

## ***DISSERTATION WRITING GUIDELINES***

### ***INTRODUCTION***

Candidates in the PhD in Communication programme are required to write a dissertation whose length may be determined by the complexity of the problem they may be addressing. The final document should be a creative intellectual exploration of an issue or topic. Chapters may be designated as follows (some situations may demand a different chapter arrangement and sometimes a content area may run more than one chapter):

Chapter 1:	Introduction and Background to the Study
Chapter 2:	Literature Review
Chapter 3:	Research Methodology
Chapter 4:	Data Presentation, Analysis. And Interpretation
Chapter 5:	Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations
	References
	Appendices

The dissertation is a presentation of the student's own academic work and contribution to the larger pool of human knowledge. It gives evidence of the student's knowledge of their field of specialisation, their ability to interact with the work of relevant experts (duly cited and credited), and their ability to contribute the creation of new knowledge in a specific scholarly discipline. As in any academic work, plagiarism is a serious offense, and is to be meticulously avoided.

### ***STEPS IN PREPARING A DISSERTATION PROPOSAL***

The first stage of writing the dissertation is to write the proposal for the research you intend to do. The proposal is, in essence, the first three chapters of what will eventually become part of the final dissertation document, as follows: 1) background, purpose, and overview of the study; 2) literature review, and 3) proposed methodology.

To prepare these three chapters, the student is to proceed through the following steps:

#### ***1. Identify the topic for their research and resulting dissertation***

#### ***2. Identify a supervisor and a second supervisor***

The coordinator of the PhD programme has a list of possible supervisors. A student may also suggest someone that they would like to work with within the following parameters:

- a. The supervisor is to be a qualified Daystar faculty member or somebody qualified to be a member of Daystar faculty, drawn from within the programme discipline area. In rare instances, someone from outside the student's major field can be selected as the student's supervisor, if they have expertise in an area directly related to their dissertation topic.

- b. It is strongly advised that at least one of the supervisors be from within Daystar, so as to facilitate coordinating schedules and knowledge of specific Daystar requirements for dissertations. In rare occasions, a supervisor may be appointed from outside Daystar. This person must be vetted (officially approved) by Daystar, through the Dean of the School, and contracted to serve as the supervisor by the university
- c. The student will also have a second supervisor. The second supervisor should also be a qualified Daystar faculty member, from within the programme discipline but can also be from outside the student's major field, if they have expertise in an area directly related to the student's dissertation topic. Just like in the case of supervisor, a second supervisor may be appointed from outside Daystar, if approved by the university.

The following are expectations of the student's working relationships with the supervisors.

- a. *Supervisor:* The student is to work directly with the supervisor throughout the dissertation process. Each time the student has completed a section or draft, submit it to the supervisor for his/her input and approval. The student should give a minimum of one week turn-around time for their supervisor to get back to them with input and corrections before they check back with him/her. Note that as the student gets to the full dissertation proposal and the final dissertation documents, two weeks is more realistic. The responsibility is on the student to contact the supervisor, to make sure the supervisor has received the document, and to collect it when it is ready for return. The student is also to work as quickly as possible in turn-around on corrections. The student should not solicit input on their dissertation from other faculty members without their supervisor's knowledge and explicit permission.
- b. *Second Supervisor:* The second supervisor is to be involved in the dissertation process throughout all the stages even though the Main Supervisor takes the lead in clearing the student to move to the subsequent stages of the study. The arrangement between the main supervisor and that of the second supervisor is perceived to be equivalent to being in a committee. Their concurrence throughout the study is important and indeed required.

### 3. ***Preparing the Dissertation Proposal***

- a. Identify a problem area to be researched.
- b. Develop a clear purpose statement
- c. Formulate a detailed study plan or proposal
- d. Write your first three chapters, with regular collaboration with your supervisors.

