

**WURZWEILER SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
YESHIVA UNIVERSITY**



**GUIDE FOR THE WRITING OF THE  
DISSERTATION**

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**WURZWEILER SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
YESHIVA UNIVERSITY**

# GUIDE FOR THE WRITING OF THE DISSERTATION

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**GUIDE FOR THE WRITING OF THE DISSERTATION**

The purpose of this guide is to define the format for and clarify expectations regarding the writing of the dissertation. Students are required to use this guide in the preparation of the dissertation. Please note that this Guide builds upon the *Guide for the Writing of the Dissertation Proposal* and is consistent with the specifications therein.

This document undergoes periodic revisions. Changes made from previous versions are in the form of clarifying questions and issues that have arisen since then. Efforts have been made to respond to the many questions which arise about the content and form of the dissertation. There is room for flexibility in the use of this *Guide* depending on the student's specific study design; any such deviations are to be discussed with and approved by the dissertation advisor. All doctoral students are expected to conform to this *Guide*.

You are likely to be receiving a copy of this Guide at the time in which you have had your proposal accepted. Please note that you may not commence with your research until you have submitted your accepted proposal, with the applicable forms, to the Yeshiva University Committee on Clinical Investigations (CCI) and have received written approval from CCI. Submission to CCI must be made within 90 days after approval of your proposal by the WSSW Proposal Review Committee, but preferably much earlier. Premature initiation of the research, without CCI approval, will be considered an ethical breach and will be subject to the sanctions detailed in the *Manual for the PhD Program in Social Welfare*.

January, 1998  
Revised, September, 2000  
Second Revision, November, 2003  
Third Revision, January, 2006

[COVER SHEET FOR THE DISSERTATION]

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by  
Student's Name  
(please use the exact name recorded in the official University's record)

DISSERTATION  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctoral of  
Philosophy in Social Welfare  
Wurzweiler School of Social Work  
Yeshiva University  
New York

(Date of Submission Below)

.....

## Table of Contents

The section headings are picked up in the table of contents so that a clear outline of each section of the proposal is made visible to the reader in a way that illuminates its organization.

See Example below:

### Table of Contents

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The committee for this doctoral dissertation consisted of:

Advisor's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member \_(WSSW faculty)\_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member \_(Outside WSSW)\_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member\*\*\*\* \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*When applicable

## APPROACH TO THE DISSERTATION

All chapters should begin with a concise paragraph about the purpose and scope of the chapter. Chapters should end with a summary of key points and a logical transition to the next chapter.

Students should show evidence that they have kept up with new developments, studies, dissertations, and policy developments since the time the proposal was prepared and accepted. All citations, in all chapters, should be updated and expanded. All students must adhere to the format requirements detailed in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5<sup>th</sup> edition* (2001).

### CHAPTER ONE: DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

The purpose of the overview chapter is to introduce the reader to the study and enable the reader to gauge its intent, boundaries and limitations. It should be relatively brief, approximately 5-10 pages in length. The first chapter places the study within the context of the profession, provides details about the state of the art of knowledge related to the area of study, and clearly spells out how and in what ways the study is significant to the profession and how the findings will contribute to knowledge enhancement.

#### Introduction

The introductory paragraph in this chapter should begin with these sentences:

This study examined (the "what" - usually a statement of the research question) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. This was a (type of  
study) \_\_\_\_\_ as defined by  
\_\_\_\_\_(reference). Data were collected (from, by -  
sample - whom, where) \_\_\_\_\_ using (what means -  
survey, interviews?) \_\_\_\_\_.  
The data were analyzed by the use of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (reference). The following  
NASW Codes of Ethics were relevant to the research \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The overview chapter should continue with a discussion of the relevant key facts which help to define the scope and importance of the current problem(s) studied. These include:

- why this topic is important;
- to whom it is important;
- how and why the approach taken leads to findings that are useful to the profession.



The overview is just that – a panorama of your study – what it is about, why it is important, how its need is justified, how the results contribute to the professional knowledge base, the approach taken and why, the research problem, study questions and hypotheses, and a summary of the methodology used, including sampling size and population and study limitations. This first chapter should also include an introduction to the literature to the extent that such an introduction justifies and highlights the importance of the study. This overview of relevant literature should lead logically to the rationale for your specific study and to the statement of the problem, research questions, and hypotheses. Scope and limitations of the study should also be provided here, but still as an overview.

This overview chapter should also address, in one or two paragraphs, a summary of key findings, followed by the anticipated contributions of the study to the profession of social work and to (where relevant) a) social work education; b) social work practice; c) social policy; and/or d) social work knowledge. Included here might be, for example, the significance of the study findings for policy development, implementation, evaluation, or analysis. How might the findings influence the re-examination or re-formation of current policies and programs? How might they assist the profession in carrying out its advocacy function? What are the implications for the delivery of services and intervention methodologies used? Do the potential findings hold significance for the nature of education for practice? What do study findings suggest social workers should do differently than current practice?

Carefully and professionally edit; avoid duplication of content between the overview chapter and later chapters. For example, quotations used in the overview chapter should not be used again later. Rather than repeating yourself in successive chapters, an appropriate option is to reference back to earlier discussion (e.g., as discussed in chapter 1....). Also make sure that you transition from one section to the other within the chapter in such a way as to ensure a logical flow. Use section headings and sub-headings as appropriate throughout the overview chapter. The opening paragraph or two that serves as an introduction to the overview need not have a section heading, but can be followed by sections that were basically consistent with those in the proposal, namely: *The Study Problem, The Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, Research Question and Hypotheses, Methods, Limitations of the Study, Results, and Implications and Contributions of the Study.*

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE STUDY PROBLEM**

In this chapter, identify and formulate the study problem in depth. This includes current statistics which demonstrate the scope and significance, duration and intensity of the problem area under inquiry. This chapter should also be relatively brief, approximately 5-10 pages in length.

