Chapter 11. Dissertation

See [http://graduatestudies.cua.edu/currentstudents/doctorateindex.cfm](http://graduatestudies.cua.edu/currentstudents/doctorateindex.cfm) for links to the Doctoral Dissertation Handbook, funding opportunities, and relevant forms.

**Doctoral Candidacy**

When students register with the department for comps, they out the form for doctoral candidacy. Candidacy begins the semester following the passing of comps. It is not possible to have a dissertation proposal or committee formally approved until the student is officially a doctoral candidate.

**Registration**

Following the passing of comprehensives, the student can begin to register for PSY 996 Dissertation - Doctoral, which costs 1 credit of tuition and is not graded (often called “Dissertation Guidance”). Beginning in Fall 2013, there is only a single course number (PSY 996) that should be used in the Fall or the Spring semester. **The student must register for at least two semesters of Dissertation Guidance, and these must include the semester in which the dissertation proposal is submitted for university approval, and the semester in which the student takes orals.** Generally, you should register for PSY 996 every semester beginning the semester following comps through the semester in which you take orals. See Chapter 6, Continuous Enrollment, for a discussion of Dissertation registration regulations, including registration while on internship.

**Dissertation Timeline**

Doctoral candidates are admitted to candidacy the first day of the semester after they pass the doctoral comprehensive examination. The program expects students to propose their dissertations within 1 year of admission to candidacy, and **students are required by the School of Arts and Sciences to have a dissertation proposal approved 2 years after passing comps.** Thus, for students who pass comps in the fall, the university deadline for the proposal is December, 2 years later. For students who pass comps in the spring, the university deadline for the proposal is May, 2 years later.

**Students wishing to apply for internship must submit their Dissertation Topic Form and 2-page proposal to the Academic Speciality of the Psychology Department by Oct. 1 of the year in which the student wishes to apply for internship. Only if the proposal has been submitted by Oct. 1 will the Director of Clinical Training fill out the form attesting to the student’s readiness for internship required for application to all internships.**
The department deadline for completion of dissertation and the oral examination is 4 years from the end of the semester of admission to candidacy. (In other words, the deadline for students who pass comps in the Fall semester is May, 4.5 years after comps; the deadline for students who pass comps in the Spring semester is December, 4.5 years after comps.)

If a doctoral candidate does not complete the dissertation and take the final oral examination by his or her deadline, the candidate will be subject to dismissal from the degree program. An extension may be requested prior to the deadline by writing a letter of explanation to the Department Chair and submitting it and a Student Request Form (available from the department office) to the faculty advisor. The student should begin the process of requesting an extension at least 2 months before his or her deadline. If the faculty advisor, the Director of Clinical Training, and the Chair approve the extension, the Chair will then recommend approval to the Dean. An extension must be approved by the Dean and will normally not exceed 1 year.

Choosing a Topic, Mentor, and Committee

The first step in beginning a dissertation is choosing an area of interest. Often the topic is a continuation of a program of research begun with a faculty mentor earlier in the student’s graduate career. At times, students will select a different topic and/or advisor. The advisor, often called the “major professor,” must be a member of the psychology faculty, of regular or adjunct rank.

The student is invited to speak with more than one faculty member about an area of interest. The final decision regarding who will serve as major professor will then evolve as a joint decision of student and major professor, according to the faculty member's interest in the topic and availability to take on the time commitment. Many faculty members make commitments to students and projects several semesters in advance. Therefore, students should plan far ahead if they are interested in working with a particular faculty member.

While in consultation with the major professor in developing a particular proposal for the dissertation, the student needs to select at least two additional "readers" for his or her committee. The two additional readers should be members of the Catholic University faculty; however, one of the readers may be from outside the Department of Psychology or the university, if this person can make a unique and significant contribution to the project and can attend the oral exam without special travel accommodations. It is the student's responsibility, in consultation with the advisor, to contact professors to ascertain their interest and willingness to serve on the committee. All committee members must agree to be present for committee meetings and for the oral examination (in person at the oral exam, not present by audio or video conferencing). Final approval of the committee must be granted by the Department chair at the time that the proposal is approved.

