

WURZWEILER SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL



GUIDE FOR THE WRITING OF THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

January 2006

**WURZWEILER SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
YESHIVA UNIVERSITY**

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GUIDE FOR WRITING THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

This guide defines the format for and clarifies expectations regarding the conceptualization and writing of the dissertation proposal. Students are required to use this guide to prepare of the proposal.

The necessary content areas of the dissertation proposal include the following sections: **Overview, Study Problem, Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, Research Question(s) and Related Hypotheses, Research Method, and Anticipated Contributions of the Study.** In addition, this guide provides instructions for a **PLAN FOR COMPLETION OF THE DISSERTATION**, the **FORMAT AND STYLE REQUIREMENTS, WHAT YOU NEED BEFORE A DEFENSE IS SCHEDULED**, the **DECISION PROCESS**, and a **SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.**

Approval of the proposal takes place at a hearing chaired by the student's advisor. Two additional members of the faculty serve on the proposal committee as readers and evaluators. At the discretion of the advisor, if a student so wishes, a scholar familiar with the subject area of the proposal may serve as a third committee member. The selection of the two additional members (and an outside member when requested by the advisor) is made by the director of the doctoral program in consultation with the student's advisor. Committee members may be assigned at any time during the writing of the proposal, although advisors and students are encouraged to have at least one member assigned as early as reasonably possible in the process. Students are encouraged to discuss with their advisor whom they would like as committee members in light of expertise and interest in the proposed topic. Advisors are encouraged to approach those mutually agreed upon faculty and to explore the possibility of a committee assignment with them. Advisors make recommendations to the doctoral program director who makes the assignment

after consideration of work-load and related issues.

The proposed research is expected to be a significant contribution to the knowledge base of the social work profession. The proposal (and dissertation) will demonstrate the student's mastery of scholarly research at the doctoral level. The proposal is a form of contract between the faculty and the student, subject to modification and review as committee members are assigned and as the Committee on Clinical Investigations may so instruct. The high standards of the dissertation proposal developed under faculty guidance and CCI approval are meant to increase the probability of successful completion of the dissertation.

This guide has been periodically revised to reflect changes in the overall doctoral curriculum and requirements. Students are to use the guidelines in effect at the time that they enroll in the Proposal Seminar (second semester of second year of course work) unless they specifically elect to come under any new guidelines which may be available at a later date. All students, no matter when they entered the program, are responsible for adhering to the rules and regulations of the Yeshiva University Committee on Clinical Investigations (CCI) regarding the use of human subjects that are in effect at (1) the time the proposal is submitted to the CCI, and/or (2) the time the research actually commences. Similarly, all students are responsible for using the most recent edition of the American Psychological Association's (APA) style guide.

June 1, 1997; Revised: November 1, 1998; Second revision: September 15, 2000; Third revision: September 1, 2003; Fourth revision: September 1, 2004; Fifth revision: January 1, 2006

Note: In light of some substantive changes in this version of the *Guide* from its predecessor, beginning in the Spring 2006 semester, students enrolled in SWK 8920, Dissertation Proposal Seminar, are required to use this version of the *Guide* when preparing their dissertation proposals. Please sign the enclosed acknowledgement of receipt form and on the same day you received this *Guide* give the signed copy of the acknowledgement of receipt form to the instructor of the class for filing with the Doctoral Program's Executive Secretary. Your cooperation in this matter is greatly appreciated.
RKC

[COVER SHEET FOR THE PROPOSAL]

_____ TITLE _____

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

PROPOSAL FOR THE DISSERTATION
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Social Welfare (Ph.D.)
in the Wurzweiler School of Social Work
Yeshiva University – Wilf Campus
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 makes clear its organization.

(INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK)

The committee for this doctoral dissertation proposal consisted of:

Advisor's Name _____

Committee Member _____

Committee Member _____

Committee Member (when applicable, e.g., outside reader) _____

SECTION ONE: THE PROPOSAL OVERVIEW

The purpose of the overview is to introduce the reader to the study being proposed, to enable the reader to gauge its intent, boundaries and limitations, and to define its anticipated contribution to the knowledge of the profession. The first section must address the "so what" question -- why is the proposed study significant to the profession, how will the findings contribute to enhanced knowledge, and how the proposed study is consistent with the NASW Code of Ethics? [It may be the case that this section is written last, although the extent to which one knows sooner rather than later precisely what will be done and how some things will get done may affect when the overview is actually written.]

Introduction

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

Does it? yes no

The study will examine (the "what") _____
_____. The type of
study being proposed (the "how") is _____
_____ as defined
by _____
_____ (reference).

The data will be gathered by the use of _____

The data will be analyzed by the use of _____
_____ (reference).

The following NASW Codes of Ethics are relevant to the proposed
research _____

The proposal overview should continue with a brief discussion of the relevant key facts which help to define the scope and importance of the current problem(s) under study. This includes:

- why this topic is important (including the issues attendant to it);
- why it is important now;
- to whom it is important;
- how the topic, research question, and approach fall within the purview of social work concerns;
- how and why the proposed approach will lead to findings that are useful to the profession (clients, practice, personnel development, policy, education for practice, etc.)
- this research is consistent with what NASW Codes of Ethics.

Further, the overview should provide sufficient information so that the reader has a preliminary understanding of the population(s) to be studied, the methods to be used in sample selection and, later, in data analysis, the setting in which the research will take place, and the grounding of the research question(s) as legitimate areas of social work concern.

As you complete this section, use the following checklist to determine if you have covered the range of content that is expected to be included.