Remember that the study problem is the larger issue/context of your area of inquiry. Review the history of the problem and its place in social work concerns and practice from an analytic perspective. This means going beyond what happened to include why things evolved as they did and what historical trends tell us about the present situation. Identify the practice and/or social policy concerns attendant to the study problem and their significance on a national, state or local level. Similarly, value and/or ethical issues impacting upon the problem are to be addressed. The overall purpose of this chapter is to place the study problem in its larger social and professional context.

Reference to the professional practice and/or social policy literature should be emphasized in this chapter. Since acceptance of your proposal, it is expected that you will have keep abreast of recent practice/policy developments & changes in practice procedures, methodologies, and/or laws and regulations, for example. Keep current with the major newspapers for new developments and emerging issues.

Use section headings and sub-headings as appropriate throughout this chapter. Such headings should reflect different themes that make conceptual sense and are of practical relevance. The conclusion of this chapter should include discussion of how the history and related practice/policy areas you have explored relate to and inform your area of inquiry.

## **CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section must demonstrate that the student is conversant with the important studies and related literature in the area of inquiry. It should be approximately 15-20 pages in length, excluding the references.

In the proposal, emphasis was placed on those contributions which significantly informed the reader about this area of study; a critical assessment and summary of the "state of the art" of current research on the topic, and what was unresolved and still needed to be investigated. For the dissertation, the literature review is expected to be logical, comprehensive and yet concise. In addition to justifying your study and its approach, the literature review leads the reader to understand the basis for your research question(s) and why they are important.

Although you have conducted a review of the literature for the proposal, it is expected that this chapter will now be expanded and updated. Hence, it should be slightly longer than what appeared in the proposal. Expansion and updating includes inclusion of theoretical developments that have occurred since writing the proposal as well as additional empirical studies that have a bearing on your study. You are expected to keep current with

the literature as you collect and analyze your data, as this is an ongoing process.

It is generally best to approach the literature review deductively, using heading and sub-headings throughout the chapter. Begin with the general literature concerning your topic area and become increasingly more focused on and specific about your area of research and your research questions. There should be an orderly and logical flow so that the reader can follow and understand why your area of inquiry and your specific research focus is needed and justified.

Although 15-20 pages of narrative are recommended, there is no one set length or format for the literature review, but avoid the “kitchen sink” approach. Focus the literature review and demonstrate your skill in synthesizing a body of knowledge. One approach is to begin with a brief introduction to the topic (about 3 pages), including an introduction to key concepts and terms and a statement concerning the scope and organization of the literature review and your criteria for what literature is included. It might be helpful to identify the theoretical or conceptual literature and then the empirical literature. This introduction is followed by a focused literature review that is meant to be summative or descriptive as well as critical or evaluative. This means that you assess the merits of the literature you review. It is unacceptable to state findings of studies as facts or as something commonly known without noting and commenting on the merits of how we came to know what is claimed. For an assessment of empirical studies, for example, this means saying something about the adequacy of the research design and the appropriateness of conclusions. This chapter concludes with a statement of the research question. Remember that the justification for your study lies in what is *not* known or is insufficiently explored.

Expectations for the breadth of the literature review include searches of:

- Key authors and journals identified through major search engines, such as Medline, Nexus Lexus, EBSCO, and ProQuest
- Bibliographic reference sources, including dissertations
- Computerized literature searches, including media outlets (major newspapers)
- Literature from other disciplines
- Literature and reports of studies produced by “think tanks” such as the Urban Institute, Brookings Institution, and Ford Foundation.

Use primary sources. Look up the original article rather than citing secondary sources. Avoid the popular press, such as *Time Magazine*, *Newsweek*, or *USA Today*.

There is a tendency in literature reviews to present only one side of an argument, viewpoint, or findings. However, it is important to show the differing findings and viewpoints. In doing so, you are also showing why further research may be needed to reconcile the different arguments, views, or findings. Although you may include commentary and descriptive literature, the major focus should be on empirical investigations.

The literature review focuses on analysis rather than description or summary. The distinction is important. Merely reiterating what is said in the literature is not sufficient. An

analytic approach includes the significance of what has been written, how it ties together, its value and utility, adequacy of past research in regard to method, design, measurement, and results, contributions of the literature, gaps left to explore (which lead to a justification of your study). You want to synthesize the literature, bringing it together in regard to patterns, assumptions, and findings. Which studies are “best” and why? Based on what criteria, methodology, conceptual approach? Identify topics that merit further study.

Group your literature review, through the use of sections, into logical subgroups. Examples include:

- Organizing the literature review on the basis of studies that examine related independent and/or dependent variables together;
- Organizing the review on the basis of type of design;
- Organizing the review around studies reporting similar findings;
- Organizing the review around theoretical premises.

Integrative transition sentences and paragraphs should be used to bring together the information you present. Tie groups of studies together in some systematic way, such as those identified above. Highlight major similarities and differences. Use comparative and evaluative phrases in regard to groups or categories of studies. Pull the material together with a summary and critique at the end of each section. Throughout, work from the general to the specific.

