

DSE Course Sequence Working Ahead Guidelines

The goal of the dissertation sequence of courses is to keep progressing weekly on chapter components and to continue to make progress on the completion of your Dissertation Proposal, IRB Application, Data Collection, and Dissertation Manuscript. Whenever possible, we encourage students to work ahead in each DIS course because there is a lot to accomplish in each course sequence. Depending on how much time you have to commit to this process, it will likely take you longer than the initial 12 weeks to complete DIS9902A, DIS9903A or DIS9904A. Most students need to enroll in one or two supplemental courses that support you.

At this point in the program, you can connect with other students in the Commons for motivation and guidance. However, be careful not to compare your progress to someone else's. All students have different demands on their time and can dedicate a unique portion of the day to this endeavor. Each student has different skillsets coming into the dissertation and each dissertation is a unique learning experience based on different elements of the research.

Ideas for Working Ahead

Once you work through the dissertation process, you should always be looking ahead to consider what you might work on next. You will often be waiting for feedback from your committee and you should not be sitting still just waiting. Find something else to do so that you are always moving forward. Many of the suggestions listed below are NOT intended to be done in order, but serve as a guide of things you might think about or work on.

Chapter 2

- Annotated Bibliographies – A good starting point is to review annotated bibliographies that you have completed in your content courses, with a critical eye toward studies that might be relevant to explaining the need to investigate your dissertation topic.
- References from key articles you have read – Use the reference sections from articles you have gathered to find more relevant articles.
- Synthesis - A challenge that students face when writing Chapter 2 is synthesizing the information in a scholarly manner. Rather than summarizing one study after the next (like an annotated bibliography or a list of research), be sure to summarize the literature around themes and allow several authors to “speak” at once, creating a dialogue about a topic between multiple researchers and their findings. Your review should not read like a book report (one author or study after another), instead, you should strive to construct sentences and paragraphs that reflect multiple sources in one reference. This means that the majority of your citations should look like this (Smolka & Walters, 2013; Walters, Smolka, & Young, 2014). Go through your draft to ensure that you have synthesized and not just summarized the literature.

Chapter 3

- **IRB Documentation**
 - Application – Be sure to familiarize yourself with the IRB application and the required supplemental materials you will need to submit.
 - Site Permission - Do not wait until you have IRB approval to start making connections for the

- research. You do not want to commit to all of the aspects of the research until your Committee has approved Chapter 3. However, you can introduce the problem and purpose to potential
- research partners to find out if an interest to participate even exists. In addition to securing your site, you may want to have a few options for Plan B, Plan C and Plan Z. You need to expect the unexpected. Even if you have not contacted all of the possibilities, create a list of possibilities so that you are ready to roll to the next one if the need arises. Determining your research site will get you a big step ahead for course DIS-9903A when you will have to complete the IRB application and data collection. You can access resources from *IRBManager* to help you understand the process, restrictions and templates for communicating with potential research participants. If you have not created your *IRBManager* account, you should do that now. You will find instructions in the Course Resources.
 - CITI Certification – You are required to have a CITI certificate to conduct research. *CITI certificates are valid for two years. Student CITI certificates and co-investigator certificates must be no less than 180 days away from expiration at the time of IRB application approval. Chair CITI certificates must be no less than 90 days away from expiration at the time of IRB application approval. Not having a valid CITI certificate can hold up your IRB processing.
 - **Instrumentation** – Start looking for instrumentation that might be useful to your study. You will need to have some type of tool to help you collect data from your research participants. If you are doing a quantitative study, this could be a survey, questionnaire, or other assessment or evaluation tool. For a qualitative study, you could have an interview protocol, observation tool, or research journal. One way to find good instruments is through your literature review by identifying possibilities described in Chapter 3.
 - **Data Collection** – There is much to think about and work on ahead of time, before data is even collected. Begin outlining the steps you will take to collect data. Your process should be explained with such clarity that other researchers could replicate your study with different samples. Outlining this process will help you with IRB as well, where you are expected to outline the process.
 - **Data Analysis**
 - Begin to familiarize yourself with software you might use for analysis. It is important that you become very familiar with its use and take time to practice before using your own data.

Chapter 4

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to present that data that you have collected in a way that will scaffold the reader's understanding of the evidence that supports your interpretations and recommendations. The findings should be reported in line with the individual research questions. One of the best ways to envision what your Chapter 4 will look like is to read many dissertations that have used the same specific methodology and research design. While you are reading, note the things that others have done which help you see the patterns in the data. Map out how you might present your data in way that will make sense to others.

Remember that tables, figures, and graphs should be prepared in a manner the reader can easily interpret with a clear associated explanation of the pertinent information you wish to convey.

Chapter 5

- Alignment - The alignment to the research questions should be an organizational and structural component of the presentation of the interpretations you present in chapter 5. Throughout your interpretation, you will also want to make connections back to the literature review to demonstrate how the existing body of knowledge supports your interpretations. Begin thinking about how your



interpretation align to the problem statement, purpose, research questions, and literature review.

- Recommendations - Be sure to write Chapter 5 in the context of how your study fits into the existing body of research, ensuring that you are citing literature from Chapter 2. Give some thought to what literature you may wish to connect to.

Other

- Title – Continue to play with your dissertation title. It can take some doing to get the right title.
- Alignment - Alignment is one of the most critical components of the research proposal. In the Dissertation Center, NCU has tools and resources that can help you identify alignment issues and track the overarching alignment of your research proposal. As you work on all of the components of the research proposal, use these tools and resources to keep you on track for alignment.
- Examples – Take the time to read examples of other dissertations. As you are reading them for content, you should also be reading Chapter 3 so that you can see examples of how others have structured similar sections. You can learn about new methodologies, possible instruments and identify appropriate analyses.
- APA Tutorials – If you struggle with APA formatting, take some time to find some APA tutorials and get the practice you might need. Not knowing APA and having to always make edits as a result can slow down your process.
- Reference Check – Periodically, you will want to check that all your references in your paper are in your reference area. You should be using annotation software to help you track and organize your references. You can use free tools like RefWorks found in the NCU Library, or the Research tool in APA Central, found in the Academic Success Center.
- Table of Contents - One area with which people often struggle is preparing the table of contents. You may want to review information on how to do so in Microsoft Word. You also will want to review the tips in the NCU DSE Dissertation Template regarding setting up your complete proposal, and then plug in your own information in the appropriate sections of the template.
- Oral Defense - You will be creating a presentation that visually supports the information that you share orally. Be sure to look ahead and check out materials in the Dissertation Center so that you know what to expect.