

# Guide to Doctoral Study in Special Education



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## A GUIDE TO DOCTORAL STUDY

Welcome to doctoral study in the Department of Disability and Psychoeducational Studies (DPS) at the University of Arizona. We are pleased to have you as part of our department and look forward to guiding and working with you as you pursue your doctorate. The purpose of this guide is to provide you with information about the department and the Graduate College's processes, procedures, and forms you will use as you work toward your doctoral degree. To orient you, the following provides some background about the department and its mission.

The Department of Disability and Psychoeducational Studies was first identified as a separate departmental unit in 1955 when the College of Education recognized the need to prepare teachers with the specialized knowledge and abilities to teach to the unique needs of students with exceptionalities. In 1962, the college established another new department, the Department of Rehabilitation, to develop academic programs that would prepare rehabilitation counselors to meet the needs of youth and adults with disabilities.

In 1987, the College of Education reorganized and the Departments of Special Education and Rehabilitation were combined; joint programs of study at the bachelors, masters, and doctoral degree levels were developed. In the fall semester of 1995, academic offerings and faculty in School Psychology joined the department, which was later named the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and School Psychology (SERSP).

In 2009, School Counseling joined the department, and it was renamed the Department of Disability and Psychoeducational Studies. Through the integration of these four specialties into one department, DPS is uniquely positioned to nationally attract research, personnel preparation, and model development funding. It is recognized as one of few programs in the United States that prepares special education teachers, rehabilitation specialists, school psychologists, school counselors, administrators, researchers, and university faculty with expertise in all areas of exceptionality among children and adults.

The goal of the University of Arizona as a land grant institution is to improve the quality of life for the people of Arizona and the nation. Evolving from this is the mission of DPS: **to advance human and economic development through the empowerment and effective inclusion of culturally diverse individuals with disabilities across the age span.** The department's teaching, research, and service reflect excellence in the pursuit of that mission. Professionals throughout this and many other countries recognize the quality of DPS, and graduates readily refer students because of the department's international reputation.

Our mission is accomplished by research and development activities that advance the knowledge and understanding of disabilities and special abilities, and the systems serving those individuals; preparation of personnel to educate and facilitate the development of abilities and of individuals within global communities; and application and dissemination including technical assistance to educational and other human service agencies. The department's research, teaching, and service activities address the needs of individuals and

families who have physical and mental disabilities and special abilities in Arizona, the United States, and other developed and developing countries.

We are glad that you are joining us for your doctoral study and look forward to working with you as we pursue the mission of DPS. As you will see, the process of obtaining your doctoral degree includes a number of steps, and you will be in touch with many individuals and units within the university. This guide has been developed to clarify the process and to answer many of the questions you might have. It is not meant to be all inclusive; there are questions and procedures that you will need to address with your major advisor and/or committee, particularly those related to the content of your program. Other doctoral students can also provide invaluable information and support. This guide is an initial resource for understanding the overall process.

While pursuing your degree, you are a student of the Graduate College at the University of Arizona. This can be confusing because your major is in special education, which is your professional discipline. However, all graduate students at the University of Arizona are administratively organized under the Graduate College. This administrative unit, located in room 316 of the Administration Building, establishes policies and standards for the completion of graduate degrees. They need to receive verification of your comprehensive exams and your dissertation progress. Early in your program, you will submit a plan of study to them so that there will be a record of your strategy for completing the required coursework for your degree (see pages 4-5). The graduate coordinator is our liaison with the Graduate College, and he or she can usually answer questions about the documents that are required by the Graduate College.

The process of doctoral study is usually an individual process that depends upon your background and goals. There are, however, a number of steps all doctoral students in DPS complete. These steps are described in chronological order in this manual. They include:

- Determining a doctoral advisor and committee
- Passing the oral qualifying exam
- Creating a doctoral plan of study
- Completing the program portfolio
- Progressing toward the degree
- Passing the comprehensive examination
- Holding a dissertation proposal meeting
- Researching and preparing a dissertation
- Successfully defending and submitting a dissertation

## DOCTORAL ADVISOR AND COMMITTEE

Throughout your doctoral studies you will have a faculty advisor and committee to guide and support you and to serve as your examination committee as you complete the oral qualifying examination, the comprehensive examination, and the oral dissertation defense.