CHECKLIST

Have you included:

An overview of the study, including:

- | | | |
|---|---------|--------|
| Statement of purpose? | [] yes | [] no |
| Scope of study? | [] yes | [] no |
| Its place in social work? | [] yes | [] no |
| Grounding the study in Code of Ethics
social work literature, position statements, etc.? | [] yes | [] no |
| Stating how it is relevant to social welfare policy, social
work education, and/or practice? | [] yes | [] no |

Documenting the significance of the question to the profession? [] yes [] no

Is there an explicit statement as to why this topic

is important? [] yes [] no

To whom it is important? [] yes [] no

What we will know as a result that we don't now know? [] yes [] no

Is there a brief methodological description indicating:

Type of study to be conducted? [] yes [] no

How the study will be carried out? [] yes [] no

Does this description include:

Sample population? [] yes [] no

How sample will be identified? [] yes [] no

Size of sample? [] yes [] no

Justification for sample size? [] yes [] no

Where the study will be carried out? [] yes [] no

Participating agencies or individuals? [] yes [] no

How permission will be obtained? [] yes [] no

Issues related to informed consent? [] yes [] no

Study limitations? [] yes [] no

Does this section end with:

Discussion of the anticipated contributions

to knowledge building? [] yes [] no

To social work practice? [] yes [] no

To clients served? [] yes [] no

To social work education? [] yes [] no

An answer to "so what"? [] yes [] no

A statement about NASW ethics? [] yes [] no

Depending on the stage of development of your precise research question and study focus, some students may find that it is best to return to Section I after later sections have been completed. Work on these later sections may help crystallize the issues that need to be covered in the overview.

Reminder: To the extent possible, avoid duplication of content that will appear later on. In this overview section, the goal is to introduce and justify your study. Although some references are appropriate, use the literature only to ground and justify your study and to place the study within the purview of social work.

SECTION TWO: THE STUDY PROBLEM

In this section, identify and formulate the study problem. Include current statistics, if available, which demonstrate the scope and significance, duration and intensity of the problem area under inquiry. The social policy concerns attendant to the study problem should be identified and its significance on a national, state or local level should be delineated.

The problem places the research question in its larger context. The discussion and analysis of the background of the problem lend both credibility to the area of concern you will be exploring and provide sufficient background to elaborate on the “so what” issue. By the end of this section, the reader should be clear about the historic and current context of the problem and its logical connection to the question you plan to address.

As you complete this section, use the following checklist to determine if you have covered the range of content that is expected to be included.

CHECKLIST

Have you included:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| A clear statement of the problem to which your study relates?* | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
| Characteristics of the problem? (Who is affected, how) | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
| Scope and intensity of the problem? (How many affected?
with what impact?) | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |

- Its place as a social work concern - historically and now? yes no
- Background of the problem within American society? yes no
- Discussion of relevant federal and state policies and/or judicial
decisions to address the problem, both historic and current? yes no
- Role of social work, if any, in defining the problem, devising
solutions, and implementing programs? yes no
- How and in what way the problem relates to social work values? yes no
- The relationship between the problem and your research question? yes no

*The problem delineated in this section is not the same as your research question, although the research question should be logically linked to and directly flow from the identified problem. In this section, the problem you propose to address is of a societal nature, such as homelessness, poverty, domestic violence, or children in need of permanent homes.

SECTION THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section must demonstrate that the student is critically conversant with the important studies and related literature in the area of inquiry. The literature review provides a summary and critique only of those contributions which significantly inform the reader about this area of study. Thus, the focus of the literature review should be on the "state of the art" of current research on the topic. It is meant to be descriptively summative as well as evaluative. In addition, the literature review identifies what is unresolved and still needs to be investigated. Theoretical and empirical approaches that have been used to study the topic in the past should be identified and critically assessed as to their merits and limitations, with a focus on what is not known -- what is missing from past empirical investigations in terms of methodological approach, questions investigated, or contributions to knowledge. The justification for your study lies in what has not been answered and/or satisfactorily addressed to date. Your concern, however, goes beyond gaps in the literature. You want to evaluate the questions asked, the methods used (such as adequacy of sample size or limitations in regard to geography), and the findings reported in terms of breadth, adequacy, pertinence to your area of inquiry, etc.

In getting started, you might want to develop an outline from which a detailed literature review can then be developed. It might be helpful, for example, at the first stage of an outline to identify the two or three major concepts that provide the rationale for the study. The second stage of an outline can then include subtopics to each of the major concepts. The third stage of the outline would then include the most important references (journal articles, books, government reports, and the like) that address or support each subtopic.

For example, suppose you were interested in verifying and accounting for health disparities by race/ethnicity among women. There are many ways to conceptualize health, including mortality rates, number and types of childhood diseases, cancer rates, breast cancer rates, obesity rates, and the like. For our purposes here, let's focus on mortality. In addition to mortality as a major concept and as your indicator of health for purposes of your study, you would also need to identify other concepts that may be causally related to the health outcome of mortality. Such concepts may include race/ethnicity, human capital, genetic predispositions, social capital, and socioeconomic status of one's parents at the time of one's birth, and the like. Finally, you would then identify relevant articles that inform your work about each of these major concepts.

In addition, for each subtopic, it might also be helpful to have two broad sections, one devoted to theoretical or conceptual literature and the other to empirical or evidence-based studies. Topical sub-sections can then appear in each subtopic's two main sections. The empirical studies section can be divided into qualitative and quantitative studies, and further subdivided by different types of each accordingly. Students can learn from the literature not only what others have studied (and hence what we know as the "state of the art," but also how scholars have approached their research – that is, the methods and procedures they used to address the research question(s) of interest and hypotheses they tested.

