Dissertation for the Ph.D.

Dissertation

During the dissertation process, all students must complete nine (9) hours of IT 898- Dissertation. A minimum of three (3) credit hours of IT 898 must be completed during the semester in which the dissertation is defended. A student should be enrolled in dissertation hours during the semester following the passing of the Comprehensive Examination, and continue to enroll in dissertation hours for each subsequent semester during the preparation of the prospectus and dissertation work. In conference with the major professor, the student estimates the proportion of time to be spent on dissertation work and assigns an appropriate number of credit hours. During initial stages, credit hours may be small in number, but will normally increase as the dissertation proceeds. During the entire period (a minimum of nine hours of enrollment), the student must continue to take additional dissertation hours until the dissertation is completed. Students working on the dissertation must enroll in a minimum of one dissertation hour each semester.

The student submits three documents to a doctoral dissertation committee: a pre-proposal, a proposal, and a completed dissertation. The last two documents are defended orally. A student applies for candidacy only after all degree requirements, except the oral defense of the dissertation, are completed.

Dissertation Timelines

*Time limitations:* The dissertation must be defended after the completion of coursework and comprehensive exams and within eight (8) calendar years of the initial enrollment into the program. The actual time it takes to complete the dissertation depends on many factors including the scope of the study, the methodology used, and the skill level and disposition of the student. A typical dissertation within the department is generally completed within 1.5-2 years.

*Deadlines:* Students are responsible for meeting the dissertation deadlines* that are listed on the thesis-dissertation deadline schedule in the Bulletin and on the Web at [http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/deadlines](http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/deadlines). If a student fails to meet the final deposit deadline, his or her degree will be awarded the next semester. The student must enroll for one (1) hour of 898 that semester.

*Students must allow a minimum of 12 working days* for committee members to review the pre-proposal, prospectus, and dissertation documents. This will be a major factor in meeting dissertation deadlines. The dissertation chair may require the student to provide documents to committee members farther in advance under certain circumstances (e.g., lengthy documents).

Graduate Reader

The graduate reader ensures that dissertations meet university requirements. Students should consult with the graduate reader throughout the dissertation process ([http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/graduate-reader](http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/graduate-reader)).
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

The University of Southern Mississippi and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have established standards and guidelines to protect individuals from risks associated with participating in research studies. The university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) is responsible for ensuring that adequate safeguards are in place to minimize the risk to individuals involved in such studies. The IRB, through an appointed chairperson, reports directly to the vice president for research and economic development. The IRB acts as a monitor to ensure that the university’s research using people as participants is in compliance with the U.S. DHHS policies and other procedures. All investigations, experiments, surveys, or demonstrations involving human subjects, regardless of funding or the source of the funds, must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board before the activity is begun. This includes doctoral dissertations. Application forms for submission of protocols for review by the Institutional Review Board are available from each college’s representative and in the Office of Graduate Studies. Prior to submitting the required copies of an application for approval by the IRB, students should have:

- the application approved by their dissertation chair (after the prospectus is approved).
- secured the appropriate signatures.
- the application reviewed by their college representative to the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The signed and approved IRB approval letter should be included in an appendix of the dissertation. Application procedures for the IRB can be found at [http://www.usm.edu/irb/index.html]. Students should expect the IRB review process to take at least one month. The process may take longer if the review board requests revisions from the student.

Pre-proposal

The student prepares a pre-proposal describing the rationale, problem, procedure, and expected nature of results for his/her dissertation (see instructions and cover page at end of this document). The pre-proposal is reviewed by the major professor, and when approved, is submitted to the other members of the committee for approval and signing. A copy of the prospectus is filed in the student's folder, and one copy is forwarded to the department head. There must be a minimum of two months from the pre-proposal to the defense of the Dissertation Proposal (first three chapters). In other words, the approval of the pre-proposal must precede the proposal defense and generally submitted no later than the end of the semester prior to the anticipated defense of the proposal.

Students should consult with their dissertation chair in developing the pre-proposal. Students should then meet individually with committee members and provide each a copy of their Pre-Proposal document and Pre-Proposal Response sheet. A committee member may either approve for the student to proceed to the prospectus (proposal) stage or ask the student to modify and/or resubmit the Pre-Proposal document prior to granting approval. Once all members have approved the Pre-Proposal, the student may proceed with the development of the prospectus (proposal). The student should return all Pre-Proposal Response Sheets to the dissertation chair. A meeting of the committee may be scheduled to discuss the prospectus with the student.

