

## IIT INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOLOGY DISSERTATION PROCESS PHILOSOPHY

(Approved by the Faculty on November 17, 2003)

The Institute of Psychology at Illinois Institute of Technology offers only one doctoral degree: the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology. Although each student has a program area of specialization, it is very important to remember that all graduate students pursuing the doctorate are working on the same degree, implementing the same dissertation process, and aiming at the same criteria and standards of excellence. The Doctor of Philosophy degree is a research degree. The dissertation should be the culmination of an extended program of study and research, which serves as a public testament of graduate quality and expertise. That is, the proposed research addresses a meaningful and unanswered question in the field, the underlying methodology has sufficient internal and external validity and the scope of the research project is sufficiently large to constitute a dissertation. As such, it must be an original contribution to the body of knowledge and readily available in the public domain. In no real sense is it a totally individual project, but rather the product of a committee of scholars that is communicated to the profession for evaluation and use.

By definition, the members of a Dissertation Committee have already demonstrated their professional skills and expertise. In contrast, the student is in the midst of an effort to demonstrate these skills and is seeking professional acceptance. Thus the student is working for acceptance as a peer by the members of a profession he or she wishes to join. This effort begins with individual faculty members and ends with the completion of a satisfactory oral examination. Student's responsibilities include the following:

- A. a knowledge of the literature in their area of research,
- B. a knowledge of the methods in their area of research,
- C. ability to apply what they know to the problem,
- D. ability to relate the results of their study back to the literature and
- E. ability to communicate their research findings.

Faculty members serving on a Dissertation Committee must also have knowledge relevant to the area of research or be willing to get knowledge in the area of research in the course of the dissertation development. The membership of the committee should be primarily based on the expertise that the faculty members bring to the project, and not on other factors including interpersonal relationships or faculty reputation of being "easy" or "hard." By the time the student arrives at the oral defense, he or she should be a leading expert in the area and the members of the Dissertation Committee should already be reasonably convinced that this is true. Thus, the student has the dual responsibility of selecting a problem relevant and suited to abilities of existing faculty members as well as demonstrating to the selected faculty that he or she has a full command of the problem area. Faculty members may decline to serve on Dissertation Committees related to problems for which they have no expertise and are not likely to contribute significantly.

The Chairperson of the Dissertation Committee holds a position of key significance and responsibility. The Chairperson is both a sounding board for the student as well as the spokesperson of the Dissertation Committee to the student. Chairpersons should have or develop an extra knowledge in the problem area in which the student is expected to be an expert by the end of the dissertation process. The Chairperson of the Dissertation Committee is responsible for seeing to it that the requests of the committee are respected in full at all times and that the standards of excellence set by the committee are met prior to the oral examination. Once these standards are met, the Chairperson of the Committee is an aid to the student and a supportive peer. Even when the oral examination has been completed, the obligations of the Dissertation Committee Chairperson continue via possible dissertation document changes, assistance with employment efforts, and dissertation publication nudges.

The essence of the dissertation process is frequent and direct communication between the graduate student and Dissertation Committee Members at all points of development. Informing, instructing, and responding to all committee members is the primary responsibility of the graduate student. It is this frequent interaction that makes the dissertation a successful collaborative affair rather than an individual act. Satisfactory interactions should ensure a quality dissertation so that the oral examination will serve as an occasion for peers to welcome a new member to the profession. Dissertations are not Nobel-Prize-level acts nor are they archaic-public-rite chores. They are relevant public statements of research skill and graduate program quality.

