

PUBH 9000

Guidelines for DrPH Dissertation Research

Doctor of Public Health

Environmental and Occupational Health Program



Department of Public Health

Brody School of Medicine

East Carolina University

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# Introduction

Listed below and described herein are guidance information and checklists to assist the student with the dissertation process: As part of these steps, it is important the student refer to the DrPH, EOH Student Handbook, consult with their academic faculty advisor and committee members on a regular basis. The Program Director is available to students to answer questions and guide the dissertation process by ensuring the research is conducted in accordance with university and national accreditation compliance policies.

- **Stage 1: Dissertation Research Plan**
- **Stage 2: Research Proposal**
- **Stage 3: UMCIRB (University and Medical Committee Institutional Review Board) and Data Collection**
- **Stage 4: Final Defense**
- **Stage 5: Dissertation Submission and Graduation**

The Best Practices section outlined in the back of this document are intended to provide guidance to EOH doctoral students, dissertation chairs and committee members. Any questions, concerns or matters regarding policy and procedures should be directed to the EOH, Program Director.

Note that the resources located in the Appendix are provided to assist students with the dissertation research project. The Dissertation Bootcamp, Statistical and Research, and Writing Workshops offered at ECU are important training and learning opportunities available for students to enable them towards developing a high quality, scholarly product.

# Where do I start?

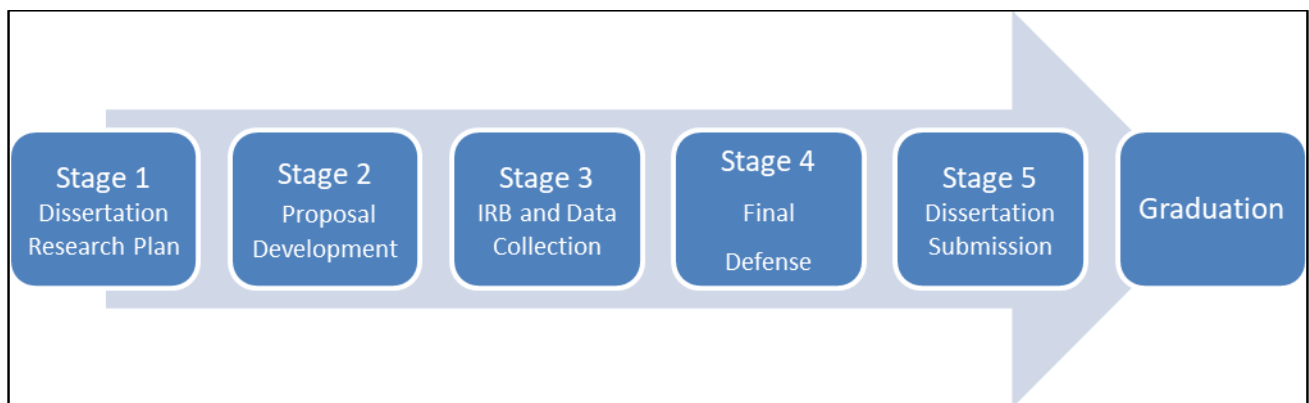
## Dissertation Research Plan Description

The Dissertation Research Plan is an informal, but important document that outlines the student's intended research. The development of the Dissertation Research Plan should invoke considerable thought towards identifying and offering solution(s) to an important public health problem.

When developing the Dissertation Research Plan the student should consult with their advisor and others as necessary. As a practice-based, professional degree, the DrPH dissertation (aka the Integrative Learning Experience) should address a significant environmental public health topic/concern and offer rational solution(s). For example, a designed intervention that could lead to policy change and/or improved health outcomes. Although the Dissertation Research Plan is a general outline of the proposed research project, it should be clearly written and include enough detail so that it accurately describes the problem, identifies gaps in the published literature, provides a justification for the need for the research, and offers initial thoughts on solutions that could lead to a positive change.

Because most doctoral students in the EOH program are completing the DrPH online, it is important that communication be maintained between the student, committee members and the program director. During the process, the student's dissertation chair should be consulted at a minimum of at least once each semester.

The core elements that the student should be familiar with throughout the dissertation process are shown below.



The 5 key stages of the DrPH, EOH dissertation research process (see guidance below).

