Student Guide to the DPA
Dissertation Process

With Special Thanks to
Dr. Kristi B. Godwin and
Dr. Daniel Baracskay
TABLE OF CONTENTS

I: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 3
   Helpful Tips .................................................................................................................. 4
II: DISSERTATION PROCESS OVERVIEW .................................................................... 6
   The Procedural Checklist ......................................................................................... 7
   The Dissertation Component Checklist ................................................................ 9
III: FORMATTING GUIDELINES .................................................................................... 10
IV: CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................. 11
   Helpful Links ............................................................................................................. 12
   Suggested References ............................................................................................... 13

APPENDIX .....................................................................................................................14-18
   Process Map.............................................................................................................A
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to give an outline for the process of writing, researching, and reviewing your dissertation to completion. Writing a dissertation is a long and somewhat confusing process, especially if it is a journey you have never embarked on before (as is the case for most). I do hope this guide will give you a clear idea of what to do and prepare you for the trek ahead. I recommend reviewing this guide from time to time along the way to be sure you aren’t forgetting something and referring to it whenever you have questions about the next step in the process. Feel free to make suggestions to update this as the process changes, or if you encounter an issue not addressed here—this should be a “work in progress” designed to help all future DPA students! 😊
HELPFUL TIPS

1. Take Your Time

The dissertation process is designed to be a lengthy one, so be prepared not to rush through. Take your time and ensure that your paper and resulting project will be one that will earn respect and be worth the read. Do not get discouraged if others finish ahead of you or if you feel “left behind.” There is no set time for completion of the program (other than the seven-year limitation) and each dissertation is very different—it is important to remember to focus on your own work and not allow yourself to engage in a “race to finish.” The end result is the most important thing—you will finish if you persevere!

2. Be Practical

Remember to take Dr. Argyle’s famous advice to choose a feasible capstone project and not try to “save the world” with your dissertation. PADM 9050 gives you a wonderful opportunity to choose a reasonable project and to try it out (in doing a “mini-dissertation” type project). This should allow you to determine if it is a workable project or if you should try a different topic. This gives you the chance to find out if the data you need is even available, potentially saving you tremendous time later on. Being able to use this same idea later and building on it will save you time in the long run and you will be able to get a “head-start,” so to speak, on your dissertation. You will have to expand it quite a bit for it to qualify as your final dissertation/project, basically doubling it in size and elaborating in depth on the research and statistical portions, but it is still much more
practical than starting on a brand new project. However, it is important to note that even if you are able to expand on that project that it is still a long way from being a completed dissertation. Be careful not to go into the final dissertation process thinking you are “almost done” as many of us have done in the past. This can set you up for frustration and even possible failure when you realize how much work still has to be done.

3. Select Committee Members Carefully

Be very careful in your selection of committee members—only select those you have experience with or have a working relationship with because personality conflicts and difficulty in communication can definitely hinder your progress and even prevent completion. Your committee is essential for moving through the process, motivating you through, being available to answer questions and give suggestions, and to instruct you on the next steps to take. Your committee chair is the most important person, as the majority of your work is dependent on them and their availability to review your work, make suggested changes, review those changes, and then give permission for you to send out to the remaining members. In the initial stages of the dissertation (the first three chapters) you are working in the capstone course and must first send each individual chapter to your professor. You must first get all corrections suggested by your professor completed, and get their “green light” to send each chapter to your chair. You then send the chapters to your chair for their review, and their corrections. You may not send your work to anyone else without your chair’s permission, so any delay on their part is a delay for the entire process. It is a good idea to be very familiar with your chair and their work ethic,
and to even research to see previous dissertation committees they have served on. You cannot be too careful in assembling your team—they are essential to your success!

4. Residency Weekend (Travel Tips)

Part of this program is a requirement to attend at least five residency weekends. The fifth is very important, as it comes just before the capstone course and includes specific instructions from the professor about the course and the dissertation process. There is also a great chance for the students to ask questions of the professor and also to work on finding their committee members (meeting and talking with them in person). For students who are long-distance from campus, traveling for residency weekend and also for defense meetings and other dissertation-related business can be difficult. Parking is usually available at the Nevins Hall lot, but if not, you will want to stop by the parking office to request a free one-day student parking pass.

