

**HIGHER EDUCATION  
DOCTORAL STUDENT  
HANDBOOK**

## Doctoral Program Checklist

<u>Date</u>	<u>Requirement</u>
_____	Admitted to doctoral program
_____	Meet with major advisor to discuss a coursework plan upon admission
_____	Complete residency and required coursework according to DegreeWorks
_____	Develop a committee, which consists of the major advisor, a faculty member in the student's department, and a faculty member external to the student's department.
_____	Schedule written comprehensive examinations through the major advisor (oral examination will be scheduled with the major advisor after successful completion of the written examination)
_____	Submit the Doctoral Comprehensive Examination Form to the Office of Graduate Studies and Research upon successful completion of oral and written examinations
_____	Submit a signed copy of the Schedule for Presentation of the Dissertation Proposal to the Office of Graduate Studies and Research by the 20 <sup>th</sup> of the month preceding the month of the proposal defense
_____	Upon advisor approval, ensure that committee members have received the complete proposal (Chapters 1-3) at least <b>2 weeks</b> before <b>the scheduled defense date</b>
_____	Submit an extra copy of the dissertation proposal to the major advisor for the Graduate School representative
_____	Complete the online CITI research training
_____	Submit IRB protocol and the CITI certificate(s) to the major advisor
_____	Complete proposal defense satisfactorily
_____	Secure approval of proposal from department head and COEHS dean
_____	Submit to the Office of Thesis and Dissertation Services the Graduate School Proposal Form, the Advisor's Approval to Submit Form, and a revised copy of the proposal

- \_\_\_\_\_ Secure IRB approval
- \_\_\_\_\_ Secure approval of proposal from the Office of Thesis and Dissertation Services
- \_\_\_\_\_ Complete dissertation
- \_\_\_\_\_ File for graduation through the Registrar's office
- \_\_\_\_\_ Submit the Schedule for the Presentation of Final Examination/Defense to the Office of Graduate Studies and Research by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month preceding the month of the dissertation defense
- \_\_\_\_\_ Upon advisor approval, ensure that committee members have received the complete dissertation at least 2 weeks before the scheduled final defense
- \_\_\_\_\_ Complete final dissertation defense satisfactorily
- \_\_\_\_\_ Order graduation regalia (NOTE: Check with bookstore for details)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Submit the final approved dissertation, the Final Defense Form, iThenticate report, and the Advisor's Approval to Submit Form to the Office of Thesis and Dissertation Services by the deadline stated in the schedule of classes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Obtain list of needed changes from the Office of Thesis and Dissertation Services
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make required changes and submit revised dissertation, iThenticate report, and Advisor's Approval to Resubmit Form to Office of Thesis and Dissertation Services

## **Introduction**

This handbook outlines the procedures to be followed by students pursuing the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree in Higher Education through the Department of Higher Education and Learning Technologies (HELT) at Texas A&M University-Commerce. It is designed to assist doctoral students in meeting all of the departmental, college, and university requirements and deadlines, from the time of admission until graduation. The student should also review the **Doctoral Student Handbook** compiled by the Office of Graduate Studies at

[http://www.tamuc.edu/academics/graduateSchool/documents/Doctoral Student Handbook2.pdf](http://www.tamuc.edu/academics/graduateSchool/documents/Doctoral%20Student%20Handbook2.pdf).

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## **Admission to the Doctoral Program in Higher Education**

The first step toward the doctoral degree is application and admission to the Graduate School through the Office of Graduate Studies. The prospective student should read and follow the information provided by the Office of Graduate Studies about the application for doctoral studies at

[http://www.tamuc.edu/academics/graduateSchool/documents/Doctoral Student Handbook2.pdf](http://www.tamuc.edu/academics/graduateSchool/documents/Doctoral%20Student%20Handbook2.pdf).

After filing a complete admission application to the Graduate School, the prospective student's folder is sent to HELT. Admission is a committee decision based upon previous Grade Point Averages, verbal and quantitative Graduate Record Examination scores, 2 letters of reference, and a writing sample. After review, the Departmental Doctoral Program Coordinator will recommend admission or denial. Recommendations will be forwarded to the Dean of the Graduate School.

If denied, the Office of Graduate Studies will notify the applicant. If accepted, applicants should receive two letters: one from the Department Head and one from the Dean of the Graduate School. The letter from the Department Head will provide the name of a faculty member who will serve as the student's major advisor.