The preceding two paragraphs are meant to be suggestive. The literature review can be organized in any number of ways, such as by content categories, types of studies (qualitative versus quantitative and within each, longitudinal versus single point in time, etc.), evolution of studies in terms of time line, or any logical ordering that makes sense in regard to your topic. In any case, be sure to specify the basis on which you are organizing and analyzing the literature. That is, prepare readers in regard to what they are likely to expect by way of topics and subtopics

in the forthcoming pages of the literature review.

In writing the literature review, focus on synthesizing the extant literature and deducing from your analysis how and why the study you propose is needed, unique, and builds upon the foundation you establish as the existing knowledge base. Synthesizing the existing literature can be done by presenting the overall pattern of findings from other studies related to a given topic, as well as findings that run counter to these. A good literature review that both synthesizes the literature and provides detailed information is BUEHLER, C., ORME, J., POST, J., & PATTERSON, D. (2000). THE LONG TERM CORRELATES OF FAMILY FOSTER CARE. *CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES REVIEW*, 22, 595-625. State your research question(s) and related hypotheses that flow from the literature review. By the end of this section, any reader should be able to discern readily exactly how and why the research question or hypothesis was formulated in the proposed form and exactly why the proposed research strategy was selected.

Note: The literature review is not expected to be exhaustive, although the more comprehensive it is at this stage in the dissertation process the less that will have to get done later. All the major concepts that will be part of your study should be identified in the literature review and variations in definitions of these concepts should also be provisionally highlighted and summarized. Further exploration of the literature is expected to occur during the writing of the dissertation which should include developments that occurred between approval of the proposal and implementation of the research design. For purposes of the dissertation proposal, the intent is to use the literature to justify your study and the approach. The literature review should explain how your study fits in "the march of ideas" contained in these works. A more detailed and extensive literature review will be required for the dissertation. To the extent possible, avoid duplicating the literature discussion in the theoretical section (Section 4). Section 3 and Section 4 should draw on different literature, as each section has a different purpose. The theoretical content in this section (3) should be a critical summary and assessment of what theoretical approaches others have used in their research. In Section 4 described below, students explicate and justify the theoretical framework that will guide their proposed study.

As you complete this section, use the following checklist to determine if you have covered the range of content that is expected to be included.

CHECKLIST

Have you:

Conducted a review of the literature, including:

Computer search (key words, authors, subject area) in social work? [] yes [] no

Sociology, political science, anthropology, psychology,
education, as appropriate to your topic? [] yes [] no

Does the literature review emphasize empirical research? [] yes [] no

Have you identified, ordered and read dissertations completed on
your subject area? [] yes [] no

In preparing this section, have you included:

An opening statement providing a synopsis of the purpose and scope
of the section and how you are organizing the content (e. g., chronologically,
by groups of like-studies, by theme, by theoretical orientation, etc.) [] yes [] no

A summary and critique of the major findings related to your topic? [] yes [] no

A critique of the methods/procedures used to obtain the findings? [] yes [] no

Highlights of areas of agreement or conflict in the approaches and
findings of the different studies? [] yes [] no

Highlights of how the research and/or approach to it has
changed over time (trends in research/methods)? [] yes [] no

Does your review of the literature show areas in which further
research is needed? [] yes [] no

Do you specify what is unresolved as related to your problem
area? [] yes [] no

How and in what way does your proposed study relate to these gaps? [] yes [] no

Are you sure that all components of the literature review are
specific to your problem area and study question? [] yes [] no

That the relevancy of each component of the review is articulated
and clear? [] yes [] no

That you have made a clear and concise case for why your study is needed and how it builds upon the existing knowledge base? [] yes [] no
Do you now have the foundation for selecting and articulating a theoretical framework for your study which encompasses the next section? [] yes [] no

SECTION FOUR: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As previously noted, the literature review serves primarily to justify the need for your study based on existing knowledge and sets up your research question(s) and related hypotheses. The theory section focuses on how you conceptualize the study question. It identifies and defines the major, critical concepts used in the study you are proposing to undertake, shows how they are related to one another, and when applicable informs as to why the relations among concepts are as presented.

In general, theories are used primarily to identify, define, and organize important concepts or mechanisms (that is, to show how the concepts or mechanisms of our study gleaned from the literature are related to one another), to explain or account for the why of these relationships, and to predict likely outcomes or results if the explanation(s) of the theory or theories used to guide the study are correct. The theoretical orientation you select is intended to drive the specific formulation of your research question(s) and related hypotheses.

Theories used primarily in a descriptive sense (showing how concepts or mechanisms are related) can serve as the basis for variable selection. Theoretically driven research that is primarily descriptive in nature should in part be justified by its contribution to the development of appropriate concepts for further study. Theories used primarily in an explanatory or predictive sense can be used to test the internal consistency of a given theory or test the veracity of rival theories. Keep in mind that good theories, whether descriptive or explanatory, in addition to internal consistency and coherency, also generate hypotheses that can be shown to be true or false, that is they are “testable” or “falsifiable.”

It might be helpful to think of orienting your study within one theoretical framework or school of thought (e.g., feminist theory, Marxist theory, human capital theory, rational choice

theory, public choice theory, cognitive theory, behavioral theory, structural-functional theory, existential theory, phenomenological theory, and the like). Your proposed study can then determine if relationships about concepts consistent with it hold up to the empirical scrutiny. If, for example, human capital theory is correct, people who are discriminated against would be expected to invest less in their education and skill development since doing so would not pay. Why get a doctorate if you are a woman, for example, if discriminatory practices preclude your getting tenure? Your study may be designed to determine if this is correct &/or under what conditions or circumstances it might hold up. It should be acknowledged that within a school of thought there often are variations and the purpose of the study may be to test their merits.