Your committee must include at least three faculty members who are tenured, tenure eligible, or approved by the Graduate College as tenure equivalent, and may additionally include (with Graduate College approval) non-tenure eligible faculty or external committee members who are important in supporting your goals. One of the tenure track faculty members will serve as your advisor. In most cases, this will be the person who has the greatest expertise in your academic discipline.

The relationship between you and your advisor/committee is one of mutual agreement. The members of your committee can change across your doctoral studies and it is not unusual for members and/or your advisor to change after the oral qualifying exam and the comprehensive examination.

As a new doctoral student, you are assigned an initial advisor whose function is to guide you through the oral qualifying exam. This includes selecting an initial committee. The approach allows you to work with various faculty before deciding on a permanent advisor and committee. Your initial advisor is often the person you will choose as your permanent advisor.

Any time you decide to change your advisor or select new committee members after the initial committee is created for your qualifying exam, you should ask the faculty member you have in mind to serve as the new advisor or member, and you must inform the present advisor or member(s) of the change. Then complete the *Change of Committee Form* (see Resources Page) and submit it to the graduate coordinator. If necessary, you will also have to submit the *Special Member Request Form*, (see Resources Page). The form is necessary *only* if a committee member has not yet received approval from the Graduate College to serve on doctoral committees.

## ORAL QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

The oral qualifying exam is to be held during the first year of course work, after the first 12 units are completed; or, at the latest, at the beginning of the third semester. During the exam, the committee will decide if you are qualified to continue in the program and will agree upon your plan of study. The examination consists of a brief student presentation related to a major paper, and a question/answer discussion with the committee members. Following the determination of your qualification, you and the committee members will review your plan of study and proposed program portfolio.

For this exam, you should prepare a notebook for each committee member that includes:

- Date, time, and location of exam and list of committee members

- Statement of your goals
- Current vita or resume
- Scholarly paper (APA style) on a relevant topic
- Proposed plan of study: this consists of a list of courses completed and to be completed grouped by major and minor areas of study. The semester the course was completed or is proposed to be completed should be listed.
- Program portfolio: you will prepare a list of the products that will be completed during the time you are taking courses. Instructions for preparation of the portfolio begin on page 6 of this manual.

To arrange for the oral qualifying exam, establish an agreeable date and time with the committee members. Please contact the graduate coordinator to reserve a room. If a room is not available through the department, contact the Dean's Office (621-1463) to reserve a room in the college. When you have arranged for the meeting, inform the graduate coordinator of the date, time, and committee members for the exam.

Send a reminder note to the committee members with the date, time, and place of the exam. On the day of the exam, your advisor should pick up your file and the *Qualifying Exam Request and Report* (see Resources Page) from the graduate coordinator and take them to the exam. After the exam, your advisor should return the file and the signed form to the graduate coordinator.

There are no specifications regarding the length of the oral qualifying exam; however, exams in DPS generally last one to two hours.

During the meeting, you and your committee members will discuss your professional background, your paper, and your future plans. Through questioning, the committee will explore your knowledge of the field to determine your current comprehension and to assist in planning your program of study. If the committee approves your continuation, they will review and negotiate the plan of study that you prepared for the exam. This is discussed in further detail in the next section.

If you fail the oral qualifying exam, you may be allowed one opportunity to retake it, if the committee so advises. The reexamination may not be taken during the same semester, but must be taken within one calendar year.

### **DOCTORAL PLAN OF STUDY**

In consultation with the major advisor, you should prepare a list of the courses to be taken to fulfill the doctoral degree. This plan of study should be provided to the committee in the notebook presented at the oral qualifying exam. Occasionally, changes in courses might be necessary due to course availability or relevance, but the written plan of study represents your working program plan. During the third semester of the program, you should formally submit this course plan to the Graduate College. The procedure for doing this is described at <http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/dpos> (see Resources Page for location of form).

