

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION & THE ARTS

## DOCTORAL PROGRAMS DISSERTATION HANDBOOK

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This handbook guides the dissertation process for Liberty University School of Communication & the Arts doctoral students. It does not constitute a contract and is subject to change at the discretion of Liberty University School of Communication & the Arts. This version of the dissertation handbook supersedes all previous versions.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction to the Doctoral Program and the Dissertation Process**

The doctoral programs in the School of Communication & the Arts (SCA) consist of two primary components: the coursework and the dissertation. The student completes coursework to develop and hone critical thinking, writing, and knowledge skills. The purpose of the coursework is to prepare the student to become a doctoral candidate. The doctoral dissertation is the final academic requirement for the doctoral program and is designed to evaluate the candidate's capabilities as a scholar. It is often more complex and can take longer to complete than the coursework.

### **1.2 Purpose of this Handbook**

The purpose of this handbook is to provide information about the dissertation process and related policies. The handbook guides the dissertation, including the writing, the proposal defense, and the final dissertation. In general terms, the roles and responsibilities of the candidate and the committee are outlined. Because the completed dissertation is a publication of Liberty University (LU) and represents the university, the SCA, and the candidates are expected to maintain high standards concerning the content and appearance of their dissertations.

## **2. Academic Policies and Specialized Coursework**

Several academic policies pertain specifically to the doctoral programs in the SCA. Some of the policies are dependent on the specific degree completion plan (DCP) with which the student is working. More information about these policies is detailed below.

### **2.1 Time Limit for Completion of the Degree**

The maximum time limit for completion of the doctoral program is seven years. Any student who does not complete coursework within the permissible time limit for any reason,

including discontinued enrollment, must reapply for admission. If the student wishes to continue in the program later, he or she will need to reapply and, if accepted, will be subject to all requirements for the DCP for the current academic year. A student may reapply to the program only once, and the Online Chair will determine how many additional semesters will be granted. Students who wish to appeal for extra time in the program should submit a formal appeal via the [SCA Policy Appeals Form](#).

**Exception:** For students admitted with 18 or more hours of credit from an Executive Certificate in Communication or transferring from another doctoral program, the time limit for completing the doctoral program is five years.

## **2.2 Number of NP Grades**

Students are only allowed one No Pass (NP) grade as part of the doctoral program. Two NPs in any one course will result in removal from the program. This policy applies specifically to COMS 987, 988, 989, and 990.

## **2.3 Limit for Times Registered for COMS 987, COMS 988, and COMS 989**

Candidates are only allowed to register for COMS 987 three times before successfully completing an approved proposal. In addition, candidates have a limit of six times registering for COMS 988 and COMS 989. Exceeding either of the limits will result in removal from the program. If the registration limit is exceeded, students who wish to continue in the program must submit a formal appeal via the [SCA Policy Appeals Form](#) to request an extension. Each student must include a complete justification of the request and, if applicable, documentation evidencing his or her chair's support of the extension. If the appeal for an extension is approved, the Online Chair, in consultation with the Dean of the School of Communication & the Arts, will determine the new deadline for program completion. Any student who does not complete coursework within

the permissible time limit for any reason, including discontinued enrollment, must reapply for admission. If students wish to continue in the program later, they need to reapply and, if accepted, will be subject to all requirements for the DCP for the current academic year.

## **2.4 Continuous Enrollment Policy**

After completing COMS 987, students must be continually enrolled in the program until COMS 990 (Dissertation Defense). Continuous enrollment means that the student must be enrolled in at least one course that will count toward completion of the doctoral program per semester (including summer). Failure to maintain continuous enrollment will result in removal from the program. If students wish to continue in the program later, they need to reapply and, if accepted, will be subject to all requirements for the DCP for the current academic year.

**Note:** Students returning to the program after breaking enrollment for more than one year may be required to complete additional coursework or retake courses at the discretion of the Online Chair in consultation with the Dean of the School of Communication & the Arts.

## **3. The Dissertation Committee**

The standard dissertation committee for the doctoral program consists of two members:

(a) a dissertation chair and (b) a committee member. One of the two, either the chair or committee member, must be an approved methodologist (see note below). Upon entry into the program, students should begin identifying a potential dissertation chair. Each candidate should officially secure a dissertation chair and committee members by concluding their coursework.