The following suggested outline for your proposal may be useful:

### *Chapter One: Introduction and Background to the study*

Chapter one should include the following sections, though this is not rigid. Depending on the student's topic and approach, these may vary to some degree: (the student should not include the letters here in their section headings)

- a. Introduction: Definition of the main problem or research question. Here they introduce the topic for research.
- b. Background to the study: Presentation of the justification/rationale of the need for this research, plus a brief explanation of the conceptual or theoretical framework.
- c. Statement of the Problem
- d. Purpose of the Study: A precise statement, no more than three sentences.
- e. Objectives of the Study: A breakdown of the purpose of the study into sub purposes.
- f. Hypothesis or Research Questions.
- g. Justification/rationale:
- h. Significance of the Study: A statement of who will benefit from the study and in what ways.
- i. Assumptions:
- j. Scope of study: This should indicate the purposeful parameters the student has placed around their research with proper justifications.
- k. Limitations and delimitations: Potential drawbacks or shortfalls, including assumptions of what needs to be in place which are requisite for successfully pursuing the research, such as honest self-reporting by informants, etc.
- l. Definition of Terms: Define operational terms for the specific research.
- m. Summary: A summary of the chapter and a brief overview of the remaining chapters.

### *Chapter Two: Literature Review*

Chapter two presents and discusses what has been written related to topics relevant to the student's research study. By examining what others have researched and written, the student will also be demonstrating the existence of an aspect of the field that has not been explored, a gap which they intend to address through their research. Within their literature review, they should present the theoretical or conceptual framework that will guide their research.

### *Chapter Three: Research Methodology*

Chapter three should include a detailed description of the design of the study and the methodology to be utilized. Selected research methods should be appropriate to the research problems and questions identified in chapter one. Reasons for choosing the specific methods should be defended, and an explanation provided for why alternative methods were not selected. Suggested sub-divisions of this chapter include: (the student should not include the letters here in their section headings).

- a. Introduction

- b. Research Designs
- c. Population to be studied
- d. Sample(s) to be selected
- e. Sampling method(s)
- f. Types of data
- g. Data collection methods
- h. Data collection procedures
- i. Instrument pre-testing
- j. Data analysis plan
- k. Ethical considerations (where applicable)
- l. Summary

The following are required in the proposal

- a. Timetable for data collection, analysis and write-up
- b. Estimated budget, including source of funding, if any
- c. Permissions required (if any)

The student may organize their chapter three in this order, or if they are using several methods (e.g. content analysis, survey questionnaires, and in-depth interviews), they may choose to address a-g one method at a time.

#### ***4. Defending their dissertation proposal***

These first three chapters form the dissertation proposal. The student SHOULD NOT begin any field work/data collection until after the proposal has been officially approved. Only after the supervisors have approved the prepared proposal should the student prepare a final copy for review. With the approval of both the supervisors the main supervisor is to contact the coordinator of the student's programme to inform him/her of the student's readiness for defense. The student may then proceed to setting a defense date through the office of the Dean of the School.

In preparation for the proposal defense, which is a public forum, notices should be prepared and posted. A proposal overview should be prepared, which will be distributed to all attendees on the day of the defense. This overview may be single-spaced typed, and should be NO MORE than three pages long. The more concise it is, the better. It should include: the topic with a brief background to the problem (to establish the need for the research and the conceptual or theoretical framework), the purpose statement with research objectives and hypothesis or research questions, the topics reviewed from literature, an overview of the proposed research methodology a statement regarding the significance of the study.

The defense will be chaired by the Dean of the School or the Dean's designated faculty member (such as the Coordinator of the related program). At least four faculty members will comprise the panel although the number can be larger. All panel members must have the latest complete clean copy of the dissertation proposal at least two weeks prior to the defense.

After initial introductions facilitated by the chair the student will be asked to take the panel and the attendees through the written document. They will describe the dissertation research proposal. This should take approximately fifteen minutes. After that, the chair will open the floor for questions from the panel first and may be later for those in attendance.

Following the defense the panel (along with any other faculty members in attendance at the defense who are invited by the chair) will meet to determine the readiness of the proposal for data collection. If the defense is successful, the panel may give full approval and release the student for data collection. Alternatively the panel may give partial approval, requiring some corrections to be done and to be brought back to the supervisors prior to embarking on data collection. Finally, the panel may determine that the proposal is not ready for data collection and may require the student to make specified changes and return to defend the proposal again.

After successfully defending the proposal and receiving the committee's approval to proceed, the will go to the field to collect data.

## **STEPS IN COMPLETING THE DISSERTATION**

### **1. *Collect your data***

Once the student has been approved to go to the field to collect data, it is wise to pre-test any questionnaires, in-depth interview guidelines, or focus groups discussion guides by doing a trial run with informants similar to, but not being used in, the actual data collection processes. Based on feedback from pre-tests, the student should refine their research tools in consultation with their supervisors, and then proceed to the field. If they are using research assistants in the collection of data, they should be sure that they are trained well, and are clear on their responsibilities, having the materials and/or equipment that they will need.

