

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL
DISSERTATION PROPOSAL/PROSPECTUS POLICY RESOURCE FOR
THE MULTI-ARTICLE DISSERTATION

This document is a resource for academic programs to adopt, edit, or revise for program policy if they so choose. This document does not represent Graduate School policy.

For many fields, it is common for students to write the first three chapters of the dissertation document for the dissertation proposal. This traditional structure may not be the best fit for proposing a multi-article dissertation for several reasons. First, the structure of the multi-article dissertation is quite different from the traditional dissertation, which means that students may write a great deal of content for a traditional proposal that may not be used in the final dissertation. This can have an unintended side effect of delaying student's time to graduation. It can also make it more difficult for the dissertation committee to evaluate the proposed project, as the traditional format may not clearly demonstrate how the proposed project would be organized into several related manuscripts. Second, the traditional and multi-article formats requires wholly different kinds of writing style and skills. A traditional dissertation is often hundreds of pages long and requires writing more akin to a book while the multi-article dissertation requires succinct, parsimonious writing required in scholarly journals. Therefore, if the dissertation committee is to evaluate the student's readiness and ability to complete a multi-article dissertation, the dissertation proposal/prospectus should match the writing style, structure, and purpose of the dissertation the student intends to complete. For these reasons, the Graduate School has provided this resource, which allows for programs and academic components to adopt, edit, or revise the dissertation proposal/prospectus policy found below as best fits their own discipline. Programs are not required to use any portion of this resource.

As the multi-article dissertation is meant to help prepare students for a career in academia and research, this policy follows the method and manner in which academics propose research projects; that is, through grant proposals. Consequently, the dissertation proposal policy below is designed in the structure of a federal grant proposal while meeting the Graduate School prospectus requirements.

Dissertation Proposal/Prospectus Policy

Programs and Academic Components may adapt and edit this example policy to meet their specific discipline

Purpose

The purpose of the dissertation proposal/prospectus defense is to assure that the student's plan for dissertation research is sound, rigorous, and meets the expectations of the field. Students are recommended to work closely with their dissertation committee in preparing the dissertation proposal/prospectus content. The dissertation proposal/prospectus represents a formal understanding between the dissertation committee and the student, wherein the committee grants approval of the student's proposed research project.

Content

For the Multi-Article dissertation, the student proposes a research project from which they will prepare two to three publishable manuscripts. The dissertation proposal/prospectus needs to contain adequate

information in order for the student to demonstrate their command of the literature and research domain and also for the dissertation committee to judge and evaluate the student's proposed project. The contents of the research proposal/prospectus will follow that which is similar for a federal grant, wherein researchers propose a project with multiple publications.

Therefore, the dissertation proposal/prospectus will consist of a project narrative, no more than 8-10 pages (not including cover page, figures, tables, reference section, and appendices). The proposal/prospectus document should include the following:

- Specific Aims (used interchangeably with: hypothesis, research questions, or objectives)
- Research Strategy (may include figures, charts, tables, images, etc.)
- Significance - explain the importance of the problem, the critical barrier to progress in the field that the proposed project addresses, or how the project will improve scientific knowledge.
- Innovation - explain how the proposed project challenges and seeks to shift current research or describe novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies.
- Methodology & Approach - describe the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project.
- Manuscript Organization – describe how the project can be divided into possible manuscripts for publication.

Scheduling the Dissertation Proposal/Prospectus Defense

When the dissertation chair approves the dissertation proposal, the student will schedule a dissertation proposal defense. It is the student's responsibility to find a date and time that all committee members can attend. The dissertation proposal requires the presence of all committee members. When setting a date for the dissertation proposal, the following policies must be followed:

- All dissertation committee members must have **at least 10 working days** to review the final proposal approved by the dissertation chair. Therefore, the dissertation proposal cannot be set less than 10 working days prior to the final dissertation proposal being sent out to committee members.
- No dissertation proposal may be scheduled during finals week, university or student holidays, or between regular semesters.
- Dissertation proposals can only be scheduled during Summer semesters if all dissertation committee members have a university appointment during the regular Summer semester.

The Dissertation Proposal/Prospectus Defense Meeting

Students are encouraged to dress professionally for this event. Business attire is appropriate. The student is also responsible to test all audio-visual equipment prior to the meeting. The public is welcome to attend the dissertation proposal, including friends, family, and colleagues. As a reminder, the dissertation proposal is a professional presentation and oral examination of the student's dissertation document. All those in attendance are expected to maintain professional academic decorum.

The dissertation proposal typically lasts about 2 hours and involves the following:

1. **Proposal/Prospectus Presentation** (15-20 minutes; open to public)
 - Using presentation software (e.g., PowerPoint, Prezi, Sway), the student will provide an overview of the dissertation proposal. The purpose of the presentation is to demonstrate that the student can clearly and succinctly represent the proposal to other professionals. The presentation should provide a succinct, yet thorough, overview of the relevant literature, theoretical underpinnings, proposed methodology, and analysis plan. It should also demonstrate how the proposed study fits with other scholarship within the student's field of study.

- Following the proposal demonstration, the dissertation chair will invite those in attendance to ask questions to the student.
2. **Public Defense** (5-15 minutes; open to the public)
 - The dissertation chair will ask the audience for any questions or comments related to the presentation and dissertation document. The dissertation chair is responsible for screening out any inappropriate questions or comments from the public audience. At the conclusion of this section, the dissertation chair will ask that attendees leave the room.
 3. **Proposal/Prospectus Defense** (45-60 minutes based on department guidelines; closed to the public, open only to the student, committee, and TWU administrators)
 - The proposal defense is an opportunity for students to defend the merits of the proposed research and the ability of the student to conduct this research in a scholarly manner. This is achieved through committee members asking questions pertaining to the proposal, which may include methodological decisions, research aims, writing style, grammar, significance of the work, etc.
 - Students are expected to present with advanced knowledge in their area of the dissertation (literature, methodology, implications) and be prepared to defend this area and to support research decisions using scholarly resources. Students should be prepared to justify decisions, synthesize information, and explain the research content, methodology, and analysis.
 - Students should be able to independently respond to the questions posed by committee members in a professional, academic manner. At times committee members may give differing or even opposing suggestions and critiques. It is students' responsibility to consider these suggestions and justify or explain their decisions to incorporate or not incorporate feedback from committee members.
 4. **Dissertation Committee Evaluation** (15-30 minutes; closed to public, open only to committee members and TWU administrators)
 - The dissertation committee dismisses the student from the room to discuss the merits of the dissertation proposal and the student's responses to concerns or suggestions raised by the dissertation committee. The committee will decide whether the student's dissertation proposal is: (a) Accepted, (b) Revise with Minor Revisions, or (c) Revise with Major Revisions.
 - **Accepted** signifies no revisions or edits are required. The student may proceed to finalize the dissertation proposal (outlined below).
 - **Revise with Minor Revisions** signifies that the requested edits are minor in nature. There may be a small or large number of minor revisions requested. The changes will be reviewed by the dissertation chair and may also be required to be reviewed by committee members. Once the dissertation chair has approved the requested revisions, the student may proceed to finalize the dissertation proposal (outlined below).
 - **Revise with Major Revisions** signifies that there are substantial revisions that must be completed. The changes must be reviewed by the dissertation chair and the dissertation committee member(s) who requested the changes. The student may be required to re-defend the dissertation proposal in a subsequent dissertation proposal meeting.
 5. **Dissertation Committee Decision** (10-20 minutes; closed to public)
 - The dissertation chair will invite the student back into the room to inform the student of the dissertation committee's decision and to clarify any revisions that are expected.