**Note:** One member of the committee, either the chair or committee member, **MUST** be a Liberty SCA certified research methodologist. Liberty SCA certified research methodologists are trained in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method research. They have demonstrated an established record of research, evidenced by their professional contributions to the field of communication

through peer-reviewed publications and conference presentations. They have experience chairing and sitting as a committee member on numerous dissertation committees. Before being invited to serve as a Liberty SCA certified research methodologist, the methodologist's coursework, dissertation, publications, presentations, and teaching ability are considered.

### **3.1 Chair and Committee Selection (Dissertation Pairing Tool)**

Candidates will be given access to the Dissertation Pairing Tool once they reach 33 credits completed. The chair or the committee member must be a Liberty SCA certified research methodologist. Candidates should first reach out to prospective chairs one at a time. A mass e-mail must never be sent to multiple faculty members. When contacting potential chairs and committee members, the candidate needs to organize and provide documentation discussing their research topic (e.g., literature reviews or proposals from doctoral courses would work well). Candidates who need assistance selecting a prospective chair can e-mail [SCADissertation@liberty.edu](mailto:SCADissertation@liberty.edu) with an attached dissertation topic and the names of any chairs already contacted, and the Doctoral Support Team will assist them in the committee search process.

When the chair and candidate identify a willing committee member, the candidate will complete the [Dissertation Pairing Tool](#). The Doctoral Support Team must approve all committee requests. The Committee Member Form will be reviewed, and candidates will be notified whether their chair and committee member selections are approved.

**Note:** Once a chair and committee member are approved, changes to the committee will only be considered when there are extenuating circumstances. Under these circumstances, the candidate should contact the Doctoral Support Team at [SCADissertation@liberty.edu](mailto:SCADissertation@liberty.edu) to seek approval for a change in committee. The Doctoral Support Team is available to assist the



candidate with any questions or concerns during the dissertation process, and candidates should contact [SCADissertation@liberty.edu](mailto:SCADissertation@liberty.edu) immediately if they encounter any issues, such as concerns with committee members.

## **4. Dissertation Guidelines**

### **4.1 Dissertation Research Topics**

Students should start considering dissertation topics upon entry to the program. When opportunities exist, students should research the topic of interest in literature reviews and related papers for doctoral coursework. **It is important to note that a research topic is not the same as a research study.** A topic is general, whereas a research study is very narrow in focus with defined methods to answer a particular question(s).

Candidates are encouraged to pursue dissertation topics of relevance and significance; however, a candidate needs to ensure that the topic is researchable. It is wise to avoid overly ambiguous, challenging, and esoteric topics. Further, it is never ethical to conduct research where the researcher has any type of authority over the participants (e.g., teacher, professor, or administrator) if the data cannot be collected anonymously. Ideally, the research topic should be within the expertise and research interests of the potential dissertation chair. Candidates are encouraged to dialogue with faculty throughout their coursework and look through the Chair/Committee Member search list to become familiar with the SCA faculty and their research interests.

Faith integration within the dissertation is acceptable where appropriate. If a faith perspective is included, it should be well-integrated throughout the manuscript (not included as an afterthought or simply tacked on).

### **4.2 Dissertation Research Designs**

Dissertations may consist of various research designs; however, all research studies for a doctoral dissertation should include rigorous scholarly knowledge production. Ph.D. candidates will choose either a quantitative, qualitative or mixed method. Candidates may choose from among the following designs:

- For quantitative studies, standard research designs that a candidate may choose quasi-experiments, causal-comparative designs, and correlational (survey) studies; and content analysis
- For qualitative research, a candidate may choose to utilize phenomenological (interviews), case study, ethnographic designs; and content analysis

If a candidate wishes to use an alternate design, he or she will need to provide a rationale and seek approval from the Chair of Doctoral Programs and Research.

#### **4.3 Recommended Textbooks**

It is highly recommended that candidates retain their textbooks from their previous research and methods courses. These include:

##### **Quantitative Textbooks.**

Punch, K. F. (2005). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. SAGE.

Wrench, J. S., Thomas-Maddox, C., McCroskey, J. C., & Richmond, V. P. (2015). *Quantitative research methods for communication: A hands-on approach*.