The doctoral plan of study should include a minimum of 75 credit hours, 18 of which are dissertation units. Generally some hours from your master's degree can be included if they meet program requirements for the Ph.D. **The guidelines in this section are for the Ph.D. degree. If you are pursuing an Ed.D. degree, see your advisor for modifications.**

MAJOR CORE: The major core consists of at least 54 credits in a major area of study.

- All students are required to take:
  - SERP/DPS 595D, *Recent Advances in Special Education and Rehabilitation*. This course should be taken as early in the program as possible, preferably in the first semester of study.
  - SERP/DPS 695M *Professional Writing*
  - SERP/DPS 695E *Preparation for the Professoriate*
  - SERP/DPS 696E *Grant Writing Seminar*
- At least 6 additional units of SERP/DPS 695 colloquium courses must be taken..
- At least 18 units must be completed at the post-master's level. Dissertation units cannot be taken until you have successfully passed your comprehensive exam, described on page 7.
- Courses from the master's degree may be applied to the major core. This is determined in conjunction with your advisor and committee.

MINOR AREA OF STUDY: Identify a minor area of study either in a related discipline or as a specialty area within special education. A minimum of 9 units of coursework are required for the minor. Content of the minor will be agreed upon by the committee, usually during the oral qualifying exam meeting. The number of units will be determined by the minor committee members.

COLLEGE CORE: The college core consists of 6 units from the following courses:

- SERP/DPS 556 *Research Methods in Education* (3 units) (only offered in spring) or equivalent
- SERP/DPS 504 *Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Exceptional Learner* (3 units) or equivalent

RESEARCH CORE: The research core includes the following 13-14 units of research course work:

- EDP 541 *Statistical Methods in Education* (3-4 units) (recommended)
- LRC 605 *Qualitative Methods in Education* (3 units) or HED 605 *Qualitative Methods in Education* (3 units)
- TTE 696C (3 units) or EDP 667 *Research Design and Techniques in Education* (3 units)
- EDP 641 *Selected Applications of Statistical Methods* (4 units)

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS: Six additional units of research are required, such as:

- SERP/DPS 590 *Single Subject Research Design* (3 units)
- EDP 646A *Multivariate Methods in Educational Research* (3 units)
- EDP 696B *Issues in Educational Psychology* (1-5 units)
- SERP/DPS 794 *Research Practicum* (3-9 units)

- SERP/DPS 900 *Research* (1-3 units)

### PROGRAM PORTFOLIO

\*Please note: Between 2010 and 2014, students will have the ability to choose either the previously required 8-hour written comprehensive examination, or the program portfolio. After 2014, all students will complete the portfolio. Please see your advisor for more information.

Portfolio activities will be selected in consultation with your advisor before the oral qualifying exam takes place. You will complete the selected products and save them in electronic format. Products will be reviewed annually by your advisor.

REQUIRED ACTIVITIES: You must complete each of the following at least once during your program:

- Assist with teaching or teach a university course
- Write a grant proposal
- Write and submit a publishable scholarly paper to a peer-reviewed journal
- Develop a scholarly presentation and present it at a professional conference
- Develop a professional curriculum vita

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES: You must complete three of the following and include the materials in your portfolio:

- Implement a research study
- Publish a position paper, book review, or other non-refereed writing in a professional journal
- Complete an internship or externship relevant to program
- Conduct a community or school-based project relevant to program
- Develop a multimedia product for teaching (e.g., web based course)
- Plan and deliver a workshop for practicing professionals
- Write a literature review and critique
- Complete any other activity approved by committee

### PROGRESSING TOWARDS THE DEGREE

**If the degree is not completed within 5 years after passing the oral qualifying exam, you must file a petition with the Graduate College for an extension of time.**

You must be continuously registered at the university (fall and spring) or you will be required to apply for readmission. If you are not taking coursework or dissertation units, enroll for supplementary registration units. A student who will not be using university facilities or faculty time may request a leave of absence from the Graduate College for one or more terms. Doctoral students are required to register for 3 units each fall and spring, until all coursework, comprehensive exams and the required 18 dissertation units have been completed; at that point the requirement is 1 unit per semester. Students should also meet with their advisors for an annual progress review before the end of the spring semester each

year. As you approach the final steps in writing your dissertation, you should review the *Steps to Your Doctoral Degree* (see Resources Page).