There is a wide variation in the topics considered appropriate for a dissertation. As a general rule, in preparing a proposal the student should become well versed in the background literature of that area and related areas, develop specific hypotheses and predictions, and propose a
methodology to address the question and statistical procedures to analyze the data. The specific requirements for demonstrating this preparation of a proposal (e.g., written literature review) are up to the discretion of the major professor and committee members. However, the investigation cannot proceed to data collection until the proposal is approved by the Department, the Dean, and the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies. Approval of the Vice-Provost requires an approved human subjects protocol (see below).

A note regarding statistics in the dissertation: Students may receive statistical consultation from others, including consultation on how to run particular analyses, but students must run all of their own statistical analyses. Student will also be expected to defend their use of statistics at the oral defense, and thus must thoroughly understand whatever procedures they use. Therefore, in designing the study and crafting the research questions, students should take into account any limitations they may have on the level of statistical sophistication they can bring to their analyses.

The following book has been recommended by at least one student:


Approval of the Proposal

The two-page dissertation proposal must be reviewed and approved at four levels: Department of Psychology faculty, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, the university's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (if the dissertation involves human participants), and the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies of the university.

The student should note, however, that this two-page concise version of the proposal is not necessarily the only requirement the advisor and committee will impose at the proposal stage. They may, for example, require completion of the first two chapters of the dissertation. The student is encouraged to discuss specific expectations with the major professor early in the proposal process, since the committee must approve the proposal before it is submitted for departmental approval.

**Departmental approval.** Upon completion of comps, the departmental Academic Specialist provides the students with a form outlining the procedure for circulating dissertation proposals through the department. Students should refer to this form throughout the dissertation process. A copy of the form is included at the end of this chapter.

When the student is ready to submit a proposal, he or she must complete a “Doctoral Dissertation Topic and Committee Request for Approval" form available at [http://graduatestudies.cua.edu/forms/DoctoralForms.cfm](http://graduatestudies.cua.edu/forms/DoctoralForms.cfm) (Note: faculty ranks are Assistant, Associate, and Ordinary (not full) Professor; the date you were admitted to candidacy is the first day of class in the semester after you passed comps, NOT the day you got your M.A., which is often later.) The student must
attach a concise proposal to the topic form, not to exceed two pages single-spaced. The university has explicit guidelines for the two-page proposal, which are available at the link above and from the department Academic Specialist. Generally, the two-page proposal should describe the literature in the area, the purpose of the study, the hypotheses to be tested, the proposed methodology, statistical measures appropriate for analyzing the data, human subjects concerns, and the contribution the project will make to the discipline of psychology. References must also be attached on a separate page. As noted, all members of the committee must approve the proposal before it is presented to the faculty, and the advisor must sign the topic form to signify committee approval.

The student should submit a copy of the Doctoral Dissertation Topic and Committee Request for Approval Form and 2-page summary, as well as a copy of the complete proposal (Topic form, 2 page summary, references, measures, consent form, etc.) to the Academic Specialist. Upon receipt, s/he will sign your “procedure for circulating dissertation” form and circulate the proposal to the faculty by email. At that point, the department faculty have 5 working days (10 days in the summer) to comment on the proposal. A member of the faculty is designated Dissertation Proposal Coordinator and receives these comments. If no suggestions on the proposal are voiced within 5 working days, the proposal is considered final as is.

When a faculty member has comments or suggestions, he or she conveys them to the Dissertation Proposal Coordinator, usually in writing, and the Coordinator passes the comments on to the student and advisor. If the advisor receives any such comments, he or she communicates them to the student, and advisor and student work together, in consultation with the rest of the student's committee, to resolve the concerns. It is the student's responsibility to respond in writing to all suggestions and comments of faculty, giving a copy of the reply to the advisor. If a faculty member is not satisfied with the outcome of this process and wishes to discuss the proposal further, he or she can request that the chair not sign the proposal and that a discussion of it be placed on the agenda for the next Department faculty meeting.