##### **Qualitative Textbooks.**

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Schwandt, T. (2007). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Additionally, it is highly recommended that the candidate obtains the following dissertation textbook to guide their writing efforts.

Foss, S. K. (2015). *Destination dissertation: A traveler's guide to a done dissertation*. Rowman & Littlefield.

#### **4.4 Academic Honesty**

Honesty and integrity are highly valued at LU and in the SCA. The same principles and expectations of academic honesty and integrity in coursework are true for the dissertation. The [Liberty University Code of Honor](#) details specific definitions, penalties, and reporting processes. The presence of plagiarism, including structural plagiarism, within any dissertation manuscript or document, may result in dismissal from the program. The dissertation chair, the committee, and the SCA administration decide the final consequences of academic dishonesty.

The dissertation needs to be an original work of the candidate, and the reuse of previous research (e.g., master's theses or publications) is not acceptable. Reuse of doctoral course work is typically not allowed. Student's wishing to reuse part of any work submitted to another LUO course must receive approval from the instructing professor and their dissertation chair.

According to current American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines, any previous work needs to be cited, and the APA manual's section on self-plagiarism should be reviewed. Properly crediting another individual's work is also an ethical imperative.

### **5. The Qualifying Assessment Exam**

The primary assignments in COMS 987 are the qualifying assessment examination and the proposal and defense. The qualifying assessment examination is administered during the first

two weeks of COMS 987.

### **5.1 Prepare for the Exam**

The candidate will receive access to the examination questions during Week 1 of COMS 987. Once the questions have been reviewed, the candidate will have two weeks to write and submit the exam response paper. The exam response paper addresses two broad areas in the field of communication. The exam questions will consider philosophy or the history of communication and communication theory. The candidate is expected to rely on authoritative sources such as course textbooks and outside materials such as journal articles to support and defend any claims made within the paper. The candidate must submit the exam response paper through Canvas. The exam response paper will be checked by Turnitin for similarity matches to institutional documents and Internet sources. According to current American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines, all borrowed content (e.g., words, phrases, sentences, and even ideas) needs to be cited. Candidates should review the APA manual's section on self-plagiarism before submitting their exam response paper. Properly crediting another individual's work is also an ethical imperative. Failure to cite another author's work will result in not passing the qualification assessment examination.

### **5.2 Pass the Exam: Milestone One**

The committee has two weeks to review the exam response paper. The qualifying assessment examination is graded as 'pass,' 'pass with revisions,' or 'no pass.' If the grade is a 'pass,' the candidate may develop the proposal. If the grade is a pass with revisions, the candidate will be allowed to revise the examination paper. The revision must be completed in the same semester as the first attempt. If the candidate does not pass the examination after the revision period, the candidate will be enrolled in COMS 987 for another term. A total of two examination

attempts may be made, but not concurrently in the same semester.

**Note: The candidate must pass the qualifying assessment examination to defend their proposed study.**

## **6. The Proposal**

### **6.1 Develop the Proposal**

After successfully completing the Dissertation Pairing Tool, the candidate will be enrolled in the first five hours of COMS 987 in his or her chair's section. Although COMS 987 is not a typical course, the primary objective is to develop and defend the dissertation proposal. There are weekly tasks to help the candidate progress through the course, and weekly progress reports and manuscript submissions are required. COMS 987 is an A-term course (full semester), and candidates must enroll continuously.

Upon completion of the qualifying assessment examination in COMS 987, the candidate begins working with his or her committee to develop a solid dissertation proposal. The proposal needs to consist, at a minimum, of the following: *Title Page, Abstract, Table of Contents, Chapter One: Introduction, Chapter Two: Literature Review, Chapter Three: Methods, References, and Appendices* with instruments, participant letters, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) applications. The proposal is approximately 50-70 pages in length, with a minimum of 30 pages for the literature review (Chapter Two). Although the proposal is usually lengthened as it is transformed into the first three chapters of the complete dissertation, it may or may not change once it is completed and approved as part of COMS 987. Candidates should not change their topic once it has been approved for research work in COMS 987. A change in topic or research design could slow the dissertation completion process or in extreme cases, may warrant the need for a candidate to complete additional coursework or retake courses.