The pre-proposal represents a general agreement between the doctoral student and the committee as to the nature of the study to be conducted. It is understood that circumstances will invariably necessitate changes from the study as described in the pre-proposal as it is carried out. The student is responsible to recognize when such decisions are required and to exercise professional judgment.

The format of the pre-proposal is not rigid, but generally covers the statement of the problem, background literature, and research and/or developmental procedures (see the Pre-proposal Guidelines document). The primary emphasis
should be on describing the proposed research methodology. The literature review should reflect the general background of the problem and a sampling of the various literature sources which will appear in the dissertation. The statistical procedures to be used should be indicated. In many cases, additional analyses, which are not anticipated in the pre-proposal, will be employed in the dissertation.

**Proposal**

The proposal for the dissertation is more complete. The first three chapters need to be written and thoroughly explained. These three chapters include the (1) introduction, (2) literature review, and (3) methodology that describe the instruments and methods of data collection. Proposals are first reviewed by the major professor who provides suggestions and recommendations on the content in the proposal. The prospectus should be paginated and include title page, table of contents, appendix and references along with the chapter texts. Students work closely with their chair to develop an appropriate prospectus and **may not send the document to individual committee members until the chair, in consultation with the committee’s statistician/methodologist, determines the prospectus is ready for review by the committee.** The student must provide copies of the prospectus to each committee member **at least 12 working days** prior to the prospectus meeting. Format for the proposal should follow Graduate School guidelines [http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/graduate-reader].

After the major professor approves the revisions, copies can then be distributed to other members of the committee. If conflicts arise between the committee members in terms of the content of the dissertation, the major professor will consult with other members of the dissertation committee and negotiates a common ground.

Once all of the committee members indicate that they have no major problems with the proposal and ready for the oral defense, the student will be notified. A common time and place will be scheduled for the oral defense at which the student will defend the proposal and answer any questions that may arise from the committee. The defense is open to any member of the faculty and, at the discretion of the chair, may be opened to the public. The committee chair, with advice from the committee, has complete authority for the conduct of the defense. The chair may recognize those wishing to ask questions about the candidate’s prospectus. Questions and resulting discussion should be appropriate. The committee chair may end the open part of the defense by restricting the meeting to the committee after an appropriate time.

If the committee approves that the proposal is acceptable and that dissertation work can now be completed, members of the doctoral advisory committee will provide signatures on the appropriate form to indicate passage of the proposal defense. This **Dissertation Proposal or Prospectus Approval Form** is to be completed after the successful defense of the prospectus (http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/degree-and-graduation-information). After the dissertation prospectus has been approved, the student must file two copies of the form with the graduate degree auditor and one copy with the adviser, before or at the time the application for degree is filed.

**Completed Dissertation**

In accordance with the approved proposal, the student independently designs the specific procedures, develops materials, collects data, and analyzes and interprets results. The major professor has the primary responsibility for providing advice to the student, which will ensure that all aspects of dissertation work are conducted appropriately and adequately. The student may seek the advice of other committee members when required.

The writing of the dissertation is an important part of the process, and adequate time needs to be allocated for reviewing and revising. The final draft, prepared in accordance with the latest current edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, is formally submitted to the committee and serves as the basis of the oral defense. Final revisions are made following the defense. Determining and enforcing standards of quality for
dissertation research is the prerogative and duty of the committee.

When the semester arrives during which the student will complete his/her dissertation and undergo an examination in defense of it, s/he registers for three units of IT 898.

The dissertation should follow the guidelines provided by the graduate studies office and typically follows the most current APA format unless otherwise indicated by the dissertation chair. The Student Manual for Preparing Theses and Dissertations (http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/graduate-reader) is the official style guide for dissertations approved at The University of Southern Mississippi. The dissertation is typically of book length and generally consists of five (5) chapters: Introduction, Review of Literature, Methodology, Results, and Conclusions. The student should consult with his or her dissertation chair and statistician/methodologist in the development of the dissertation document and should clarify format, length and other expectations. Students may not send the document to individual committee members until the chair, in consultation with the committee’s statistician/methodologist, determines the dissertation is ready for review by the committee. The student must provide copies of the dissertation to each committee member at least 12 working days prior to the defense.

An oral defense of the dissertation is conducted at a time and place suggested by the major professor, who presides at the examination. An announcement of the examination is published in an official University publication at least two weeks before the date of the examination, based upon information supplied by the major professor. In addition, the defense will be publicly announced on the program listserv. The defense is open to attendance by all members of the graduate faculty and should be held in a large enough room.