## **New Student Orientation**

At the beginning of every Fall semester on Tuesday, annual New Student

Orientation will be held from 6 pm to 8 pm *at (TBA)*. You can also participate via Zoom remotely. This is a great opportunity to meet with your advisor, program faculty members, and your ‘study’ buddies, and become familiar with program expectations and requirements. We strongly encourage your physical (preferred) or virtual presence. Session will be also recorded for a later review if one has to miss the event. During the orientation, the followings will be covered:

- University and program highlights
- Introduction (Students & Faculty)
- Program overview
  - MS in Higher Education
  - Doctorate in Higher Ed.
  - MS in Organization, Learning, & Tech.
  - MS in Educational Technology/Library Science

### **DegreeWorks**

After accepting admission, the student should contact the major advisor to make an initial appointment. The major advisor and the student will discuss the student’s educational and professional background as well as short- and long-term goals. Together, they will design a **tentative** course of studies that will lead to goal attainment and timely completion.

Students can check their course progress and remaining requirements through DegreeWorks, an online portal that can be accessed through MyLeo. Students should communicate their degree progress with their major advisors preferably at the end of every semester but minimally once a year. The Department also conducts an annual review of each student’s academic progress and makes one of three determinations: good/adequate progress, marginal progress, and unsatisfactory progress.

### **Coursework**

Students should plan class schedules on the basis of courses listed on DegreeWorks, the 3-year Course Rotation Plan on the Department Website, and the University Course Schedule that publishes a course listing about one semester in advance (see <https://appsprod.tamuc.edu/Schedule/Schedule.aspx>). Certain requirements should

be considered that include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Core courses;** Introduction to Higher Education (HIED 615), History of Higher Education in the United States (HIED 627), and Higher Education and the Law (HIED 656) should be taken early in the program. **What counts as your Core courses follows the catalogue year you were admitted (this shows up on DegreeWorks).**
- **Additional required courses;** HIED 650, HIED 622, and HIED 710 are designed to assist students' enculturation into higher education and their preparation of the dissertation proposal. The Internship (HIED 622) is required for all students who are not currently employed at a college or university, and **students who are currently employed at a college or university may substitute another HIED course if they wish to not take HIED 622.** Writing the Literature Review (HIED 650) includes the development of Chapter 2 (Review of Related Research) of the dissertation proposal. In the Dissertation Prospectus course (HIED 710), students will develop Chapters 1 (Introduction) and 3 (Method of Procedure) of the proposal. Prerequisites for HIED 710 include all the research tools, the core classes, and HIED 650. Ideally, HIED 710 should be the last course taken before beginning HIED 718 (dissertation) and may be taken in the same semester as the comprehensive exams.
- **Research tools;** HIED 695 Research Methodology (prerequisite for remaining tools, **thus take HIED 695 early in consultation with your advisor**), HIED 617 Introductory Quantitative Research, and HIED 696 Introductory Qualitative Research, and either HIED 619 (Advanced Statistics) or HIED 698 (Advanced Qualitative Research) should be taken in a specified order, one course per semester. **NOTE**—HIED 617 is a prerequisite for HIED 619, and HIED 696 is a prerequisite for HIED 698. Students must enroll in HIED 695 as early as possible in their doctoral studies. All research tools must be completed prior to scheduling comprehensive examinations. Students must consult the faculty advisor to determine the order of taking Research Tools courses.
- **Electives and course substitution;** A variety of topics are offered as electives. Limited numbers of courses can also be taken from HELT's master's program in Organization, Learning, and Technology (OLT) or Educational Technology, or

from other programs at the University. If any course substitution is desired, approval from the faculty advisor is required before taking the substituted course.

Students should retain class syllabi and course notes as well as any other materials that will be helpful when studying for the comprehensive examinations at or near the end of all coursework.

### **Doctoral Residency**

Each student is required to complete a residency on a college or university campus after admission. Currently, this requirement can be satisfied only by the completion of an approved schedule of at least 6 graduate hours per semester in three consecutive semesters. **This requirement is different from the HIED 622 Internship course, which requires a supervised project within a semester.** Residency instructions and forms may be accessed at <http://www.tamuc.edu/HIEDresidency>.

### **The Comprehensive Examinations**

Taken at or near the end of all coursework, comprehensive examinations represent a very important step in the doctoral preparation process and demand extensive preparation. A student can obtain the HELT-prepared Study Guide from the major advisor at any time. Designed to test the student's in-depth knowledge and understanding of core course material and research methodology covered throughout the doctoral program, comprehensive examinations may not be scheduled until the student has completed all of the research tools and core classes, has met the residency requirements, and has no more than 6 hours of coursework remaining, excluding HIED 718.

