

ELC Student Advising Guide for Doctoral Students

Information and Strategies for Successfully Completing Your Doctoral Studies and Dissertation



Some tools and capacities you will need. . .

Motivation, determination and patience; good analytical, writing and organizational skills; willingness to be reflective and accept constructive critique; confidence; willingness to ask for help and show vulnerability at times; ongoing communication with an academic advisor; an advisor who is supportive, accessible, knowledgeable about your area of specific study and interested in your ideas; transparency in the advising/mentoring relationship; Ed.D. or Ph.D. paperwork and forms; supportive network of family and/or friends.



The Advisor-Advisee Relationship

During the dissertation process, an academic advisor plays a pivotal role in students' academic trajectory and success. This multifaceted relationship is often new for students and it can take some getting used to. The advisor:

- offers suggestions, feedback and constructive critique throughout the entire process — from idea formation to the writing of the final draft; and,
- serves a constructive critic, taskmaster at times, coach, and mentor.

Dissertation advisors and advisees should feel very comfortable with each other and co-construct a friendly, professional relationship where each person is aware of and satisfied with the other's expectations, approach and style—achieving this takes time and negotiation. It requires building rapport and trust.

All doctoral students are assigned an advisor upon admittance to the ELC department, yet one can change advisors if academic interests and/or working styles are not a good fit, or if there is simply another faculty member with whom there is a deeper professional connection. Changing advisors is a normal and acceptable practice, though it is best done before a student gets very far in planning her or his dissertation. Students should be prepared for their advisors to have high expectations and insist that they produce high quality work that meets all program requirements.

Upon graduation, dissertation chairs and advisees often remain in contact. Their relationship becomes more distant but also more informal and collegial. Advisors often become part of the former student's professional network and/or they serve as references for employment for students who pursue academic careers.



When working with your advisor/dissertation chair,

- keep lines of communication open and mutually agree on the best ways to contact each other (e.g. by email, phone, how often? etc.). This will help advisors and advisees communicate more clearly and efficiently
- express your interests and concerns pertinent to your work
- ask questions
- keep an open mind
- be flexible
- meet deadlines set forth in collaboration with your advisor
- when necessary, reveal the personal and/or professional constraints that may be hindering your doctoral studies (to the extent that you are comfortable) and consider how you can overcome these constraints without quitting or doing inadequate work
- be willing to push yourself (and be pushed) to create high quality scholarship that is meaningful and relevant to you and other scholars
- be realistic with your expectations, requests, and timeline for completion.

Dissertation Development Stages

You will take the lead in accomplishing the tasks described below. Your interests and preferences will guide your studies, yet you will also need to discuss and negotiate each step with your advisor/dissertation committee chair. Your chair must approve all aspects of your dissertation plans since she or he, along with you, will be accountable for your work.

- **Dissertation Topic** – Your dissertation should be original scholarship that contributes knowledge and insight to the field of education. Education is broadly defined in the ELC Department as pertaining to schools, communities and to other social and cultural spaces. The dissertation should also address an area you wish to pursue to advance your practice and intellectual development. Choose a topic that is important and compelling to you because your dissertation work must sustain your interest and commitment over lengthy period.

Tip # 1 → Keep a journal from the time you begin your doctoral studies. Jot your dissertation ideas in the journal, whether they constitute several pages of deep thoughts or just a few lines of questions, reminders or key concepts. Be sure to write down any questions that you wonder about that are not addressed in your readings or course work. You never know when one of these will become an ongoing and compelling strand in your doctoral inquiry and a possible topic for your dissertation. You'll likely change your mind many times and get lots of ideas about potential topics, theories, and research methods—this is perfectly normal. When the time arrives for you to commit to a topic, review your journal and identify the common themes that you seem to come back to again and again. These themes will reveal your core interests, from which you should draw to develop your dissertation focus.

