

UMBC School of Public Policy

Dissertation Handbook

2019-2020

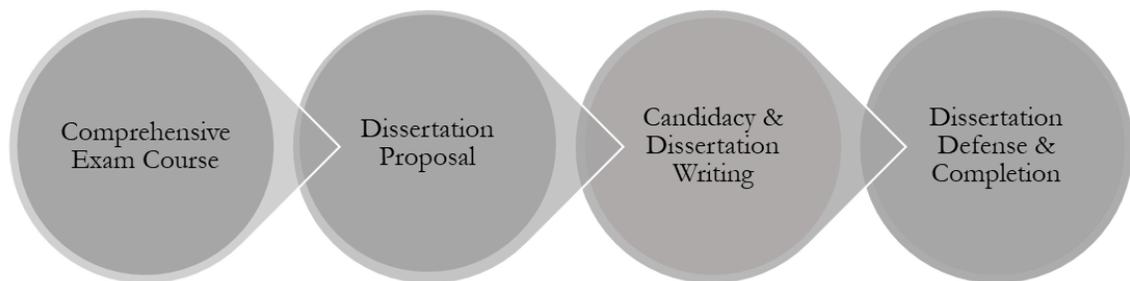


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OVERVIEW

A public policy dissertation is an original work of research that provides insight into important theoretical questions in the field. This handbook describes the pathway to complete a dissertation at the School of Public Policy at UMBC.

This document is a guide and not a rule book. UMBC's rules for doctoral students are published by the Graduate School. You should visit its website early and often to keep up to date on important deadlines, rules, and forms.

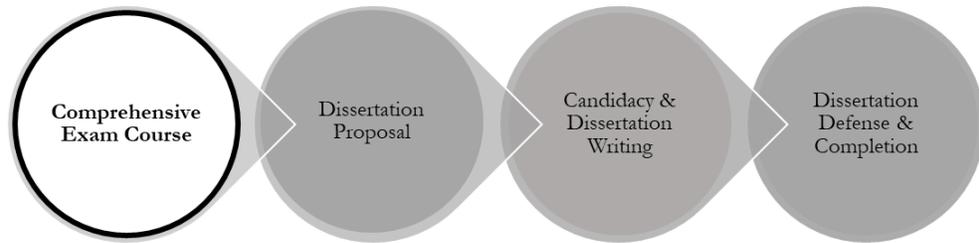
<https://gradschool.umbc.edu/students/policies/>

In addition to the resource of the School of Public Policy, the Graduate School offers several programs to support doctoral students including Dissertation House, Writing Advisers, and a Writing Center.

<https://gradschool.umbc.edu/graduation/dissertations/services/>

Always consult your academic advisers if you have questions or concerns.

STAGE 1: COMPREHENSIVE EXAM COURSE



OVERVIEW

The comprehensive exam in public policy is completed in conjunction with enrollment in PUBL 609: Social Science Approaches to Policy Analysis. This required course provides a synthesis of theory from the core curriculum, focusing on applications to empirical research. Students write a comprehensive exam paper, on a topic of their choice, which demonstrates mastery of relevant theory and the ability to apply theory in empirical research.

The comprehensive exam paper is the first step in your dissertation development process and is intended to serve as the foundation for your dissertation proposal.

STEPS

- Select a faculty adviser for initial dissertation work
- Enroll in PUBL 609
- Complete PUBL 609 by writing a passing comprehensive exam paper
- Complete any remaining core coursework

TIMING AND ENROLLMENT

PUBL 609 is offered every *spring* semester. During the *fall* semester of your final year of core coursework, you must select a faculty adviser who will support and assess your work in PUBL 609. Any full-time public policy faculty or faculty affiliate can serve as an adviser at this stage. Once you have an adviser, request permission to enroll by submitting the Application to take the Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination Course to the instructor.

You may enroll in up to 2 core courses concurrently with PUBL 609, but all core coursework must be completed by the end of the spring semester in which you complete PUBL 609.

REQUIREMENTS FOR PASSING

PUBL 609 is graded pass/fail, based on the quality of the comprehensive exam paper. Your performance will be assessed by the course instructor and your adviser as a team. A passing paper indicates that you are ready to move on to the dissertation proposal writing stage.

Students who do not pass may be invited to revise and resubmit the exam paper at the discretion of the instructor and faculty adviser. Rewritten exams must be completed by the first day of the following fall semester (e.g. a failure in Spring 2020 must be resubmitted by the first day of the Fall 2020 semester).