Comprehensive exams are offered three (3) times per year – in the months of **January, June, and September**. The written portion is a **1-week take-home format**. The oral portion is scheduled on an individual basis after successful completion of the written portion **and can be done virtually**. The student should

1. Schedule a conference with the major advisor to confirm that no more than 6 hours of coursework, excluding 718, are remaining. The major advisor will then notify the

doctoral program coordinator.

2. If the committee has not been finalized upon completion of the written exams, schedule another conference with the major advisor to determine the composition of the doctoral committee. The student must have a minimum of three committee members: two from HELT and a third from outside HELT. **If the outside member is from another university, it needs to be approved from the Graduate School, and an approval form has to be submitted.** The presence of the third non-HELT committee member during the oral exam is optional, but it is still strongly recommended that committee members be decided at this time.
3. Notification of the written exam results is sent during the **fourth** week after the exam. If the student passes, he or she should contact the major advisor and arrange for the oral exam. If the student fails, only failed portions of the exam will be retaken. However, a study plan must be completed by working together with the major advisor, and the plan must be approved from the Graduate School before a retake is arranged. If the repeated exam is unsatisfactory, the student may be withdrawn from the program.
4. For official registering of the comprehensive result, obtain the **Doctoral Comprehensive Examination Form** at <http://www.tamuc.edu/academics/graduateSchool/documents/doctoralcomprehensiveexam.pdf>. The major advisor submits this form to the HELT office after the oral exam if it is completed in the same semester as the written exam, or upon failure notice of the written exam (together with the study plan). (NOTE—the following link will be used for all doctoral forms starting with the comprehensive exams: <http://www.tamuc.edu/academics/graduateSchool/graduateForms.aspx>).
5. A copy must be filed with the departmental secretary for placement in the student's file. A copy of the signed form will be returned to the student at a later date.

Upon verification of the completed **Doctoral Comprehensive Examination Form** by the Office of Graduate Studies, a copy of the signed form will be mailed to the student. This form is official notification to candidacy and will itemize any restrictions such as



uncompleted coursework and the timing requirement of completion for the degree. Once admitted to candidacy, the student (now titled the “candidate”) must enroll in HIED 718 (dissertation) every fall and spring semester until graduation. In addition, the candidate may apply for reduced tuition for HIED 718 through the Office of Graduate Studies. To receive doctoral advisement or to use University facilities and resources during the summer sessions, the candidate also must be enrolled in HIED 718 for the summer session.

### **The Doctoral Proposal**

***\*This section is long, but critically important. So please read carefully.***

Once comprehensive exams are passed, the doctoral candidate focuses upon the completion of remaining coursework and the dissertation proposal defense. All non-718 coursework must be completed and the candidate must be enrolled in HIED 718 at the time of the proposal defense.

The dissertation is an extensive, comprehensive research project to be completed by the doctoral candidate and planned and coordinated in conjunction with the candidate’s committee working primarily through the major advisor. Throughout the dissertation process, final approval at all levels lies with the committee with ultimate authority resting with the major advisor. Once the committee has approved the proposal, it must then be approved by the Department Head, the Dean of the College of Education and Human Services, and the Dean of the Graduate School.

The dissertation proposal may be quantitative or qualitative and must consist of the following parts:

1. Title Page, Signature Page, and Abstract
2. Table of Contents
3. Chapter 1—Introduction
  - a. Statement of the problem
  - b. Purposes of the Study
  - c. Hypotheses and/or Research Questions
  - d. Significance of the Study
  - e. Definitions of Terms
  - f. (De)limitations

4. Chapter 2—Review of the Literature
5. Chapter 3—Method of Procedure
  - a. Design of the Study
  - b. Sampling
  - c. Instrumentation
  - d. Data Collection
  - e. Data Analysis
6. References

As a rule of thumb, the dissertation proposal must be **comprehensive** with each chapter thoroughly developed (i.e., each chapter must be able to stand on its own). It is essential to note here, it is the candidate's responsibility to be knowledgeable about his or her chosen method (qualitative/quantitative)

The dissertation proposal should be developed in conjunction with the major advisor and must be based upon a **high quality review of the literature** whose topics and topic sequence must match and be aligned well with the research purpose and questions. Throughout the dissertation process, the major advisor will be the candidate's primary contact, providing guidance, as needed, and reviews of the dissertation chapters. The major advisor must approve the dissertation chapters before submission to other committee members, and candidates should not work directly with nonadvisor committee members without the direction of the major advisor.