As the student collects data, they should continually confirm for themselves that they are clearly documenting the procedures as well as the responses of the informants. In the case of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, it is wise to use more than one method of data recording, and it is important to review the notes and recordings after each session, filling in gaps as they appear while the student's memory is still fresh. As soon as possible, while information is still fresh, the student should begin the transcription and input of data.

### **2. *Writing the final dissertation***

Once the student has completed data collection and compiled and analyzed findings, it is time to write the remaining two chapters of their dissertation. They should also update their first three chapters as to what they have done, changing the future tense of the dissertation proposal to past tense. For the final dissertation, they are to also remove their proposed timeline and budget which were part of the proposal. They are not to be included in their final dissertation.

The remaining portion of the dissertation should include the following chapters:

*Chapter Four: Data Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation*

In chapter four, they are to systematically report, and discuss research findings. Summarize the noteworthy findings and results, but not discuss implications of their findings until chapter 5. Note that some chapters may have more than one division.

### *Chapter Five: Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations*

Chapter five should discuss overall findings and implications in light of the theoretical or conceptual framework provided in the literature review in chapter two. The student should draw conclusions, explaining the extent to which the research questions have been answered. Then make recommendations drawn from their research, and propose possibilities for further study.

### **3. Prepare the final dissertation**

At this point, in addition to chapters 1-5, the student should also prepare their one to two page abstract, their preliminary pages, and any appendices. They should make sure that they are submitting a clean copy of their work to the committee for their final defense. This means that the copy should be free of all spelling and grammatical errors, and should be correctly formatted. Their title should contain the key aspects of the study, including key words that would be needed to find the content of their dissertation in a library or on-line search. They should keep the title concise, generally not more than 12 words.

### *Format of Dissertation*

Daystar requires that the PhD dissertation be formatted using APA (American Psychological Association) Style guidelines, fifth and sixth editions. The student should use either English or American English consistently throughout the document. Dissertation is to be presented on A4 paper (be sure both your word processor and printer are set to A4 paper, not letter size – which often is the default setting), single-sided, double-spaced typed. Top, right and bottom margins for the final dissertation are to be 1” (2.54 cm) while the left margin is to be 1-1/2” (3.8 cm), allowing ½” for binding.

For font, the student should use a standard serif font (e.g. Times New Roman, New York, Palatino) for all their text in 12 point size, including preliminary pages.

For spacing, the student should always double space with the following exceptions:

- Long quotations over 40 words (for which you then use block quotes, indented 5 spaces, single-spaced).
- Table headings and figure captions
- Reference list (but double space between entries)
- Tables
- Headings and sub-headings that exceed one line

In preparing the final dissertation, preliminary pages and any appendices must also be included.

### **4. Conduct the final dissertation defense**

After both supervisors are satisfied that their dissertation is ready for the final defense, they are to suggest several possible dates and times to their supervisors, who will then inform the coordinator. The coordinator will then set the date, time and panel members to comprise the final dissertation examination panel. The student is to prepare the determined number of copies of their dissertation, to be distributed to panel members prior to the final defense.

### *Order of Dissertation Sections*

As the student prepares their final dissertation, the sections and pages should be in the following order:

- a. Title Page
- b. Signature Page
- c. Student's Declaration Page
- d. Dedication (optional)
- e. Acknowledgements
- f. Table of Contents
- g. List of Tables & Figures
- h. List of Abbreviations
- i. Abstract
- j. Chapter One
- k. Chapter Two
- l. Chapter Three
- m. Chapter Four
- n. Chapter Five
- o. References
- p. Appendices

The final defense is a process in which the student is able to present their research to a panel of experts, and in which they will be asked to defend their process and research findings. The student is expected to demonstrate their mastery of the field in general, and of their research topic in particular.

The defense will be chaired by the Dean of their School or the Dean's designated faculty member (such as the coordinator of the related program). At least four faculty members will comprise the panel, including the designated chair, the supervisors, and a representative of the office of the Registrar. All panel members must have the latest complete clean copy of the dissertation at least two weeks prior to the defense.

