GUIDELINES FOR DISSERTATIONS
IN
COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

Counseling Psychology Program

Gannon University

June 2005

Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction and Rationale	1
Procedural Guidelines	
Doctoral committee	2
Dissertation proposal	2
Institutional Review Board	3
Dissertation defense meeting	3
The Dissertation Document	4
References	7
Appendix A: Dissertation Committee Form	8
Appendix B: Dissertation Proposal Committee Meeting Form	9
Appendix C: Dissertation Approval Form	10

June 2005

Introduction and Rationale

One goal of the program is that students will begin to view their own clinical practice as potential research projects thus decreasing the now broad gap between research and practice. Historically, counseling psychologists in clinical practice rarely publish or participate in research. Another frequently expressed concern is the gap between research and practice, that the two have little connection with one another (Stricker & Trierweiler, 1995). Consistent with recommendations for research in scholar-practitioner programs, the emphasis in research training in the doctoral program is in applied settings (Stoltenberg, et al., 2000).

Similarly, Stricker and Trierweiler (1995) described the "local clinical scientist" model as one that

> …encourages critical, scientific thinking and the application of scientific knowledge to clinical issues… the model is consistent with conducting research. The clinician has a clear obligation to contribute to a public body of knowledge, as it is through this body of disciplinary knowledge that the real link between science and practice exists. (Stricker, 1992). …The local clinical scientist model recognizes that scientific training… can provide an attitude and an orientation to the problem at hand that will lead to an informed solution that is the best the state of the art can generate. (p. 999)

Consistent with this and the program's philosophy, the dissertation, focuses on applied psychology. The dissertation is designed to demonstrate the students' ability to assess, critically evaluate, and integrate knowledge from research, theory, and clinical practice. Under the guidance of their committee members, students are expected to become expert in an area of psychology and use their critical thinking and evaluation skills to contribute to psychological knowledge.

Normally student dissertations will be empirical in nature, reflecting professional psychology's long tradition of science-based practice. However, other types of dissertations that create or extend contributions to practice may also be conducted. These might include the development and evaluation of new treatment manuals or other psychoeducational or curricular materials. Such alternative dissertations must be approved by the dissertation committee and follow professionally accepted standards of excellence.

Procedural Guidelines

Doctoral Committee

The doctoral committee is recognized as the major element in the process for maintaining the quality of doctoral research and guiding the student to completion of the dissertation.

The committee will be composed of a minimum of three members. Two members must be full-time, tenure-track psychology faculty. The third member may be chosen from other Gannon University faculty. All committee members must have an earned doctorate in their field of study and be members of the graduate faculty. At least one member must be a counseling psychology faculty member.

Students may choose a committee member from outside the University. This member is usually selected because of expertise they hold in the topic area for the dissertation, thus allowing them to provide additional guidance for the student. This member may not take the place of one of the three from the Gannon faculty. The outside member will always be a fourth member of the committee. The outside member will participate in all aspects of the development of the dissertation, and will sign the dissertation, but will not vote on the acceptance of the proposal or the completed dissertation. The outside member must be approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies and usually will have an earned doctorate.

Individual students will select dissertation committee members according to the guidelines listed above. The chairperson must be a full-time Gannon faculty member. The chair and committee members indicate their consent to sit on the committee by signing the Dissertation Committee Form (see Appendix A). The student is responsible for submitting the signed form to the chair. The original is kept by the Director of Training with copies to committee members, student, student file, and the Dean of Graduate Studies. Once the Dissertation Committee Form is on file, changes to the Committee must be approved by the Chair and Director of Training.

The student is responsible for scheduling committee meetings and coordinates this and other committee activities with the chairperson. The student will take the initiative in contacting committee members for assistance and to facilitate communication as needed.

The committee will meet as a whole on at least two occasions: to review the dissertation proposal and at the defense of the completed dissertation. All members must be present for the two meetings. Additional meetings are at the discretion of the chairperson.