Tip #2 → Once you are confident about the dissertation topic you wish to pursue, try to link your coursework assignments to your topic. Use your assignment requirements to develop your knowledge and expertise and to piece together the draft components of a dissertation proposal (topic overview, literature review, theoretical framework & research design). This is also a good time for you to do an independent study to further explore your topic under the guidance of a faculty member. Also, consider consulting with the education reference librarian in the University's Jackson Library to locate materials for your literature review.

- **Dissertation Committee** – After completing 18 credits in the doctoral program, consult with your advisor about submitting your plan of study to the UNCG Graduate School and forming a dissertation committee that consists of four faculty members. Strive to take classes with as many ELC faculty members as possible during your first 18 hours of coursework so you can make an informed decision about committee membership based on first-hand experience. A faculty member from outside the ELC Department may join the committee as well.

Work with your advisor to determine which four faculty members can offer you the most insight and guidance as you develop your dissertation. Ideally, faculty members should bring different areas of expertise that relate to your research interests. For instance, you will want someone who is very knowledgeable about your topic, someone who is familiar with the literature you will need to review, someone who understands and advocates for your theoretical framework, and someone who has experience implementing the research methods you wish to use. One faculty member may not have expertise in all of the areas listed above. Yet, the committee overall should be able to cover the necessary ground.

Be sure to consult your advisor before approaching faculty members to join your committee, and then meet with faculty members to ask them to join your committee. Inform them of your dissertation plans and share your ideas about what you hope they can contribute to your studies. It will be helpful for you to provide a one page overview of your research interests to prospective committee members. Be open to faculty feedback and suggestions. Understand that some faculty members have heavy advising loads, so they may not be able to join your committee or they may not feel they are the best fit.

Complete the plan of study and committee formation forms, which can be found in the ELC Department Office and online at the ELC website. (See <http://www.uncg.edu/elc/deptforms.html>.) These forms require the signature of each committee member and must be submitted to The Graduate School. It is also recommended that you keep a copy for your records.

- **Comprehensive Exam & Defense** – When you complete (or are very close to completing) your coursework requirements, you can begin planning your comprehensive exams (“comps”). After conferring with your advisor about your research interests and exam plans, contact your committee members and request an examination question from each person. Faculty members will design a question related to your dissertation interests that pushes you to think deeply about the sociocultural, political, moral, theoretical and/or methodological dimensions of your dissertation topic. You will spend ample time researching the questions and writing essays that thoroughly address each exam question. Your advisor can help you create a reasonable timeline for completion. Specifically, some advisors may request that you complete your exams within a semester or an equivalent timeframe.

Each essay is typically 10-15 pages. Your committee will meet together with you after reviewing your exam responses, and you will be given the opportunity to orally present your responses, answer faculty members’ questions, and explain your work. This meeting, which your advisor will facilitate, constitutes your comprehensive exam defense. Your committee will decide whether your exam responses are acceptable or need revising. You may be responsible for coordinating the time and space for this meeting. In addition, you should submit your exam responses to your committee members at least two weeks prior to your defense so they have sufficient time to review them.



- **Dissertation Proposal** – You will need to write a thorough proposal that explains your dissertation interests and inquiry plans. The format, content and length of dissertation proposals vary across educational leadership and cultural foundation disciplines. For instance, it can be advantageous to write an extensive proposal that contains an introduction to your study, a detailed literature review and conceptual framework, and a comprehensive discussion of your methodology and research design. An extensive proposal usually contains material that can be revised and updated to form the first two or three chapters of the actual dissertation. It can also be advantageous to write a briefer proposal (or prospectus) that provides a more concise overview of your dissertation plans. You will then draft the initial dissertation chapters upon the completion of your study. Many students take *ELC 749 Dissertation Seminar*, near or at the end of their course work, as a vehicle for defining a dissertation topic and developing an initial draft of a dissertation proposal.