## SPECIAL EDUCATION COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

The Special Education Doctoral Comprehensive Examination consists of three components:

- Portfolio review and scoring by major area faculty (or the written comprehensive examination—see your advisor for more information)
- Examination or paper as required by minor area
- Oral comprehensive examination

**Portfolio review:** When all portfolio activities have been completed and you are in the last semester of courses, provide supporting portfolio documents in electronic format to each member of your major committee. Individual committee members will score the materials according to a rubric. Major area faculty will submit their completed rubrics to the advisor, who will score the reviews and determine whether you have passed the portfolio review and minor requirements. When you have passed, you can schedule the oral comprehensive examination.

**Minor exam:** The minor area may require a paper or examination, and you must fulfill this requirement as required by the minor department before applying for the oral comprehensive examination.

**Oral comprehensive exam:** Following committee approval of the portfolio products and the minor exam, contact committee members to schedule the oral exam. Three hours should be scheduled, although most examinations do not require that much time.

Prior to taking the oral comprehensive exam, you should prepare the Graduate College form *Results of the Oral Comprehensive Examination* (see Resources Page) and take it to the graduate coordinator to get the department head's signature. You should then take this form to the oral exam to have the result registered and certified by your committee.

The oral comprehensive exam must last a minimum of 1 hour but will not exceed 3 hours. You and all of the committee members must be present. If one of the major or minor committee members is not able to attend, a substitute member must be present for the exam. (It is possible for a committee member to participate in the oral exam by telephone or video conference if he/she cannot be present; as with other members, this member must participate for the entire duration of the exam.)

Graduate College policy requires that the comprehensive exam committee must include at least four members, at least three of whom must be UA faculty who are tenured, tenure-track or approved as tenure equivalent. A fourth or fifth member who does not meet this standard must have approval from the Graduate College as a "special member." If there is any question about the validity of the planned committee, check with the Graduate College prior to the written and oral comprehensive exams [see

<http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/program-requirements/doctor-of-philosophy/comprehensive-examination>].

If you pass the oral comprehensive examination, you can proceed with scheduling your dissertation proposal meeting.

If you fail the exam, you may be allowed to retake it. A second attempt to pass must be recommended by your examining committee and endorsed by the major department. Four months must elapse between the first and second attempts. The committee for the second attempt must be the same as the committee that administered the initial exam. If you fail the oral comprehensive examination a second time, your status will convert to “Non-Degree” and you will not be allowed to continue in the program.

Upon passing the oral comprehensive examination, you will be advanced to doctoral candidacy by the Graduate College, provided all coursework on the plan of study has been completed. You will be charged the graduate candidacy fees (\$35) and, in advance, for the processing and archiving of your dissertation (\$100). The Graduate College will notify you by e-mail when you have been advanced to candidacy and charged fees.

### **DISSERTATION PROPOSAL MEETING**

During their program of studies, most doctoral students begin formulating ideas for their dissertation research. During the last two semesters of coursework or just after completing the oral exam, you should work with your advisor(s) to develop and write a dissertation proposal. The format and content of the proposal is guided by your advisor. In most cases, the proposal will include a draft of three chapters of the dissertation: The Introduction, the Review of Literature, and Research Methodology.

While developing your dissertation study, you may choose to select a different advisor and/or committee. Members of this committee should be those who can best advise you regarding your research. Graduate College policy requires that the dissertation committee include at least three UA faculty members who are tenured, tenure-track or approved as tenure equivalent [see <http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/program-requirements/doctor-of-philosophy/dissertation-committee>]. It is not necessary to include a member from the minor on the dissertation committee.

Once you and your advisor agree the proposal is ready for a proposal meeting, contact your committee members and schedule a dissertation proposal meeting. At least 3 members of the committee must be present. To schedule a room for this meeting, you should contact the graduate coordinator or the Dean’s Office.

Provide copies of your proposal to your committee members at least 2 weeks prior to the dissertation proposal meeting.

