relevant to the problem and the analysis of those data are essential to a dissertation.

It may be helpful to consider that a dissertation is not intended to be (1) a research project pursued merely for the sake of research and having little, if any, potential for immediate application; (2) merely the development or compilation of a product, such as a film, book, handbook, or course of instruction; (3) solely a survey or description of existing practices; (4) historical research with no application to practice; or (5) a simple comparison of two or more groups of subjects to test the effectiveness of an experimental technique.

A dissertation is developed around a thesis. A thesis is “a proposition stated or put forward for consideration, especially one to be proved or maintained against objections.” The thesis should state a proposition with some hypothesis or theory about which the associate possesses some preliminary opinion, based upon evidence, which eventually is to be demonstrated by the assembly and analysis of the additional data from the research. The doctoral dissertation must provide new knowledge, making an original contribution to the chosen field.
The Associate’s dissertation committee can be expected to provide assistance in the choice of a topic. It is often helpful to consult colleagues, supervisors, or administrators for suggestions or reaction to ongoing institutional problems which might be suitable for dissertation research.

What is required in a dissertation?

Normally, you will be expected to demonstrate some or all of the following:

Evidence of scholarly research. Examples are using search facilities in the library (CD ROMS, book and journal indices, etc.), and showing evidence that a wide range of sources have been located and sensibly used. Original materials obtained from the use of interviews and questionnaires are another possibility.

Evidence of independent thought. This can be provided by comments on the theories and opinions of scholars, analysis of interview and questionnaire data, etc.

Interpretation of evidence. Pure description of an event, situation, opinion, etc. without explanation or analysis is not sufficient. Similarly, quotations in your dissertation should not be used simply for their own sake. One way of using them is to support a particular viewpoint or argument. You are not rewarded simply for reproducing the words of other writers. If tables are included, make sure that you give the source of the data and that you use them to support an argument, comment on a theory, etc. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that mere description alone is not sufficient: you must analyze, evaluate, or interpret your data and information. A conceptual understanding of the topic chosen, using an appropriate theoretical framework, should be evident. Thus, when choosing a topic, you should remember that a central purpose is to allow the application of appropriate theory.

Clarity and lucidity of argument and expression in the presentation of your findings. This aspect is very important, but it can present special difficulties for students whose first language is not English. Here we are not looking initially for perfection in either grammar or sentence construction, but examiners must be able to understand what you are trying to say.

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is using the work of other people without acknowledging that you have done so. It can take a number of forms. One example is reproducing a table or diagram without giving the source. Another is directly copying one or more sentences and not saying that these are not your own words. A more frequent form is paraphrasing the work of somebody else and passing it off as your own. An extremely serious form is using all, or a major part, of another dissertation and claiming it as your own, or downloading material from an Internet website and claiming it as your own work.

Thus plagiarism is a deliberate attempt to deceive an examiner and it will be penalized. The penalties and procedures associated with cheating are set out in the student handbook in the Academic Catalog. All of the above examples are legitimate as long as they are properly referenced.
Referencing

Make sure that you follow the parenthetical citations-reference list style throughout your dissertation. This citation style is also referred to as “author-date style, because the author’s name and the date of publication are the critical elements for identifying sources” (Turabian 2013, 216). For technical details of this citation style, refer to A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers, 8th edition, by Kate L. Turabian (revised by Wayne C. Booth, et al), chapters 18 and 19.

In case of a comment is needed, use footnote style throughout your dissertation.

Presentation

Make use of WCIU’s Dissertation Template as you write. For other form and style issues, reference A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 8th edition.

Procedures for Dissertation Development and Approval

The dissertation development consists of the following steps in sequence: (1) the prospectus, (2) the research proposal, (3) the conduct of the actual project, and (4) the final dissertation.

Prospectus

The first step is the development of a prospectus, a two to three page statement of the concept of the dissertation and the tentative procedures to be followed. A prospectus should clearly set forth, 1) the proposed title of the project; 2) the proposed thesis, with an explanation of the nature and significance of the problem or issue to be studied; 3) research questions to be answered; 4) the type of problem-solving methodology to be used, in as specific terms as possible, and a brief explanation of tentative procedures; and 5) how anticipated outcomes may be applied to addressing the problem and improving practice in the work setting.

The major purpose of the prospectus is to enable the Associate’s committee members to determine if the concept is appropriate for a dissertation, if the topic is manageable and feasible, and if the Associate has the potential capability and knowledge to conduct the study. The committee members should respond to the Associate with approval or suggestions for revision.

Once the suggestions of all committee members have been incorporated and the prospectus has been accepted by the entire committee, the prospectus should become the basis for the development of the Doctoral Learning Contract in its fullest form. Typically, this is done during Research Design, the final course of the Standard Courses of the Ph.D. program.
SECTION 2 - RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The next step is to develop the dissertation/research proposal; it should consist of two chapters: the **Introduction** (Chapter 1), and the **Review of Literature** (Chapter 2). These two chapters will basically become the first two chapters of the final dissertation, which may include presentation of research data (Chapter 3), data analysis (Chapter 4), and conclusions and recommendations (Chapter 5). Alternatively, some prefer to devote a whole chapter on Methodology and Procedures (Chapter 3) where appropriate rationale for the chosen methodology is presented, including *research strategy, data collection and analysis, access and reliability, ethical issues, and research limitations*. In any case, the section or chapter on Methodology should be clearly and adequately delineated to include the above mentioned areas.