Be sure to obtain signatures from the faculty member serving as dissertation proposal coordinator and from the Department Chair on your departmental circulation form.

**Approval by the A&S Associate Dean for Graduate Studies.** After securing the approval of the departmental chair, the student will create a packet of the complete proposal (topic form with original signatures, 2 page summary, references, measures, consent form, additional information relevant to the protection of human subjects including certificate of training, etc.). If a member of the committee is from outside the university, his or her curriculum vitae should be included as well.

The original packet, along with one copy, will be submitted to the A&S Graduate Associate Dean’s Office in McMahon Hall. You may deliver the packet yourself, or submit them to the Academic Specialist and request that s/he deliver to the Associate Dean within 2 days.

In addition, the student should submit a copy of the packet to the departmental Academic
Specialist for the department’s files. It is also strongly recommended that the student retain a personal copy.

The Associate Dean may make comments or require additional information or changes before approving the dissertation proposal. Delay in responding to these requests may delay approval.

**Human subjects committee approval.** All dissertation proposals using human subjects must be approved by the university's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS, which is the university’s Institutional Review Board) prior to data collection. If it involves human participants, after the proposal has been approved by the A&S Graduate Dean, it will be delivered to the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies and the CPHS. Consent forms must be included with the copy of the proposal submitted to CPHS. In addition, it is often advisable to include more information on the study than just the cover page, two-page proposal, consent form, and measures. If you have written a manuscript-length or longer introduction and method section, include these with the copy for the CPHS; the two-page proposal often does not contain enough information to allow the CPHS to understand your proposal well enough for their purpose. Also include your human subjects training certificate (see below) in the copy for the CPHS.

Information about the CPHS, including guidelines for submission, dates of committee review, training information, etc. is available online: [http://sponsoredresearch.cua.edu/Human-Subjects-Protection/index.cfm](http://sponsoredresearch.cua.edu/Human-Subjects-Protection/index.cfm).

The CPHS requires you to complete a human subjects training and to submit a certificate. If you have not already done such a course and obtained a certificate, you can take a free, web-based course. A link to the course is available at the website for the CPHS above. Be sure to print a certificate of completion and include it in your proposal packet.

If the data are being collected at another facility, that facility's Institutional Review Board must also approve the research in most cases. It is advisable to include a copy of this approval in your proposal packet.

If a dissertation requires full review by the CPHS (see below and Chapter 2, Research Ethics), the student and advisor will receive correspondence from that committee. However, approval by the CPHS does not constitute approval of the dissertation by the university, since the committee only deals with human subjects concerns.

If the student has filled out the portion of the proposal form declaring the dissertation to be exempt from human subjects review (e.g., uses only archival data), the CPHS must verify the exemption. The student must include the two forms regarding exemption from review that can be found on the CPHS link above. The CPHS may decide that the dissertation proposal requires full review, in which case the student will be notified. Only the CPHS can decide if a study is exempt from full review, regardless of how obvious it seems to the researcher.
Note that the proposal will circulate automatically to the CPHS after it has been approved by the A&S Dean.

**Approval by the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies.** Following CPHS review, the proposal is evaluated for academic standards by the Vice Provost. The Vice-Provost will typically send the proposal to a member of the faculty in a related discipline for review and comment. Only after the dissertation has been approved by the Department, the Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences, the CPHS (if applicable), and the Vice Provost is the dissertation fully approved by the university. The student and advisor are notified of university approval by letter from the Vice Provost. This letter signifies that the student may begin the dissertation.

**Working with Your Major Professor and Committee**

Generally, both the proposal and the finished dissertation will need to go through multiple drafts before they are acceptable. It is important that the student plan ahead sufficiently to give the major professor and committee members sufficient time to read drafts of material, both at the proposal stage and later. A 2-week turn-around time for reading drafts is customary. Students should not expect their major professor or committee members to read drafts in the summer (unless they explicitly agree to it, without pressure) or during university breaks (e.g., Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, Spring Break). Because deadlines can creep up, students should be aware of the deadlines and plan ahead accordingly.