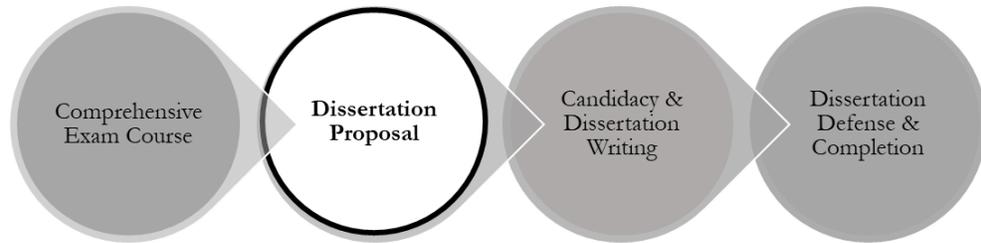
Successful completion of PUBL 609 is equivalent to passing the comprehensive exam and is required to continue to Stage 2.

For students enrolled before Fall 2018 only, there is also the option to take a 3-day take-home comprehensive exam. This test, offered each August and January, is graded by the Public Policy examination committee.

PAPERWORK CHECKLIST

- ✓ Application to take the Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination Course
- ✓ PhD Curriculum Worksheet

STAGE 2: DISSERTATION PROPOSAL



OVERVIEW

After passing the comprehensive exam, you will complete field courses and develop a formal dissertation proposal. During this stage, students plan their dissertation research, including clearly defining research questions, conducting a comprehensive literature review, establishing a theoretical research framework, and identifying empirical methods and data for original research. Graduate School policy dictates that doctoral students advance to candidacy within five years of admission to a doctoral program. Talk to your adviser or the Graduate Program Director if you need an extension.

STEPS

- Field and elective coursework
- Select a dissertation adviser
- Draft a dissertation abstract
- Form a dissertation committee
- Write a dissertation proposal
- Apply for IRB approval for human subjects research
- Schedule a dissertation proposal defense
- Defend your proposal
- Submit paperwork for candidacy

ENROLLMENT

You must complete the required field and elective coursework for your area of track before moving to candidacy. Field and elective coursework should be selected to foster expertise in theory and methods required to conduct empirical research in your area of interest.

To work independently on your proposal with the support of your adviser, you should register for PUBL 898: Pre-doctoral Dissertation Research. Students who have completed all required coursework register for 3-9 credits of PUBL 898 until advancing to candidacy. Ask your adviser for permission to register.

SELECTING A DISSERTATION ADVISER

Select a dissertation adviser with substantive expertise in your areas of interest. The adviser in the proposal stage will typically become the student's dissertation committee chair. To serve as a solo chair, the adviser must be an eligible "regular" graduate faculty member at UMBC. A faculty member who is not "regular" faculty can co-chair with a "regular" faculty member.

Check the Graduate School faculty list to see if your adviser is eligible to chair a dissertation committee:

<https://gradschool.umbc.edu/faculty/>

CONDUCTING ETHICAL RESEARCH

Social science research is an exciting and rewarding endeavor, but there also many risks. Each student is responsible for ensuring that dissertation research is original and ethical. At a minimum:

1. Familiarize yourself with norms and rules regarding attribution and plagiarism in academic work (https://www.umbc.edu/undergrad_ed/honesty/)
2. Complete basic Human Subjects Research Training and additional training components that are relevant to the population you will study (<https://research.umbc.edu/2135-2/>)
3. Apply for approval for human subjects research from the UMBC's Institutional Review Board (<https://research.umbc.edu/institutional-review-board-human-subjects/>)

CITATION FORMAT

Citations and references should be formatted consistently in your written work. There are several citation formats used in academia (e.g. Chicago Style Manual, APA, etc.). Choose the one that is used in the venue where you hope to publish your work and follow those guidelines consistently throughout your proposal and dissertation narratives.

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Overview

Approval of a dissertation proposal includes 4 steps: 1) research abstract, 2) form a committee, 3) written dissertation proposal, and 4) oral proposal defense.

Step 1. Research Abstract

The abstract is a short (typically 2-page) document that summarizes your dissertation plans. Its dual purpose is to clarify your research ideas and communicate these ideas to potential committee members. An abstract will typically include:

- Statement of the research objective and motivation for the study
- Description of the theoretical framework to be applied
- Description of research questions and the potential contribution the dissertation could make to the academic literature and policy communities
- Preliminary bibliography of relevant prior studies (no page limit)

Completed abstracts should be submitted to the Director of the School of Public Policy who will share them with core and affiliate faculty. This is a useful step in recruiting dissertation committee members.

Step 2. Form the Committee

A dissertation committee supports your research and writing process and evaluates the final written dissertation. Each student is responsible for reaching out to faculty to form a committee. Typically, this is done by sharing the abstract and visiting office hours.

