



## The Doctoral Dissertation

### *Purpose*

The doctoral dissertation is a substantive piece of original research (that may take the form of a scientific study or a philosophical inquiry) conducted by the candidate the findings of which are, in principle, publishable in one or more peer-reviewed journal articles. The dissertation represents the hallmark of doctoral education. It is a contribution to the discipline of nursing and a demonstration that the candidate is prepared with the knowledge and skills to conduct research in the discipline.

### *Types of Dissertation*

In the School of Nursing, we recognize two types of dissertation: the traditional dissertation that is 1) a single document that is a report on a research project, or 2) the publication-based dissertation. The student and supervisory committee select the type of dissertation together.

Traditional Dissertation	Publication-Based Dissertation
<p><b>Introductory chapter</b>—Sets the boundaries of the study, determines prevalence of the problem or issue, and establishes the context and significance of the thesis.</p>	<p><b>Introductory Chapter/Forward</b>—The foreword could include an introduction of the scholarly work, review of the literature, discussion of relevant theory and conceptualization of the methodology. It sets the boundaries of the research, determines prevalence of the problem or issue, and establishes the context and significance of the thesis.</p>
<p><b>Background or Review of the Literature</b>—Reviews, critiques, and synthesizes previous research; identifies areas needing further research (the gaps); justifies the need for the study, establishes the aims of the study.</p>	<p><b>Manuscripts</b>— The dissertation will include three to five scholarly papers (manuscripts) either published during the student’s PhD studies or submitted for review for publication to peer reviewed journals. The student should be the sole or first author on all the manuscripts. Others can be co-authors, but the manuscripts should represent work that is primarily that of the student. The supervisory committee in consultation with the student will determine the number of sole and first authored papers.</p>
<p><b>Methodology</b>—Describes the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings; research design; limitations of the method; procedures for recruitment, data collection and analysis; ethical issues.</p>	
<p><b>Findings Chapter(s)</b>— Presents and elucidates the findings. <i>May be 1-3 chapters.</i></p>	
<p><b>Discussion</b>—Discusses research findings in relation to literature, highlighting points of concordance and divergence.</p>	<p><b>Afterward (Summary and Conclusion)</b>— The afterword (or final chapter) includes a synthesis of the work and a discussion of implications for nursing. May include recommendations for practice, research policy, and education, plus concluding statements.</p>
<p><b>Conclusion</b>—Discusses the limitations of the study; recommendations for practice, research, and education; presents a summary of whole project and concluding statements.</p>	

References	References
Appendices	Appendices

## Procedure for Publication-Based PhD Dissertations

The publication based PhD dissertation, like any PhD dissertation:

*must embody original work and constitute a significant contribution to knowledge in the candidate's field of study. It should contain broad knowledge of the relevant literature, and should demonstrate a critical understanding of the works of scholars closely related to the subject of the dissertation. Material embodied in the dissertation should, in the opinion of scholars in the field, merit publication.* (UVIC Graduate Studies Calendar 2009-2010, p. 19)

The guidelines in this procedure are intended to provide the Supervisory Committee with a standard to follow within which there is considerable flexibility for sound academic decision-making to best serve the needs of the individual student.

### Guidelines for the Supervisory Committee

- The dissertation will include three to five scholarly papers (manuscripts) either published during the student's PhD studies or submitted for review for publication to peer reviewed journals.
- In addition to the manuscripts, the dissertation will include a foreword and an afterword. The foreword includes an introduction of the scholarly work, review of the literature, discussion of relevant theory and conceptualization of the methodology. The afterword includes a synthesis of the work and a discussion of implications for nursing.
- The publication(s) represents research or scholarship comparable in scope and contribution to the portion of the standard thesis or dissertation it replaces. The published material is substantially the product of the student's period of study at UVic and was primarily conducted and written by the student.
- Students themselves will usually be the first author of the manuscripts; subsequent co-authorship will be decided by the student in consultation with the supervisory committee.
- In the oral examination, the student is "responsible for the entire content of the dissertation. This includes those portions of co-authored papers which comprise part of the dissertation" (UVIC Graduate Studies Calendar 2009-2010, p.19).

### Process

The development of a dissertation is an iterative process and students can expect to submit multiple drafts of each chapter while writing the dissertation. Students often think that they will sit down and write the dissertation in a linear fashion, from chronological beginning to end. In fact, writing a dissertation involves revolving between various sections or even chapters, for example making notes for what to address in the discussion chapter while writing the findings chapter(s). While conducting the study, students may identify new or overlooked literature to incorporate into and strengthen the literature review.

Students are advised to allow sufficient time to complete a dissertation; it is a process that cannot be rushed. Students are advised to develop a timeline for their dissertation work in consultation with the supervisory

committee. The timeline should be somewhat flexible and should include benchmarks (e.g., dates for completion of each chapter) and a proposed project completion date. Experience has shown that sometimes timelines might be adjusted to accommodate changing circumstances. If a benchmark date is unlikely to be met, the student should immediately be in contact with the supervisor to renegotiate a new date.

It is important for students to maintain contact with their supervisory committee. Although the dissertation research is independent research, it is not a solitary process. Members of the supervisory committee, and particularly the supervisor, act as mentors to doctoral students. Students are encouraged to seek advice, consultation, and input from their supervisory committee throughout their dissertation research. By maintaining frequent contact with the supervisory committee, students are able to continue moving forward, identify and deal with problems in a timely fashion, and prevent complications arising from inadequate communication. It also helps in preparation for the oral dissertation defense because everyone is familiar with the research and the student. When the supervisory committee is satisfied with the dissertation, it is ready to be sent to an external examiner.