

GSAPP - Dissertation FAQs

1) How do I develop an idea for my dissertation? The Dissertation manual provides very clear guidelines about the specific types of dissertations that students can conduct, but consider the following examples of tactics or strategies that GSAPP students have used throughout the years to begin their dissertation journey: (a) review recent dissertations that have been completed by GSAPP students, (b) think about the topics that resonate with them and for which they would want to become an expert, (c) get to know the areas of expertise for GSAPP faculty and speak with them about their research and applied/areas of professional practice, (d) participate on research teams as early as they can during their GSAPP careers – being a part of a team dedicated to discussing and reflecting on research ideas is invaluable to their own professional growth and development.

2) How do I select dissertation committee members? There needs to be a minimum of two individual on students' Dissertation committees. Students should strive to develop a committee whose members collectively possess the expertise and knowledge relevant to students' dissertations and who can provide the necessary scholarly guidance and support. It is advisable for students to develop a committee whose members possess a range of skills, areas of expertise, and knowledge. Students are encouraged to see page 3 of the Dissertation Manual for greater information about the required credentials of committee members

3) What is the role of each dissertation committee member? The Chair of the committee will be directly involved with all aspects of the dissertation process, including but not limited to, the provision of feedback regarding the critical aspects of the dissertation (e.g., appropriateness of students' research topics, nature of research questions and designs etc.), cosigning IRB applications that students are required to submit prior to their study, and provision of general guidance regarding the different steps of the dissertation process. In contrast, second committee members (and an optional third committee member) will often answer student questions about specific aspects of their dissertations (e.g., appropriateness of a statistical methods, understanding of certain critical concepts), will read students' proposals and final dissertation papers, and will attend and provide feedback at the dissertation proposal and defense meetings. Students are responsible for discussing and clarifying the roles of committee members at the outset of the dissertation process.

4) Should I do anything to ensure that my committee members are available when I need to propose and then defend my dissertation? YES. Students are strongly encouraged to clarify the roles and coordination of committee members so there is clear understanding of the process and timeline for submitting drafts and making revisions. Given that committee members often involve a diverse group of individuals with varying schedules and because many committee members may not be able to meet or review documents during the summer months, students

should proactively discuss these issues with their committee members at the outset of the dissertation process.

5) Does my dissertation have to include data? IT DEPENDS. School psychology students are required to conduct dissertations that include data. However, clinical psychology students can conduct data-based dissertations but are not required to do so.

6) If my dissertation includes data, can it include data that I collected or someone else collected (archival)? YES to both. Students are often encouraged to collect their own data as part of their dissertation topic (primary data collection) but they can seek out archival data sets to examine unique and novel research questions.

7) If my dissertation includes data, does my dissertation have to include specific research questions? YES. Although students can conduct a variety of different types of dissertations, it is expected that students develop specific research questions and utilize appropriate research methodologies to address these questions.

8) Does my dissertation need to include a priori hypotheses? IT DEPENDS on the type of research study that students conduct. Some studies are exploratory in nature and thus students may not need to devise a priori hypotheses. For many other types of studies, however, students are strongly encouraged to include a priori hypotheses that are supported by research and/or theory. Students should consult with their Dissertation Chair regarding the need to include a priori hypotheses for their particular dissertation.

9) Does my dissertation need to include data analyses linked to my research questions (RQs)? YES, both parametric and nonparametric statistics as well as specific qualitative data analyses can be used. Analyses need to be specific and directly linked to RQs. Rationales need to be stated for each of the analyses.

10) Do I need to submit an IRB application for data I will collect and/or archival data? YES. IRB approval must be obtained before starting ALL data collection and analyses. Typically, students will get IRB approval after their dissertation proposal is formally approved by their dissertation committee; however, students should be encouraged to consult with their Dissertation Chair about the timing of the IRB application relative to the proposal meeting.

11) Is there a time of day when a dissertation proposal or defense can be scheduled? YES. Meetings can be scheduled Monday to Friday. The meetings cannot be scheduled to begin before 8:30am and cannot be scheduled to begin after 6:00pm.

12) After my dissertation proposal is approved at the proposal meeting is there anything that I need to submit? YES. Please submit the Dissertation Committee Approval Form and the Dissertation Proposal Signature Page to the administrative assistant in the Department of Clinical Psychology or the Department of Applied Psychology, who will then forward a copy to the Student Services Coordinator.