## ELEVEN STEPS TO A DISSERTATION

1. Select and meet with chairperson of Dissertation Committee to discuss proposal, e.g. statement of the problem, literature review and research design.
2. Select the other committee members and negotiate conditions for serving on the committee (e.g. they may want to see something in writing before agreeing to serve). Selection of committee members must be consistent with procedures specified by individual programs. All programs require a minimum of two people from the student's program and a third member from among the psychology faculty to serve on any dissertation committee. A faculty member from outside the Institute of Psychology and from within the University must be selected to serve on the dissertation committee as the fourth member. This fourth member is typically involved only in the final oral examination.
3. Write and distribute a copy of the proposal to each committee member after the chairperson has approved the version to be distributed. Committee members must have at least two weeks to read the proposal. Students have the option of meeting individually with committee members to make revisions in the proposal before the formal proposal meeting. The student schedules the proposal meeting no less than two weeks before the proposal meeting.
4. Write and circulate to each committee member a list of revisions agreed upon at the proposal meeting. A copy of the agreed-upon decisions and revisions, signed by each committee member, must be placed in the student's portfolio before running the study. If for some unforeseen reason, any further changes are necessary in the opinion of the student, chairperson, or committee member (if appropriate, before the beginning of data collection), any of these parties may request a second proposal meeting at which time changes may be made. It is understood that some unlikely event (such as publication of an identical study) will necessitate reconsideration.
5. Prior to the start of the study, the student must request and obtain the necessary approvals from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approval is also needed for the use of archival and pilot data. The IRB approval must be renewed annually.
6. Conduct the study. If there are any major "in-process" changes in design or analyses due to unforeseen circumstances, the student must put these changes in writing and submit them as an addendum to the revised proposal. The proposed changes should be discussed, approved, and signed by each committee member, either individually or at a committee meeting called by the student and his or her advisor. Students will not be required to make significant additions or changes in design from that which was agreed upon in the proposals and addenda.
7. The student should analyze the data and write a draft of the dissertation. At this point, consultation with the chair should occur whenever the chair or student deems it

necessary. The chair must approve the draft before it is distributed to other committee members as a proposed final manuscript. This process may require several revisions before the chair agrees that it is ready to be distributed. His or her approval means that the chair believes the manuscript is of sufficiently high quality, although revisions following review by other committee members may still be expected.

8. The Chair may sign the 501A Form after determining that the manuscript has all the necessary components. The student then obtains the signatures of other Committee members on the 501A Form. The student schedules an appointment with the thesis examiner to review the manuscript.

The signing of the 501A Form by the committee members and the approval of the manuscript by the thesis examiner must be completed at least five weeks prior to commencement<sup>\*</sup>.

9. The student schedules the oral examination (time, date and place) with a 301B form and must do so prior to two weeks before the date of the examination. The Committee members (including the outside reader) must be given a copy of the approved manuscript at least two weeks before the oral examination.

The Graduate College requires that the 301B Form be received in its Office of Academic Affairs by the second week of the semester<sup>\*</sup> in which the examination is going to be held. If the actual date for the oral examination appears later in the semester, the student must submit a revised 301B Form at least two weeks prior to the actual date of the final examination.

An announcement of the oral examination including the title of the dissertation, the date, time and place must be posted on the program's bulletin board at least 2 weeks before the defense date. Prior to the defense, any committee member may call a work meeting if he or she believes substantive changes are necessary and then the date of the defense must be rescheduled. The committee member should inform the chair and remainder of the committee of the general nature of the changes requested. The student then schedules a work meeting in which any or all committee members that feel they have contributions to make can attend. If a work meeting is required, the student modifies the dissertation and this step may be repeated until no committee member wants additional changes. The student and a committee member have the option of meeting individually for work meetings, but the student is responsible for notifying in writing other committee members of the nature of the change. If this step cannot be successfully completed, a final meeting can be scheduled to terminate the process.

10. The student defends the dissertation at the oral examination. The outside reader is usually present for the first time. However, at the dissertation chair's discretion, the outside reader can be present at the proposal meeting. The student is expected to be an expert in the area and capable of communicating the results of the study and the implications for the field. The committee members sign the 501B Form if they concur that there are no substantial changes yet to be made.

A committee may fail a student who was unable to successfully (after repeated attempts) include the suggestions of her or his committee.

11. The student is responsible for making all changes directed by committee members and thesis examiner and to arrange for final bound copies of the dissertation to be forwarded to the Institute of Psychology and to the advisor.

NOTE: The student may appeal his or her case to the Academic Standing Committee (consisting of Program Directors and the Institute's Director and Assistant Director) if disagreements arise as to whether he or she has followed the above procedures. If extenuating circumstances require a student to forego any of the above procedures and if the advisor agrees that the student should be granted permission to forego the procedure in question, the advisor and student can bring their request before the Academic Standing Committee for a decision.

Adherence to the philosophy and the procedures outlined above is the responsibility of the entire Institute of Psychology community.

\* Please check the Graduate College Bulletin for the most up-to-date information.