The literature review should include a final synthesis of the subsections. In this section, you would specify unexplored topics worthy of investigation as well as strengths and weaknesses of past literature. The synthesis and analysis of the literature should lead directly and logically to a rationale for your proposed study, both in regard to your study questions and your methodology. Accordingly, your literature review should highlight important unanswered questions, that is, those you are proposing to answer. Your critique should also include methodological problems and shortcomings with past studies that were addressed and overcome in your study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The review of the literature should logically lead to the theoretical framework that guided your study. The checklist provided on p. 17 in the *Guide for Writing of the Dissertation Proposal* (January 2006 version) should be used to ensure that the objectives of this chapter are met. This chapter should be as identical as possible to what appeared in the proposal. Differences should reflect unforeseen changes that were necessary as the study was implemented. Its length should be approximately 10-15 pages. The organizing questions in this chapter are:

- What is the theoretical framework you have selected and why?
- What is the relationship between theory and research design? How does theory inform selection of research questions and design and in what ways?
- How does the inclusion of the chosen theoretical orientation contribute to an understanding of the problem being investigated? Why was this particular theoretical orientation chosen out of the field of available theories?
- How will the theoretical orientation aid in the organization of the inquiry and the analysis of data?

The content of this section should flow from and be logically connected to Chapter Three: Literature Review. In Chapter 3, the focus was on a summary and critique of the theoretical and empirical literature that had a bearing on the research question. Chapter 4 provides a full explication of the theory or theories that had guided your study in terms of variable selection and conceptual relations of those variables &/or for the research question and hypotheses that flowed from this framework. In this section, a picture or graphic of theoretically relevant concepts and how they are related to each other might be worth a thousand words, so if you can draw it out either manually or mechanically (i.e., computer assisted), by all means, do so.

This chapter includes: (1) a brief review of the major theories and related concepts pertinent to your study as gleaned from Chapter 3; (2) identification, description, and justification of the theoretical orientation that guided your study; (3) how the theoretical framework was used in regard to variable selection, hypothesis testing, etc.; (4) itemization definition, and elaboration of the critical concept of the study; and (5) as noted above, a narrative and/or visual description of how the theoretically concepts are related to one another. This last item is often referred to a “modeling” and such models often form the basis of multivariate statistical procedures used for analyses, as well as further theoretical developments.

There may be some inevitable overlap between the sources used in Chapters 3 and 4. For example, an article which reports the findings of an empirical study may also conclude with the formulation or application of theory. In such instances, it is appropriate to cite the same article in both sections, avoiding duplication of content to the extent possible.

The conclusion of this chapter should again synthesize the literature covered in your

analysis. Direct linkages between the theory and your study questions should be made. Remember, the selected theory must be appropriate to the research question. Further, the theory should inform, clarify, and justify your research question.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE RESEARCH QUESTION & RELATED HYPOTHESES

This section deals with the "big question" and related hypotheses that formed the heart of your study. Sub-questions should provide greater specificity. Each sub-question should be followed by hypotheses that broke down the "big question" into researchable form. This chapter should follow closely what appeared in the proposal, noting adjustments or changes made in the protocol in light of implementing the study. Chapter 5 should be brief, approximately 2-3 pages.

The Study Question – What was the main question or questions that the study addressed? Did it flow from the literature review and theoretical framework?

### Hypotheses

Construction of hypotheses should have been guided by the following considerations:

- a) Were the hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework and/or literature delineated in the previous sections? If not, delete them because they should have been!
- b) Were the hypotheses testable? That is, were they capable of being shown to be true or false, to hold or not hold? If not, delete them because they should have been!
- c) Were they statements of fact? If not rewrite them so that they are, using simple declarative sentences.
- d) Were the variables under investigation and the nature of the relationship (positive or negative, strong or weak) among the variables clearly and correctly stated?
- e) Could every term or variable in the hypotheses be referred directly or indirectly to observable empirical events?
- f) Did the variables stated in the hypotheses refer to a particular set of observations that are capable of being defined operationally and objectively?

The form for presentation of the study questions should easily convey to the reader the flow of thought connecting the question and related hypotheses. Thus RQ1 (Research Question 1) should be followed by SQ 1 (Sub-Question 1) which in turn should be followed by H1a (Hypothesis 1a) and H1b (Hypothesis 1b); RQ2 if applicable should be followed by SQ 2 which in turn should be followed by H2a and H2b, etc. If there is only one main research question, SQ1 should be followed by H1a (Hypothesis 1a) and H1b (Hypothesis 1b).

Research questions and related hypotheses should be ordered in a logical manner, for example, from most important to least important or from conceptually or analytically anterior to posterior (referred to as lexical ordering).

The research questions and hypotheses should have been deduced and developed from the theoretical framework delineated in the previous section. Hypotheses should have been presented as either a comparison between two or more groups or terms of a dependent variable or as a relationship of two or more independent and dependent variables. Keep in mind that hypotheses take the form of declarative statements about the relationship between two variables. They should be stated either as null, predicting no relationship between variables, or in experimental or evaluative form, that is, as positing a relationship (direction) between variables. Hypotheses may be either direct (two variables changing in the same direction, whether increasing or decreasing) or inverse (two variables going in opposite directions: as the values of one increase, the values of the other decrease). Direct and inverse relationships are used interchangeably with positive and negative relationships. Be advised that when one talks about positive or negative (positive or negative) relationships they should do so when the relationship is expected to be linear.

It is helpful, but not always necessary, to state the direction of the relationship (e.g., the higher the cost of services, the more selective agencies are in including the service in the case plan). Make sure to avoid stating research questions, sub-questions, and related hypotheses in terms to which the response is “yes” or “no”.