A research proposal is a formal document submitted to the Graduate Programs Committee for review and approval, the format of which is the same as the *WCIU Dissertation Template*, and should include all relevant sections of the following outline:

**TITLE PAGE**

The Research Proposal/Dissertation title should be a concise and accurate description of what your dissertation is about, with the problem and type of investigation clearly stated. The title can be changed as the dissertation is developed. It often appears in two parts; e.g., “Dynamics of the Sojourners’ Association in Contemporary China: A Historical and Missiological Investigation.” See Appendix A for a sample proposal title page.

**CONTENTS**

It is sometimes referred to as Table of Contents. Consult *WCIU Dissertation Template* on format.

**CHAPTER 1**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Statement of the Problem**

A brief description is made of the setting in which the study will be conducted. The problem to be addressed is clearly stated in a declaratory sentence, and a statement explaining the purpose of the research project is included. The statements about the subject to be investigated and the purposes of doing so should be sufficient to provide context but should not be so detailed or so full of generalities as to overshadow the subsequent sections that explain the steps to be taken in the project. A conceptual base from which the study flows should be developed in this section.

**Research Questions**

In this section, the critical issues pertaining to the problem should be explored more thoroughly than in the prospectus. This exploration should lead to some specific research
questions to which answers will be sought. In some cases, research hypotheses will be formulated. They may be based on findings from previous research, on the observations and experiences of the Associate, or from situations that are significant within the Associate’s NGO or work setting. The function of this section is to expand on the nature of the problem and the types of information needed to address it.

**Delimitations**
These define the scope of what will be studied and what will be excluded from the study based on whether or not certain issues are closely relevant to the research topic.

**Assumptions**
The assumptions are the “foundational perspectives for the study. They are not the issues to be addressed in the research.” And assumptions are often based on commonly accepted perspectives or “established precedent research” that provide essential perspectives with which readers are able to interpret the study appropriately (Elliston 2011, 27).

**Limitations of the Study**
This section should include a description of any conditions, restrictions, or constraints that may affect the validity of the study.

**Definition of Terms**
Any terms that are technical or specific to the area under investigation or that are given meaning in the study other than the way they are ordinarily used should be defined in this section.

**Methodology and Procedures**
It is essential that the research methodology to be used should be stated. Procedures should be outlined in clear, precise, sequential statements about how the project will be conducted. In many dissertations, it is helpful (if not essential) to seek assistance from some authoritative or competent source for validation or verification of instruments, statistical procedures, or the like to be used. Depending on the overall methodology, plans should be submitted on such matters as the sources of data and how they will be collected, sampling procedures if they are to be used, and the nature of contemplated survey instruments. The plan should also include a process for the identification of relevant dependent and independent variables, if appropriate, and how they will be used to give direction to the study. The plan must also describe how the data will be treated and how the data will be related back to each research question.

**Theoretical Framework**
Models and theories are often used to explain and understand phenomena in social science research. The theoretical framework consists of models and theories that are relevant to your research, and it provides a structure under which your research project is supported. Most social science researches deal with problems that are interdisciplinary in nature, which would often require the researcher to develop the theoretical framework out of several relevant disciplines.
**Implications for Improvement of Development Practice**
This section should include a discussion of the expected or anticipated implications of the study for the improvement of development practice.

**Significance of the Study**
Significance of the study often identifies the contribution of the study to the existing body of knowledge, and the immediate and future application of the study to the field work. It also anticipates the potential personal and corporate impact.

**Implementation and Dissemination**
Plans should be outlined for the implementation (if possible) and evaluation of the results. The Associate also describes how the results and recommendations of the study will be submitted to appropriate persons within the organization or institution and disseminated to outside organizations, including professional groups and publications.

**CHAPTER 2**
**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In this chapter, you will review what has been done previously about your research topic, (1) to demonstrate the significance of your research issue, (2) to identify gaps in the existing knowledge that your research can fill, (3) to assess relevant theories and perspectives to establish evaluative tool or framework for your research data. Remember that review of literature is more than a summary of the precedent research. It should include “an evaluation of the relevance of the research from the perspective of the researcher’s central research issue and the contributions it may make to the present study” (Elliston 2011, 45).

**REFERENCE LIST**

WCIU requires Reference List (Author-Date) style in documentation systems. References List entries should only include the works cited in the proposal. It is the same for the dissertation. If you decide to include works you consulted but not cited in your proposal or dissertation, you may create an Other References section following Reference List.