The agenda of the meeting varies and may be decided by the committee at the meeting itself. Usually, you will be asked to make a short presentation on the dissertation proposal. The committee then will ask you questions about your study, including how you became interested in the research, the rationale for the research, the methodology, the study’s

significance, and its implications. The major purpose of this meeting is to make final decisions regarding how your study will proceed.

If your committee approves your research and dissertation proposal, you should complete the *Proposed Dissertation Subject* form (see Resources Page) and submit it to the graduate coordinator.

If your committee approves your research, but not your written proposal, revise the proposal and resubmit it to them until they approve it. If the committee does not approve your research and requires that you have another proposal meeting, schedule it with the committee and contact the graduate coordinator or the Dean's Office to arrange a room.

## HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

If your dissertation research involves the use of human subjects, you will need to complete a *Project Approval Form for Ethical Review of Activities Involving Human Subjects* (see Resources Page). Submit this after the proposal meeting. *Before* you submit your proposed research to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), you must also pass the *Collaborative Institute Training Initiative* (CITI) training, which can be found at <http://orcr.vpr.arizona.edu/node/199>. In most cases, researchers in DPS will take the Social/Behavioral Training.

The first section of the *Project Approval Form* includes the project title and personal information about you, the principal investigator. The following sections require you to state the purpose and objectives of the study, give a brief rationale and background of the study, describe the population being studied, describe your methodology and procedures, explain how the data will be utilized and protected, and explain the benefits, costs, and risks of the study. The form also includes a *Subjects Consent Form* and a form for projects involving minors. It also includes instructions for payments to human subjects and procedures for subjects receiving fees from state agencies. Some studies may require a *Certificate of Confidentiality*. If this certificate is needed, your committee can provide direction as to how the certificate may be obtained.

After you have completed the *Project Approval Form*, you should review the information with your advisor, and then give it to the graduate coordinator who will forward it to a member of the DPS Human Subjects Committee. Make all corrections suggested by that committee. When the departmental committee has approved and signed it, the graduate coordinator will contact you to pick up the form and take it to the Human Subjects office. It will be reviewed by the staff and, if needed, it will be given to the Institutional Review Board Committee for review. It is not unusual for the staff or the IRB board to make recommendations for changes, and you will need to address these recommendations before you can carry out your research. When you have the approval letter from the IRB, you can begin your research project. University-level approval is needed prior to beginning data collection. **The Human Subjects Form must be attached to the dissertation and presented at the dissertation defense.** Any student whose research requires review by the Human Subjects Protection Program must submit a copy of the approval (or exemption) notification to the Graduate College.

## DISSERTATION COMMITTEE APPOINTMENT

After passing the oral comprehensive examination and at least 6 months before graduation, submit the *Committee Appointment Form* (see Resources Page) to the Graduate College.

If IRB approval is still pending, it is preferable to submit the *Committee Appointment Form* early and to provide evidence of IRB approval to the Graduate College later.

Note that the minor department's head or director of graduate studies must sign this form to certify that you have satisfied all requirements for your minor.

Remain registered continuously for at least 3 units during the fall and spring semesters until you have taken the required 18 dissertation units; at that point you are only required to register for 1 unit per semester. If you are not taking coursework or dissertation units, enroll for supplementary registration units (SERP 930). You must continue your registration at the university (fall and spring)—or request a leave of absence—or you will be required to apply for readmission.

## THE DISSERTATION RESEARCH AND THE DISSERTATION

Work with your advisor in conducting your research and writing your dissertation. Your advisor and your committee members may be able to provide you with sample dissertations that are similar to yours.

For the rules related to the format of the dissertation, refer to the *Manuals for theses and dissertations* at <http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/diss-theses/manuals>.

It is best to provide drafts of your dissertation to your advisor and committee members regularly as requested. This will ensure that there are no problems or discrepancies in the research before you move forward.

## DISSERTATION ORAL DEFENSE AND SUBMISSION

When your committee agrees that you have a penultimate draft of your dissertation and are ready to defend it, establish an agreeable date, time, and room for the defense, allowing a maximum of three hours. Be sure to schedule your defense for a date that will allow you to meet the Graduate College deadline for submission of the dissertation for graduation in the desired term [see <http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/deadlines-for-graduation>].