The checklist provided on pp. 18-19 in the *Guide for Writing of the Dissertation Proposal* (January 2006 version) should be used to ensure that the objectives of this chapter are met.

In every dissertation proposal the study questions are intended to answer the basic question of the inquiry: What is it that we wish to find out? For those students whose dissertation is qualitative in nature and/or is not hypothesis driven, the study questions must be explained in detail. In many instances, even exploratory studies, hypotheses may be used in qualitative studies. Given a good literature review and sound theoretical framework, some hunches or speculations of what to expect are in order. Sub-questions are absolutely relevant.



## CHAPTER SIX: METHODOLOGY

This chapter should also follow closely what appeared in the proposal, noting adjustments or changes made in the protocol in light of implementing the study. You are expected to review the corresponding chapter in the *Guide for Writing of the Dissertation Proposal* (January 2006 version). Since your research is now completed, this chapter will provide the step-by-step road map of what you did and how you did it. All steps in the process are to be included. Make sure that you have addressed ethical issues, such as informed consent and confidentiality. Note: it is the expectation that the rationale and justification for each step in the process was supported through use of the research literature.

Chapter 6 should be brief, approximately 10-12 pages, contingent primarily on the number and type of measures used, as well as the complexity of the procedures used. Begin with a brief reiteration of your research approach & the type of study you are conducting, using definitions from the literature. Citations to the research literature are essential. As appropriate, briefly reference back to the empirical and theoretical literature to justify and ground your approach. If the study was an extension or continuation of previous studies or of another study conducted by others simultaneously, this should be communicated in a discussion as to the particular contribution being made by this study.

The methodology section should provide sufficient details so that a reader will be able to replicate your study. Since it is a step-by-step guide to what you did and why, this chapter is primarily descriptive. Sections in this chapter should include: research questions, hypotheses, key concepts and operational definitions, description of method used in sampling and/or selection of subjects, setting of the study, measures (dependent, independent, etc.), and procedures. The exact content to be covered and its ordering depends on your particular study, but should flow in order roughly approximating the following:

Chapter Sections – Much of what follows is taken directly from the *Guide for Writing of the Dissertation Proposal* (January 2006 version).

The elements of this section are:

- a) **The research design** and the rationale for this decision, buttressed by citations from the research literature.
  - 1) *The research perspective*: Indicate whether the research was quantitative, qualitative, or mixed.
  - 2) *The type and subtype of the research*: Identify the general type, e.g., case study, and specify a subtype, e.g., ethnography. There are only so many general types of designs, so readers will expect something that looks familiar, such as: experimental, quasi-experimental, causal-comparative, correlational, descriptive, evaluation, or case study. Keep in mind that the appropriateness of any particular design is a

function of what you want to study and how it is best to go about doing so. Also, some designs may overlap. For example, in doing evaluation research that assesses the effectiveness of an intervention, experimental or quasi-experimental designs are often used. It is advisable to go beyond main textbooks like Rubin & Babbie's *Research Methods for Social Work* when selecting, describing, and justifying the research design. **Note:** survey is not a research design per se, but rather a way or method of collecting data.

- (a) Experimental or Quasi-experimental include subtypes classical experimental, ex-post facto, Solomon four-group designs or single group (time series), nonequivalent groups, and factorial respectively. In general, many of the same methods are used for experimental or quasi-experimental research, although quasi-experimental research does not use random assignment of subjects and therefore has to introduce other procedures to ensure comparability between the experimental and control groups. Also, keep in mind that most experimental studies are intended to establish cause-and-effect relationships, which are very difficult to establish with other designs, including quasi-experimental and those taking advantage of sophisticated statistical controls and longitudinal data.
- (b) Causal-comparative research includes subtypes between-group (e.g. non-equivalent control group; ex-post facto), time series, path model, and archival time series. Research using this type of design seeks to identify causative relationships between dependent and independent variables. Demonstration of a causal relationship based on these designs, however, should be treated cautiously.
- (c) Correlational Research – no special subtypes, although such research often relies on data gathered by surveys. Analyzing Census data to assess the relationship between socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity is an example of correlational research design. In this case, multivariate statistical procedures would be used to rule out spuriousness of variables and to control for several factors that might account for variation in SES beyond that of race/ethnicity. Correlational studies attempt to understand patterns of relationships among variables. Such studies cannot establish causation. They are useful in predicting one variable from another or from several others when building a theory about a complex phenomenon. You might decide to use correlational research to answer a question such as this one: “How are television viewing and violence related?”