**Proposal Approval Process**
A first draft of the proposal should be sent to the members of the committee. Procedures for obtaining the consensus of the entire committee will vary somewhat, depending on the committee’s preferred method of working. In any event, it is customary for there to be considerable interaction among the committee members and the Associate regarding the proposal, which represents a kind of blueprint or model for the final dissertation. It is quite likely that more than one draft will be needed before the committee gives final approval. The proposal should be no less than 40 pages in length.
After there is committee consensus on the proposal, the Associate should submit it to the PhD Program Office. After review by the Graduate Programs Committee, the Associate will be notified in writing of official approval.
SECTION 3 - DISSERTATION

Reference *Dissertation Template*. The recommended length of the dissertation is between 37,500 to 62,500 words (~150 to 250 pages), with format and styles conforming to the *Dissertation Template*. 
SECTION 4 - DISSEMINATION

Associates may consider publication of dissertations with WCIU Press. For details about publication, contact WCIU Press at wciupress@wciu.edu
APPENDIX A

SAMPLE TITLE PAGE FOR THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

A Comparison of the Cognitive Styles of Deaf Students with the Cognitive Styles of Hearing Students

By

Thomas E. Griffin

A Dissertation Proposal
Presented to the Faculty of
William Carey International University
Pasadena, California

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved and Recommended by

__________________
Major Advisor

__________________
Committee Member

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Committee Member

January 2011
APPENDIX B

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING ABSTRACTS

The abstract should be

1. Informative rather than descriptive,
2. Approximately 500 to 600 words for the dissertation,
3. As concise as possible, and
4. Neither critical, nor evaluative.

The abstract should include

1. A statement of the problem and the purpose of the project,
2. Research questions and hypotheses, if any,
3. A description of samples and method of selection, if utilized,
4. Research methodology employed and a summary of procedures,
5. A summary of results and conclusions (dissertation only). Here, chapter summary is recommended for non-English dissertations.
6. Recommendations of the study (dissertation only).

The abstract should not include

1. Discussion of, or reference to, the literature review,
2. Detailed elaboration on the purpose of the dissertation and development of hypotheses or research questions,
3. Rationale for the treatment or procedures selected,
4. Detailed descriptions of statistical analyses,
5. Detailed discussion of implications of results (dissertation only).
APPENDIX C

SAMPLE DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Abstract

A Comparison of the Cognitive Styles of Deaf Students with the Cognitive Styles of Hearing Students

Thomas E. Griffin

Central Piedmont Community College enrolled large numbers of deaf Students during the year 1989. The number of deaf Students enrolled in the college has continued to increase quarterly. These deaf Students have been included in the mainstream of the college. That is, they attend the same classes as other Students with the only difference being that deaf Students have interpreters who interpret the lecture material into sign language. Since the major orientation of Central Piedmont community College has been towards the non-handicapped, the primary purpose of this study was to see if the Students with the handicap of deafness have different cognitive styles from hearing Students.

The instrument used to investigate the differences in cognitive style was a Cognitive Style Interest Inventory developed at Oakland Community College (1983). Cognitive style in the framework of the study relates to three sets of influences: (1) symbols and their meanings, (2) cultural determinants of the meanings of symbols, and (3) modalities of inference. These aspects combine to form cognitive style.

A compromise was made between a group of twenty-five deaf Students enrolled at Central Piedmont Community College in the fall quarter of 1990 and a group of hearing Students enrolled in the same quarter. The groups were similar except for the handicap of deafness of one group. Students of both groups responded to a cognitive style interest inventory which consisted of 216 descriptive statements to which each Student assessed himself in terms of Usually, Sometimes, or Rarely.

Hypotheses were formulated and tested by a discriminate function analysis with .05 as the acceptable probability level. The hypotheses of the study were expressed in relation to the framework of cognitive style.

In relation to the sets, symbols and their meanings, the results of the study indicated significant difference between the symbolic orientations of deaf Associates and the symbolic orientations of hearing Students. In the set, nineteen separate variables were studied. There were significant differences between the two groups on the variables of auditory quantitative, qualitative auditory, tactile, visual, proprioceptive, empathy, aesthetic, proxemic, and synnoetic.
In the set, cultural determinants of the meanings of symbols, three variables were studied. Of these three variables, there were significant differences in the variables of individual and associate influences between the deaf and hearing Students.

In the third set of variables, modalities of inference, five variables were considered. Of the five considered, there was a significant difference shown on the variables of appraisal.

In the overall construct of cognitive style which combines the three sets of variables mentioned above, the results of the study indicate significant differences between the cognitive styles of deaf Students and the cognitive styles of hearing Students.

Considering all twenty-seven variables of the study, the overall F ratio was 6.221 and the overall probability was .0001. These differences exist in all three sets of variables of the cognitive style format.

In the set, symbols and their meanings, the results of the study indicate that presentations should vary from deaf Students to hearing Students. That is, hearing Students seem to be aware of certain symbolic meanings while deaf Students are aware of other meanings. In terms of cultural determinants, information should be presented culturally to the deaf Students from a student point of view and also from a family point of view. The hearing Students prefer the same information in an individual frame of reference. In inferential patterns, hearing Students tend to be more appraisers while deaf Students tend to infer more from relationships.

Cognitive styles of deaf Students in contrast to cognitive styles of hearing Students suggest many modifications to individualized learning programs. These modifications must take into account the many differences that may exist among the majority groups as well as the differences that may exist among minority groups.