Jacksonville Airport is actually closer than Atlanta if you are planning to fly in and drive the remaining distance. There is an airport in Valdosta, but the flights there are fairly limited. Don’t be afraid to ask for traveling tips and recommendations from fellow students who are local.
THE PROCEDURAL CHECKLIST

- Consult advisor for program-specific requirements
- See DPA Final Project/Dissertation Process Map (Appendix)
- Admission to candidacy form should be submitted (as part of the Capstone course process)
- Develop tentative proposal
- Consult with major professor/committee chair
- Consider committee options
- Conduct preliminary feasibility study
- Select committee
- Submit Appointment of Committee form (at least 3 semesters before graduating)
- Also Apply To Graduate 2 Semesters Before Expected Graduation
- Draft proposal
- Register for credit
- Get IRB Approval
- Begin research and writing of chapters 1-3 as part of PADM 9090
- Submit chapters to the chair; once the chair approves you to send it to the remaining committee members you may do so. Once all members have approved the changes made to the chapter and give you permission to, you may move on to the next chapter.
- Make changes suggested by committee
- Send corrections back to the committee for them to approve
- Draft proposal defense
- Schedule proposal defense date
- Defend proposal
- Submit Proposal Approval form
- Conduct actual research, continue writing
- Prepare defense draft
- Write abstract
o Receive approval for defense

o Schedule defense (recommended around mid-term) (must be done by a specific date each semester—**must be announced at least 8 weeks before graduation**—in order for you to graduate in that semester)

o Submit notification of defense form (1-2 weeks prior to defense date)

o Perform defense (recommended to have signature pages and defense approval form signed at defense—**must be defended at least 6 weeks prior to graduation**)

o Chair needs to notify graduate school (email or letter) that you successfully defended

o Make changes from defense (having committee approve changes each time)

o Prepare final version

o Have final version proofread by a professional

o Obtain committee signatures on signature pages (if not already obtained)

o Pay binding fees

o Submit a hard copy of the final version, with all signature pages and the binding fee receipt, to the Dean. Once the Dean makes corrections it may be forwarded to the Graduate School. (must be done by a specific date each semester—**4 weeks prior to graduation**—in order for you to graduate in that semester)

o Submit final draft and all signed signature pages, plus a copy of fee receipt to Graduate School by assigned semester deadlines (must be done by a specific date each semester—**must be done at least 2 weeks prior to graduation**— in order for you to graduate in that semester)

o Submit final paper copies to be bound with the Binding Fee form AND bring a CD or Zip drive with an electronic PDF (WORD FORMAT) copy of your thesis or dissertation to the Odum Library Acquisitions Office; fill out and sign the Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Permission form in Acquisitions

o Celebrate with family and friends!

*(Please note that the deadlines for graduation come really quickly in the process, and most of it is out of your hands. It is imperative that you remain aware of these dates, stay within the deadlines, and try to work to BEAT the deadline to allow extra time for unforeseen delays)*
THE DISSERTATION COMPONENT CHECKLIST

- Title Page
- Copyright Page
- Signature Page
- Fair Use and Duplication Release Form
- Abstract
- Table of Contents
- List of Figures or Illustrations
- List of Tables
- *Preface
- *Acknowledgments
- *Dedication
- Body of Text and Nontext Elements
- Endnotes/Footnotes/Text References
- Bibliography/Reference List
- Appendix/Appendices (if applicable)
- *Autobiographical Statement

*= optional
FORMATTING GUIDELINES

All pages have 1” margins, with the left hand margin being 1.5” (to allow for binding). The first page of each chapter has a 2” top margin, but all other pages have the standard 1” top margin. The first page of each chapter should begin on a new page. The body of the text should be in Times New Roman, 12 pt font, and double-spaced. The Table of Contents, Signature Pages, and all proceeding pages should be single-spaced. The title page, copyright page, and signature pages should not be numbered. The dissertation must be printed on 20 lb acid free paper. The abstract is double spaced and is the first page that is numbered, but is numbered using the letter i. Subsequent pages are numbered in roman numerals. The first page of Chapter 1 is the first page that is numbered using Arabic numerals. For more details on formatting see the website link for the Graduate School guidelines given in the conclusion section of this guide.
CONCLUSION

I hope you have found this guide to be helpful, but in the event you face an issue you are unsure of do not hesitate to ask your advisor or the program director for assistance. Good luck!
HELPFUL LINKS

Valdosta State University’s **Public Administration** Website: (check here for semester deadlines and all required forms)

[http://ww2.valdosta.edu/pa/students/index.shtml](http://ww2.valdosta.edu/pa/students/index.shtml)

Valdosta State University’s **Graduate School**: (check here for semester deadlines & sample pgs)

[http://www.valdosta.edu/academics/graduate-school/](http://www.valdosta.edu/academics/graduate-school/)

Valdosta State University’s **Dissertation Guidelines**:

SUGGESTED REFERENCES


Appendix A
1) DPA students defend both their project proposal and completed project. The project proposal may be defended online using Wimba, while the completed project is defended at the end, in person, on the VSU main campus. The progression for scheduling the defense for both stages is shown below:

**Steps in Project Proposal:**

1. Student works on proposal in PADM 9990 with faculty member teaching the course
2. Student works with PADM 9990 professor to identify possible chair / committee members
3. PADM 9990 professor approves student’s draft to send to committee chair only
4. Committee chair reviews student proposal and offers revisions and recommendations
5. Student completes revisions and returns updated draft back to committee chair for approval
6. Committee chair reviews revisions and either approves or returns it to student for further revisions (repeat step 5 above)
7. Upon chair’s approval of updated draft, student sends proposal to other committee members
8. Committee members review draft and offer revisions to student (and copies chair)
9. Student completes revisions and returns updated draft to committee for approval
10. Committee reviews revisions and either approves or returns to student for further revisions (repeat step 9)
11. Committee approves proposal and chair works with PA secretary to schedule day, time, and Wimba location
12. Student defends proposal and committee votes to accept or reject proposal (if rejected, student works out revision plan with committee)
13. Upon successful acceptance of proposal, chair gives approval for student to proceed with next chapter in project
14. Student follows procedures for final project (below)
Steps in Final Project Completion:

1. After student’s proposal is approved by chair and committee readers, he/she starts work on subsequent chapters.
2. Student requests a professional proofreader to review most recent draft prior to submitting it to committee chair.
3. After the proofreading process is completed, student sends most recent draft to chair only.
4. Committee chair reviews draft and offers revisions and recommendations.
5. Student completes revisions and returns updated draft back to chair for approval.
6. Committee chair reviews revisions and either approves or returns it to student for further revisions (repeat step 5 above).
7. Upon chair’s approval of updated draft, student sends project to other committee members.
8. Committee members review draft and offer revisions to student (and copies chair).
9. Student completes revisions and returns updated draft to committee for approval.
10. Committee reviews revisions and either approves or returns to student for further revisions (repeat step 9).
11. Committee approves project and chair works with PA secretary to schedule day, time, and location; student works to have a professional proofreader review final draft.
12. Student defends project and committee votes to accept or reject it (if rejected, student works out revision plan with committee).
13. Upon successful acceptance of project, chair gives approval for student to send project to graduate school.
14. Student follows all graduate school procedures and requirements, and afterward chair and committee sign off on project.
*Note:*
Students are informed by their committee chair of when a proposal or final project defense is ready for scheduling. Afterward, the chair works with the PA program office to schedule a date, time, and Wimba session and/or location. Students should not request to defend either their proposal or final project prior to receiving notification to proceed from their committee chair.

2) The final project / dissertation is a major academic undertaking. Producing a high quality project will take a considerable amount of time. A typical project will take 3-4 semesters to complete. This does not preclude a student from finishing earlier with the permission of the committee and scheduling.

3) Students should not presume to tell their committee when they will be finishing their projects or defending. The Public administration faculty has no preconceived expectation of when a student should complete their proposal or final project. The chief priority of faculty is to work with students to ensure that a practical and defendable project is produced that will follow programmatic and graduate school guidelines. **Students are not to email their committee telling them they must finish by a certain date or semester.** The chair and committee members will provide their approval for the student to move to a defense after all requirements have been satisfied, and no defense will be scheduled prior to this point.

4) Students should understand that it is up to the purview of committee members and the chair as to whether a proposal or final project defense will occur during final exam week of any semester (fall, spring, or summer). Further, it is at the discretion of individual committee members as to whether the project is covered in summers. Faculty members use summers to catch up on teaching, research, and travel, and are not obligated to continue work on any student’s project.

5) As indicated in the steps taken in the final project diagram (shown above), students **are required** to secure the services of a professional proofreader. It is essential that the student’s final project utilize proper grammar, spelling, and sentence structure. Students should be prepared to secure a brief one page letter from the professional proofreader they selected, indicating that person’s qualifications, training, and experience, and their work in reviewing the student’s paper.

6) Students should be aware that the review process takes considerable time for each draft submitted throughout the process. While some committee members may be able to respond within a two week period of when the draft of a student’s proposal or final project is submitted, other members take longer with the review. Students should not email their committee members to ask if their draft has been reviewed prior to a two week period of time, and after that period, the student may check with their committee occasionally for updates on the process. This is consistent with other colleges and programs at VSU.

7) Final drafts (already defended) are to be submitted to the Graduate School for review no less than two weeks before graduation of each semester. The primary purpose of this review is for formatting issues. The review process could extend beyond graduation.
8) Students should take particular care to ensure that no portion of any draft or paper submitted at VSU has been copied or pasted, or plagiarized in any way. Proper citations and references should be provided – note that the Public Administration Program at VSU follows the style of the American Political Science Association (APSA). An excellent guide worth consulting is:

9) In accordance with university policy, all correspondence with committee members must only take place through VSU email accounts and/or internal D2L email, and not personal email addresses.