- (d) Evaluation Research – It is often the case that social work researchers are involved in evaluation research or “evidenced-based” research. Evaluation research is not a research design, although it makes use of experimental, quasi-experimental, causal-comparative, and correlational designs. Evaluation research makes judgments about the merit or worth of service programs or interventions, products, or organizations and is usually undertaken to assist administrators and practitioners making professional decisions. There is some controversy regarding whether evaluation research is a legitimate type of research. Features distinguishing it from research are as follows: It is parochial (i.e., focusing on a single entity); it examines multiple aspects of the unit being studied; it often originates with a client, not the researcher; it is often undertaken when a decision must be made. The parochial nature of this research is its most vulnerable aspect, since such a study is not likely to make a significant contribution to knowledge if it reaches a conclusion of this sort: “Service X is inferior.” Parochialism can be overcome, however, if the evaluation research accomplishes one or more of the following purposes: provides an early test of a new approach or model of evaluation; develops an instrument that can be used in other studies; evaluates a program that is widely used but has little systematic evaluation; documents how evaluation results were used by groups of stakeholders. Hence, an evaluation research proposal can be acceptable if you clearly indicate how one or more of these purposes are met by your study, in addition to having a theoretical framework, sound methodological procedures, and specificity regarding how results of the study are expected to add to the knowledge base. To the extent that an evaluation study relies on such established designs as experimental or quasi-experiment, or makes use of appropriate statistical controls in a multivariate analysis, the case of undertaking such research is strengthened. When specifying the research design for such evaluation studies, it is advisable to use experimental or quasi-experimental phraseology. That is, the purpose of the research may be to evaluate an intervention, while the design used to do so might be experimental or quasi-experimental.
- (e) Descriptive and case studies are two other types of studies that are problematic for dissertation purposes and hence such proposals are usually unacceptable. In general descriptive studies are those intended to describe a phenomena that is unknown. To the extent one can justify why a description of an unknown phenomenon is desirable, a case for such a dissertation proposal can be made. For example, if you wanted to find out the nature and types of facilities providing services

to children and youth (residential vs. non-residential, profit vs. non-profit, public vs. private) because such information is currently unavailable but necessary to make policy decisions regarding allocation of money or other related services, then a case could probably be made for conducting census-like or survey research to acquire such information as a dissertation. Such a dissertation however, would be a-theoretical and it would lack formal hypotheses, although guided by research questions germane to policymaker and related stakeholder interests and what can be gleaned from the review of related literature. Because proposals for descriptive research are a-theoretical, it is difficult to discern how they contribute to the knowledge base. Initial approval of such proposals is at the discretion of the dissertation chair and committee members and still subject to review from the Committee of Clinical Investigations for final disposition regarding acceptability. Hence, students should be aware that such proposals may be turned down because they fail to satisfy the condition of offering to contribute to the knowledge base. Likewise, case studies are generally richly descriptive, although at times due to sampling limitations or funding limits, or some other practical limitations, you might select one site, such as an agency, in which to implement a study of the effects of different treatments or a particular treatment vs. no-treatment (waiting list) of clients using experimental, quasi-experimental, causal-comparative, or correlational design. To the extent case studies are theoretically driven and either have or have the potential to develop testable hypotheses for future research, they are in principal acceptable, but nonetheless may be ruled as unacceptable by the CCI if deemed potentially insufficient to contribute to the knowledge base due to limitations or other reasons.

- 3) *The context for the study:* Indicate where and when the study was conducted and whether/how access was assured. Include any supporting documentation regarding requisite permissions regarding access as part of the Appendices.
- 4) *Data & subjects:* What was the source of data for the study? Did you rely on an already existing data file that someone else has already collected? Which one? Describe it. Who or what were the subjects of this research? What was the unit of analysis? What was the selection process? How many subjects were included in the study? Discuss the feasibility and the methodological rationale for the type of sample and its size. Address how sampling addressed sub-population issues, as appropriate. Were there any excluded categories of people or vulnerable populations according to the Committee on Clinical Investigation criteria?

- 5) *Measures:* Itemize and define the critical concepts, key terms and variables used in the study. Every dependent and independent variable in the study must be operationalized, that is, defined clearly and exactly. If the concept of depression was a focus of the study, it must be operationalized – that is, the means or instrument used in the study to measure depression, such as Beck’s Depression Scale, must be identified. Address the related issues of reliability and validity of all measures used. If you used an existing instrument, provide a brief history and use of the instrument and its applicability to your study. Be sure to note that you obtained formal permission to use the instrument and cite the relevant sources about reliability and validity. Be sure you evaluated those sources to ensure that reliability and validity procedures were appropriate. As applicable, discuss the process of procuring permission to use the instrument. If you adapted an existing instrument or created one for purposes of your study, indicate how reliability and validity were determined, specify the changes you made to the original, and provide the rationale for doing so. If you created your own instrument, detail how you will determine validity and reliability. Cite sources of scale construction. It is advisable to start this subsection with the main dependent measure followed by the independent measures of most interest, then the others. Ideally, the order should follow what appeared in the literature review. If you studied the effects of depression on earning capacity, for example, the literature review should begin with a general discussion of earnings capacity and earnings should be the first measure itemized here. The literature review should then summarize the related works about the role of depression on earnings and depression should be the next measure defined. Other factors or measures gleaned from the literature to affect earnings capacity in order of their importance should then be itemized and defined in this subsection accordingly. Such factors might be race/ethnicity, gender, age, birth order, education, region of country where one lives, number of years lived in poverty, and the like. Use a table to list out and define the measures and arrange them in the order of most importance. This will be the same order used for presenting results and organizing the discussion.

NOTE: If for some reason, concepts that are relevant to your study have yet not been defined as you intend to use them, do so now. Create another subsection as in 6) immediately below.

- 6) *Definitions of other relevant concepts.* Given the literature review, theoretical section and measures sub-section, the number of such concepts should be limited.

- 7) *Procedures:*

(a) How did you collect data – in person, by mail survey, by telephone survey, by direct observation, some other way? If you used a questionnaire to collect your data (whether by phone, mail, or in person), make sure that every question related to an identifiable variable or measure defined above. For example, if one of your independent variables was age of respondents, make sure that there was a question in your questionnaire about age. The opposite applies: if there was a question about age on your survey form, you need an operational definition of it in this section. Keep in mind that some demographic variables might have been used solely to describe your sample and not as independent measures. When sex and age, for example, are not independent variables in your study, but such information is useful in describing your sample, you can list these variables as descriptive variables. To the extent they are obvious or commonly understood, no definitions are needed. If you relied on data that someone else collected (that is, you did a secondary data analysis), you need not repeat the source of the data. Rather, proceed to (b) below.