# The Dissertation Research Plan

The purpose of the Dissertation Research Plan is to create a starting point for your environmental public health dissertation research. Doctoral students should consult with their academic advisor shortly after passing the comprehensive qualifying exam to discuss their proposed research topic. Once the research topic has been discussed, the student should complete the Dissertation Research Plan below and submit to their advisor/committee chair and the program director for review and approval. The information provided will help the academic advisor assist the student with selecting the appropriate committee members and the program director ensure required program policies (and competencies) are met. Students are not bound by the information they provide on the Dissertation Research Plan form. The Dissertation Research Plan is meant to be a flexible, living document that serves as a starting point of the intended research.

# Dissertation Research Plan

(Complete in consultation with Academic Advisor)

- **Date**
- **Student Name**
- **Mentor/Advisor Name**
- **Proposed Topic Area and Description:** Briefly describe your intended environmental public health topic concern/problem in one paragraph.
- **Proposed Title:** Present a title with approximately 20 or fewer words; include topic, variable and relationship between them, including critical words.
- **Proposed Background Problem Statement:** Briefly describe the history or background leading up to the current environmental/occupational public health concern or problem. Present a logical argument at the closing of the background that describes the importance to address the concern. This section should be supported by 3-5 primary or key references to support your statements).
- **Proposed Purpose and Significance:** Briefly provide a concise statement that connects the problem you wish to address with the focus of your study. Identify how your research/study supports professional public health practice or allows for practical application. In other words, state why this research is important, and who or what will benefit as a result (e.g., specific policy change, improvement in drinking water systems, reduced illness and disease?)
- **Proposed Framework:** Briefly describe the conceptual/theoretical framework that will ground your study (e.g., socio-ecological etc.).
- **Proposed Research Question(s) and Hypothesis:** List 3 or more potential questions that you intend to answer. Your questions should align with your study purpose and include non-testable and testable (quantitative and/or qualitative analysis) (please no descriptive only studies). Your objectives (how you plan to address the questions and carry out the study) can be briefly mentioned.
- **Possible Types and Sources of Data:** List potential sources of data that will be used to help address your proposed research questions. For example, will you collect your own data (original) or use secondary data or combination of the two? If using secondary data, you will need to briefly explain some of the methods you may consider as part of your analysis (see significance above). If you are unsure, the student should discuss with the advisor and any potential committee member as your research plan is formulated.

- **Committee Members** (minimum of 3 ECU Grad Faculty and 1 External Public Health member)

Schedule a meeting and consult with your advisor on the appropriate committee members for your research. Three out of four minimum committee members must have ECU graduate faculty status. External members (e.g., government, industry) that bring public health practice expertise can be added and are encouraged. The committee must include two faculty members from the Department of Public Health (BSOM) with expertise in the student’s area of research and one methodologist.

Consult with your advisor and complete the table below.

- **Competencies Addressed:** List 3 competencies that you intend to address as part of your dissertation (please refer to student handbook for list).
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
- **References:** Provide 3-5 major references that support your proposed research project.

### Dissertation Committee

Role	Name	College/Department or Organization
Dissertation Advisor		
Committee Member		
Committee Member		
Committee Member/External		

**Dissertation Chair Comments:**

**Approved:**\_\_\_\_ **Revise:**\_\_\_\_

Dissertation Chair, Signature:\_\_\_\_\_

Date:\_\_\_\_\_

**Program Director Comments:**

**Approved:**\_\_\_\_ **Revise:**\_\_\_\_

Program Director, Signature:\_\_\_\_\_

Date:\_\_\_\_\_

# Dissertation Guide and Checklist

## Stage 1: Dissertation Research Plan

Completed	Task
	Consults with advisor(s) to discuss preliminary public health topic (problem) area
	Student submits initial draft of Dissertation Research Plan to advisor for approval (see attached form)
	Advisor routes Dissertation Research Plan to PD and solicits potential committee members
	Student and advisor meet to finalize Dissertation Research Plan and selection of committee chair/committee members
	Advisor notifies PD of committee approval of Dissertation Research Plan and emails copy of student's Dissertation Research Plan
	Student submits <i>Advancement to Doctoral Candidacy Form</i> ( <a href="http://gradschool.ecu.edu/forms/">Graduate School Forms - gradschool.ecu.edu/forms/</a> )
	Monitor emails to ensure DocuSign has been routed and approved by each committee member listed
	PD sets up a secure, shared documents folder on SharePoint/OneDrive for student/committee members
	PD emails folder web-link to student/committee members

