

# PH.D. Leadership Dissertation Process

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### Policy Statement

The student's doctoral dissertation is the final stage in the PhD in Leadership program at Carolina University. It represents years of study, course work, and original research.

### Policy Procedures

The PhD dissertation examines a particular problem or issue related to the discipline of leadership and addresses one or more research questions related to that topic. In order to facilitate the student's preparation and development of the research dissertation, the School of Leadership has prepared a dissertation completion plan including a dissertation proposal protocol.

#### Identifying a Dissertation Topic

The process of writing a dissertation begins with the topic selection process. Students must choose a topic that incorporates a leadership component and is focused on an area of study within their field. Ideally, students begin the process of identifying a topic early in their doctoral program and will continue to explore that topic throughout the coursework leading up to the dissertation courses. When opportunities exist, students should research a topic of interest by examining literature reviews and related papers for doctoral coursework. Formally, students will identify a topic to which they will seek approval by their Dissertation Chair at the start of RES877.

The dissertation topic must be relevant, feasible, significant, and worthy of research. Students are encouraged to pursue dissertation topics that are of personal relevance and significance. The student must be able to carry out his or her research given the constraints of time, finances, and other impending factors. The topic must contribute new findings to the student's field of study and show that the findings constitute a theoretically meaningful contribution to the field highlighting a leadership component. A dissertation must involve the collection of new relevant data or a new analysis of previously collected data. A doctoral dissertation must be indisputably and undeniably the student's own work.

#### Document Review Turnaround Times

The dissertation process encompasses a handful of review stages by different boards or committees. Students should expect to receive feedback from each review stage within the below time frames.

- Dissertation Proposal review by Committee members: 7-10 days
- IRB Review: 7-10 days, but allow up to 2 weeks for extenuating circumstances
- Dissertation review by Committee members: 7-10 days

#### Dissertation Proposal Defense Protocol

The preparation and presentation of the dissertation proposal allows the student to select a topic, begin a relevant literature review on that topic and delineate an appropriate method to investigate the research topic. However, the proposal defense provides valuable counsel and direction from the student's Dissertation Committee prior to the implementation of the student's research method and data retrieval. The successful dissertation proposal defense allows the student to proceed with the completion of research and dissertation writing knowing that the focus of research is valuable and valid.

#### Dissertation Proposal Overview

The PhD in Leadership program at Carolina University consists of six components: the residency, the core coursework, the concentration and research coursework, the Comprehensive Examination, the dissertation proposal defense, and the dissertation defense. The student must attend residency, satisfactorily complete all of the core, concentration, and research courses and pass the Comprehensive Exam prior to beginning the dissertation.

Once the student has passed the Comprehensive Exam, the student's Chair and two Dissertation Committee members are assigned to the student as his or her Dissertation Committee. Beginning with RES877 Dissertation I the Chair commences work with the student to identify a unique research problem or issue, an ensuing research purpose, topic, and question(s), an appropriate research method that will address the topic under investigation, and an extensive review of extant literature pertaining to the student's topic. During the succeeding months and dissertation courses, the student designs and

produces a dissertation proposal consisting of the first three chapters of the dissertation.

#### Dissertation Proposal Format

With the production of the first three chapters of the dissertation, the student is now able to proceed to the proposal defense stage. It is at this point that the full Dissertation Committee examines the student's dissertation work. The dissertation proposal is circulated to the two committee members for their examination, and the full Dissertation Committee then deliberates and discusses the student's work in detail. The Dissertation Committee, through the Chair, returns one of four possible results: approval with no revisions, approval with minor revisions, approval with major revisions, or rejection. Please find a copy of the PhD in Leadership Dissertation Proposal Defense Approval Form. The approval of the student's dissertation proposal then allows the student to proceed to the IRB application stage. Only after the student has approval by the Dissertation Committee may the student submit the IRB application seeking approval to begin human subject research. Following the approval of the Carolina University Institutional Review Board the student then begins data collection, analysis, and writing of the last two chapters of the dissertation.

#### Dissertation Proposal Requirements

Generally, the dissertation proposal contains the first three chapters of the dissertation, a reference section, title page, tentative table of contents, and any attending documents germane to the dissertation. The proposal is written in 12-point Times New Roman font and follows APA 6th edition, second printing format. Any proposal not following these presentation guidelines will be immediately returned.

The proposal demonstrates the student's scholarly comprehension of the area under investigation, a mastery of the literature related to the dissertation subject, and a clear understanding of the methodology required to obtain the data and establish pertinent research findings. Consequently, the student is encouraged to exhaustively prepare the proposal prior to submission. This will allow the student to move more quickly to the data gathering stage with less revision of the earlier chapters.

The dissertation proposal defense is both challenging and exciting. It requires significant scholarly effort and presentation as it demonstrates the student's mastery of the subject under investigation. However, it also provides valuable feedback, direction, and encouragement as the student progresses to the research stage of the dissertation process.

#### Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Carolina University recognizes the need to provide careful oversight of all institutional research involving human participants. The protection of human research subjects is both ethically responsible and consistent with the principles specified in the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Part 46 (45 CFR 46), and the Belmont Report. As such, any human subject research conducted by faculty or students associated with CU is subject to the review process of the Institutional Review Board of Carolina University.

#### The Function of the IRB

The IRB of Carolina University ultimately functions to protect the general welfare, privacy, and rights of human subjects involved in research conducted by faculty or students of CU. Consequently, IRB approval is required prior to any and all human subject research. While not limited to the following, the IRB of CU examines any proposed research protocols for potential risks to human participants, benefits to human participants, selection and level of vulnerability of human participants, identified safeguards to protect the privacy, rights, and welfare of human participants, stated indications of informed consent by human participants, and adherence by CU faculty and student researchers to ethical standards governing human subject research. The jurisdiction of the IRB extends to all aspects of the application that may pertain to risk of human participants in the research process.

#### The Authority, Composition, and Responsibility of the IRB

##### Authority

The IRB of Carolina University serves under the authority of the Provost and ultimately the Board of Carolina University. The IRB's authority includes, but is not limited to, approval, modification, or rejection of a proposed research project involving human subjects, termination or suspension of a previous approval of a research study involving human participants, the

requirement of progress reports in unique research cases involving human subjects, the ongoing review of potential risks in unique research studies involving human participants, and mandated restrictions on human subject research in unique

research cases.

## Composition

The IRB of Carolina University consists of at least five members. The IRB Chair, appointed by the Provost of CU, is responsible for the selection and orientation of the IRB members, alternates, and possible consultants. As well, the Chair of the IRB is responsible to communicate the decision of the IRB to the applicant researcher's Chair in a timely manner. Members of the IRB represent sufficiently diverse backgrounds, experience, and educational expertise in order to adequately examine and evaluate proposed research studies. The IRB includes at least one member that is not associated with the university. The selection of the members reflects the schools of the university that participate in human subject research.

## Responsibility

The members of the IRB are responsible to review all IRB applications with respect to consistency and adherence to human subject research guidelines outlined in 45 CFR 46 and the Belmont Report, review all accompanying documents pertaining to IRB applications, participate in discussion regarding IRB applications, evaluate the risk levels pertaining to IRB applications, recommend improvements, if necessary, to IRB applications and accompanying documents, maintain confidentiality in matters pertaining to their responsibilities as IRB members, recommend possible improvements to the IRB procedures or policies, and vote on IRB applications.

## The Review Protocol of the IRB

The Institutional Review Board Chair of Carolina University receives and refers IRB applications to IRB members in a timely fashion. As most research students at CU operate on a seven-week session basis, their need for a timely appraisal of their IRB application is apparent. Member deliberations, either in written or verbal form is forthcoming in an equally timely manner.

The IRB Chair informs the applicant researcher's Chair of the Board's decision within one week to ten days from the time the application is received. The Carolina University Institutional Review Board determines whether the IRB application warrants exempt status, expedited review, or full board review and recommends changes, additions, alterations, and deletions to the IRB application and supporting documentation.

## IRB Applicant Procedures & Submission

The student researcher will make IRB application prior to beginning any human subject research (Appendix C). A separate IRB application is required for any pilot study. Any human subject research undertaken prior to the approval by the IRB of CU is disallowed. The student researcher under the direction of the Chair of their Dissertation Committee will determine when the IRB application should be made. The researcher's Dissertation Committee can submit the application after the dissertation proposal approval. The researcher will submit the IRB application through the Dissertation Committee Chair to the Chair of the IRB.

Any alterations or changes to the IRB application details after IRB approval must be resubmitted for further approval. No human subject research may be undertaken until the further alterations and changes have been approved. This restriction also pertains to the use of pilot tests. Because a pilot test involves human subjects, the pilot test must also be approved by the IRB. The researcher may gather expert opinion or feedback on the applicability and clarity of the instruments that will be used in the research study. This feedback and opinion does not require IRB approval. However, the researcher may not gather test data from those individuals without approval from the IRB. Such data gathering constitutes human subject research and must be IRB approved. The researcher should include all related project documents with this application. These may include, but are not limited to surveys and survey instructions, invitations and procedures, informed consent letters and forms (Appendix D), study participation instructions, and interview questions.

## Application Approval

The IRB will deliberate as to the status of the IRB application. The IRB's determination will be communicated to the researcher's Chair within one week to ten days from the time that the application is received. The IRB may request alterations, changes, deletions, or further explanation and documentation. Alterations must be resubmitted to the IRB for re-evaluation. The IRB may also decline the IRB application in certain circumstances, particularly those contexts where exceptional risk to human participants is anticipated. A copy of the IRB decision will be forwarded to the School of Leadership and the Dean of the researcher's school.