(b) How did you analyze the data?

(1) If yours was a quantitative study, what statistical procedures were used to assess bivariate relationships? What procedures were used to assess multivariate relationships? Keep in mind that for quantitative proposals sole or primary reliance on bivariate analyses such as bivariate correlations, Pearson chi-square, and T-tests are not generally acceptable as doctoral level work. Some form of discriminate, factor, or multivariate analysis should be proposed. Be sure to construct hypotheses with this in mind. Thus, for example, if you were interested in the relationship between depression and drug use among adolescents, you might have hypothesize that they are positively related, but your analysis must indicate how you controlled for other factors found in the literature to be influential.

(2) If yours was a qualitative study, it is highly recommended to identify specific analytic strategies and techniques, which can be found in several *Qualitative Data Analysis* texts. Grounded theory (not to be confused with the theoretical framework discussed above) is one specific set of highly developed, rigorous, and intellectually demanding analytic techniques for generating substantive theories of social phenomena. There are also several software packages that can be highly

helpful in organizing data for analytic purposes. Be sure you described and cited the analytic approach to the qualitative study.

- b) **Protection of human subjects:** All plans, letters, consent forms related to protection of human subjects, as applicable.
- c) **Information sheet and explanation of study for participants (appendix).**  
Note: these materials should be found in the Appendix.
- d) **Limitations of the study.** Acknowledge the boundaries of the study (what was not investigated) and also the problems inherent or encountered in conducting this particular study, such as the research design, any aspect of its implementation (such as sample size), the reliability of the data gathered, and any cautions in regard to the interpretation or application of the findings.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: RESULTS

In this chapter, you are to present the results of your study. Every statistical test or analytic framework used to test your hypotheses needs to be explicated. Use the APA Manual, 5<sup>th</sup> edition for to obtain the proper format for all tables and figures. Avoid copying and pasting SPSS, SAS, STATA or other statistical software output directly into your dissertation since these formats differ from those in the APA Manual and in all likelihood contain more information than is necessary. Again, a step-by-step approach is appropriate. First, briefly describe the demographics of the sample studied, focusing in the narrative only on the most essential descriptors and having the remainder in a Table that readers can peruse at their leisure. Table 1 for example might include the names of all measures arranged in conceptually coherent way, an abbreviated definition from that which appears in Chapter 6, and the Means and Standard Deviations of each measure.

After the descriptive or univariate statistics, present results in the order of the research question(s) and related hypotheses as they appear in Chapter 5. Often times this might mean presenting bivariate findings followed by multivariate results.

The narrative should clearly indicate to what question or hypothesis results pertain. If it helps with the narrative flow, state the question / hypothesis first then give the results. In regard to each category of research questions and the hypotheses which fall within them, report, item by item, on the measurements conducted and the results. In general, present the results in order of the importance of the hypotheses (check back to review ordering of your hypotheses; is there a logic to it?). For each analysis you conducted, include information about it -- name of the variable(s), tests used and relevant details about them, i.e., values and levels. Also include means, medians (if appropriate), standard deviations, and sample sizes for each dependent variable.

Use tables and figures throughout to illustrate and highlight your findings. In general, means and standard deviations should be presented in table form, unless there are so few of them that they can be adequately presented in the text. Use the names of statistical tests and why they were selected to test the hypotheses sparingly since you already specified and justified these procedures in Chapter 6. For example you do not have to say that you used a T-test when reporting differences between two groups on an ordinal or interval level measure, as long as you report the *t*- and *p*- values in the narrative. Likewise, when reporting percentage distributions across categorical groups, no need to say “Chi-square results show that...” Instead, report the percentage differences and at the end of the sentence show the following “(Chi-square = ??, *p* < .05).”

Be sure to state whether your hypotheses were or were not supported. Present data related only to the purposes of the study. Save interpretations and analyses for Chapter 7. When reporting results, show the statistics (e.g., *t*-value, *F*-value, *p*-value) when found to be significant. Refer to the APA Manual to determine what and how statistics should be presented. If additional analyses are done to better understand results, these too should be reported accordingly.



## CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

Focus on what your results mean. This is the time for analysis and interpretation of the findings. It is not the time to bring in new or additional findings. First, discuss hypotheses in the order originally presented, briefly restating each and indicating whether or not they were found to be statistically significant. (There is no need to repeat the actual statistics or the methods used to determine them.) What do the results say about the relationship between independent and dependent variables? Are there alternative explanations for your findings? If hypotheses were not supported, explore possible explanations, ranging from instrumentation, sample size or characteristics, to inadequate manipulation of the independent variable, to faulty or otherwise inadequate or inappropriate modeling.

This is also the time to go back to the past empirical and theoretical work you have discussed in chapters 3 and 4 as they pertain to your findings. Are your findings consistent with past empirical work? In what way do your findings shed new light, support, or deviate from prior research? What do we know now that we did not know before? Does such knowledge conform to your expected findings? If not, why not? What might the explanation(s) be for any deviations?

Since your study was framed in theory, you also need to go back to your framework to see to what extent your findings “fit.” In what ways do your findings contribute to theory affirmation or new theory development? How do your findings further inform the theory you have selected as your framework? How do the findings contribute to knowledge building? What if any aspects of the theory should be reconsidered?