Dissertation Proposal

The research proposed by the student will reflect the current methodological techniques used by the profession. Both quantitative and qualitative designs are acceptable. Because the Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology at Gannon University uses a scholar-practitioner model, students are encouraged to propose research designed to advance the practice of psychology.

Students are encouraged to provide a copy of their proposal to each committee member six weeks prior to the proposal meeting to allow members to suggest revisions prior to submission of the final draft. Students are expected to provide a copy of the final draft of their proposal to each committee member at least two weeks prior to the meeting.

There are three possible outcomes from the proposal meeting. The committee can accept the document, accept with revisions, or reject the proposal (see Appendix B). To avoid rejection of the proposal, students are strongly encouraged to work closely with the members of their committee in preparing the proposal.

Once the committee has formally accepted the dissertation proposal, it is considered a contract between the student and the university. The committee and student will ensure that the proposal is very specific in describing what research will be done and how it will be done in accordance with generally accepted standards of the profession and the guidelines set forth by the University.

In the event that a committee member must be replaced after the formal acceptance of the proposal, the new member must agree to accept the proposal in its entirety. Minor changes may be made to the original proposal after formal acceptance in the form of an addendum.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

All proposals involving human subjects must be submitted for approval by the IRB following formal acceptance by the committee. The committee chairperson will assist the student with the presentation of the proposal to the IRB. The IRB meets monthly during the academic year. Application forms can be found in the department office, or obtained from the chair of the IRB or the Director of Training. IRB approval must be obtained prior to the collection of any data.

Dissertation Defense Meeting

Dissertation defense meetings will be scheduled at the convenience of all members. Other students and faculty are invited to attend the defense meetings and they will be advertised in the Gannon publication *Under the Arch*. Two weeks prior to the final defense, a copy of the final draft of the dissertation must be provided to each committee member. When the dissertation is accepted by the committee, the Dissertation Approval Form will be signed by all committee members for inclusion in the final dissertation document.

The Dissertation Document

All dissertations must follow the format outlined in the APA Publication Manual as well as the Gannon University Style and Form Manual. Copies of the Style and Form Manual are available in the psychology office as well as on the program's website. For additional information, we recommend Cone and Foster (1993), *Dissertations and theses from start to finish*, and Nicol & Pexman (2003), *Displaying your findings*.

Changes to the following formats are accepted only at the discretion of the committee chair.

All dissertations that are Quantitative in nature will contain the following sections and follow the format below:

1. Introduction
   a. This should include the purpose of the study, and introduce the reader to the topic.
   b. This should also address why this study is important (social implications and relevance of the topic, new knowledge and contributions to the profession to emerge from studying the topic, knowledge to be gained by researcher).

2. Literature Review
   a. Use subheadings to organize your material.
   b. This is more than a summary of the literature; you must critique the research and/or theories (include the procedure for selecting studies, the methodology of these studies, and a summary of core findings).
   c. Following the literature review, include a Statement of the Problem. This provides the reader with a brief rationale for the study. Include how the present research differs from prior research (in question, model, methodology, and/or data collected)
   d. Finish this section with the hypotheses or research questions.

3. Methods
   a. This section includes participants, design, procedures, measures, and data analysis.
   b. Include ethical considerations

4. Results
   a. Discuss statistics used (for quantitative studies).
   b. Summarize results.

5. Discussion
   a. Discuss results of the study.
   b. Discuss the limitations of the research.
   c. Discuss implications for future research.
   d. Discuss implications for the practice of counseling psychology.
   e. Discuss how the findings differ from previous research.