Typically, a dissertation proposal contains an

(1) Overview of your desired topic with an explanation of why the topic is important and worth researching. What research questions will guide your study, and how are those questions linked to a significant educational problem or dilemma? Why should other educators and scholars care about your topic?

(2) Overview and/or analysis of the scholarly literature that has been written about your topic, focusing on the strengths and limitations of the most influential literature and highlighting how you can contribute knowledge to the area. What do we already know about your topic and what do we need to learn or revisit?

(3) Discussion of the theories that form your conceptual framework – how do you view your topic and the educational challenges you wish to explore? What ideals, philosophies, and educational goals most influence your perspective? How is all of this grounded in theory?

(4) Discussion of how you plan to conduct your dissertation research/inquiry. This discussion may vary depending on if you plan to do an empirical or theoretical study. Some questions you will want to address include:

(Empirical/Data-based Studies)

- What type of study do you want to implement and why?
- What methodological principles and ethics will guide your work?
- What research methods will you use, and why are these methods appropriate?
- Who will participate in your study and how will you sample participants?
- What types of data will you collect?
- How will you analyze the data in a thorough, trustworthy and critical way?

(Theoretical/Philosophical Studies)

- What type of inquiry do you want to undertake and why?
- What tradition of inquiry will guide your work, and why are these traditions appropriate?
- What types of knowledge(s) will this methodology help you to produce?
- What types of material/information/data will you study and generate?
- What types of arguments do you expect to make from this information, and how?
- How will you establish the trustworthiness and quality of these arguments?

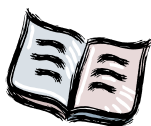
Ultimately, your advisor/committee chair will suggest that you format your proposal based on his or her professional preference and understanding of your topic and your developmental needs. University reference librarians will be available to help you find scholarly resources to review and analyze as you develop your proposal.

As with the comprehensive exams, you will likely be required to present your proposal to your committee during an oral defense. In some instances, your advisor may opt circulate the

proposal among your dissertation committee members for their perusal and approval instead of holding an oral defense. In all circumstances, however, your entire committee must approve the proposal, and you will then submit appropriate paperwork to The Graduate School. You should submit your proposal to your committee members at least two weeks prior to your defense so they have sufficient time to review it. Be certain to check with your advisor or individual committee members about how he or she would like your proposal submitted (hard copy, electronic copy, etc.).

- **Dissertation Research Preparation** – Both empirical and theoretical dissertations are possible. Many students develop empirical dissertations, thereby spending ample time collecting data (archival information, documents, interviews, narratives, observations, focus groups, ethnographies, quantitative data sets, etc.). Other students develop dissertations based on historical, philosophical and/or theoretical inquiry. Regardless of your dissertation approach, you must take appropriate coursework (15 credit hours) related to research design and methods prior to beginning your dissertation study. It is advisable to take introductory research courses, such as *ELC 665 Approaches to Qualitative Inquiry* or *ELC 664 Foundations of Interpretive Inquiry*. Then take more advanced courses like *ELC 688 Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis* and *ELC 688 Narratives of Self*. After completing your first 12 hours of research courses, consider taking *ELC 688 Writing Preparation and Proposal Development*. In the future, ELC courses related to *Case Study Research, Representation in Qualitative Research* and *Action Research* may also be available. You should also consult with your advisor about enrolling in research courses offered by other departments to fulfill program requirements. Some faculty members may offer research-related independent studies as well.

Please remember you should not collect data for your dissertation before gaining approval from UNCG's Institutional Review Board (IRB) or your dissertation chair. Doing so constitutes a legal and ethical violation. Gaining IRB approval entails earning human subjects certification, which you can obtain online or through completing a university-sponsored workshop. You must also submit: 1) a complete IRB application that describes your research plans, 2) proof of your human subjects certification, and 3) proof of your advisor's human subjects certification. See the UNCG IRB website at uncg.edu/orc/irb.htm for more information. Note that it can take several months to obtain IRB approval, so you should plan accordingly.