### Implications and Contributions

The implications of your study (process and results) should be examined, as appropriate, in relation to: your area of research, including the study population or problem area; practice methodology and/or practice theory; social work education; social policy development, implementation, and evaluation; ethics; society as a whole and the human condition. Be sure to stay close to the data and do not go too far beyond it. To the extent you feel compelled to do so, however, be sure to indicate that you are speculating as such. Come back to the “So what?” question and answer it in relation to the contributions of your study to knowledge building in social work. How do your findings improve our understanding of the phenomenon you investigated?

### Areas of Future Research

Also address whether and to what extent you accomplished what you intended in regard to answering unanswered questions. What is left unanswered? The limitations of your study should also provide guidance about how future researchers may replicate or extend your research design to the same or similar questions. Does your study suggest new factors that are important to control in future investigations? Do your findings have implications for improvements in design and measurement?

In regard to the significance of your study, note substantiated implications clearly

and forcefully while avoiding the temptation to make more out of the findings than is warranted. Discuss the limitations of your study in regard to what you did not attempt to do or succeed in doing. What would you do differently now to overcome the weaknesses in the design or implementation of your study?

A good place to end is with a research agenda that builds on what you just accomplished. This means that you tell others what questions and issues might be examined in the future in light of your findings.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendices must be referenced in the text. Appendices provide specific details about your study that will enable another researcher to replicate your study or that might be important to committee members in determining that you approached your study in a competent way. Copies of instructions to study participants, consent forms, data collection instruments, and permissions are examples of appropriate materials for inclusion in appendices. Be sure to include all letters giving permission for use or modification of research instruments and letters from agencies authorizing the use of their site and/or access to their staff or clients for your research.

Appendices should appear in order of their appearance in the text of the dissertation.

## FORMAT AND STYLE REQUIREMENTS

### References

All proposals and dissertations must adhere to APA style; see American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association*, 5th ed. Washington, DC: Author.

In citations, derivative material, such as text books, should be used only when original or other primary materials are unavailable. If there is a choice, quotations and citations should be from original sources. You should work closely with your faculty advisor in the selection of sources and in ensuring their appropriate use and attribution. These considerations are vital aspects of a sound dissertation which will be accepted and respected by other scholars.

### Preparation

Each section or chapter must begin on a separate page and the top quarter of the page should be devoted to its title. Sections or chapters should end with a summary of the ideas being communicated and a transition to the section or chapter which follows.

### Format

- a) Title: The title of the Dissertation should be no longer than 72 characters, including the spaces between words.
- b) Margins:
  - Left: One and a half inches
  - Right: One inch
  - Top: One inch
  - Bottom: no less than one inch
- c) Pagination: "right corner", one inch from the top and one inch from the right margin, continuously throughout the entire document including references.
- d) Font: Courier 10 or Times New Roman 12.

## TIMETABLES

### Time Frames

All students in their **fourth year (if not earlier)** and beyond will be working on their dissertations and most students will be able to bring their studies to a successful conclusion during the fourth or fifth year. Once the dissertation proposal is accepted, the student must be continuously registered for Doctoral Dissertation Research, even if the required 24 credit hours of research and or the 60 credit hours necessary for the degree have been completed.

Those students who require additional time **beyond the sixth year** will request an extension for one year. If recommended by their faculty advisor, subject to the review and approval of the Doctoral Faculty Committee, the extension will be granted. The Doctoral Committee has the authority to grant such extensions up to and including a tenth year of study. (Formally approved leave of absences are not counted against this time limit.) Each year, the advisor must request an annual extension based upon the continuing productivity of the student's work. The intent of this policy is to hold both student and advisor accountable for the appropriate fulfillment of their respective roles in assuring the progress of the dissertation work.

Students are strongly encouraged to complete their dissertations within six years of their enrollment in the program and extensions should be an exception. Note: under some exceptional circumstances, students are able to complete and defend their dissertation prior to the point at which they have earned the 60 credits required for graduation. Under no circumstances can this credit requirement be waived. It is the responsibility of the student to plan for and pay all applicable tuition and fees.

### Completing the Dissertation

Hopefully, you have kept your advisor informed about the progress of your work and consulted with him or her, as appropriate, throughout the writing of your dissertation. As you begin the analysis of your findings, if you have not done so beforehand, it is time to discuss with your advisor the appointment of a second committee member who has either the content or methodological expertise needed. The second member of the dissertation committee is selected from within the WSSW faculty. You might also consider who might be an appropriate third committee member, one from outside the WSSW faculty, although this decision can come after the chair and committee member have reviewed revisions of an entire first draft.

Decisions regarding the composition of the committee are made in consultation with the student, dissertation advisor, and director of the doctoral program. The final decision in regard to all committee members resides with the director of the doctoral program.

It is important to consult with the research member of your committee about how you will approach data analysis. Do not attempt this without such consultation!

When you submit your first full draft, your advisor will read it and provide feedback. Remember, this is a draft, not the finished product. At any time, your advisor may ask that the second committee member be assigned and available to read sections of your dissertation as needed.