**Financial Assistance**

The student may wish to explore possible sources for financial support of the dissertation. It is best to look into funding sources well in advance of actually beginning the project, since such funding, if granted, usually takes several months to become available. The student will need to submit a formal proposal, describing the study's aims and methodology, to potential funding agencies.

The Department of Psychology provides a limited number of Dissertation Research Awards (The Beryl Anderson Dissertation Research Award) for graduate students who are candidates for a PhD in Psychology. Funds will be awarded to students to support non-personnel costs directly associated with their dissertation research project. Information can be found at [http://psychology.cua.edu/research/dissertationaward.cfm](http://psychology.cua.edu/research/dissertationaward.cfm). The number of awards granted will depend upon the number of applications and available funds. More details are found in Chapter 14 of this handbook. The average award is roughly $500.

Beyond the psychology department, there are numerous possibilities for dissertation support, including both federal agencies and private foundations. See chapter 14 of this handbook for a list of funding resources. Some of those links are repeated here.

Since federal monies for any behavioral research are difficult to obtain, it is wise to explore the possibility of funding from private sources. There are many foundations that offer financial support to areas of behavioral research in which they express an interest. The student should first begin to explore which foundations might be interested in his or her topic area. Previous work in the area may cite a particular foundation as having provided support for the research, or faculty who are familiar with the area may have a sense of which agencies typically fund related projects. Information on foundations can be obtained from the Office of Sponsored Programs on campus. The Foundation Center is also a helpful resource for locating foundations relevant to specific research areas, [http://foundationcenter.org/washington/](http://foundationcenter.org/washington/). Finally, information about research grants may also be available on the website for CUA’s Sponsored Programs office.

**Other Kinds of Assistance**

In addition to financial assistance for the dissertation, the student may also seek assistance from various persons, other than committee members, for help with various tasks (for example, for statistical support). Students should consult their advisor with any specific questions they may have before inviting persons to assist in their dissertation.

**Deadline for Completion of Dissertation**

By departmental regulation, a student has **4 years** from the end of the semester of admission to candidacy to complete the dissertation, including the oral defense. In other words, the deadline for students who pass comps in the Fall semester is May, 4.5 years after comps; the deadline for students who pass comps in the Spring semester is December, 4.5 years after comps. A student who anticipates that he or she will not complete the dissertation by the deadline may request an extension prior to the deadline by writing a letter of explanation to the Department Chair and submitting it and a Student Request Form (available from the departmental Academic Specialist) to the faculty advisor. The student should begin the process of requesting an extension at least 2 months before his or her deadline. Some of the factors considered in the decision whether to approve the request are the reasons the student gives for the delay, the efforts he or she has shown to finish on time, and the student's plan for finishing. If the faculty advisor, the Director of Clinical Training, and the Chair approve the extension, the Chair will then recommend approval.
to the Dean. An extension must be approved by the Dean and will normally not exceed 1 year.

**Scheduling the Oral Examination**

It is the student's responsibility to keep the committee members informed of his or her progress throughout the course of the project. This becomes particularly important for allowing them enough time to read and return material to meet deadlines. When the student has a draft of all the chapters in the dissertation approved by the major professor, he or she should provide a draft of the complete dissertation to each committee member. After the committee has approved the draft, and the student has made any required changes, the student is able to schedule the oral examination. See Chapter 6, Continuous Enrollment, for information on registration in the semester of orals.

All committee members must sign a candidacy form in the office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences indicating they have read the dissertation and that they believe it is ready for defense before the student can schedule the oral examination. Signatures indicate that the dissertation is complete; **projected** completion is not sufficient. An off-campus reader may send an email to the Associate Dean giving his or her approval for scheduling purposes, and sign the candidacy form just before the oral exam.