Throughout the semester, candidates will receive feedback from their chair and committee member. Feedback is designed to be constructive and to help the candidate develop a strong proposal and present a defensible study. Candidates should meet with the chair on a regular basis and discuss all feedback provided to them. Failure to implement the feedback from the chair and committee member, especially regarding research design and analysis, will result in significant delays in the dissertation process.

**Note: the candidate may not defend the proposal without committee approval.**

## **6.2 Proposal Review**

The committee chair continuously reviews the proposal manuscript. When the chair is satisfied with the proposal and has given approval, the chair disseminates the manuscript to the committee member for feedback. Committee member reviews can take up to two weeks. Whichever committee member is serving as the methodologist will provide feedback on the manuscript, with a specific focus on the proposed research methods. Once the committee is satisfied with the proposal, the chair will send it to [SCADissertation@liberty.edu](mailto:SCADissertation@liberty.edu) for review by the Online Chair. A director review can take up to two weeks. *No proposal defense can take place without approval from dissertation chair and the Online Chair.*

The candidate should expect the proposal manuscript to go through multiple revisions before a proposal is approved for proposal defense. Candidates should contact the Dissertation Coordinator if two weeks is exceeded, or the committee chair becomes unresponsive. The committee chair should contact the Dissertation Coordinator if the committee member is not responsive. Once the chair and the committee member decide the candidate is ready for a proposal

defense and the proposal has passed the Online Chair review, the candidate may move forward with scheduling a proposal defense.

### **6.3 The Proposal Defense**

Once the candidate incorporates and addresses all feedback from the chair, committee member, and Online director, the candidate discusses his or her readiness for the proposal defense and schedules a time for the defense. At this stage of the process, the committee chair will ensure that the candidate's manuscript has been submitted to Turnitin, the university's plagiarism detection software, via the COMS 987 submission link in Canvas. It is the responsibility of the committee chair to review the results from this submission and to note any problems or issues with similarity. The candidate is responsible for making sure the proposal manuscript is free from grammar, punctuation, and style errors. The proposal manuscript should be complete, containing full chapters, and checked for adherence to APA style in citations and references. Failure to ensure the manuscript meets the standards of doctoral and scholarly academic writing, could result in not passing the proposal defense or in a rescheduling of the defense date.

The formal proposal defense uses the university's e-conferencing system. The candidate is responsible for identifying dates and times convenient for the chair and committee members. The chair is responsible for facilitating the proposal defense via Teams.

### **6.4 Defend the Proposal: Milestone Two**

The formal dissertation proposal defense is about 60 minutes in length. After prayer and preliminary remarks by the chair, the candidate presents the proposal. The proposal needs to include the following: a description of the study's purpose and significance, the research question(s) and hypothesis(es) (if quantitative), and the methods (including the plans for the

research design and analysis). The following procedures are recommended for the formal proposal defense:

- Introductions and welcome (chair)
- Opening prayer (chair)
- 10-minute presentation with PowerPoint on proposal defense (candidate)
- 20 minutes questions and comments from the committee
- 20 minutes dismissal of the candidate for committee deliberation
- The chair will contact the candidate with the committee decision and any required revisions
- The chair will notify the SCA at [SCADissertation@liberty.edu](mailto:SCADissertation@liberty.edu) of the outcome of the proposal defense within 24 hours

A maximum of two proposals defenses may be attempted. Failure to successfully defend within two successive proposal defenses could result in removal from the program or remediation (e.g., enrollment in additional coursework) before progression in the dissertation process. The proposal defenses may not be attempted concurrently within the same semester. The Online Chair makes the decision in consultation with the Online Dean of the School of Communication & the Arts.

## **7. Institutional Review Board**

### **7.1 Submit IRB Application(s)**

After completing a successful proposal defense and beginning in COMS 988, an IRB application review and approval are needed before any participants may be recruited or data may be collected. IRB is a federally mandated body established to ensure ethical treatment of human subjects. Within ten business days of the approved proposal defense, the candidate must submit his or her IRB application, ancillary material, and documentation of site



permission(s) to his or her chair for an initial review and approval. The chair is responsible to ensure

- (a) candidates use the most current application retrieved directly from the [LU IRB website](#)
- (b) all applicable items are fully addressed and free from spelling or grammar errors, and
- (c) that correct templates provided by the IRB are used (e.g., the informed consent).