The candidate should schedule meetings with the major advisor and other members of the committee—as per the major advisor's approval—to discuss ideas for the study and methods for pursuing the study. When appropriate, an individual who has expertise in statistics should be consulted regarding the statistical approach to be employed and preparing for and conducting the data analysis. **Ideally, the initial work for this project will be conducted in HIED 650 and HIED 710.** However, successful completion of these courses does NOT assure that the committee will accept the proposal. Working in conjunction with the major advisor, though, the candidate may find that by the end of HIED 710, the nucleus for the proposal is identified.

**IRB – Research with Humans.** After the candidate's proposal meets the requirements of the major advisor and the committee members, he or she must then comply with the federal regulations regarding research with human subjects and the

guidelines of the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), available at [http://www.tamuc.edu/research/compliance/IRB-Protection\\_of\\_Human\\_Subjects/default.aspx](http://www.tamuc.edu/research/compliance/IRB-Protection_of_Human_Subjects/default.aspx).

A candidate cannot gather any data from human subjects without the University's IRB approval. The IRB process takes anywhere from 2-3 weeks to 2 months or longer depending upon the complexity of the research design (e.g., number of sites, types of participants). The Graduate School registers the completion of the proposal defense when it receives IRB approval. Because IRB approval takes time, a candidate will want to submit the IRB application as soon as the proposal is successfully defended; thus, **make sure the work for the proposal defense includes a completed draft of the IRB Protocol Form** (forms and review schedule and procedure can be found from the preceding link; please check with the major advisor regarding which protocol form to complete). The candidate will also need to complete the CITI online training as part of research compliance and submit the clearance record together. For more see <http://www.tamuc.edu/research/compliance/default.aspx>.

**Setting up a proposal defense satisfying all these requirements** takes time. Remember, the proposal defense will not require the IRB application to be included, and one cannot submit the IRB without a successful proposal defense. To schedule the proposal defense, the candidate must secure the **Schedule for the Presentation of the Dissertation Proposal Form** available at <http://www.tamuc.edu/academics/graduateSchool/Thesis%20and%20Dissertation%20Services/dissertations.aspx>

This form must be completed by the candidate, signed by all appropriate persons, and submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies by the **20<sup>th</sup> of the month preceding** the month in which the candidate plans to defend the proposal. If the 20<sup>th</sup> falls on a weekend, the form must be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies by the preceding Friday. The Office of Graduate Studies will then publish the date of the defense and the name of the person who will serve as the representative of the Office of Graduate Studies—a nonvoting member of the committee who attends to assure compliance with the policies of the Office of Graduate Studies.

After completing and submitting the **Schedule for the Presentation of the Dissertation Proposal Form**, the candidate should obtain the **Graduate School Dissertation Proposal Defense Form** and the **Advisor's Approval to Submit Form** (please check the

above URL again). Excluding the signature lines, both forms should be completed and ready for signatures by the major advisor. The committee members, the Department Head, and the Dean of the College of Education and Human Services are also expected to sign the Dissertation Proposal Defense Form. These forms should be taken to the defense.

The major advisor must allow at least 2 weeks for the committee members to review the candidate's proposal and obtain committee agreements to schedule the final defense. To do so, the proposal must be approved by the major advisor before being disseminated to the committee members. If the candidate has worked closely with the major advisor, no major surprises should occur at the proposal defense. However, some committee suggestions or required changes to the proposal invariably are necessary.

The proposal defense is of paramount importance for the candidate and should be regarded as such. Both the candidate and the committee members should arrive at the assigned location prior to the scheduled time for the defense to begin. The candidate should arrive early enough to ensure that all equipment is working properly and to make any necessary adjustments. The candidate should also have a contingency plan in case of equipment failure. At the proposal defense, the candidate should take notes concerning suggested and required changes and should confirm with the members of the committee the working title for the dissertation. This title may be adjusted further before the dissertation is submitted to the Office of Thesis and Dissertation Services after the final dissertation defense. The candidate will be responsible for addressing the changes and responding to any clarification requested by the committee. Again, related to the proposal defense, four forms must be submitted: (a) **Schedule for the Presentation of the Dissertation Proposal Form (by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month preceding the defense)**, (b) **The Graduate School Dissertation Proposal Defense Form (1-2 weeks before actual defense)**, (c) **the Advisor's Approval to Submit Form and a copy of the revised proposal** (copies of these forms must be placed in the student's doctoral folder in the HELT office), and (d) the **IRB Protocol Form** (upon successful completion of proposal defense; the candidate prepares the form, and the major advisor submits it). \*Proposal defenses are scheduled once the student has a clean, reviewed proposal. Proposal hearings will not be scheduled at the student's request alone but rather when the advisor has approved the readiness of the proposal.

