Students and Faculty Guidelines for the Dissertation Prospectus and the Second Examination

**Prospectus**

All dissertation proposals should contain the following sections. Note that methodology components will vary depending on the method chosen. Students using multiple methods should incorporate all the necessary components to fully explain the methodology chosen.

- **An introduction**, which introduces the topic and identifies the problem or issue to be addressed in the dissertation. This should also lay out the theoretical framework or orientation of the dissertation.

- **A literature review**, which examines the previous research that is directly relevant to the proposed study (the literature review in the dissertation will be more comprehensive than is necessary at the proposal stage).

- A section that discusses the **conceptual approach of the study**. For quantitative studies this outlines and explains the precise research questions and hypotheses (if the proposal is deductive) and the ways in which they will be investigated. For qualitative studies this section addresses several issues. It elaborates research questions that will be answered; outlines theories relevant to the investigation; provides a rationale for why the specific group, location or event should be studied; and, for critical and feminists research projects, discusses experiential knowledge relevant to the study.

- A substantial **methodology** section. The research method should be described in enough detail that the committee fully understands exactly what it is that student proposes to do in the research.

For **quantitative** studies, this section should include a detailed discussion of each of the following components:

- Population and sample
- Sampling/Subject selection criteria
- Data sources
- Independent and dependent variables
- Operationalization of key concepts
- Instrument
- Data analysis techniques proposed as well as a precise analysis plan
- A discussion of potential findings that explains which results would support your hypotheses and which results would undermine your hypotheses

For **qualitative** studies, the methods section should describe all the arrangements, decisions, procedures, and steps the student must take to collect and analyze data. The content of this section will vary depending on the research paradigm utilized. But, at a minimum, it should include the following elements:

- Research design (e.g., case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis) and rationale for using that design
- Nature of relationship to be established with participants
Sampling plan (e.g., purposive, convenience, maximum variation) and the rationale for that design

Methods for recording and managing data

Data collection details. Specifically:
- Studies that rely on participant/observation must discuss an observation plan including what the student will do, with whom, how often, and why
- Research based on interviews must describe what the student will ask, of whom, in what circumstances, and why
- Research utilizing documents and other forms of data collection should describe instruments and procedures for eliciting information

Analytical procedures involved in data analysis, including:
- Instrument development information - including pilot forms, preliminary schedules, observation formats
- Data reduction and analysis products – such as, summaries, and theoretical notes
- Data reconstruction and synthesis products – including likely structure of categories (themes, definitions, and relationships)
- Materials relating to intentions and dispositions - including personal notes (reflexive notes and motivations) and expectations (predictions and intentions)

Explanation of the methodological strategies for producing credible and rigorous qualitative research, such as:
- careful purposive or theoretical sampling
- prolonged engagement
- triangulation
- member-checking
- negative or deviant case analysis
- consideration of alternative explanations
- discussion of researcher reflexivity

A discussion of ethical considerations involved in the study

A concluding section that discusses how the study will make a contribution to the literature, including potential policy implications.

Appendices, if applicable, including:
- A copy of all research instruments
- The IRB proposal, certificate of approval or waiver of IRB exemption from the Graduate Center. All dissertations using empirical designs must receive IRB approval, and this process must begin prior to the second examination.
- CITI certificate (showing successful completion of the Course in the Protection of Human Research Subjects)
- Confirmation of access from agency or organization where data is being collected

The length of the dissertation proposal will vary based on a number of factors (most notably the type and complexity of the methodology). A long proposal is not necessarily better than a shorter one. Proposals should not exceed 50 double-spaced pages in length.
The Second Examination

The second examination consists of two parts. Part I assesses the students’ mastery of the literature in the broad research area of the dissertation. The literature review in the proposal should justify the importance of (and need for) the proposed study and it should be narrowly tailored to a discussion of the problem at hand. Part II of the exam will review the research method chosen to study the research question and the proposed system of data analysis. In the dissertation proposal, the student must identify a specific method for studying the research question and demonstrate competence in that method. One or more members of the dissertation committee must have expertise in the method selected.