Doctoral students must be registered for Dissertation (PSY 996) in the semester in which they will sit for the final doctoral oral examination. See Chapter 6, Continuous Enrollment, for more information, including registration during internship.

The School of Arts and Sciences has pre-scheduled dates and times for conducting the doctoral oral examination during the Fall and Spring semesters (10:00am, 1:00pm, or 2:00 pm, Monday-Friday during the academic year Sept.-May). No oral examination will be scheduled between semesters or during the summer session. The student should contact the Dean's office (202-319-5254, McMahon Hall) or email Arts and Sciences staff member Caitlin Haswell, haswell@cua.edu to inquire about possible dates, and then consult with each committee member to arrive at a date. The deadline for getting signatures in order to defend in a given semester is much earlier than most students would expect, so be sure to contact Ms. Haswell for the current semester date well in advance. Once all committee members have signed the form indicating approval of the dissertation, and the student has found a date and time for the orals that is satisfactory to all committee members, the orals can be scheduled by the Dean's office. The orals date must be a minimum of 3 weeks after the scheduling of the exam. There is paperwork to fill out in conjunction with scheduling the orals that you get from Ms. Haswell.

The Dean's office will arrange for two faculty from other departments of Arts and Sciences to represent the Graduate Board in the examination, serving as Chair and Secretary for the oral defense. Deposit one copy of the dissertation with the Academic Specialist in our department for the outside committee members’ review. You may also wish to send individual copies to the Chair and Secretary in advance of the oral examination. All members of the student's dissertation committee must be present at orals, including members from outside the university. No orals will
be conducted with any member on speakerphone or by videoconference.

**PhD Leaflet**

Three weeks prior to the oral examination, the student must submit information for the PhD leaflet to the Dean’s Office: outline of studies, biographical data, and abstraction of dissertation. Instructions and forms may be obtained from Ms. Haswell in the Associate Dean's office, haswell@cua.edu.

The first page is prepared in the Dean’s Office. On one sheet, type a short summary of the dissertation. This must not be longer than one page and must be approved by the major professor. On the second sheet type **Outline of Studies**, and list the courses taken toward the Degree. On the third sheet type **Biographical Data**, Begin with birth date, list previous education and degrees already held, and list any teaching experience or publications. Be sure to include your permanent address. Each section should be confined to one page only. Submit information in correct typed form so it can be reduced and photocopied without being re-typed.

Please note: If there are any changes made in the **TITLE** of the dissertation, no matter how small or large, it is **mandatory** that a “Change of Title” form be processed at least two weeks prior to your defense date. Additionally, if there is a change in the committee, the Change in Doctoral Dissertation Committee form must be filed. These forms can be obtained at [http://graduatestudies.cua.edu/forms/DoctoralForms.cfm](http://graduatestudies.cua.edu/forms/DoctoralForms.cfm).

**Oral Defense**

The Department of Psychology, with approval from the University, has initiated a new procedure for the oral defense beginning in Fall 2012. The examination now consists of two parts: a public seminar and a closed session. The first part is a formal presentation of the thesis to a general audience of 40 to 45 minutes in length followed by 5 to 10 minutes of questions from the audience. The Oral Examination Committee is present during the public presentation and considers it as part of the examination. The presentation is similar to a conference presentation, and appropriate visual materials may be used during this portion of the exam. Immediately after the seminar portion is the closed session with the Oral Examination Committee. No one else may be admitted into this portion of the examination without permission of the graduate dean of the school. The closed session will last for approximately 60 minutes. The duration of the examination itself (both public and closed sessions) will not ordinarily extend beyond 2 hours. Following completion of the examination, the student is asked to leave the room while the examiners discuss the exam, vote on whether the student passes, and sign the required forms.