Alternatively, you might want to use two or more theories from different schools of thought to orient your study. As explanations, some theories compete with one another and your study may help to determine under if &/or what circumstances rival theories are correct. To what extent &/or under what circumstances, for example, is patriarchy (feminist theory) a better explanation of women's earnings capacity than class (Marxist theory)?

The organizing questions in this section are:

1. What theoretical orientation guides the study?
2. What rationale justifies the use of this theoretical orientation?
3. How does the inclusion of the chosen theoretical orientation contribute to an understanding of the problem being investigated?
4. How will the theoretical orientation aid in the organization of the inquiry and the analysis of data?

This section should include: (1) a review of the major uses of theories in general and the use of choice for your study; (2) identification, description, and justification of the theoretical orientation that will guide your study; (3) how the theoretical framework will be used in regard to variable selection, hypothesis testing, etc.; and (4) itemization, definition, and elaboration of the critical concepts of the study. The best guide for looking at options for theoretical frameworks is completed dissertations on this same or similar topic. On-line or electronic dissertation abstracts are good places to start for purchases and inter-library loans, in addition to perusing (by appointment with the Doctoral Program Director) recently completed Wurzweiler dissertations

located at YU-Wilf Campus in Belfer Hall, Room 907.

This proposal is not an opportunity to show all you know about theory. Rather, the goal is to frame your entire study problem within a theoretical framework that ultimately helps organize, simplify, and order your research question and related hypotheses within the context of the extant knowledge base.

In preparing this section, an opening statement providing a synopsis of the purpose and scope of the section and how you are organizing the content should be provided. As applicable, identify that there are one or more approaches to framing the study problem from a theoretical perspective and specify what these are. Then explain why you are choosing the particular theory that is your framework. It is entirely permissible to create and present a “hybrid” theoretical model, in which you draw from two different theories to create one model with components from theory – but be careful and pay attention to internal consistency and coherency. You may opt to begin this section by identifying and justifying selection of one theoretical framework.

The section should end with a clear specification of how the theory aids in determining and justifying the type of empirical investigation you are undertaking and its methodology. Make use of a table or figure to show how concepts are defined and how they are related. Theories compete with one another; it is therefore essential to show how the theoretical framework you have selected leads to the specification of the hypotheses delineated in the next section. Thus, there should be a logical linkage to the next sections on the research question and hypotheses.

As you complete this section, use the following checklist to determine if you have covered the range of content that is expected to be included.

CHECKLIST

In preparing this section, have you included

An opening statement providing a synopsis of the purpose and scope of the section and how you are organizing the content (i.e., what will be presented in what sequence?)	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
A review of the nature of theory and its uses?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Explanation of how the selected theory meets the criteria of a theory (using literature that defines the characteristics of a theory?)	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Rationale for selecting a theory or “hybrid” theory that is the framework for your study?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Identification and discussion of the components of the theory?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Discussion of the application of the theory in similar categories of studies?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Application of the components of the theory to your study problem?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Articulation of how the theory helps us understand the study problem?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Specification of how the application of the theory aids in the identification of a specific research question?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Specification of how the theory aids in determining and justifying the type of empirical investigation you are undertaking and its methodology?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Itemization and delineation of critical concepts?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no

SECTION FIVE: THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This section deals with the "big question" and related hypotheses that form the heart of your study. Sub-questions provide greater specificity. Each sub-question is followed by hypotheses that break down the "big question" into researchable form.

The Study Question – What is the main question or questions that the proposed study will address? Is it or are they researchable? That is, do they lend themselves to empirical analysis? Does the main question lend itself to sub-questions, the answers to which will add to the knowledge base? Have only a limited number if more than one main research question, with perhaps two or three sub-questions for each, as gleaned from the literature review and delineated in the theoretical framework.

Hypotheses

Construction of hypotheses should be guided by the following considerations:

- a) Are the hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework delineated in the previous section? If not, they should be!
- b) Are the hypotheses testable? That is, are they capable of being shown to be true or false, to hold or not hold? If not, they should be!
- c) Are they statements of fact? If not they should be, using simple declarative sentences.
- d) Are the variables under investigation and the nature of the relationship (positive or negative, strong or week) among the variables clearly and correctly stated?
- e) Can every term or variable in the hypotheses be referred directly or indirectly to observable empirical events?
- f) Do the variables stated in the hypotheses refer to a particular set of internally

consistent observations that is 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).

The research questions and hypotheses should be deduced and developed from the theoretical framework delineated in the previous section. Hypotheses should be 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. Hypotheses take the form of declarative statements about the relationship between two variables. They may be stated as null, predicting no relationship between variables, or in experimental or evaluative form, positing a relationship between variables. Hypotheses may be either direct (two variables changing in the same direction, whether positive or negative) or inverse (two variables going in opposite directions).

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”.

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 proposal design 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.

As you complete this section, use the following checklist to determine if you have covered

the range of content that is expected to be included.