Once the chair has reviewed and approved the IRB application (by completing the signature page of the application), the candidate will submit the IRB application and all other related documents to IRB Cayuse for review. The chair MUST be copied on all communication with the IRB.

Candidates must submit documentation of institutional permission from each research site to the IRB prior to receiving IRB approval. If study procedures involve colleges or universities, IRB approval from those institutions will need to be obtained as directed by the specific institution's IRB. Permission from the research site may be sought before submitting the LU IRB application, but candidates must not begin recruiting participants until after receiving full IRB approval. If a candidate cannot gain permission from the research site prior to applying for IRB approval, LU IRB will review the rest of the application and issue a conditional approval letter to assist in obtaining needed site permission. Then once the candidate provides the applicable site permission documentation to the LU IRB, the IRB will change the conditional approval to full approval, and the candidate may begin his or her research.

If the study includes faculty, students, or staff from *a single* department or group within LU, the candidate must obtain permission from the appropriate supervisor (e.g., Dean, Department Chair, Coach) and submit a signed letter or date/time stamped e-mail to LU's IRB to

verify approval to use students from that department or group. The candidate may apply without having obtained this permission; however, the IRB will not approve the study until proof of permission has been received. If the study includes faculty, students, or staff from *multiple* departments or groups within LU (e.g., all sophomores, LUO), the IRB will seek administrative approval on the candidate's behalf. Candidates should NOT contact the Provost's office directly.

Liberty University researchers planning to conduct survey research limited to LU students, faculty, and staff must use Qualtrics. Qualtrics is Liberty University's approved web-based survey software tool. It allows the user to construct and distribute complex surveys and provide statistical reports based on the results. For studies that will involve survey research with LU students, faculty, and or/staff, please contact [SCADissertation@liberty.edu](mailto:SCADissertation@liberty.edu) for information about Qualtrics. Note: Qualtrics is provided free to doctoral candidates, thus it is highly recommended that all students intending to conduct survey research use Liberty's licensed survey application.

## **72 Receive IRB Approval: Milestone Three**

Although most IRB applications for communications research do not require full reviews, the IRB will decide. Candidates should refer to approval timeframes on the LU IRB website. Modifications to the application should be expected. Candidates should thoroughly review the LU IRB website and incorporate all the methodologist's feedback to avoid delays.

Execution of research **CAN NOT** begin prior to receiving IRB approval. If data are collected or accessed prior to obtaining all necessary and full IRB approvals, the candidate will be removed from the program. Once IRB approval is obtained, the candidate must forward the IRB approval letter only, including the IRB approval number, to the Doctoral Support Team at [SCADissertation@liberty.edu](mailto:SCADissertation@liberty.edu).

## **8. The Dissertation**

## **8.1 Execute the Research and Develop Dissertation Manuscript**

After IRB approval is given and all necessary consents (adults) and assents (minors) are given from participants, the candidate executes his or her research, including data collection and analysis. Each candidate should note that depending on his or her level of comfort, ability, and competence with the chosen quantitative, qualitative analysis, or mixed methods research, he or she may seek an outside consultant. However, the candidate is held responsible for knowing, understanding, and answering for ethical behavior, procedures, accuracy, interpretation, and integrity of the research design and analysis.

Under the guidance of the committee chair, the candidate refines Chapters One through Three and writes Chapters Four and Five. The committee chair may advise the candidate to seek guidance from the committee member (if applicable) on specific aspects or may require that the candidate seek an outside editor.

## **8.2 Dissertation Review**

The chair reviews the dissertation manuscript first. When the chair is satisfied with the dissertation and has approved the document, the chair disseminates the manuscript to the committee member for feedback. Committee member reviews can take up to two weeks. Whichever committee member is serving as the methodologist will provide feedback on the manuscript, with a specific focus on the research methods. Once the committee is satisfied with the dissertation, the committee chair will send it to [SCADissertation@liberty.edu](mailto:SCADissertation@liberty.edu) for review by the Online Chair. A director review can take up to two weeks. *No dissertation defense can take place without the approval of the Online Chair.*

## **8.3 Submit the Dissertation Manuscript for a Professional Edit**

The final defense cannot be scheduled until the chair, committee member, and

Online Chair have reviewed the dissertation and granted approval for a final defense. During the final revision process, professional edit of the manuscript is required. The professional edit can be performed prior to or after the defense at the discretion of the dissertation chair and committee member based on the quality of the manuscript. This requirement may include a full edit or simply an APA edit. Candidates may use any professional editor.