13) Do I have to follow a certain format for my final dissertation? YES. Specific details about formatting is included in the Dissertation Manual. In general, students are expected to include a series of preliminary pages (e.g., title page, list of tables, list of figures etc.) followed by the format of a typical manuscript as delineated by the APA Publication Manual – 6th edition (i.e., introduction, methods, results, discussion). Students can access detailed information about the order of the preliminary pages at the following link located on the GSAPP website (Dissertation Materials tab):

<http://gsappweb.rutgers.edu/cstudents/dissertation%20material/index.php>

14) Are there any exceptions to the APA formatting rule? YES. Students may elect to include table and figures within the text rather than following the references. Students should consult with members of their dissertation committee to determine the preferred style.

15) Should I include chapter numbers in my dissertation? NO. Although most students have traditionally divided their dissertation into different chapters, the GSAPP faculty members expect students to follow the APA Publication Manual – 6th edition regarding formatting of their dissertation. Students should consult with their Dissertation Chair regarding these formatting issues and related issues, such as the use of appendices to supplement information included in the body of the dissertation.

16) Do my margins need to be set at a specific size? Students should use top, bottom, and right hand margins at 1” with the left hand margins being between 1” to 1.5”. Traditionally, students have used 1.5” but students will be allowed to use 1” for the left margin, if that is preferred.

17) Do I have to include a comprehensive literature review as part of my dissertation manuscript? YES, although there is some flexibility regarding where to include this comprehensive literature review. For example, it is acceptable for students to include the comprehensive literature review as part of the Introduction section or as an appendix. Students should consult with their Dissertation Chair regarding their preferences and expectations.

18) What do I need to do to prepare for the dissertation defense, and when do I need to do it?

At least 2 weeks before the dissertation defense, students must submit an approved, signed abstract in the format listed under “dissertation material” on the GSAPP website along with the electronic version of the dissertation. At that time, a room will be reserved by the Student Services Coordinator.

19) What do I need to do after the defense? After the defense, students must conduct the following activities: (a) submit the publishing agreement form to Student Service Coordinator; (pages 4, 5, and 6 if they paying for copyrighting); (b) go to the Cashier’s office 620 George Street, New Brunswick (Records Hall) to pay for the microfilming/copyright form. Get form stamped and give copy to Student Services Coordinator; and (c) submit final dissertation electronically to Rutgers Electronic Thesis & Dissertation site: <https://etd.libraries.rutgers.edu/login.php>, (d). Submit final dissertation electronically to Student Services Coordinator

**Students are also encouraged to consult with the Dissertation Defense Checklist provided on the GSAPP website listed above.

20) If I have taken the required nine dissertation credits, do I still need to register for dissertation credits? IT DEPENDS. If students have taken nine dissertation credits and they are enrolled in other courses (e.g., internship) then they would not need to register for dissertation credits. However, if they are not registered for any other classes and they have not yet defended, then they must enroll in three credits of dissertation.

21) Do I need to always enroll in three credits of dissertation? YES, with one exception. After students have completed nine dissertation credits, students are granted a one-time exemption of enrolling for one credit of dissertation to maintain active status.

22) Are students required to take the Dissertation Seminar course? NO, this course is not a requirement for GSAPP students.

23) How long do students typically take to complete their dissertation? There is no set timetable, as students progress and complete their dissertations at different paces. It is advisable for students to make a list of the steps of the dissertation process that they need to complete and then devise a plan with their best estimates of how long each step will take to complete. Providing this timeline or strategic plan to their Dissertation Chair can be helpful in preventing misunderstandings about the dissertation process and/or the time that a given step might actually take. Examples of steps to consider in such a timeline include (this list is not exhaustive): (a) identify a topic of interest; (b) develop a general research idea; (c) develop specific research questions; (d) determine the research design and corresponding methods that best address their

research questions (e.g., experiments, needs assessment, case study etc.); (e) identify the target sample; (f) identify a research site (if applicable); (g) submit an IRB proposal; (h) complete the formal proposal; (i) send the final proposal to the Dissertation Committee prior to the Proposal Meeting; (j) modify the proposal based on feedback from committee (submit an amendment to the IRB, if needed); (k) collect the data; (l) conduct data analysis; (m) draft dissertation document (expect several revisions for this step); (n) schedule dissertation defense meeting; and (o) submit final dissertation to Student Services Coordinator.

24) Do students need to complete their dissertations prior to Internship?

NO. However, students are encouraged to complete as much of their dissertation as possible prior to going on to internship. Given the amount of time and effort that goes into completing a dissertation, many students will struggle to complete it during internship year. Further, students may have difficulty obtaining a post-doctoral position or a professional job if they do not complete their dissertation by the end of their internship year. Students should consult with their advisor and Dissertation Chair about this issue.