CHECKLIST

In preparing this section, have you included:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| An opening statement providing a synopsis of the purpose and scope of the section and how you are organizing the content (i.e., what will be presented in what sequence?) | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
| A clearly articulated statement of the research question? | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
| A list of any and all sub-research questions? | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
| A list of hypotheses, correctly stated, that follows and flows from the research sub-questions? | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
| Language and form that ensures that the hypotheses, as stated, are researchable? | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
| Does the form for presentation of the study questions easily convey the flow of thought connecting the sub-questions and the related hypotheses? | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
| Is SQ 1 followed by H1a and H1b; SQ 2 followed by H2a and H2b, etc.? | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
| Is there a hypothesis for each area to be covered in your study (i.e., for each category or, as appropriate, each question on your survey form or interview guide)? | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
| If the proposal design is qualitative in nature and/or is not hypothesis driven, are the study questions explained in detail? | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
| Does this section, overall, answer the question: What is it that you wish to find out? | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |

SECTION SIX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology section is to be thought of as a step-by-step road map, guiding the reader to understand what you are going to do and how you are going to do it. Include all steps in the process. Ensure 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 will be supported through use of the research literature.

Section Elements

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 will be 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 have testable hypotheses, 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 will be conducted and whether access has been assured. Include any supporting documentation regarding requisite permissions regarding access as part of the Appendices.
- 4) *Data & subjects*: What is the source of data for the study? Are you relying on an already existing data file that someone else has already collected? Which one? Describe it. Who or what are the subjects of this research? What is the unit of analysis? What is the selection process? How many will be included in the study? Discuss the feasibility and the methodological rationale for the type of sample and its size. Address how sampling will address sub-population issues, as appropriate. Are 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 to be 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 is 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 are using an existing instrument, provide a brief history and use of the instrument and its applicability to your study. Be sure to get formal permission to do so and cite the relevant sources about reliability and validity. Be sure to evaluate 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 are adapting an existing instrument or creating one for purposes of your study, indicate how reliability and validity will be determined. If adapting an instrument, specify the changes you are making to the original and provide the rationale for doing so. If you are creating 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 are studying 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 follows:

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 are you going to collect data – in person, by mail survey, by telephone survey, by direct observation, some other way? If you are using a questionnaire to collect your data (whether by phone, mail, or in person), make sure that every question relates to an identifiable variable or measure defined above. For example, if one of your independent variables is age of respondents, make sure that there is a question in your questionnaire about age. The opposite applies: if there is 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 are 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.

(b) How are you going to analyze the data?

(1) If yours is a quantitative study, what statistical procedures will be used to assess bivariate relationships? What procedures will be 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 are interested in the relationship between depression and drug use among adolescents, you may hypothesize that they are positively related, but your analysis must indicate how you are going to control for other factors found in the literature to be influential.

(2) If yours is 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 to describe and cite the analytic approach to a 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 can be found in the Appendix.

Here are some other things to consider when preparing this section of the proposal:

An issue concerning the proposed dissertation is whether it is “do-able” - is the question worthy of exploration and is the proposed method likely to yield answers to the question? Also, the design must be realistic in terms of time frame, cost, access to the population or agencies, etc.

The choice and design of instruments to be used in the study must be explained. The history of the use of the instrument and its applicability to your study needs to be addressed. Note: if you are using a pre-existing instrument, you must obtain permission from the author of the instrument to use it, even if major adaptations will be made to it. A letter of permission from the author must accompany the proposal. A hearing will not be scheduled without such authorization.

If an instrument already developed and used elsewhere has been chosen, the student should communicate the facts and issues regarding such usage which will help the reader to understand the validity and reliability issues surrounding the proposed research. If the instrument is to be modified in any way, the student must discuss how the problems of validity and reliability which result from the changes will be dealt with. The same considerations apply to instruments designed by the student. Changes from an existing instrument or creating your own instrument may require a pretest of the revised or new instrument.

If a pretest is warranted, a plan for it should be incorporated into this section, most likely as the first item under the *Procedures* subsection. Note that pretests must include ethical safeguards and cannot begin until after CCI approval of the proposal. (See section on CCI approval).

Key Questions

Some key questions which you will need to address, as elaborated above, are:

1. How representative is your sample to the population?
2. What will be the N of your sample? Why?
3. Is the sample size adequate for purposes of the proposed statistical analysis?
4. How much control do you have over data?
5. How will you gather and record the data?
6. Has access to the data already been approved?
7. What about confidentiality and other ethical concerns?
8. How will you analyze the data?
9. What obstacles do you anticipate in data gathering and analysis and how will you deal with them?

If the study is an extension or continuation of previous studies or of another study being conducted by others simultaneously, this should be explicitly stated when describing the purpose of your study. In addition, specify the particular contribution of your proposed study in light of the others.

Questions of validity and reliability of each variable must be addressed in order for the findings to be accepted by the community of scholars. With respect to validity, the key question is: how do we know that the data actually measures what it purports to measure? With respect to reliability: is it possible for other researchers (or yourself at a later date), using the same or similar methodology, to come up with similar findings?

For most dissertation proposals, and for all quantitative research, this section should end with a Table that contains information as the following example illustrates:

<u>Hypothesis</u>	<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>Definition</u>	<u>Level of Measurement</u>	<u>Variable Use****</u>	<u>Analysis</u>
1. Depression among grandmothers raising grandchildren is higher than	Depression	Sum of CES-D scale	Ordinal	Dependent	t-Test for bivariate analysis; multiple regression for
	Grandmother-grandchild living status	Grandmothers raising grandchildren	Nominal	Independent	

those not raising grandchildren.		without benefit of a child's parents = 1; others = 0			multivariate analysis
1a. Grandmothers raising teenage grandchildren will be more depressed than others	Teenage grandchild household	A grandchild between the ages of 13 and 18 inclusive = 1; others = 0	Nominal	Independent	t-Test for bivariate analysis; multiple regression for multivariate analysis
2. Grandmothers raising grandchildren are more likely to be found in the Northeast than elsewhere in the country	Region of residence	Based on U.S. Census Bureau definitions: Northeast South Midwest West	Nominal	Independent or Covariate	Pearson Chi-square
2a. Grandmothers raising grandchildren in the Northeast will be more depressed than in other regions of the country.	Region of residence	Based on U.S. Census Bureau definitions: Northeast South Midwest West	Nominal	Independent or Covariate	ANOVA, with Post Hoc follow up if regions factor is significant

