

Rehabilitation Science PhD Program

Dissertation Proposal Guidelines

Written document and formal presentation to supervisory committee

Program Director: Dr. David Fuller (ddf@phhp.ufl.edu)
Program Coordinator: Laura Quintana (lauraq@phhp.ufl.edu)

Successful completion of the dissertation proposal is required for all doctoral students. It is completed only after the student has passed the qualifying examination. This document provides details regarding the structure, timing and format of the proposal.

Overview:

The dissertation proposal is a written plan outlining the student's intended dissertation work. **It consists of a two-step process. First, the student completes a written document, followed by an oral presentation to the supervisory committee.** The dissertation proposal addresses 1) why the research is relevant, 2) the focus of the research, and 3) how the research will be conducted. The written proposal may contain preliminary data but this is not a requirement.

The proposal is presented to the entire supervisory committee for approval, and an in-person* committee meeting is conducted in which the student presents a summary of the proposed work (see Rehabilitation Science website for template of the oral presentation). The supervisory committee will then take turns asking questions about the proposal. Once the supervisory committee and student have discussed the proposal in depth, the supervisory committee will decide if the proposal is approved.

One essential role of the primary mentor is to provide guidance on developing the proposal. Thus, students typically work with the primary mentor, and supervisory committee as appropriate, to create the general framework for the proposal. Once the framework is agreed upon, the student prepares the written document on their own without further input from the primary mentor or supervisory committee.

* The Graduate School has waived the in-person requirement due to the COVID-19 pandemic through the spring 2021 semester. Students should complete their proposal using remote technology (e.g. Zoom).

I. Timeline

- A. The dissertation proposal cannot take place until the student has passed the PhD qualifying exam.
- B. The dissertation proposal should take place within 1 calendar year of the time that the candidate passed the PhD qualifying exam.
- C. If the student has not completed their dissertation proposal by the end of their third year in the program, their primary mentor will be asked by the Program Director to submit a letter to the steering committee explaining 1) why the milestone has not been completed and 2) the target date of completion.

- ### **II. Role of the primary mentor and supervisory committee in developing the “overall framework” of the proposal.**
- We define “overall framework” as the scientific rationale underpinning the project as well as the research methods needed to complete the project.
- A. The student should work closely with their primary mentor to develop the overall framework, hypotheses, or expectations for the proposal.

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- B. The student is free to consult the supervisory committee for input during the development of the proposal framework, but this not a requirement.
- C. Once a framework has been discussed and agreed upon with the primary mentor, the student is responsible for preparing the formal written proposal. This should be done without further consultation with the primary mentor or supervisory committee.

III. Format of the written dissertation proposal.

- A. The document must:
 - 1. Represent a scholarly document in all regards.
 - 2. Include specific aims and/or research questions, background, rationale, methods, and appropriate literature citations.
 - 3. Specific formatting requirements (e.g., length, order of text, etc.) are at the discretion of the primary mentor and based on what is appropriate for the student's research aims and design. For example, some primary mentors require that the proposal is done in the format of an NIH F31 research grant while other proposals might use the same format as the final dissertation document required by the graduate school.

IV. Grading the proposal.

- A. The written document is due to the supervisory committee one week prior to the evaluation meeting. A decision regarding the acceptability written document will be made by the supervisory committee during the evaluation meeting.
- B. Grading
 - 1. Pass and/or Pass with minor revisions: The supervisory committee agrees with the proposed research project. There may be minor adjustments needed to the study plan, but the supervisory committee agrees that the proposal is appropriate for a Rehabilitation Science dissertation, and that the written document shows the level of scholarship that is expected of a PhD candidate.
 - a) *If minor edits are needed, the mentor may approve the minor edits have been completed without review of the entire supervisory but the supervisory committee should be given the opportunity to see the revised document.*
 - 2. Major revision: The supervisory committee has significant concerns with the scholarship of the document, or the proposed experiments.
 - a) The primary mentor will email the program director and detail:
 - 1. Why the committee determined major revisions of the dissertation proposal were given
 - 2. A copy of the written feedback provided to the student
 - 3. The due date of the written revisions and date of the evaluation meeting.
 - 4. Any other concerns about the student's progress.
 - b) Student is allowed one opportunity to revise the document and re-present their proposal to the supervisory committee.
 - 1. Student will receive written feedback on their dissertation proposal that includes clear instructions for what is expected for the revision. This will be provided by the primary mentor.

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Student will have an opportunity to clarify feedback and expectations.

2. A due date for the written revisions will be agreed upon by the supervisory committee.
 3. A second evaluation meeting with the supervisory committee will be scheduled by the student. At the meeting, the student will present their revisions.
 4. After reviewing the student's revisions and presentation, if the supervisory committee does not agree the student has earned a "pass" or "pass with minor revisions," the student has failed the dissertation proposal.
3. **Failure:** If a student fails the dissertation proposal, they will be dismissed from the Rehabilitation Science PhD program.

A failing grade may be given based on the following considerations.

1. Evidence of academic dishonesty or plagiarism
2. Upon revision, the document is not consistent with the expectations of the graduate school's requirements for a PhD-level dissertation, as assessed by the supervisory committee.

In the event the student fails the dissertation proposal, the primary mentor should email the program director and detail:

1. Why the committee determined the student failed the dissertation proposal.
2. How the committee voted. (e.g. was it unanimous?)
3. The program director will inform the student of dismissal.

V. Format of the evaluation meeting

- A. The student is responsible for scheduling the meeting
- B. The supervisory committee will convene in person
- C. The student will commence the meeting by providing a short presentation, typically this is 20-30 minutes, but the length can be at the discretion of the mentor. The presentation should address:
 - a) Background/introduction/theoretical framework
 - b) The aim or aims of the proposed work

Note - the formatting of this section may vary across students, but should include at least one of the following. Students should discuss with the primary mentor to determine which is appropriate.

 - i. Hypothesis or hypotheses
 - ii. Expectations or predictions
 - iii. Research questions
 - c) Methods
 - d) Preliminary data (if applicable)
 - e) Timeline
 - f) Anticipated results, challenges, and how to manage those

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- D. The primary mentor will then ask each supervisory committee member, in turn, to discuss their evaluation of the written document. This may include questions for the student.

VI. Graduate School paperwork required

- A. Students should contact the program coordinator no later than one week prior to the evaluation meeting to obtain and complete the necessary paperwork. All supervisory committee members must sign a graduate school form in order to document the milestone. The milestone is not considered completed until the student has submitted the signed form to the program coordinator.
 - 1. Pass: If the student earns a pass, the student should obtain the signatures of their supervisory committee and return to the program coordinator.
 - 2. Pass with minor revisions: If the student has minor revisions, the primary mentor may hold the signed form until the revisions are deemed complete. Alternatively, the supervisory committee may choose to wait to sign the form until the revisions are complete. Once the supervisory committee is comfortable assigning a “pass,” the student should obtain the signatures and return the signed for to the program coordinator.
 - 3. Major revisions: In the event of major revisions, the student should contact the program coordinator ahead of the second evaluation meeting for a new form. The “completion date” of the form will be updated to reflect the new evaluation date.
- B. The dissertation proposal together with the qualifying exam signify the student’s admission to PhD candidacy. After this milestone is complete, the student will be classified as “graduate-9” (graduate students who have been admitted to doctoral candidacy).