

Thesis and Dissertation Proposal and Defense Guidelines for the Clinical Section

Students are required to prepare a detailed proposal for their theses and dissertations. Generally, the proposals will include an extensive literature search, rationale for their projects, and specific hypotheses. The methodology will detail all of the procedures that are to be utilized, including instruments, proposed participants, and a summary of the statistical procedures to be utilized. Although the proposals need to be detailed and cover relevant background information and procedures to be utilized, the final thesis and dissertation projects should be in the format of a journal article. The clinical section utilizes a journal submission format because students who successfully complete our graduate program in Clinical Psychology are expected to demonstrate a wide range of competencies in research domains. Although not all of our students intend to move on to a professional position in research or academia, our department currently strives to prepare all students for this option; in addition, such training is consistent with and expected in a Scientist Practitioner model of training. Specific guidelines for the format of the thesis and dissertation include the following:

➤ **Proposal Draft:**

- The standard proposal format requires the student to demonstrate comprehensive and critical review of the research that serves as a foundation for their study. As proposed projects may be outside of committee members' areas of expertise, an extensive review of the theoretical and empirical literature may be necessary to evaluate the merits and needs of project hypotheses and design.

➤ **Proposal Meeting:**

- Students will initiate their 2 hour proposal meeting with a short presentation (10-15 minutes). This is to allow sufficient time for critique and discussion by the committee about the proposed project.
- The student and his/her advisor should take careful note of committee members' critiques, concerns, and requested revisions during the proposal meeting so that the student can formally respond to these issues at the time of the defense meeting (see below). Prior to the close of the proposal meeting, the student's advisor should confirm with committee members which of these issues are necessary for the student to address as he/she proceeds with the project and prepares the final draft to submit to the committee.

➤ **Final Draft:**

- The final draft of thesis and dissertation projects will be formatted as a manuscript prepared for publication. Students will format sections, content, and citations using APA publication guidelines for submitted manuscripts. Final drafts will vary in length from student to student; however, overall length will fall within a range appropriate to journal submission requirements in the student's area of research. At the very least, this will require more succinct introduction, discussion, and reference sections relative to the

proposal document. In the methods section, students should include the level of methodological detail that would be necessary for publication of the study in a peer-reviewed journal. The results section may remain more comprehensive than a typical journal manuscript, as students should include a comprehensive review of all statistical strategies used in order to test research hypotheses, including initial analysis of data and statistical test assumptions.

- In addition to the traditional manuscript format, final drafts to the committee will include additional content areas as Appendices. The additional sections may be removed or revised upon final preparation for submission for publication outside the university. Appendix sections are listed below:
 - **Introduction:** If deemed necessary by the committee, the student may include an Appendix (A) to the submitted document, which would address shortcomings in the proposal introduction that were identified by the committee and that cannot be addressed in a shorter manuscript (e.g., a review of an important issue that had been neglected by the student in the proposal draft, a rewrite of a particular section of the original proposal that does not fit into the flow of the final manuscript's introduction, a complete rewrite of the original proposal introduction).
 - **Methods:** Copies of the instruments used in the study and detailed review of psychometric properties of instruments used in the study should be placed in Appendix B. Before submitting the document to the College of Arts and Sciences, however, copyrighted measures will need to be removed from the Appendix.
 - **Statistical Analyses:** Supplemental, post-hoc, and exploratory analyses can appear as Appendix C to the document. The student and his/her advisor can decide which supplemental statistical analyses can be placed in the body of the document and which can appear as Appendix C.
 - **Limitations:** Students will include an examination of project limitations and their potential impact on the results. If there are limitations to the study that warrant discussion during the dissertation defense but, due to journal style, may not be presented in a detailed way in the main body of the defense document, the student can either orally present a detailed examination of study limitations during his/her defense meeting and/or opt to include a longer limitations section as an Appendix (E) to the main document.
 - **Tables & Figures:** Tables and figures should be submitted as separate documents attached to the draft of the manuscript text. Titles and footnotes should be included with the tables and figures and not on a separate page.
- Students should also note that additional formatting may be necessary before submitting the final draft to Arts and Sciences. Please refer to the A&S website for specific formatting instructions.

➤ **Cover Letter:**

- In addition to the defense document described above, the student should provide each committee member with a cover letter, in which he/she addresses the committee members' critiques, concerns, and requested revisions that were raised during the proposal meeting. The format of the letter should list, point by point, the specific critique, concern, or requested revision, and the specific way in which the student has addressed or will address the issue (e.g., specific places in the defense document that address an issue, changes to the methodology, additional hypotheses that were tested, indicating the concern will be discussed during the defense meeting presentation rather than in the written document).

➤ **Defense Meeting:** The defense meeting format will differ from the proposal meeting in length (2 ½ hours), presentation requirement, and audience present.

- Defense meetings will include a longer presentation from the student (approximately 45 minutes) about his/her project and will take a format similar to a job talk or colloquium presentation, followed by oral examination/questions from the committee regarding the project and document. Students are encouraged to use PowerPoint or other visual aids as part of their presentation. Students are reminded that during their presentation they can provide details beyond that provided in their defense document. For example, a student may choose to respond to an issue raised at the proposal meeting during his/her defense presentation rather than in the submitted document.
- For dissertation and thesis projects, meetings will be open to the public during the presentation and questioning. Non-committee members will have the opportunity to ask questions of the student following completion of committee questions.
- Students are advised to consider that, although their written document is much shorter, they are still likely to have to answer detailed questions about rationale for study, methodology, statistical analyses, and discussion/ implications/limitations of their study.
- Following questions, committee members will conduct a closed evaluation of the student, dismissing both the student and the audience during this process.
- Students defending their dissertation and thesis will need to schedule their defense meeting and submit their document to committee members at least two weeks in advance. At this time, students must also submit a proposal announcement form to Karyl Jones, departmental secretary, who will post the time, date, and location of the meeting via e-mail and in department and college postings.