



GRAMBLING

STATE UNIVERSITY®

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL AND HIGHER EDUCATION STUDIES
DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ROADMAP
From Proposal/Prospectus to Final Defense**

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⚠ CRITICAL RESEARCH COMPLIANCE NOTICE ⚠

**ABSOLUTELY NO DATA COLLECTION, PARTICIPANT CONTACT, OR SITE ACCESS
PRIOR TO WRITTEN IRB APPROVAL**

- Students MAY NOT self-determine exempt status.
- **ALL** research activities must have prior IRB approval.
- Premature data collection will be considered research misconduct.
 - Any data collected before IRB approval cannot be used.
- Violation may result in disciplinary action (including dismissal).

INTRODUCTION

This information packet/checklist serves as your essential guide through the doctoral dissertation process. Successfully completing a dissertation requires careful attention to sequence, timing, and compliance with university regulations and research protocols. While the journey can seem complex, understanding each phase and its requirements will help you navigate the process effectively.

The most critical aspect of dissertation research is maintaining absolute compliance with research ethics and IRB requirements. Many students, in their eagerness to begin their research, have inadvertently compromised their studies by collecting data prematurely or without proper approval. This guide will help you avoid such pitfalls and ensure your research meets all institutional requirements.

Your major professor and committee are your partners in this process. Regular communication and adherence to these guidelines will help ensure a successful dissertation journey.

1. **PROPOSAL/PROSPECTUS PHASE**

A. Document Preparation

- Complete Chapters 1-3 (Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology)
- Follow department formatting guidelines
- Submit drafts to major professor for review
- Incorporate feedback through multiple revisions and in consultation with major professor

B. Committee Review

- Submit final prospectus to committee (minimum 2 weeks before defense)
- Major Professor (and committee) schedules **proposal/prospectus defense**
- Prepare presentation (typically 30-45 minutes)

C. Prospectus Defense

- Present research proposal
- Address committee questions
- Document required revisions
- Obtain committee signatures
- Submit approved prospectus to graduate school

2. **IRB PHASE** ⚠️

A. Mandatory Requirements

- NO research activities may begin without written IRB approval
- This includes:
 - Pilot studies
 - Preliminary interviews
 - Site observations
 - Recruitment contacts

- Survey distribution
- Data access
- Record reviews

B. Preparation of Research Protocol for Review

- Complete CITI training if not current
- Prepare IRB application following approved methodology (The methodology approved by your committee.)
- Develop all research instruments/data collection protocols*
- Create informed consent documents*
- Prepare recruitment materials*

* - These documents must be included in the proposal.

C. IRB Submission Process

- Submit application through Sitero IRB portal (You MUST use university issued email credentials. More information can be found here: [GSU IRB INFORMATION](#))
- Include all supporting documents
- Allow 2-4 weeks for initial review
- Respond promptly to any requests for revisions (Note: the revision process is iterative and may involve several requests for revisions.)
- Secure site permissions (if applicable) * Note that external research sites may require that the proposal be submitted to their IRB for approval. You cannot receive a final IRB determination or collect data from a site until you receive appropriate site permission.
- **WAIT for written approval before ANY research activity (This may take up to 10 weeks).**

3. DATA COLLECTION PHASE (AFTER IRB APPROVAL)

A. Pre-Collection

- Verify IRB approval in writing
- Document approval date and protocol number
- Organize research materials
- Test instruments/equipment
- Establish secure data storage system
- Create tracking systems for participants

B. Active Collection

- Follow approved protocols exactly
- Document all procedures
- Maintain organized records
- Secure data properly
- **Update major professor regularly (YOUR MAJOR PROFESSOR WILL LIKELY SCHEDULE REGULAR CHECK-INS AND MAY OBSERVE INITIAL DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES.)**

4. DISSERTATION DEVELOPMENT

A. Data Analysis

- Analyze data according to methodology

- Maintain clear documentation
- **Meet regularly with major professor**
- Begin drafting Chapters 4-5

B. Writing Process

- Complete first draft of Chapters 4-5
- Revise Chapters 1-3 as needed (e.g., change verb tense from future to past, etc.)
- **Submit chapters to major professor**
- **Plan for multiple revision cycles**
- Follow all formatting requirements

5. **FINAL DEFENSE PHASE (See DHES Dissertation Approval timeline)**

A. Pre-Defense

- Submit complete dissertation to committee
- Major professor (and committee) schedules final defense date
- Prepare presentation (typically 45-60 minutes)
- Complete required forms
- Major professor submits defense announcement

B. Defense

- Present research findings
- Address committee questions
- Document required revisions
- Obtain committee signatures

C. Post-Defense

- Complete all required revisions
- Submit final version to graduate school
- Complete any additional requirements

IMPORTANT TIMELINES

- Prospectus to IRB: 1-2 months minimum (varies by study)
- Initial IRB Review to Approval : 2-10 weeks; varies by study
- Data Collection: Varies by study
- Analysis and Writing: 3-6 months
- Final Defense Review: 3-4 weeks; varies by study

KEY REMINDERS

1. Maintain regular communication with major professor
2. Document all feedback and revisions
3. Follow all deadlines and submission guidelines
4. Keep detailed records of research process
5. Back up all work regularly
6. Allow time for multiple revision cycles
7. Meet all graduate school deadlines

8. Maintain active enrollment status

RESOURCES

- DHES Handbook
- The Writing Guide
- IRB Guidelines
- APA Manual (7th Ed)
- Library Research Support

COMPLIANCE CHECKPOINTS

Before ANY research activity:

1. Do you have written IRB approval?
 - If NO → **STOP**. Contact major professor.
 - If YES → **GO**. Contact your major professor for instructions and confirmation to proceed with approved protocol.
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2. Is the activity within your approved protocol?
 - If NO → **STOP**. Submit modification request.
 - If YES → **GO**. Document and proceed.
3. Are you within your approval period?
 - If NO → **STOP**. Submit renewal request.
 - If YES → **GO**. Proceed with approved protocol.

CONSEQUENCES OF NON-COMPLIANCE

- Inability to use collected data
- Required restart of research process
- **Potential disciplinary action.**
- Possible delay in graduation
- Research misconduct record
- Potential impact on academic standing **including suspension or dismissal from the doctoral program.**

Remember: When in doubt, ALWAYS consult your major professor or the IRB office before proceeding with any research-related activities.