After initial introductions facilitated by the chair the student will be asked to take the panel and the attendees through written document, describing their dissertation research proposal. This should take approximately fifteen minutes. After that, the chair will open the floor for questions from the panel.

Following the defense the panel will meet to determine whether the dissertation passes Daystar University standards for approved PhD dissertation. Note that in their assessment of the work, the examiners will be looking for mastery of the field of research as well as of the content of the research in particular. They will also be looking at the quality of the presentation of the work (logic, clarity, grammar, spelling, format, etc.) as well as the scope and depth of the work. The student will be notified immediately afterward whether they have passed or not, but they will not receive their grade until it has been approved by the University Senate.

### *Clean Copies*

Once the student has passed final defense and has made all the recommended revisions and corrections, they will be ready to submit the clean copies of their dissertation to the Dean for binding. They are to submit a minimum of two clean copies to the School, having signed the student declaration page in the first copy. In addition, you are to submit your dissertation on a CD Rom for the library.

### **Further Notes on the The Dissertation<sup>1</sup>**

Each candidate for the Ph.D in Communication degree must submit an acceptable dissertation. The Ph.D dissertation at Daystar is expected to be a substantial contribution to research in the field of study, demonstrating originality, creativity, breadth of research, careful argumentation, and clear English style. In principle, a good dissertation will be publishable (certainly in the form of an article or articles). The dissertation is the centrepiece of the doctoral enterprise. The topic should be chosen wisely, and the proposal should be written after extensive appropriate reading and careful and thorough research.

### **Areas for Dissertation Research**

The Ph.D in Communication program emphasizes issues related to such areas of specialization as electronic and print media, health communication, intercultural communication, and public relations. Dissertations may also be “integrative” in the sense that they involve interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary work. Such integration is encouraged where necessary and where such integration makes a vital contribution to the central dissertation and goal of the dissertation.

### **The Dissertation Committee**

The Dissertation Committee consists of four members: the student supervisors and two other members. The supervisors work closely with the student throughout the production of the dissertation, offering regular guidance regarding the direction and content of the work. The committee will approve the dissertation proposal. An external examiner may be chosen toward the end of the dissertation process by the Dean of the School. The student will not be notified of the identity of the external examiner until a defense copy has been completed.

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<sup>1</sup> This section has been adapted from the Wheaton College graduate students’ handbook and is also available in the PhD manual



### **Dissertation Proposal Defense**

A carefully designed proposal is required of all students. The purpose of the proposal is to force the student to think through the chosen topic very carefully – especially in terms of its scope and method. A thoughtful and well-crafted proposal provides a roadmap for the writing of the dissertation that serves to focus and streamline the process. The proposal should clearly and succinctly identify the proposed research topic, explain the methodology to be applied, indicate the need for such a study, provide a chapter-by-chapter outline, and conclude with a reasonably comprehensive bibliography (excluding standard reference sources and commentaries). At the time of the proposal defense (though not as a part of the proposal itself), students, in consultation with their supervisors, should draw up a schedule for the production of the dissertation, including projected lengths and time of completion for each chapter.

### **Specific Deadlines for Graduation**

To graduate in any one academic year the final defense must be held at least 2 months before graduation. **Note that meeting these deadlines in no way guarantees graduation at the specified time. The need for extensive revisions of the initial or defense draft may prolong the process.**

### **Dissertation Defense**

The supervisor may choose to ask questions during the examination. Once the questioning has concluded, the Dean, will dismiss the student whose dissertation is being examined. Four outcomes of the dissertation defense hearing are possible: 1) the dissertation may be passed with no further revision necessary; 2) the dissertation may be passed without conditions but with recommendations; 3) the dissertation may be passed on condition that further revision is completed prior to resubmission (with or without an oral defense); 4) the dissertation may be failed. The passmark for the dissertation is a 3.00 GPA. Those who fail will be allowed to repeat the dissertation process once after which if they fail for the second time they will be discontinued. Students should be aware that dissertation defenses frequently result in minor and sometimes major revisions to the defense draft, often with new material. They should therefore schedule their defense well before their anticipated graduation date. Once participants have successfully defended the dissertation, they will be certified to walk in the next graduation ceremony (even if revisions to the dissertation are still required). The degree will not, of course, officially be granted until all program requirements have been completed.