The second examination is a closed exam, the only individuals who participate in this exam are the student and the dissertation committee. The committee members are made up of three Criminal Justice PhD faculty members and the other external examiner should be from outside the CRJ PhD program, either from another GC PhD program or external to the Graduate Center. The outside readers should be approved by EO/DEO before scheduling exam, see Assistant Program Officer for forms and instructions. The dissertation chair is in charge during the second exam. Students should discuss the format of exam with their chair prior to the exam. The entire exam should take up to two hours, and both parts of the exam should be given equal weight. The student should prepare a brief presentation of the prospectus (15-20 minutes) using PowerPoint or handouts.

Upon completion of Part I of the exam and/or at the end of the exam, the student must leave the room while the committee members discuss the student’s work. There must be a discussion about both parts of the exam. There are three possible outcomes for Part I of the exam: (1) pass, (2) pass with advice, and (3) fail. There are four possible outcomes for the second part of the exam (the examination of the prospectus): (1) pass with no revisions, (2) pass with minor revisions, (3) pass with major revisions, and (4) fail. If a student receives a result of pass with minor revisions, the student’s supervisor must review the revisions and sign that the revisions are sufficient. If a student must make major revisions, all the committee members and the two external reviewers must review the revisions and agree that they are sufficient to pass the examination. Students who fail must make the suggested revisions and retake the oral examination.

Requirements to schedule the second exam

In order to schedule a second examination, all of the following requirements must be met:

1. Students must inform the Assistant Program Officer of their intention to take the second examination at least 30 days prior to the exam date and provide an abstract at that time. All forms needed will be provided to you at this time.

2. Prepare your committee. The committee members should consist of a three departmental faculty members and two external examiners. One of the three faculty members must be assigned as your chair who will also be chair of your dissertation. The two committee members should be a faculty member of the Criminal Justice PhD program. The other external examiner should be from outside the Criminal Justice PhD program, either from another Graduate Center PhD program or external to the Graduate Center. In order to assign the two external readers, the Assistant Program Officer will provide you with a form which the external examiners CV’s must be attached for review and approval of Executive Officer or Deputy Executive Officer.

3. Students must submit a proposal to the IRB committee or request a waiver from the Graduate Center prior to the scheduling of the examination. If applicable, students must complete the CITI training on the Protection of Human Research Subjects.
The second exam may only be scheduled if the proposal follows the general guidelines listed above and has been certified as such by the dissertation supervisor and the Executive Officer or Deputy Executive Officer.

**Requirements after the second exam**

If revisions are required, the dissertation chair must notify in writing when revisions are completed to the Assistant Program Officer. Once the revisions are made to the satisfaction of the chair, the student will be advanced to candidacy. Once advanced to candidacy, the dissertation chair must meet with the student and create a written plan for the dissertation that includes:

1. A proposed timeline for data collection (where appropriate), analysis, writing, and completion of the dissertation.

2. A plan for scheduled meetings, discussions or other communications about the dissertation. This includes the expected time for the student to complete tasks as well as a timeline for feedback from the faculty member.

3. Student must register for Dissertation Supervision under their chair’s course code.

**Checklist for the Second Examination**

- [ ] Written prospectus of no more than 50 pages (excluding Appendices)
- [ ] IRB proposal, certificate of approval, or waiver of exemption from the Graduate Center
- [ ] CITI Human Subject training certificate
- [ ] Feedback from dissertation chair and all committee members
- [ ] Agency/organizational approval for data collection
- [ ] 30 days’ notice to the Assistant Program Officer

**Checklist after the second examination**

- [ ] Make any required revisions to prospectus, submit final written approval to Assistant Program Officer.
- [ ] Submit intent to defend to Assistant Program Officer

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