

Applied Social and Community Psychology Program Publication-Based Dissertation Option

The NCSU Graduate School and the Department of Psychology have specific guidelines for Theses and Dissertations, which can be found on their web sites. In addition, program areas within the Department of Psychology may have additional requirements and guidelines. This document outlines the requirements for those Applied Social and Community Psychology students who wish to pursue a publication-based dissertation option. These policies were approved by the faculty on 9/19/2014 and revised on 2/14/2018.

Publication-Based Dissertation Option in Brief

To satisfy the requirements for the dissertation, a student may submit a set of three publications that s/he has authored, accompanied by an introduction to the body of research, as well as an integrative commentary that discusses the programmatic issues and implications raised by this set of work.

This serves as an alternative to the journal-length dissertation format required of all students entering the program in Fall 2014 or later. This requirement is described in the document: *Journal-Length Thesis and Dissertation Format Requirements for Applied Social and Community Psychology Graduate Students at NC State University (2/4/2016)*.

Rationale for this Option

The preparation of a publication-based dissertation furthers several training objectives. First, the guidance and direction of the student's committee in preparing manuscripts for submission would target the development of important intellectual skills that are often not sufficiently addressed in the conventional dissertation or the manuscript-format alternative. These skills include the articulation of a compelling rationale for an investigation, the mastery of technical writing, and the succinct presentation of analyses.

Second, the requirement for thematic coherence across several papers as expressed in an integrative introduction and discussion (as described below) would encourage doctoral candidates to devote more attention to the conceptual underpinnings of their research and the theoretical implications of their findings. In this regard, many of the benefits of producing a traditional dissertation would be preserved.

Third, the completion of a publication-based dissertation would foster development of professional competences, including an understanding of the editorial process. Finally, the emphasis on submission of manuscripts beginning early in students' training would enhance their competitiveness for post-doctoral opportunities.

Students who entered the program before Fall 2014 can negotiate with their committee about the appropriateness of this option for their dissertation.

Description of a Publication-Based Dissertation

The publication-based dissertation would consist of three manuscripts, an introduction to the corpus of research, and an integrative discussion. Two of the manuscripts would be published or *in press* when the dissertation is defended and the third would be submitted for review.¹ An acceptable publication-based dissertation would have the following elements:

- An Introduction would establish the aims of the work to be presented, and the limitations in the literature that it addresses.
- The publications would have to present sufficient thematic coherence so that they could be effectively introduced and discussed in the dissertation as a body of work. They would not necessarily have to represent a specific program of research, but would have to address some common area of inquiry.
- A Discussion would address overarching themes, issues, and future directions.

The following guidelines indicate what publications are acceptable.

¹ The third paper should not be submitted for review prior to the dissertation proposal defense.

- One of the manuscripts could be co-authored, with the candidate as a junior author. For the remaining manuscripts, however, the candidate would be the sole or senior author.
- One of the three publications could result from the candidate's second year project or a thesis completed by the candidate at NC State.
- The completed manuscripts could include a methodological contribution or a theoretical perspective in addition to empirical articles, subject to the committee's approval.
- Whether to accept a publication based on work conducted in pursuit of a bachelor's or master's degree at another institution would be determined by the student's committee at the proposal meeting. The extent to which such publications reflect training and effort invested while the candidate was in the Applied Social and Community Psychology doctoral program would be the basis of the decision.

Examples of such a publication-based dissertation completed by students in the Applied Social and Community Psychology program at NC State are available here:

<https://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/handle/1840.20/33581>

<https://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/handle/1840.16/11074>

<https://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/handle/1840.20/34505>

Proposal Requirements for a Publication-Based Dissertation

In general, students would be encouraged to schedule a proposal meeting as soon as it becomes apparent that a publication-based dissertation is viable.

The student would present materials that effectively make the following case:

- The work described in the research manuscripts is of sufficient content, scope and quality to meet the standards for a dissertation.
- The corpus of research has thematic coherence and could be effectively introduced and discussed in the dissertation.
- The journals in which the papers appear (or along with the journal targeted for a forthcoming submission) require peer review and are appropriate with regard to their focus and quality
- There is a very high likelihood that two of the three research manuscripts will be published or in press by the time of a proposed dissertation defense date in the student's timeline

The specific length and detail of material submitted to a committee for the proposal may vary according to the situation of the student. The committee chair and the student will consult as to the length and format of a proposal needed to sufficiently address the criteria mentioned above.