*****Note: Variable Use depends in large part on the theoretical or practical importance of the variable and on hypothesis being tested. In hypothesis #1 in the table above, for example, a relationship between depression and grandmother-grandchild living status is posited such that the level of depression, the dependent measure, is a function of grandmother-grandchild living status, the independent or causal measure. The driving force behind this hypothesis might be one's interest in determining if grandmothers raising grandchildren are more likely than other grandmothers to have greater levels of depression. As stated in hypothesis #1, grandmothers raising grandchildren without benefit of a child's parents are expected to be more depressed than other grandmothers, all else being equal. Here the independent variable grandmother-grandchild living status occupies a main interest in the study. In hypothesis # 2a, depression is again the dependent measure, while region of residence (the Northeast in this particular instance) can be either an independent or covariate measure. Here it is also being posited that living in the

Northeast is causally related to level of depression. However, if region of residence is of secondary importance to your study, whether theoretically or practically, it would be more appropriate to identify this as a covariate rather than as an independent variable. In hypothesis 2, note that grandmother-grandchild living status is used as a dependent measure while region of residence can be viewed as either an independent or covariate measure. Whether causal or correlational variables are considered independent or covariate depends on the complexity of the modeling used for analyses. The specifics of modeling per se go beyond the scope of this *Guide* and should be discussed with dissertation advisors and committee members.

Historical dissertations should be based on the utilization of "primary" sources. These can include biographies and autobiographies, correspondence, unpublished papers, minutes of meetings, unpublished drafts, archival materials, recordings of the debates and actions of legislative bodies and newspaper articles from the period. Students should also use "secondary" sources such as textbooks but should not rely on them completely, as their data have already been screened through the theories and ideologies of another person. The plan presented in the proposal for the completion of research should specify the primary sources to be utilized and should discuss the problems anticipated in obtaining these data.

Ethical questions regarding research are increasingly important. The steps to protect confidentiality, obtain informed consent (or a waiver to informed consent), and the way in which the benefits of the study outweigh any potential risks to the study participants should be summarized in a part of the Research Methodology section. See, also, the *Manual for the Ph.D. Program in Social Welfare*, which cites relevant portions of the new *NASW Code of Ethics (1996)* in regard to the conduct of research. The informed consent form should be included as an appendix.

As you complete this section, use the following checklist to determine if you have covered the range of content that is expected to be included.

CHECKLIST

In preparing this section, have you included:

An opening statement providing a synopsis of the purpose

and scope of the section and how you are organizing the content (i.e., what will be presented in what sequence?)	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Have you explained how your sample will be selected?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Have you accounted for any contingencies if you are not able to get the desired sample?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Have you justified the sample size as statistically significant?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Have you addressed the limitations to the particular sample?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
If you are using a pre-existing data collection instrument, have you discussed how it was constructed?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
How reliability and validity were determined?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
If you are using a pre-existing instrument, have you indicated how you will test reliability/validity of these scales/indexes for your own study?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
If the instrument was constructed by another author and for another purpose, have you discussed its applicability to your study?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Have you obtained written consent to use pre-existing instruments?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Have you thoroughly addressed how informed consent will be obtained from the sample population?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Have you thoroughly addressed any potential risks to the population you are studying and how they will be addressed?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Have you laid out the specific procedures for administering the survey, interviewing the population, or conducting the experiment?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Is each variable stated in the hypotheses defined operationally and objectively?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Are the operational definitions written in specific and detailed language?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Would the terms be understandable to persons outside of social work?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Are authoritative references used to define the term (i.e., are		

- the definitions grounded in the literature)? yes no
- Are the operational definitions presented in paragraph form with the term italicized? yes no
- Have you distinguished between the dependent, independent and intervening variables? yes no
- Are the definitions ordered by the type of variable (i.e., dependent variables are discussed first, followed by all independent variables?) yes no
- If your study contains both qualitative and quantitative components, have you identified the steps/procedures for each component? yes no
- Have you identified the statistical package you will use to analyze the data? yes no
- Have you laid out a plan for analyzing the data? yes no
- Have you discussed potential of a response bias and how you will address it? yes no
- Have you indicated how you will provide a profile of the characteristics of your sample population? yes no
- Have you identified the statistics you will use to test your hypotheses? yes no
- Have you provided a brief rationale for the choice of the statistics, including a justification based in the research literature? yes no
- Is the rationale based on the intent of the research (e.g., to examine the relationship between variables or to compare groups?) and the hypotheses related to the question? yes no
- Does this section, overall, answer the question: How will you conduct the research study and analyze the data? yes no

SECTION SEVEN: LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In this section, the author acknowledge the boundaries of the study (what will and will not be investigated) and also the problems inherent in conducting this particular study which may

affect the data to be gathered, their interpretation, or their application. Study limitations should also include any attitudes or ideological commitments held by the author regarding the problem under study that affect the selection of the study question and, potentially, interpretation of findings.

