

# Psy.D. Dissertation Guide

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\*Adapted from Rutgers University's PsyD Thesis Guide by  
Psy.D. Program at MUN

## OVERVIEW OF THE MUN PSY.D. PROGRAM

The Psy.D. program at MUN is designed to train professional clinical psychologists at the doctoral level within a scholar-practitioner model. The program aims to promote an integration of research and practice by teaching students to become practitioners who are knowledgeable about clinical research design and methodology, as well as skilled in critically appraising and applying research findings to inform their clinical practice. This includes both the incorporation of research evidence into practice as well as active involvement in clinically-relevant research.

Of note, a PsyD thesis is distinct from a PhD thesis in that a PhD thesis is designed to train students to become independent researchers. A Psy.D. thesis, however, aims to train students to become scholar-practitioners who are expert consumers of research and able to critically evaluate and apply research finding to their clinical practice. Psy.D. graduates may also go on to become involved in research activities as part of their careers such as clinical program evaluation research.

## PSY.D. DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

The doctoral dissertation is a highly important component of the professional training of candidates for the Doctor of Psychology Degree. A wide range of topics and multiple strategies of inquiry are suitable for dissertations. The highest attainable level of quality is required.

A formal dissertation proposal (typically about 15-20 pages) is required of every student, *prior to beginning the research project*, regardless of the type of dissertation. This proposal is to be developed in consultation with the dissertation supervisor as well as members of the dissertation committee. In the process of developing a formal proposal, the committee may require a brief written prospectus prior to committing to a dissertation topic.

At least one pre-data collection meeting of the student's dissertation committee is required to discuss and approve the proposal (unless dissertation focuses on larger ongoing data collections or secondary data analysis which has already received ethics approval). Sometimes two or more meetings may be required before the proposal is formally approved. After committee members approve the proposal, a signed copy of the **dissertation proposal defense form** must be given to the Psy.D. administrative assistant for the student's file.

## TYPES OF DISSERTATIONS

The Psy.D. dissertation may be developed in a variety of ways, depending upon the student's interests and professional work. The overriding requirements are that the conceptualization and depth of understanding of subject matter be commensurate with a doctoral-level thesis, be considered an original contribution of research, and related to the science or practice of psychology. The dissertation must be of publishable quality and result in, at minimum, the equivalent of one peer-reviewed journal article and generally, at maximum, the equivalent of two peer-reviewed journal articles.

Please note that the order with which dissertation types are presented within each category is not based on their importance or quality. Students may select from the myriad of options provided. However, students must realize that regardless of the type of dissertation that they select, they still must secure advanced approval of their topic as well as their design and methodology from their dissertation committee. It is expected that an acceptable article for journal submission be one outcome of the dissertation process.

- 1) *Quantitative research study*. With these types of studies, it is expected that students will develop specific research questions and hypotheses and will conduct empirical testing of predictions derived from these hypotheses by collecting new data. Examples of methodologies for these types of studies include but are not limited to group experiments, quasi-experimental studies, or correlational studies. Another example of quantitative research studies is meta-analyses. This type of study is described in greater detail as a separate category.
- 2) *Secondary data analyses* – A dissertation may involve testing research hypotheses using secondary analyses of an existing dataset. A dissertation of this type involves formulating new research questions or hypotheses to be examined using an existing database.
  - 1) *Meta-analyses* – This is an empirically-based approach to integrating and synthesizing a group of related studies in order to identify patterns, sources of agreement/disagreement, or other relationships. Most meta-analyses will seek to accomplish these objectives using a common metric, such as an effect size.
  - 2) *Qualitative research study* - The empirical-inductive method (e.g., qualitative research) involves first establishing a database and then engaging in a carefully thought-through approach of where to begin. These data can then be organized into empirical constructs from which a theoretical model may be generated. A well-designed exploratory study leading to the eventual development of hypotheses for future testing could also be acceptable.

## DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Each student is required to have a dissertation committee. This committee consists of the supervisor (whose primary appointment must be in the Department of Psychology) plus two faculty members. At least one committee member must be a clinical faculty member affiliated with the Psy.D. program.

## DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

All students must have a formal dissertation proposal approved by the Dissertation Supervisor and the committee, *prior to starting to carry out the project*. The specifics of the proposal are at the discretion of the committee, but the proposal will typically include a full literature review, clear statement of hypotheses, description of proposed methods and procedures, plan of analysis, and references. This process must be completed by July 15th of Year 1. Students are to consult their supervisor and committee throughout the initial idea stage through developing the formal proposal to ensure their dissertation plan is feasible and appropriate. All students

planning an empirical study in which quantitative data will be collected are strongly urged to conduct a power analysis to determine the sample size needed to yield interpretable results.

## DISSERTATION PROCESS

After the proposal is approved and Research Ethics Committee approval is obtained, students then collect data, analyze the data, and write up the dissertation results. Data collection (if required for the dissertation project) must be completed by November 1st of Year 3 (i.e., before submission of pre-doctoral internship (APPIC) applications). The first draft of the full written dissertation should be submitted to the supervisor before the start of the pre-doctoral internship in Year 4, given the intensity of demands of the internship year.

## ETHICS

All research at Memorial that involves humans is governed by the Ethics of Research Involving Human Participants policy (<http://www.mun.ca/policy/site/policy.php?id=139>) and follows the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2 (TCPS2) (<http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/>). Students should be familiar with both policies, and should seek approval from the appropriate Research Ethics Board prior to recruiting any participants or collecting any data:

<https://www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr>

<http://www.hrea.ca/home.aspx>

## WRITING THE DISSERTATION IN APA MANUSCRIPT STYLE

Because the thesis should be of publishable quality, the thesis should be written in the format of an APA journal article manuscript to facilitate submitting the thesis to a peer reviewed journal. To do so, students should follow the latest APA Publication Manual closely. The dissertation will still retain some elements of a formal dissertation, including: (1) Title page, (2) Abstract, (3) Acknowledgements, (4) Table of Contents, (5) List of Tables, and (6) List of Figures. However, elements of APA manuscript style should be incorporated.

## THE DISSERTATION DEFENCE

The School of Graduate Studies regulations concerning evaluation of Ph.D. theses will be followed.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF SUPERVISORS AND GRADUATE STUDENTS

See <http://www.mun.ca/sgs/responsibilities.pdf> for Faculty of Graduate Studies policies on the roles and responsibilities of graduate students and dissertation supervisors. Supervisors should provide clear guidelines about their expectations, and should initiate regular meetings with their students about the dissertation. Supervisors should make themselves available to discuss

problems or issues that may arise between scheduled meetings. Supervisors should provide constructive feedback and suggestions on any written work submitted in a timely manner. Specifically, the Psy.D. program expects supervisors to provide guidance, structure, and support to assist students in completing the dissertation within the 4-year time-frame of the program- thus the selected dissertation project must be feasibly completed within that timeframe.

Dissertation supervisors are also responsible for monitoring and evaluating, on an annual basis, students' research progress. Students should meet milestones to ensure timely completion of the dissertation. Students must maintain regular contact with the supervisor and the members of the supervisory committee to review progress and set goals. If students feel they are being exploited in any way, or are not getting the support and feedback they need, then they have the responsibility to discuss their concerns with the Graduate Students Union, Graduate Office, Head of Department, and finally the Dean of Graduate Studies.