The defense is conducted on a final draft of the dissertation. The final copy must be provided to committee members no later than three weeks prior to the defense date to provide committee members adequate time to review the dissertation. Any changes agreed upon during the defense must be approved in final typed form by the committee member who suggested them, or by the major professor, by delegation of the committee. The examining committee completes and signs a form certifying to the Graduate Dean the results of the examination: passed, passed with revisions, or failed.

The committee chair, with advice from the committee, has complete authority for the conduct of the defense. The chair may recognize those wishing to ask questions about the candidate’s research. Questions and resulting discussion should be appropriate. The committee chair may end the open part of the defense by restricting the meeting to the committee after an appropriate time. Discussion of the results of the defense must be limited to the committee members. The dissertation is approved by majority affirmative vote of the committee. The following is a typical format for dissertation oral defense meetings:

1) Opening of the Meeting: Chair opens the meeting, recognizing guests, and committee members. The candidate recognizes the chair, committee members and guests.

2) Executive Session: The committee goes into executive session and all non-committee members leave the room (including candidate and guests). The chair polls members to ascertain if there are major concerns that might prohibit the candidate’s successful defense. At this point, the chair can decide to cancel the meeting or proceed. An example of why an oral defense may be cancelled would be an accusation of plagiarism.

3) Presentation: Although each member has thoroughly read the dissertation, at the discretion of the dissertation chair, the student makes a formal 15-30 minute presentation of his or her research (the time and format should be discussed with the chair prior to the defense). The student should be able to articulate a keen understanding of the literature, methodology, results, conclusions and implications of the study.
4) **Questions/Comments:** The chair opens the floor for questions from the committee generally calling on each committee member individually. Committee members ask probing questions and/or provide comments related to the candidate’s work. This questioning session continues until ample time has been given to each committee member and/or until there are no more questions/comments. At the discretion of the chair, other faculty members and/or graduate students in attendance may be called upon to ask questions and/or provide insightful comments.

5) **Executive Session:** The committee goes back into executive session and again all non-committee members leave the room (including candidate and guests). At this time, the chair calls for a vote on the outcome of the oral defense. Committee members have these options:
   a. Approved with no revisions
   b. Approved with revisions (committee reconvenes after revisions are made)
   c. Not approved

6) **Results:** The student/candidate rejoins the committee and is notified of the results. No guests or other non-committee members may be present during this portion of the meeting. The results are indicated on the *Results of Oral Defense of Dissertation Form*. The candidate takes this form, along with a copy of the dissertation title page, to the graduate studies office immediately after the defense. Final copies of the dissertation must be deposited in the Graduate Studies Office.

*Dissertation Grade* – Students enroll in 898 while working on their dissertation research will receive the grade of ‘E’ to indicate *work in progress*. An ‘E’ is changed to ‘P’ after successful completion of the dissertation defense by the dissertation chair.

**Doctoral Student Documentation Requirements**

The doctoral student must have the documents listed below on file with The Graduate School. Students are advised to check their files in The Graduate School for completeness of documentation. Students should check the "milestone" section of their advising transcript (GRDII) to verify these documents have been received by The Graduate School. See [www.usm.edu/graduateschool](http://www.usm.edu/graduateschool) for list of forms and online versions of forms.

A. **Plan of Study Form.** Students must submit a "plan of study" form to The Graduate School by their second semester of enrollment. See [http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/plans-study-doctoral-programs](http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/plans-study-doctoral-programs) for specific directions.

B. **Research and Scholarly Integrity Education.** Students must submit the RSIE completion certificate by the end of the 2nd month of the first semester they are enrolled. (November, March, July). See this web page: [http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/plans-study-doctoral-programs](http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/plans-study-doctoral-programs).

C. **Qualifying Exam Results Form.** The department chair should submit the form to the graduate degree auditor indicating that the student has completed the qualifying exam if it is required. See Progress Degree Forms at [http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/degree-and-graduation-information](http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/degree-and-graduation-information).

D. **Doctoral Committee Appointment Form.** The department chair should submit the form to The Graduate School indicating who will serve on the student's committee. A letter of appointment will be sent to the committee members and adviser by the dean of the Graduate School. See Progress Degree Forms at [http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/degree-and-graduation-information](http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/degree-and-graduation-information).

E. **Comprehensive Exam Results Form.** The doctoral committee chair should submit the results of the
comprehensive exam form to the graduate degree auditor. See Progress Degree Forms at http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/degree-and-graduation-information.