Keep in mind that the Chair and Secretary of the orals are not psychologists, so you cannot assume that everyone is familiar with technical jargon.
Depositing the Dissertation and Graduation

After the student has passed the oral examination and made all changes requested by the committee, the student “deposits” the dissertation. The office of the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies (202-319-5247) has a booklet on requirements for preparing the final version of the dissertation, as well as paperwork that needs to be filled out. See: http://graduatestudies.cua.edu/res/docs/DissertationHandbook.pdf for the booklet and instructions on submission. The requirements are very specific and must be followed carefully. The university now requires that the dissertation be submitted electronically via the ProQuest server, http://graduatestudies.cua.edu/onlinesubmission.cfm.

Submit a copy of your completed dissertation to your Major Professor as well as members of your committee if they request it. They may want bound copies.

Timing of graduation relative to dissertation completion. If internship training is completed, the student can graduate during the semester in which orals are passed. Arrange to deposit the final signed copy of your dissertation to the Office of the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies. If internship is not yet completed, and will not be finished during the semester of the oral examination, the student cannot graduate until the internship requirement has been completed. Regardless, do not delay in depositing your dissertation. Extended delays can result in concerns among the Deans of Graduate Studies and Arts and Sciences that your dissertation is no longer timely and up-to-date.

Remember to fill out your diploma card as soon as possible after your successful defense. The diploma card should be forwarded to the office of the registrar, McMahon Hall. (The form is available in Cardinal Station.)

Copyright of the dissertation. The dissertation is automatically covered by copyright law as soon as it is “fixed” in tangible form. The student should place the © (copyright symbol) followed by your name and the year at the bottom of the cover page. However, that does not provide you with the right to sue for damages (other than regaining legal fees) if someone uses your work verbatim without your permission. In order to obtain that right, you must register the document with U.S. Copyright Office. For more information, written by CUA legal counsel, see: http://counsel.cua.edu/Copyright/resources/dissertation.cfm.
Procedure for **Electronic** Circulation of Dissertation Proposals

All Dissertation Proposals must be circulated to the Department faculty before being signed by the Chair. This form describes the process and will help ensure its timely completion. Students should keep a copy of this form as a record of departmental processing of the proposal.

Name of Doctoral Candidate:

Student's preferred email address

Major Professor's email address

1. Obtain the signature from your advisor on the cover page of your proposal.

2. Send an electronic pdf file with your signed cover page and 2-page summary to the Academic Specialist.

3. The Academic Specialist will normally circulate the 2-page proposal to the faculty for comment within 1 business day of receipt. The faculty will return comments to you, your advisor, and the Dissertation Proposal Coordinator, Dr. Howard, within 5 business days (or 10 business days during the summer) of receipt of the proposal.

4. If you receive any comments, you should arrange to address them with your advisor and forward any modifications to Dr. Howard. One week after you have submitted the proposal (or three weeks in the summer), you should contact Dr. Howard to see if there are any outstanding concerns. When any and all issues are resolved, Dr. Howard will indicate the approval to the Chair. The following (a) signature OR (b) attached email indicates resolution of any faculty concerns.

(a) Dept. Faculty Issues Resolved: ______________________ __________

   Dr. Jim Howard      Date

(b) ____ See attached email from Dr. Howard in place of signature.

5. You should then request departmental approval of the Chair by submitting this form to the departmental Academic Specialist. You should keep a copy for yourself as a record until you receive confirmation of approval from Human Subjects.

   Approval Requested on ______________ ______________________
   Date            Academic Specialist

6. The Chair will then sign the original proposal (normally within 48 hours) to be forwarded to the Dean. The proposal will not be signed by the chair without Dr. Howard's authorization.

7. The student should make 7 copies of the complete proposal (cover page, 2-page summary, references, measures, consent form, etc.). One copy should be submitted to the department. The original and 5 copies should be hand carried to the Dean's Office in McMahon Hall. Alternatively, you may submit the copies to the departmental Academic Specialist and request that they be delivered by the department to the Dean within 2 days.

   Received Copy for Department File: ______________________ __________
   Academic Specialist     Date

   Received Proposal for Delivery to Dean: ______________________ __________
   Date