## Stage 2: Research Proposal

Completed	Task
	Student works with advisor/committee members to determine dissertation format (i.e., traditional or 3-paper option)
	Student works with advisor/committee members to develop first draft of proposal (first three chapters)
	Student identifies CEPH competencies that will be addressed as part of the research project.
	*Contact ECU, IRB early on about project (Important: even if your project is exempt, you must have an IRB research determination letter)
	Notify chair/committee that first draft is available and ready for review and comments
	Work with chair/committee to address concerns and revise proposal accordingly (repeat as necessary)
	Notify chair/committee second draft is ready for review and comments (repeat as necessary)
	Find an agreed upon date/time for the oral proposal defense (include chair/committee members and program director when scheduling)
	Schedule oral proposal defense meeting (*in-person, WebEx or Teams meeting)
	Be well prepared to present your proposal to your committee (see guidelines)
	Pass oral proposal defense
	Committee chair notifies program director of successful oral proposal completion

### Stage 3: Institutional Review Board and Data Collection\*

Completed	Task
	Complete IRB application with input from your chair and methodologist
	Submit IRB application
	Complete any revisions requested by IRB in a timely manner
	Receive IRB approval and <i>Notification of Approval to Conduct Research</i>
	Conduct your research study
	Begin preparing final document by updating proposal (to be written in past tense)

### Stage 4: Final Defense

Completed	Task
	Work with committee to complete remaining chapters (see guidelines)
	Ensure standards in rubric are addressed (including CEPH competencies and guidelines).
	Consult with chair to ensure the dissertation is ready for committee review
	Notify all committee members including program director that first draft is ready for review
	Work with chair/committee to address concerns and revise first and remaining drafts accordingly
	Consult with chair to ensure the dissertation is ready for final defense
	Coordinate with chair/committee members and program director to identify an agreed upon date/time
	Contact BSOM, Office of Research & Graduate Studies to schedule defense announcement and prepare for final (all final defenses require 2 weeks advance notice. All final defenses are held on campus, until further notice)
	Be well prepared to present your final proposal to your committee and others (see guidelines)
	Final scheduled defense

### Stage 5: Electronic Dissertation Submission

Completed	Task
	Upon approval, make any necessary revisions to the final document
	Notify all committee members of requested changes and set 2-week timeline for comments
	Finalize document
	Notify program director to submit Dissertation Signature Page ( <a href="https://gradschool.ecu.edu/forms/">Graduate School Forms</a> - <a href="https://gradschool.ecu.edu/forms/">gradschool.ecu.edu/forms/</a> )
	Upload document to ECU's VIREO system (Graduate School <a href="https://libguides.ecu.edu/vireo/etd">https://libguides.ecu.edu/vireo/etd</a> )

## Graduation

Apply to graduate at least one semester prior to completion of all requirements. Application to graduate can be made using Pirate Port. Review Graduate School for instructions: [How to Apply to Graduate](https://registrar.ecu.edu/how-to-apply-to-graduate/) (registrar.ecu.edu/how-to-apply-to-graduate/)

### Notes:

Some of the above steps may not always follow in the exact order above.

International students must be registered in the semester that they intend to graduate.

Doctoral candidates on ECU stipends are required to present oral and final defense in person, on campus

\*Advisors may develop the above actions specific to timelines as part of their PUBH 9000 course syllabus.

# Best Practices

The guidelines below are intended for doctoral candidates, faculty advisor and committee members. These Best Practices are outlined in the ECU, Graduate School, Program Directors and Program Coordinators Handbook.

## 1. Selection of Dissertation Advisor

- i. Upon entering the program, each student is assigned an initial advisor to help guide them during the early stages in the program. Students are highly encouraged to identify their research topic interest within the first year of the program.
- ii. Following successful completion of the comprehensive exam, the student will meet with their advisor and select a graduate faculty member, whose research expertise aligns well with the student's intended research area.
- iii. The student agrees to serve as the student's dissertation advisor.
- iv. The dissertation advisor chairs the student's Dissertation Committee, which may or may not be the same as the student's Initial Advisor.