SECTION EIGHT: ANTICIPATED CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

This section establishes the intended 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. The hypotheses form the organizing scheme for this section. What significance do you believe the study findings will have for policy development, implementation, evaluation, or analysis? How might they 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?

There is a tendency to promise the world and to exaggerate the anticipated contributions. Statements concerning anticipated contributions should be made with recognition of the inherent limitations of the study, as articulated in the previous section. For example, if you are studying a foster care population in one agency in one locale, it is not reasonable to list, as a potential contribution, that on the basis of the findings the entire U.S. foster care system can or will be changed. State what is reasonable and be sure to include the advancement and/or development of methodology and the potential for replicating the study in the future as among the contributions.

PLAN FOR COMPLETION OF THE DISSERTATION

On a separate page (not to be included with your proposal) prepare a plan of action which will be undertaken to complete the dissertation together with a projected timetable for completion. Here you are to convey to your committee a realistic plan for overcoming the problems which can be anticipated within a conservatively and realistically chosen time frame.

FORMAT AND STYLE REQUIREMENTS

LENGTH

Proposals should be between 60 to 75 pages. Although the length of any given section might vary considerably from others, students may find the following section page-length *guidelines* helpful:

1. Overview: 2-3 pages.
2. The Study Problem : 3-4 pages
3. Literature Review: 15-25 pages
4. Theoretical Framework: 10-15 pages
5. The Research Question (and Related Hypotheses): 2-6 pages
6. Research Methodology: 5-10 pages
7. Limitations of the Study: 1 page
8. Anticipated Contributions of the Study: 1-3 pages

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.) The American Psychological Association also publishes a companion *Mastering APA Style*, a self-guided workbook for learning APA style and the *APA Style Helper* - a computer program that facilitates compliance with APA style.

In making citations, derivative material, such as text books, should be used only when original or other primary material is 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 proposal 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.

The copies of the proposal should each be incorporated into a report folder. The copies should be sharp and clear and equal in quality to that produced by a laser printer.

The length of the proposal should be 50-60 pages, double-spaced, excluding appendices and references (the latter which should also be double-spaced). Sixty-five pages is the maximum length permitted, excluding references and attachments.

FORMAT

- a) **Title:** The title of the Dissertation Proposal should be no longer than 72 characters, including the spaces between words.
- b) **Margins:**
 - Left: One inch
 - 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.

WHAT YOU NEED BEFORE A DEFENSE IS SCHEDULED

Avoid the misconception that a first draft is a completed proposal! When your advisor decides that the proposal is ready to be considered by other faculty members, he/she will consult with the director of the doctoral program about the appointment of two faculty members to serve as readers. The advisor will serve as Chair of the proposal hearing. Under unusual and compelling circumstances, a scholar who is not a member of the faculty but who is familiar with the subject matter of the proposal may also be selected as one of the readers, in lieu of the third faculty member. This person must have a doctorate. The choice must be approved by the director of the program. Such an outside scholar may also serve as third reader, subject to approval of the director of the program.

Upon approval of the advisor, the student will submit five copies of the proposal to the doctoral office. Three copies are used by the members of the proposal committee in their review. The fourth copy is inserted in the student's file together with the memo recording the decisions and recommendations of the proposal committee. The director of the doctoral program receives the fifth copy. The proposal committee will usually need four to six weeks after distribution of copies of the proposal by the advisor in order to decide whether a hearing is indicated.

When the advisor and all readers have reached a consensus that the proposal should go forward, a hearing will be scheduled. Hearings are scheduled only if, in the opinion of all committee members, the proposal is likely to be approved, with the exception of perhaps minor changes which may be requested. It is possible that, as an outcome of the hearing, the student will be asked to make certain revisions. Final approval of the proposal will be postponed until the issues raised are appropriately addressed.

All members of the Committee must be in agreement that the proposal is ready for the hearing; it is the responsibility of your advisor to determine when this criterion has been met. Expectations include, but are not limited to:

- Completed and accurate references in APA format, following the 5th edition.
- Attachments:

- Finalized instruments
- Protocols (e.g., interview guides)
- Cover letter to accompany any questionnaire, as applicable, which must follow CCI format and address informed consent
- Specialized informed consent letters, such as if children or vulnerable populations are involved in your data collection
- Permission letters for use of an agency site, mailing list, and/or instrumentation, as appropriate.

DEADLINES

The student should consult the academic calendar for information regarding deadlines for submission of the proposal in time for faculty consideration. In the Spring semester, the end of the Passover holiday break is usually the deadline for submission of proposals which can be considered before the end of the semester. 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.

In general, proposal defense hearings are not held after May 15th of each academic year and before September 15th of the Fall semester. Students are to be registered for the semester in which they defend their proposal. The doctoral program does not run summer classes.

DECISION PROCESS

When your advisor decides that the proposal is ready to be considered by other faculty members, he/she will consult with the director of the doctoral program about the appointment of two faculty members to serve as readers. The advisor will serve as Chair of the Proposal Review Committee. As previously noted, under unusual and compelling circumstances, a scholar who is not a member of the faculty but who is familiar with the subject matter of the proposal may also be selected as one of the readers, in lieu of the third faculty member. This person must have a doctorate. The choice must be approved by the director of the program. Such an outside scholar may also serve as third reader, subject to approval of the director of the program.

There are four possible outcomes of the hearing: pass, pass with minor revisions, pass with major revisions, or fail. It is highly unusual that a hearing will be scheduled if major revisions are needed or if the proposal is not acceptable. If minor or major revisions are recommended, the student has **three months** to resubmit the proposal with the changes. This three-month time period also applies to submission of the CCI application. If the proposal is not finalized and an application submitted to CCI within three months of the defense, its acceptance will be considered null and void.