#### **8.4 Schedule a Dissertation Defense (Register for COMS990)**

Ultimately, with approval from the Online Chair, the chair and committee member decide when the manuscript is approved for defense. In the rare instance where the chair and committee member may disagree about the candidate's readiness for the defense, the Online Chair may make the final decision.

Once the committee and Online Chair approve the dissertation manuscript, the candidate and chair will schedule a time for the defense. The candidate is responsible for identifying dates and times convenient for the committee and for providing a list of dates and times to the chair. The defense date must be scheduled, and the defense completed at least four weeks prior to the last day of the semester.

Once a date and time are established, the candidate is also responsible for preparing and forwarding the manuscript to the Doctoral Support Team at [SCADissertation@liberty.edu](mailto:SCADissertation@liberty.edu) (including the chair in the CC line) to schedule the defense. The candidate should submit the dissertation the full manuscript to Turnitin in COMS 989. The chair should review the report to ensure it is acceptable before the manuscript is disseminated to the committee and any other outside readers.

The doctoral support staff will post the defense time and date in the Dissertation Defense Calendar. The dissertation support staff also e-mails an Outlook appointment to the candidate,

chair, and committee member. Once this Outlook appointment is sent, the date and time of the defense are officially set. The chair is responsible for informing each committee member of the defense's date, time, and procedures. The chair is also responsible for scheduling and facilitating the Teams meeting for the defense.

When the defense date and time are finalized, the candidate will be moved from COMS 989 to COMS 990 by the Doctoral Support Team. **Please note that a candidate may not enroll in COMS 990 without all parties' confirmed dissertation defense dates.**

Candidates should remain enrolled in COMS 989 until a final defense is scheduled with the SCA.

### **8.5 Pre-defense**

The chair may schedule and conduct a pre-defense phone call or e-conferencing session to finalize the defense details and complete a practice defense one to two weeks prior to the defense. This is a good opportunity to make sure the virtual software works well for the candidate and committee members before the final defense date. The pre-defense conference may include only the chair and candidate at the chair's discretion.

### **8.6 Preparing for the Defense**

The candidate is responsible for e-mailing the final copy of the dissertation manuscript to the committee approximately two weeks prior to the dissertation defense. The candidate prepares a 15–20-minute presentation of his or her dissertation for the defense; a visual presentation (e.g., PowerPoint or a conference style poster) is required. The presentation should be sent to the committee at least one week before the defense. The candidate should check with the committee to see if they would like to receive a printed copy of the dissertation at least one week prior to the final defense. Candidates are required to use a webcam, have reliable internet and phone connections, be in professional dress, be in a well-lit location, and

have technological support on hand, if needed, to ensure the defense runs smoothly. The university's e-conferencing system must be used for distance defenses, and the chair is responsible for setting up the virtual meeting. Only the candidate is required to share a video during the defense.

### **8.7 Defend the Dissertation: Milestone Five**

The dissertation defense takes approximately two hours to complete. The only people who should attend a defense are the candidate, the dissertation committee, and LU faculty members. The following procedures are recommended:

- Introductions and welcome
- Opening prayer by chair and introduction of the committee and candidate
- 15–20-minute presentation by the candidate
- Questions and comments from the committee
- Questions and comments from the SCA Faculty
- Dismissal of the candidate for committee deliberation
- Re-connection with the candidate for decision and discussion of revisions, as applicable
- Final remarks

After prayer and preliminary remarks by the chair, the candidate gives the defense presentation. The presentation needs to include the following: an overview of the study's purpose and significance (both practical and empirical), the methods, the analysis, the results, limitations, discussion of the findings, and suggestions for future research. The presentation should be used as an aid. Reading from the presentation or script is unacceptable and may result in an unsuccessful defense. Following the defense presentation, the committee members will ask questions. Following questions and discussion, all individuals not on the committee,

including the candidate, will disconnect to provide the committee the opportunity to discuss the defense. Using the Dissertation Defense Decision Form for guidance, the committee will decide. The candidate is invited to reconnect, and the chair will inform the candidate of the outcome. The committee makes one of the following decisions:

- Approved with no revisions or minor revisions
- Provisionally approved with major revisions
- Not approved with a recommendation to revise dissertation or write a new dissertation

**Note:** If the committee makes one of the first two decisions, the chair delineates the required steps and specifies a timeline for completion (usually 7-15 days). It should be noted that, at the chair's discretion and dependent upon the number of revisions that need to be made, the chair may require that that candidate have his or her manuscript professionally edited again.