## 2. Dissertation Committee Composition and Expectations

- i. Dissertation Advisor (Mentor) will act as a chair.
- ii. Selection of the Dissertation Committee should be initiated by the student in consultation with the Dissertation Advisor prior to an attempt at Candidacy by the student.
- iii. At least one additional graduate faculty member from within the department where the degree program is housed.
- iv. Membership should complement the direction or aims of the Dissertation project planned by the student.
- v. At least one public health practitioner member, external to the university is required.
- vi. A minimum of three (3) graduate faculty members in total is required of the Dissertation Committee.

## 3. Qualifications of Dissertation Committee Members

- i. All internal Dissertation Committee members must have ECU graduate faculty status (full or associate).
- ii. External members may be from industry, government, community organizations or other universities, and must have been approved by the process described in the Faculty Manual.
- iii. Each member is expected to have a terminal degree equivalent to or beyond the degree being sought by the student.

- iv. The terminal degree requirement may be waived for an external member from an agency, industry, government, or community organizations who serves to provide novel expertise to the student research.

#### **4. Frequency of student meetings with Dissertation Committee**

- i. A required first organizational Dissertation Committee meeting should occur as soon as is feasible after selection of the Dissertation Advisor.
- ii. An organizational meeting with the doctoral student must occur prior to the Assessment for Candidacy status.
- iii. At least one meeting per semester with student and Dissertation Advisor.
- iv. Meetings may occasionally be substituted with a formal, written update to the entire Dissertation Committee, as allowed by the Program guidelines.
- v. Face to face meetings or video conferences with students are expected for at least one of the annual meetings

#### **5. Timing of Doctoral Candidacy**

- i. Advancement to Doctoral Candidacy is required for DrPH degree (see Item #VI for details and forms).
- ii. Recommended for Doctoral Candidacy for **full-time** graduate students: End of 4<sup>th</sup> semester; no later than 5<sup>th</sup> semester (not including summer).
- iii. Recommended for Doctoral Candidacy for **part-time** graduate students: End of 5<sup>th</sup> semester; no later than 6<sup>th</sup> semester (not including summer).

#### **6. Responsibilities of the Dissertation Committee**

The Dissertation Committee will:

- i. Advise the student in the educational program, as well as the planning, conduct and interpretation of research or scholarly activities.
- ii. Monitor and evaluate the student's progress toward the degree.
- iii. Oversee the student's intellectual and scholarly development and respond to any difficulties in the student's performance on a regular basis.
- iv. Meet in person or virtually (at least twice a year) to critically assess progress toward the degree.
  - a. Meetings may be requested by the student, Dissertation Advisor or by a Committee member.
- v. Dissertation Committee must express to the Student and Dissertation Advisor any concerns they may have regarding the student's performance and quality of work
- vi. In the event the student's performance or progress is deemed insufficient, the Dissertation Committee will offer guidance to aid in the fulfillment of their expectations.
- vii. Approve of the subject matter and methodology of the Dissertation research.

- viii. Review and comment on drafts of the Dissertation regarding editorial, linguistic and bibliographic quality prior to submission to the Graduate School.
- ix. Verify proper organization, content, and formatting of the Dissertation for submission to the Graduate School.
- x. Verify, to the best of their ability, the quality of the data collection and evidence, data analysis, and logical reasoning or interpretation considering the research aims.
- xi. Evaluate whether the student's Dissertation fulfills the requirements of the degree using the DPH provided rubric.
- xii. Encourage the Student in the submission and revision of manuscripts based on the Dissertation for publication in the scholarly literature.
- xiii. All members of the Dissertation Committee are expected to attend the Dissertation Defense in person or virtually as situation demands.

#### **7. Advancement to Candidacy Status**

- i. Advancement to doctoral candidacy precedes a student's entry into the research or project or scholarly activity implementation process.
- ii. All components should be evaluated by the Committee; outcomes reported in a single, documented report to Program Director
- iii. Doctoral Programs: outcome must be formally reported to the Graduate School using the "Advancement to Doctoral Candidacy" form. (Efforts should be made to include this step in the student's electronic academic file.)

END