Depending on the response to your first draft, you may have minor or major changes to make. Frequently, students need to conduct further analyses of their data or amplify the explanation of the findings. Your advisor may conclude that certain parts of the first draft need to be reviewed by the second committee member, at his or her discretion. The revised version, or second draft, will go to both committee members. Students are expected to provide the first draft along with the revisions so that the changes made are easy to identify. It is often helpful if a student also provided a summary description of what changes were made and where they can be found in the revised version. (This procedure is common practice for manuscripts submitted to peer-reviewed journals, so it is a good habit to develop. Speak with your advisor about expected time frames for his or her review of the draft documents. A realistic turnaround time is four weeks for advisors and committee members who are familiar with your work and from four to six weeks for advisors on reading the first full draft of the dissertation and for committee members who are seeing the manuscript or any parts of it for the first time.

After you receive feedback on your first draft and begin work on revisions, you and your advisor should discuss possible outside readers who might be willing to serve on your committee, if you have not already done so. The third committee member is someone from the practice community or academia who is an expert in the area of your dissertation research. You are probably more familiar with the major people in the field than anyone else, so think about some possibilities. The person must, however, have a doctorate, though not necessarily in social work. He or she should also be an acknowledged expert, as evidenced by his/her standing in the community and/or contributions to the literature. The outside reader will be asked to provide a copy of his/her Curriculum Vita to the director of the program and if approved, the director will then send a formal letter to that individual extending an invitation to serve as a committee member.

The time frame from submission of your first draft until defense depends, of course, on the extent to which that first draft meets requirements. Have you followed the guidelines in regard to what must be incorporated? Have you updated and expanded the policy and literature reviews? Have you followed the data analysis plan suggested by the methodologist? Have you addressed, in the findings, each hypothesis fully? Is the final chapter, **Discussion**, thorough and does it relate your findings back to your theoretical framework? Have you clearly spelled out, as well, how consistent your findings are with past research?

After you have completed the first draft, it is time to make your appointment with the staff person assigned by Dr. John Fisher in the Registrar's Office to review the "cosmetics" of the document, including tables, adherence to APA style, margins, etc., etc. In this consultation, establish what needs to be done and schedule a follow-up appointment.

Some relatively minor, but important points:

- Be sure to change the language from future (“this study will”) to past tense (“the purpose of this study was to...”; “the method used was...” and the like.
- Sections become chapters.
- The ordering of the chapters should follow those in this manual, the dissertation guidelines.

It is important to understand that there are three different readers who may approach the review of your dissertation from three different perspectives. Each may have a set of issues that they want you to address. It may be appropriate to meet together if there are differences of opinion. Your advisor is the key person to see you through this process. It is possible that one of the committee members judges the manuscript to be unacceptable and sufficiently deficient to a formal hearing or defense of the manuscript, even after revisions and discussions with the student and other committee members. Should this situation arise, the judgment precluding a formal defense stands. It is not acceptable policy to change committee members at this point.

You may want to review WSSW dissertations completed within the last year or two to get a sense of what the final product looks like, both visually and in terms of organization and content. Keep in mind, however, that you might be one of the first students whose work was guided by the *Guide for the Writing of the Dissertation Proposal* (January 2006 version). Only the most recent dissertations might reflect these changes.

The student should consult the academic calendar for information regarding deadlines for submission of the proposal in time for faculty consideration and for graduation. In the Spring semester, the end of the Passover holiday break is usually the deadline for submission of dissertations which can be considered before the end of the semester for expected graduation in May. Students approaching deadlines should be in touch with their advisors with respect to the particular issues of timing which will govern consideration of their work. Students should keep in mind that they can expect revisions to their manuscripts throughout the entire process, including the oral defense. In general, dissertation hearings will not be scheduled in the summer months. If there are any doubts about university related deadlines regarding when all materials have to be completed and submitted for graduation, check with the Executive Secretary of the Doctoral Program.

## **Oral Defense**

The final rung of the doctoral education ladder is the oral defense of the dissertation which is scheduled when the student has completed a final draft of the dissertation which has been read by all committee members and the chair has granted approval to proceed to the orals. If there is still substantive work to be done on the dissertation, it is premature to go to an oral defense.

At most defenses, students may initially be asked to leave the conference room so the committee members can go over “ground rules” about how the defense will proceed and to share general impressions of the work. The student will then be asked to return to describe the “what, why, and how” of their studies. After that opening statement, the members of the Committee ask whatever questions they wish regarding the content of the

dissertation.

A suggested outline for the oral presentation includes:

- State the problem.
- Explain how and why the problem is important.
- What theories have been used in the study?
- What are the hypotheses tested?
- Methodology and data collection: where, how, when?
- What problems did you encounter in collecting data? How did you address these problems?
- How were the data analyzed?
- Which theories and hypotheses were most strongly supported?
- What are the implications of the findings?
- What would you do differently in researching this subject if you were just beginning?

At the end of the session, the student will be directed to leave the room and the Committee decides whether or not the student has passed. It is not uncommon to ask the student to make some revisions in the dissertation based on the discussion during the defense. At the Committee's discretion, revisions may be submitted for final approval to the Chair who certifies in writing that the changes meet the expectations and requirements of the Committee. Alternatively, the Committee may indicate that another defense meeting is necessary. In either event, the Committee will provide the student with sufficient direction of what needs to get done and how the process of review will proceed. Keep in mind that Committee members must reach consensus regarding the merits of the manuscript and requisite revisions when necessary. This means that any one person on the Committee can exercise a veto, require substantive changes, and/or request additional analyses when the other Committee members cannot convince him/her otherwise.

At the defense, the Committee members sign the title page of the Dissertation. After revisions have been completed, a final copy of the dissertation is delivered to the Doctoral Program Office. Final copies of the dissertation are then submitted to the Registrar's Office for certification and binding.

Next stop: Graduation!



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