F. Application for Degree. The student should present two copies of the Application for Degree form, and pay fees during the semester preceding that of graduation. See http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/application-degree for details. Students can pay fees online. Students not graduating in the semester for which they applied must contact the graduate degree auditor and submit a deferment form.

G. Dissertation Prospectus Approval and Application for Candidacy Form. After completing all the requirements for the doctoral degree other than the dissertation and after the dissertation prospectus has been approved at least one semester prior to graduation, the student must file two copies of the form with the graduate degree auditor and one copy with the adviser, before or at the time the application for degree is filed. Students are reminded to secure approval of the Human Subjects Review Committee or the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee if necessary. Approval letters must be in an appendix. Students should consult the chair of these committees as to the need for Human Subjects (IRB) and IACUC approval.

H. Dissertation Defense Results Form. The doctoral committee chair should submit the results of the oral defense of the dissertation form to the graduate reader immediately following the defense. See Progress Degree Forms at http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/degree-and-graduation-information. A copy of the dissertation title page should also be submitted. Final copies of the dissertation must be deposited in The Graduate School (see deadlines: http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/deadlines).

Graduation

To complete the Ph.D. degree in Instructional Technology and Design, students must achieve a minimum 3.0 cumulative grade point average, complete all course work, pass comprehensive examinations, and successfully complete and defend a dissertation. All requirements for the degree, except the dissertation and final oral examination, must be completed within a period of six years. This time requirement dates from the first registration for graduate courses on a student's program of study. Doctoral candidates have eight years in which to complete their program degree requirements including the completion and defense of the dissertation.

Commencement: The chair attends commencement and has the honor of ‘hooding’ his or her doctoral graduates. This is a major life event for the graduate and every effort should be made by the chair to attend the event. Should the chair be unable to attend, he or she should select an appropriate substitute from the dissertation committee and notify the Graduate Studies Office of the substitution.

Last Update: August 24, 2014

Ph.D. in Instructional Technology and Design
Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education
The University of Southern Mississippi
Hattiesburg, MS, United States
Pre-Proposal Guidelines

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Pre-Proposal is to determine if the student has conceptualized an appropriate research topic. The student’s dissertation committee reviews the Pre-Proposal to determine if the topic is both acceptable and researchable and gives constructive feedback to guide the student toward an appropriate research focus. The Pre-Proposal is considered the initial step toward the completion of the dissertation. Once approved by at least three members of the committee, the student may then proceed with the development of a full Proposal (basically, Chapters I, II, and III). Only after the approval of the Proposal can a student seek appropriate IRB approval and commence with the study.

POLICY

ITD doctoral students must submit a Pre-Proposal and gain approval of their committee members no later than one semester prior to their Proposal Defense.

PRE-PROPOSAL FORMAT

The pre-proposal document should be 5-10 pages in length and should include the following information:

1. General Research Question(s): What does the study seek to investigate? What variables might you examine and how do you plan to measure/analyze them?
2. Rationale for Study: What is the importance of the study? How will your study make a contribution to the field? Why is this research needed?
3. Support for Study: What is the theoretical basis for the study? Provide a ‘brief’ narrative of evidence found in the literature that would support the legitimacy of your proposed study. This may include reference to similar studies.
4. Procedures: At this stage, how do you foresee completing the study? How will the data be collected? Where? When? Who will be involved/participants?

PRE-PROPOSAL APPROVAL

Each ITD doctoral student should meet individually with committee members and provide a copy of the Pre-Proposal (with the Pre-Proposal Response Sheet attached) no later than the end of the semester prior to the anticipated semester for the defense of the Proposal. Each committee member will be asked to provide the student with constructive feedback regarding the study. A committee member may ask the student to modify and/or resubmit the Pre-Proposal document prior to granting approval to proceed. Once a Pre-Proposal Response Sheet is signed by the chair, the statistician/research expert, and at least one other committee member, the student may proceed with the development of the full Proposal (Chapters I, II, and III).
Dear Committee Member,

Please review the attached Pre-Proposal Document and provide feedback below. Your signature denotes that you have read the Pre-Proposal and have indicated whether or not I can proceed with the development of my Proposal (Chapters I, II, and III). Your signature does not indicate approval of the Dissertation Proposal.

1. General Research Question(s)
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

2. Rationale for Study
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

3. Support for Study
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

4. Procedures
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

Check Approval Status:  _____ Approved to Proceed to Proposal Stage
                        _____ Not Approved to Proceed to Proposal Stage

________________________________________  _________________________
Committee Member’s Signature            Date