- **Dissertation Writing** – The structure, format and length of dissertations vary. Typically, they are written in chapters like a book. Many dissertations contain the following components:

- Introduction
- Literature Review & Conceptual Framework
- Research Methods (or) Inquiry Plan
- Findings & Data Analysis
- Implications and Conclusions.

Though many dissertations will contain each of the above components, some dissertation chairs/committees will encourage you to take creative license in formatting your dissertation. Chairs may also require other dissertation components that are not listed, particularly for historical, philosophical and/or theoretical dissertations.

Dissertation writing is a very lengthy and complex process. The dissertation is also an online public document. Writing multiple drafts of each dissertation chapter is common. It is expected that each draft you submit to your advisor will be your best possible work and that drafts will incorporate all prior suggestions. Your chair (and perhaps other committee members) will review a draft and provide you feedback that you will then address in your next draft. The chair/committee members will return feedback to you in a timely manner. This process continues until a mutually satisfactory draft of each chapter has been written. You will then finalize the dissertation and submit copies of it to your committee members for review and final approval.

Anticipate that it will take at least one calendar year to complete your dissertation study and writing. Note that no matter how anxious you may be to graduate, or whatever personal circumstances may arise, committee members will only approve a thoroughly complete dissertation that is of high quality. Also, remember your timeline for completion will be co-created with your advisor, who will factor in the availability of all committee members.

- **Dissertation Defense** – After committee members read and evaluate your dissertation, they will meet together with you for your final dissertation defense. The University requires that you schedule and successfully pass your dissertation defense approximately eight weeks before graduation, so be sure to consider this deadline as you plan your completion timeline with your committee chair. You and your advisor must submit a dissertation scheduling form and a copy of your dissertation abstract to the Graduate School at least two weeks before the date of the dissertation defense. The date, time, and place of your dissertation are publicized on the UNCG website along with the title of your dissertation. You should submit your dissertation to your committee members at least three weeks prior to your defense so they have sufficient time to review it.

Like your comprehensive exam and proposal defenses, you will be given the opportunity to orally present your dissertation, answer faculty members' questions, and explain your work. Your committee chair will facilitate this meeting. Your committee will decide whether your dissertation is acceptable or needs revising (typically there are at least some revisions required). While your defense meetings may seem intimidating, consider them an opportunity for you to engage in a scholarly discussion about your interests and expertise. Your defense meetings are your time to shine. They are also your time to have a captive audience of accomplished scholars who care about you and your work. Consult with your committee chair about all of these matters.

- **Dissertation Filing** –After your dissertation defense, you must make any corrections that your committee requires and submit a paper copy of your complete dissertation to the Graduate School for approval. The Graduate School reviews the dissertation to see that it complies with the requirements in the *Thesis and Dissertation Manual*, which is available at <http://www.uncg.edu/grs/current/TDmanual.html>. After the Graduate School approves the paper copy, you must file your dissertation electronically a couple of weeks before graduation. The dissertation will become a permanent part of the University's archive. It will be accessible to the public, yet you will own the copyright. Electronic filing of the dissertation is required and there are detailed formatting guidelines required by UNCG that you will need to follow (See http://www.uncg.edu/grs/bulletin/doctoral_regulations.html). Contact Mary Early, the Assistant Director of The Graduate School, for more information (mgearly@uncg.edu).
- **Licensure** – Please note that your doctoral degree is conferred by the University, while administrative licensure is granted by the state. To apply for administrative licensure contact Debbie Merritt, the School of Education Teacher's Academy licensure processor, dwmerrit@uncg.edu.