A maximum of two dissertation defenses may be completed. If the candidate fails to pass the defense on the first attempt, he or she will remain registered in COM 989 until a second attempt can be scheduled. The candidate may not attempt more than one dissertation defense per semester. Failure to defend successfully within two defenses will result in removal from the program. Within 24 hours of the defense, the chair should send the Dissertation Defense Decision Form (which includes a final grade) to [SCADissertation@liberty.edu](mailto:SCADissertation@liberty.edu) so that the Doctoral Support Team can post the final grade in COMS 990.

## **9. Publication and Graduation**

Upon approval from the chair, the candidate follows the Jerry Falwell Library (JFL) submission guidelines for publication. These guidelines must be strictly followed and accessed at the following webpage: [Theses and Dissertation Publishing Guidelines](#). Candidates

should note that the final grade for COMS 990 cannot be posted without the JFL confirmation e-mail evidencing that the dissertation is accepted. This e-mail must be forwarded to [SCADissertation@liberty.edu](mailto:SCADissertation@liberty.edu) by the last day of the term to receive a final grade for COMS 990. The dissertation should be submitted to the JFL *no later than one week before the end of the term*, as it may take one to two weeks to receive the confirmation e-mail from the JFL.

As a reminder, the candidate must complete the requirements and paperwork necessary for graduation and plan to attend the hooding ceremony and graduation exercises in May. Graduation information can be found on the [Registrar's website](#). Application for graduation should be completed no later than the beginning of the term in which the candidate intends to defend the dissertation.



## **Appendix A: Dissertation Committee Qualifications and Responsibilities**

### **The Chair**

#### **Qualifications**

- LU faculty member or approved chair from the School of Communication & the Arts
- Must hold an earned doctorate from a regionally accredited university. This means a Ph.D. typically in a communication-related field.

#### **Responsibilities**

- Provides mentorship to doctoral candidates through the dissertation process as outlined in the Dissertation Handbook, from the development of the proposal to the final publishing of the dissertation. This mentoring includes providing timely and thorough feedback. Unless otherwise communicated to the candidate, all feedback on manuscripts should be provided within a two to four-week timeframe.
- Provides feedback on doctoral candidates' writing skills and provides necessary referrals for additional support.
- Ensures that the proposal and the dissertation manuscript comply with all university criteria and are scholarly works, including conformity to content, structure, format, style, and ethical guidelines.
- Maintains frequent communication with the candidate and with a committee member.
- Communicates with the committee member frequently and welcomes his or her suggestions for the candidate's manuscript.
- Uses all dissertation technologies as outlined in the Dissertation Handbook. Completes

Canvas responsibilities as outlined in the dissertation handbook.

- Completes necessary forms and rubrics as outlined in the dissertation handbook.
- Makes proposal and dissertation defense arrangements.
- If the chair is the methodologist on the committee, he or she will also be directly responsible for ensuring that the highest standards are met regarding research methods, design, procedures, and analysis (primarily Chapters Three and Four of the dissertation).

## **Committee Member**

### **Qualifications**

- Approved School of Communication & the Arts *committee member*.
- Must hold an earned doctorate from a regionally accredited university. This means a Ph.D. typically in a communication-related field.

### **Responsibilities**

- Provides mentorship to doctoral candidates through the dissertation process as outlined in the Dissertation Handbook, from developing the prospectus to the final publishing of the dissertation. This includes providing timely and thorough feedback.
- Works collaboratively with the committee chair to guide the candidate in the dissertation process. Unless otherwise noted, regularly communicates with the candidate, and provides feedback on manuscripts within a two-week timeframe.
- If the committee member is the methodologist on the committee, he or she will also be directly responsible for ensuring that the highest standards are met regarding research methods, design, procedures, and analysis (primarily Chapters Three and Four of the dissertation).

## Appendix B: Dissertation Approval Process

Below is a visual representation of the dissertation approval process, showing the order of major milestones and the overall process flow.