All dissertations that are Qualitative in nature will contain the following sections and follow the format below as outlined in Maxwell (1996) and Creswell (1998):

1. Introduction
    a. This should include the purpose of the study, and introduce the reader to the topic.
    b. This should also address why this study is important (social implications and relevance of the topic, new knowledge and contributions to the profession to emerge from studying the topic, knowledge to be gained by researcher).
    c. Autobiographical statement about experiences of the author leading to the topic and incidents that led to curiosity about the topic.
    d. The research question, and the terms of the study.
2. Research Content
    a. Use subheadings to organize your material.
    b. Introduction to the literature, including the procedure for selecting studies, the conduct of these studies and themes that emerged in them, a summary of core findings and statements as to how the present research differs from prior research (in question, model, methodology and/or data collected)
    c. Demonstrate how your research fits into a particular area of psychological knowledge.
    d. Explain the theoretical framework behind the study
3. Research Questions (chapters 3 and 4 may be combined)
    a. Explain how your questions relate to theory and prior research as well as your experience and exploratory research.
    b. There should be a small number of major questions that are related and form a coherent whole.
4. Methods
    a. This section includes participants, the research relationship you have with the participants, design, procedures, data analysis, and validity.
    b. Include ethical considerations
    c. Use subheadings to organize your material.
5. Results
    a. Summarize the results.
    b. Use subheadings to organize your material.
    c. Include verbatim examples of data collection, data analysis and synthesis of the data, horizontalization, meaning units, clustered themes, textural and structural descriptions and a synthesis of meanings and essences of the experience.
6. Discussion
    a. Discuss results of the study.
    b. Discuss the limitations of the research.
    c. Discuss implications for future research.
    d. Discuss implications for the practice of counseling psychology.
    e. Discuss how the findings differ from previous research.

References

Cone, J. D., & Foster, S. L. (1993). *Dissertations and theses from start to finish*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Maxwell, J. A. (1996). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Nicol, A. A. M., & Pexman, P. M. (2003). *Displaying your findings.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th Ed.). (2001). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Stoltenberg, C. D., Pace, T. M., Kashubeck-West, S., Biever, J. L., Patterson, T., & Welch, I. D. (2000). Training models in counseling psychology: Scientist-practitioner versus practitioner-scholar. *The Counseling Psychologist, 28*(5), 622-640.

Stricker, G., & Trierweiler, S. J. (1995). The local clinical scientist. *American Psychologist, 50*(12), 995-1002.

Appendix A

Gannon University
Dissertation Committee Form

_____
Student Name

_____
Proposed Title

By their signature, the following individuals indicate their consent to serve on the above-cited doctoral dissertation committee.

_____
(Chair) Name Degree Dept/Affiliation Signature Date

_____
(Member) Name Degree Dept/Affiliation Signature Date

_____
(Member) Name Degree Dept/Affiliation Signature Date

_____
(Member) Name Degree Dept/Affiliation Signature Date

_____
Student Signature Date

Approved: _____
Director of Training, Counseling Psychology Date

CC: Dissertation Chair
Director of Training
Committee Members
Student
Dean of Graduate Studies
Dean of HBE

Original to Student File

June 2005

Appendix B

Gannon University
Dissertation Proposal Committee Meeting

Title of Proposal _____

Name of Student _____

Accepted as presented_____ Accepted with revisions _____ Rejected _____

Specific Revisions _____

_____

_____

Revisions to be reviewed by Chair only _____

Revisions to be reviewed by all members of Committee _____

Another Committee meeting is required to review revisions _____

Upon acceptance of the proposal by a majority of the Committee, this document represents a commitment to authorize the research as presented. Only minor changes in the proposal will be accepted after the date of acceptance, and these at the discretion of the Chair in consultation with the other committee members.

Committee Members:

_____	_____
Signature (Chair)	Signature
_____	_____
Signature	Signature

Date: _____

CC: Dissertation Chair
Student
Dean of HBE
Dean of Graduate Studies
Director of Training

Original to Student File

June 2005

Appendix C

Gannon University
Dissertation Approval Form

Title of Dissertation _____

Name of Student _____

This dissertation was submitted under the direction of the chair of the doctoral dissertation committee listed below. It was approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Gannon University.

Approved:

_____	_____
Typed Name	Signature and degree (Chair)
_____	_____
Typed Name	Signature and degree
_____	_____
Typed Name	Signature and degree
_____	_____
Typed Name	Signature and degree

_____
Date of Final Approval

CC: Dissertation Chair
Director of Training
Committee Members
Student
Dean of Graduate Studies
Dean of HBE

Original to Student File

June 2005