

DISSERTATION PROCEDURES FOR MUSIC EDUCATION CANDIDATES

University of Florida School of Music

The dissertation is the capstone of your PhD program. It represents both you as a professional in the field and the University of Florida and its School of Music. It is often read by prospective employers, and usually you can develop articles for professional publications based on your dissertation research. It is also a demonstration of your individual initiative and ability to write and conduct research. For these reasons, it is a very important document that calls for a high quality of scholarship and writing.

Here is a list of steps that you need to follow in preparing and writing your dissertation.

1. Begin thinking about possible dissertation topics soon after you begin the PhD program. Usually ideas come from things in the profession that interest you and about which you think more information is needed.

2. During the second semester of your PhD program, you should form your PhD committee. It will consist of at least two professors from music education, an additional professor in the School of Music, and one professor from a field other than music. You should ask each professor personally if he or she would be willing to serve on your committee. You also need to invite one of your music education professors to be chair of your committee

3. You should probably meet several times with your chair, and occasionally with the other music education professors on your committee, to consider ideas you have for a dissertation. Essentially, a dissertation topic should be one in which you seek to find out something about a situation or idea. It should not promote any preconceived views you may have about a topic. It need not be a topic that has never been researched before, which is nearly impossible anyway. Research in the physical sciences is often replicated in nearly exactly the same way. A dissertation in music education should not be an exact replication of an existing study, but often it can be an extension or variation of previous research studies.

4. Some work on your dissertation should be started prior to taking your Qualifying Examinations, because you will need to identify a topic at least in a general way by that time.

5. When you seem to have a workable, useful idea, write up a short description (three or four pages) of your proposed study for your chair. This will be presented for approval as a part of your oral qualifying examination, which follows the successful completion of your written examinations. Include:

a) The nature of the problem (e.g. many children in first grade can't sing on pitch),

- b) The purpose of the study (e.g. to find out if family musical activities have a significant effect on the ability of first grade children to sing on pitch),
- c) A brief review of previous research on the topic,
- d) A general idea of how you intend to conduct the study (type of study, selection of subjects, length of study, how information will be gathered, etc.)
- e) How the results will be analyzed.

6. When your chair and committee believe you have a viable topic and plan for conducting a study related to it, you will then write a draft of the first three chapters of the five chapters of a typical dissertation. A technical editor recommended by the Graduate School should be employed at this time if recommended by the music education faculty. The five chapters are:

- Chapter 1 – Description of the problem
 - Purpose of the study
 - Hypotheses (research and null)
 - Limitations, delimitations, and definitions of terms
- Chapter 2 – Related research
- Chapter 3 – Procedures for the study
- Chapter 4 – Results of the study
- Chapter 5 – Summary, major conclusions, discussion, and recommendations for further research

7. When the draft of the first three chapters is completed, the chair will circulate a hard copy of them to the committee. He or she will also call a meeting of your committee to offer suggestions and recommendations regarding the proposed study.

8. A change of topic or major change in your study after this meeting is possible, but only if it is approved by your chair and committee. If a change seems necessary, another meeting of the committee will probably be needed to approve the change.

9. After the approval of your topic and research procedures by your committee, you should begin working on your dissertation as much as possible. You will find it easier to work on it while you are in Gainesville. Often before candidates have completed their dissertations, they will have accepted employment elsewhere and moved away. The demands of the new job usually make it more difficult to complete the dissertation in the five years that the University of Florida allows after passing the Qualifying Examinations.

10. While working on your dissertation, you should be in contact with the chair of

your committee on a regular basis. These contacts may in person or by email or telephone. The number of contacts depends on the amount of work you have done. They should occur, however, at least once each semester, even if you doing almost nothing on your dissertation. They may be as frequent as once a week at other times. The important thing is to keep your chair involved and informed. Your chair will consult with other committee members at various points in the process.

11. When a draft of your dissertation is completed, your chair will decide if it is ready for submission to the Graduate School. He or she must submit a letter to the Graduate School stating the dissertation is ready to be defended. You must submit a hard copy and a number of other documents to the Graduate School by a specified date. At the same time, a hard copy the final draft is made available to each member of your committee. When the members are satisfied with it, then you can set a date for your final defense. If they are not, they need to give you specific suggestions regarding what needs to be improved. You will need to follow these suggestions as much as reasonably possible.

The members of the music education faculty want your dissertation to be as good as possible, and to be something that both you and they can point to with pride.