## The Dissertation

Upon completion of the proposal defense, the candidate should begin to convert the proposal to appropriate dissertation chapters (including changing future tense to past tense and making any revisions suggested by the committee). The candidate **MUST NOT** begin collecting data until the IRB protocol has been approved and the Office of Thesis and Dissertation Services has approved the proposal. In most instances the use of an editor will be of benefit to the candidate, which is particularly true for recurring structural problems or if time has become a major factor. However, the selected editor must be reputable and knowledgeable of the methods of APA style acceptable to the department and the Office of Graduate Studies. Although editors are not inexpensive, a good one can be an invaluable asset. The Graduate Office updates a list of external editors at a reasonable fee. There is no absolute guarantee for the quality of service, yet if the candidate does not know any competent editor personally, contacting the Office of Graduate Studies for editorial assistance can be helpful.

Chapter 4 (titled Presentation of Findings) reports the findings of the study. Quantitative researchers will include their statistical data in this chapter whereas qualitative researchers will include narrative documentation for their findings. Chapter 5 (titled Summary of the Study and the Findings, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations for Future Research) includes discussion, followed by implications, limitations, recommendations/suggestions for future research, and conclusion. This chapter is of major importance because it presents what the candidate has interpreted from the findings/results of the study (in the Discussion section). A typical error made by candidates is confusing a presentation or summary of the findings with a discussion of the findings. A discussion is not a repetition of the findings; a discussion typically begins with a statement of key findings followed by a comparison of these findings with past, relevant studies coupled with insights or new meanings that the findings add. Thus, this section should highlight what the study adds to the body of the literature!

Once all five chapters have been approved by the committee, the candidate, with the guidance of the major advisor, may schedule the final defense. The candidate must be registered in HIED 718 during the semester of the defense and **cannot complete both**

**proposal and final defense in the same semester.** The procedure for scheduling the final defense is similar to that of the proposal defense and cannot be scheduled until all committee members agree that the candidate is ready to defend. (Note: Committee members must have the entire dissertation NO LESS than **2 weeks** before signing the defense schedule form.) Of course, changes may be recommended or required at the defense. The defense must be scheduled by the **20<sup>th</sup> of the month preceding the month** in which the defense will be held. \*Final dissertation defenses are scheduled once the candidate has a clean, reviewed dissertation. Final dissertation defenses will not be scheduled at the candidate's request alone but rather when the advisor has approved the readiness of the final dissertation.

### **The Final Defense**

To schedule the final defense, the candidate must secure the **Schedule for the Presentation of the Final Examination/Dissertation Defense** (please check <http://www.tamuc.edu/academics/graduateSchool/Thesis%20and%20Dissertation%20Services/dissertations.aspx>). The final defense schedule form must be completed by the candidate and signed by all appropriate persons. The form requires the date, time, and place for the defense. As with the proposal defense, the candidate is responsible for scheduling a time that is convenient to all committee members. The completed form, including the dissertation title and the signatures of all committee members, must be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies by the **20<sup>th</sup> of the month preceding** the defense. The candidate must defend the dissertation at the scheduled time. Upon successful completion of the defense, committee members and the Department Head will sign the **Final Examination/Dissertation Defense Report**.

After the final defense, the candidate should make final corrections and/or modifications to the dissertation. Once the candidate has completed this task and an iThenticate report is generated, the dissertation and the report should be submitted to the Graduate School for final checking. In addition, the candidate must submit the following items:

- **Final Examination/Dissertation Defense Report, Doctoral Degree**, completed with all required signatures.

- **Advisor's Approval to Submit Form.**

The final copy of the dissertation is required in the Graduate School approximately 1 month before graduation. The candidate is required to confirm the exact date for this submission as it is listed on the Graduate School website. The candidate should also remember that the submission of the dissertation to the Graduate School does NOT mean that the candidate is registered for graduation. The candidate must apply for graduation with the Registrar's office before the deadline early in the semester of graduation. The candidate should note that there are graduation filing deadlines published each semester in the Schedule of Classes, and these deadlines are enforced. Candidates should also be aware that doctoral academic regalia must be secured well in advance as it is not a stock item in the University Bookstore.