In general, the revised proposal is reviewed only by the chair of the committee to determine that the changes meet with the expectations delineated by the committee at the conclusion of the hearing. In some circumstances, the committee may opt to have all its members review the revised document. Once the advisor or committee has indicated that the revisions are acceptable, then the student is to submit two bound copies of the final, accepted proposal to the director of the doctoral program for the official records. The cover of the revised document is to indicate the date of the hearing and the date of re-submission, as applicable. The chair of the committee will include a memo with the final submission indicating that the changes have been approved.

Approval by the Committee on Clinical Investigations

A proposal is not officially approved until it has received favorable action by the Committee on Clinical Investigations (CCI). All proposals are reviewed by the Yeshiva University CCI to determine whether human subjects who participate in the research are adequately protected against harm as a consequence of their participation and that informed consent has been obtained. All research projects approved in this process must include strict measures to protect the confidentiality of the responses by the human subjects at the time of inquiry and thereafter. The information detailed below (CCI forms, portions of the proposal, and appendices) must be submitted to the CCI within three months of the date of the proposal hearing. If this timetable is not followed, the proposal will be considered “out of date” and will need to go back to committee for re-consideration.

Effective October 1, 2000, the National Institutes of Health require that all investigators who submit applications or proposals involving human subjects must provide in their application “a description of education completed in the protection of human subjects”. To meet this requirement, WSSW is incorporating relevant educational components into several doctoral level courses: *Strategies of Inquiry, Research I and II*, and the *Dissertation Proposal Seminar*. In addition, all doctoral students, prior to submission of the proposal to the CCI, are to complete and pass the on-line exam regarding research on human subjects. Information about signing up for this exam is available from the Doctoral Program Office and/or your second year research professor.

On April 14, 2003, the Health Insurance Portability Act (HIPPA) went into effect. This law affects the conduct of research on human subjects and the records involved in that research. Under the new law, researchers must obtain written authorization from the research subject to use the subject's record, or obtain a waiver/exemption from the CCI. Information on HIPPA requirements can be obtained on the CCI website at <http://www.aecom.yu.edu/home/ci/hippa.htm>.

The greater the power of the agency involved relative to the human subjects of the research, the greater the concern of the reviewers regarding the risk to these human subjects. The greater the power of the research or researcher to influence the life situations of the subjects of the research, the greater the concern of the reviewers regarding these considerations. Research that involves the use of clients, subjects, staff, or records of any organization must have prior written approval of that organization to conduct the research as detailed in the proposal. In other words, participating organizations must explicitly approve the research and indicate their cooperation in the conduct of the study.

In addition to concerns about the risk of harm, all research must meet another test: the potential benefits of the project must be clearly evident. If we are asking the subjects of our research to answer questions or perform an action, the reasons for shaping the inquiry in this way must be enunciated clearly. The proposal must demonstrate that the benefits to be derived outweigh any potential risks to the subjects. In this respect, the validity of the science (aims, research design, methodology), itself, may be called into question.

In designing the research protocol, students should be aware of the guidelines for

review which have been developed by Yeshiva University and discuss their applications for approval with their advisors. The director of the doctoral program or the Dean of WSSW may be involved in additional three-way discussions in order to clarify particular questions.

Not all proposals require a full or face-to-face hearing by the CCI. Some studies are eligible for exempt status or an expedited review without a face to face hearing. For example, when an organization formally approves the conduct of a research study within its scope of authority, an expedited review may be possible. Studies which do not involve human subjects inquiry, such as historical or policy research, may be exempt, but this determination is made solely by CCI upon review of the application.

If a proposal is submitted for CCI consideration under the categories of either exempt or expedited, only sections 1, 5-8, references, and appendices are to be included with the CCI forms. If a proposal is submitted with the potential that a full CCI review will be required, the entire proposal must be included with the forms.

If a hearing is necessary, the dissertation proposal advisor, as the principal investigation of the research, will participate. The University faculty designated as reviewers by the CCI are expected to share any major concerns in advance with the advisor/principal investigator so that the student and advisor can deal directly with these concerns at the hearing. In some situations, a postponement of the hearing may be requested in order to address the issues raised by the reviewers. Alternatively, the CCI reviewers may suggest that the protocol be withdrawn from CCI consideration until such time as substantive changes are made in accord with reviewer recommendations.

The timing of submissions for review is a serious concern. Proposals approved by the WSSW Proposal Committee no later than April 1 will probably be able to be reviewed by CCI during the regular academic year. If the WSSW Proposal Review Committee gives its approval after April 1, and a hearing is required, it may have to wait until early Fall. **Under no circumstances can the research commence until the CCI has rendered a decision in writing. Likewise, no pre-testing on human subjects can begin until after CCI approval has been obtained.**

A copy of the forms required to be completed in order to request CCI consideration and approval are available through the Doctoral Office and on the CCI website. These forms are completed after the WSSW Proposal Committee has approved the proposal and after all revisions requested by this committee are made.

Once the proposal has been formally accepted, it is still possible to modify the methods of investigation. These changes should be discussed with the dissertation advisor and he/she should keep the director of the doctoral program informed. If there is a substantive change in the focus of the investigation, it is important to discuss this with the dissertation advisor to determine whether a new proposal should be formally submitted. Any changes in proposal design or method should be appended to the file copy of the proposal in the Doctoral Program Office. Further, if the changes in any way affect ethical issues in the conduct of research that are within the purview of the Committee on Clinical Investigations, the modified research design will need to be re-submitted to that body.

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