Dissertation Preparation Timeline

The time it takes to complete a doctoral program greatly varies from student to student given each person's personal circumstances and obligations, professional workload, and developmental progress. The University of North Carolina policies, however, require that students complete their doctoral programs within seven years from the date that they enrolled in their first course (this includes transfer and Vision classes too). You should consult with your advisor about your developmental progress, circumstances and expected completion date on an ongoing basis. Many students' progression through their doctoral program falls within the following range, yet there are exceptions:

Stage of Doctoral Study/ Dissertation Development

Estimated Timeframe

- Participate in Professional Development Activities
- Network with doctoral students and the faculty
 - Join professional and scholarly associations
 - Attend and present at scholarly conferences
 - Engage in collaborative research, writing and/or consulting
- Complete Coursework Requirements
- Develop/Refine Dissertation Topic
- Finalize Dissertation Committee & Plan of Study
- Prepare & Defend Comprehensive Exams
- Prepare & Defend Dissertation Proposal
- Complete Dissertation Research, Writing & Defense

Ongoing

Years 1-4

Years 1-4

After completing 18 credits

Years 3-5 (often completed over a semester or equivalent timeframe)

Years 3-6 (often completed over a semester or equivalent timeframe)

Years 4-7



GRADUATE & CELEBRATE !!!

Essential Contact Information

** Your Academic Advisor/Dissertation Chair and Committee Members **

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|--|---------------------------------------|
| Dr. Rick Reitzug, Ed.D. Program Coordinator | ucreitzu@triad.rr.com, (336) 334-3460 |
| Dr. Svi Shapiro, Ph.D. Program Coordinator | svishapiro@nc.rr.com, (336) 334-3465 |
| Dr. Carol Mullen, ELC Department Chair | camullen@uncg.edu, (336) 334-9865 |
| Ms. Karen Stacherski, ELC Department Secretary | kastache@uncg.edu, (336) 334-3490 |
| Ms. Mary Krautter, UNCG Jackson Library
Head Reference Librarian, | mmkrautt@uncg.edu, (336) 256-0273 |
| Ms. Mary Early, The Graduate School
Assistant Director/Dissertation & Thesis Reviewer | mgearly@uncg.edu, (336) 334-4886 |
| Ms. Carol Resch,
Teachers Academy, Licensure Processor
The Graduate School | crwalke2@uncg.edu, (336) 334-3450 |
| | General Phone Number (336) 334-5596 |



UNCG Resources: Important Policies, Deadlines & Forms

ELC website → www.uncg.edu/soe/itc/elc/
UNCG Graduate School → www.uncg.edu/grs/
UNCG Office of Research → www.uncg.edu/rsh/index.html
UNCG Teaching and Learning Center → www.uncg.edu/tlc/
UNCG Writing Center → www.uncg.edu/eng/writingcenter/
UNCG Speaking Center → htwww.uncg.edu/cst/speakingcenter/main

- Comprehensive descriptions of the ELC mission, all program requirements, important forms, scholarship information, and faculty biographies are available on the ELC website. Please regularly refer to the website throughout the course of your studies. See <http://www.uncg.edu/elc/index.html>.

ELC Faculty-Recommended Resources for Doctoral Students

Readings

- Boote, D.N. and Beile, P. (2005). Scholars before researchers: On the centrality of the dissertation literature review in research preparation. *Educational Researcher*, 34(5), 3-15.
- Goldman, K.D. and Schmalz, K.J. (2004). The matrix of literature reviews. *Health Promotion Practice*, 5(1), 5-7.
- Mullen, C. A. (2006). *A graduate student guide: Making the most of mentoring*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Rudestam, K.E. and Newton, R. R. (2007). *Surviving your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage. Third edition.
- Thomas, R. Murray and Brubaker, D.L. (2008). *Theses and dissertations: A guide to planning, research, and writing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.



Websites

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| ➤ Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) | http://www.ascd.org/ |
| ➤ American Educational Research Association | http://aera.net/ |
| ➤ American Educational Studies Association | http://www.educationalstudies.org/ |
| ➤ National Association for Multicultural Education | http://nameorg.org/ |
| ➤ University Council of Educational Administration | http://www.ucea.org/ |