Complete the *Announcement of Final Oral Examination Form* (see Resources Page) and submit it to the graduate coordinator to forward to the Graduate College **at least 7 working days** prior to the oral defense. The committee members and department head must sign the announcement, thus indicating that the dissertation is ready for defense, and agree to examine you at the time and place specified for the defense.

Schedule a room for at least 3 hours by contacting the graduate coordinator or the Dean's Office.

You must be registered in the semester or summer session in which the oral defense is held. The requirement for the final semester is the same as for other semesters; if you defend during the summer, you must register for at least 1 unit in either of the summer sessions (not both).

Provide the committee members a copy of the penultimate draft of your dissertation at least **7 working days** before the examination.

Before the final examination date, you should prepare your doctoral approval page. You can find samples and a template at:

<http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/diss-theses/samples-templates>.

Take two copies of this page to your defense for the committee to sign; those signed copies are then submitted to the Graduate College.

The format and content of the dissertation oral defense may vary depending on the committee. A public presentation of your research is required and may be followed by questions and discussions. Discuss the format ahead of time with your advisor. The Graduate College places a notice of the defense on the university's master calendar, as visitors are welcome for the presentation of the research, but only the committee can be present during the question and discussion period.

If you successfully defend your dissertation, your committee may approve your dissertation as presented, approve with minor revisions, or approve with major revisions. Your advisor will work with you on your revisions.

A good source of information about Graduate College policies and procedures can be found at: <http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/steps>

Dissertations are submitted to the Graduate College electronically. Detailed information about the process and required steps can be found at:

<http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/diss-theses/format-check-process>

The submission of the dissertation is the last step of the doctoral degree. Your Ph.D will be awarded by the Graduate College once your dissertation submission is complete and the graduation term is over. At the end of your graduation semester (or in December for summer graduates), you can enjoy the pride and satisfaction of joining the faculty and fellow students in the College of Education convocation and the University Commencement. If you have not received information about graduating by the middle of your final semester, contact the graduate coordinator for information about how to register for the ceremonies.

Congratulations! As a professional with a Ph.D. in Special Education, you are one of a small number of people who has advanced skills in knowledge in leadership, teaching, and research in your field. We are pleased that you chose to pursue your degree at The University of Arizona.

## RESOURCES

The forms listed below are presented in the order in which you will need them as you progress through your degree. Please note that most of these forms require your UA login or email address in order to be accessed, on both the Graduate College website and the DPS graduate site.

DPS Graduate Student Forms

[http://www.fp.arizona.edu/dps/main\\_forms.asp](http://www.fp.arizona.edu/dps/main_forms.asp)

Graduate College Forms

<https://grad.arizona.edu/gc/forms>

## REQUIRED FORMS

- *Qualifying Exam Request and Report Forms*
  - available on the DPS Graduate Student Forms site
- *Doctoral Plan of Study*
  - available at the Graduate College Forms site
- *Request to Schedule Written Exam*
  - available on the DPS Graduate Student Forms site
- *Change of Committee Form*
  - available on the DPS Graduate Student Forms site
- *Results of the Oral Comprehensive Examination*
  - available at the Graduate College Forms site
- *Dissertation Proposal and Report*
  - available on the DPS Graduate Student Forms site
- *Committee Appointment Form*
  - available at the Graduate College Forms site
- *Announcement of Final Oral Examination*
  - available at the Graduate College Forms site

## MISCELLANEOUS FORMS AND RESOURCES

- *Steps to Your Doctoral Degree*
  - available at [http://www.coe.arizona.edu/dps/spec\\_doc](http://www.coe.arizona.edu/dps/spec_doc)

- *Human Subjects Protection Program* departmental instructions
  - available at [http://www.fp.arizona.edu/dps/guide\\_doc.asp](http://www.fp.arizona.edu/dps/guide_doc.asp)
- *Special Member Request Form*
  - available at <http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/forms>
- *Comprehensive Exam Packet*
  - available at <http://grad.arizona.edu/academics/degree-certification/forms>
- Financial resource information
  - available at <http://grad.arizona.edu/financial-resources>