Decisions to be made at the proposal meeting would include the following:

- The completed research manuscripts, in conjunction with plans for the remaining manuscript, are appropriate in content and scope for a dissertation.
- The research work has thematic coherence and lends itself to an introduction and integrative discussion in the dissertation.
- For the first two manuscripts, the journals in which the manuscripts appear (along with the journal targeted for a forthcoming submission) require peer review and are appropriate with regard to their focus and quality. This decision is the committee's, with the assumption that the outlets are read by scholars in the field of interest and are held in some degree of respect by the scientific community. No minimum impact factor or specified list of approved journals will be made on an *a priori* basis.
- For the third manuscript, the background is appropriate in scope and content; the methods and interpretation of findings (if analyses have been conducted) are sound; and the order of

authorship proposed by the student is appropriate and defensible according to the APA authorship guidelines.

- The student's plans for the acceptance for publication of the first two manuscripts and submission of the third manuscript within the proposed time frame are reasonable and in the student's best interest. The proposed defense date in the timeline should be no longer than a year from the proposal date.
- Expectations regarding the length of the Introduction and Discussion sections.

If the student is proposing a work in progress as the basis of the third manuscript, the student and the committee would be well advised to address the following question: *If the publication-based dissertation option were to seem not viable or not in the best interest of the student, could this third research manuscript serve as the basis for the journal-length dissertation option in the Applied Social and Community Psychology Program?* This issue is described in more detail below.

The Final Defense Requirements for a Publication-Based Dissertation

Format of the Defense Document

Following submission of the third manuscript and the completion of the introduction and discussion following their revision as directed by the adviser, the student would circulate the publication-based dissertation and schedule the final defense. The document would contain the following:

- A cover page with a "signature block" below the title and author. (Use the title page crafted for your proposal. Now you should be able to simply insert "dissertation" in place of "proposal.")
- All other sections of a thesis or dissertation (abstract, biography, table of contents, list of tables, list of figures, references, etc.) required by the Graduate School. (See the Graduate School's Thesis and Dissertation Guide.)
- The main text, which will contain the following:
 - Introduction: This would establish the aims of the work to be presented, and the limitations in the literature that it addresses. (This section is anticipated to be at least 10 double-spaced pages, though specific length requirements should be determined by the committee at the time of the proposal.)
 - Publication 1
 - Publication 2
 - Publication 3
 - Discussion: This would be an integrative commentary that would address overarching themes, issues, and future directions. (This section is anticipated to be at least 15 double-spaced pages, though specific length requirements should be determined by the committee at the time of the proposal.)
 - References (for the Introduction and Discussion, not the three publications)
 - Appendix (any supplementary material deemed necessary by the committee)

Approval of the Defense Document

The standard procedures regarding scheduling, constitution of the committee, involvement of the Graduate School Representative, and other administrative matters remain in effect. The usual ETD process of the Graduate School has to be followed.

The final defense would proceed in the typical manner as specified by the Graduate School. The current standards for assessing the quality of the candidate's research, and the decision-making options (i.e., unconditional approval, conditional approval, and fail) will still apply.

The extent to which committee members' comments must be addressed to reach a final approved document will be determined during the defense meeting.

Switching from a Publication-Based Dissertation to the Journal-Length Dissertation Option

In some cases, approved plans for a publication-based dissertation may not materialize or may begin to seem not in the student's best interests. The student's alternative to the publication-based dissertation option is to complete a dissertation as described in the document: *Journal-Length Thesis and Dissertation Format Requirements for Applied Social and Community Psychology Graduate Students at NC State University (2/4/2016)*. Switching from a publication-based dissertation to the journal-length dissertation option would require a revised proposal and proposal meeting that meets the requirements described in that document.

Potential Student Benefits

In the policies described above, the student's dissertation process is integrated with his/her research productivity throughout his/her training. The actual preparation of the publication-based dissertation should help the student in thinking about his/her work as an articulated and viable research program. The student and his/her committee should consider on a case-by-case basis whether the publication-based dissertation option or the standard journal-length manuscript option is in the student's best interests.