Committee members should be diverse in terms of academic training and research methods, while having expertise in your substantive policy area, theoretical framework, or selected research methods.

Timeline

The Graduate School must approve your committee **at least six months prior to your dissertation defense**. To meet this goal and get the most support for your work, the committee should be formed as early as possible in the proposal development stage.

Membership

Dissertation committees must conform to the Graduate School's rules for committee composition. All members must hold doctoral or appropriate terminal degrees. The

Graduate School designates UMBC faculty as regular, associate, or special. A minimum of 3 committee members must be “regular” graduate faculty.

Designations for UMBC faculty are listed at the Graduate School website:

<https://gradschool.umbc.edu/faculty/>

UMB graduate faculty are also eligible to serve on UMBC dissertation committees. That list is available here:

<https://www.graduate.umaryland.edu/About/Faculty-and-Staff/Graduate-Faculty/>

Each committee of 5 members must include 3 “regular” members and the following:

Chairperson (1)

Your chairperson is your primary dissertation adviser for the duration of the process. Chairs must be “regular” graduate faculty and must be affiliated with or appointed by the School of Public Policy.

Readers (2)

Readers determine if your dissertation is ready to defend. Readers can come from any department at UMBC.

External Member (1)

At least one faculty member must be appointed outside the School of Public Policy. You can choose an external member from any other UMBC department (including affiliated departments) with any designation from the Graduate School. External members may also be employed outside UMBC, if they have the appropriate degree and distinguished professional record.

If you choose an external member who is not listed on the Graduate School’s faculty directory, you must submit that member’s CV to the Graduate School with your committee nomination form. Official approval must come from the Graduate School for any members who are not UMBC faculty.

Other Members (1)

Any UMBC or external faculty member with a terminal degree can serve as the final committee member. Any external members must be approved by the Graduate School.

Step 3. Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation proposal serves as a basis for your dissertation research. The proposal should provide the committee with detailed information about your research plans including the policy focus and background, specific research questions, relevant extant literature, expected contribution to academic and policy communities, theoretical framework for analysis, methods, and data.

Dissertation Formats

The School of Public Policy supports two distinct dissertation formats – Multi-Chapter and Three-Paper. The text of the dissertation proposal will form a substantial part of the final dissertation, so choosing the right format is important at the proposal stage. Talk to your adviser about which format is best for your publication and career plans.

Option 1: Multi-Chapter Dissertation

The multi-chapter dissertation is a cohesive work, appropriate for publication as an academic book. For students intending to use this format, the proposal typically includes chapters up to, but not including, empirical results. A typical outline of the chapters is:

Theoretical and policy background and motivation for the dissertation research, including statement of an empirical and theoretical research puzzle
Comprehensive review of extant literature and relevant theory that set up your puzzle and will allow you to address it
Clear statement of empirical research objectives and the potential contribution of the work to both theory testing/theory development and practical policy work
Description of and justification for planned research methods
Description of planned data sources

Option 2: Three-Paper Dissertation

The three-paper dissertation consists of three related but distinct empirical research papers, each appropriate for publication on its own in an academic journal. Three-paper dissertations are typically unified by a common theoretical framework or policy focus. Students using this format must complete Paper #1 before the proposal defense. The full dissertation proposal for a three-paper study typically includes:

Completed draft of Paper #1
Abstracts outlining the research questions, motivation, framework, methods and relevant data for Paper #2 and Paper #3

Step 4: Dissertation Proposal Defense

When you and your committee determine that you are ready to defend your proposal, you are responsible for scheduling the event. It can be a challenge to get busy committee members together, so plan well in advance. Public Policy staff will officially announce your defense and invite the UMBC community to attend.

At least one month prior

- ✓ Provide each committee member with a copy of the dissertation proposal
- ✓ Contact committee members to identify a time (typically 2 hours) when all five members can attend a defense.
- ✓ Ask Public Policy staff to book a room and arrange for any needed technology

At least one week prior

- ✓ Email Public Policy staff with the details needed to invite the community to your defense (date, time, location, committee members, and title)
- ✓ Submit the Application to Form a Preliminary Dissertation Committee to public policy staff

Structure

The proposal defense is a public event attended (in person or virtually) by all committee members. A typical proposal defense consists of a presentation by the student, followed by questions from the committee and feedback on the proposed research. Finally, the committee meets privately to determine if the student is ready to advance to candidacy.

The proposal defense is likely the only time all committee members will meet in one room before the final defense. You should take full advantage of the opportunity to discuss your research design with a panel of interested experts and to set clear expectations for the work. Even a successful defense often results in recommendations for substantially revisions to research plans. You should leave the defense with a clear plan for completion of a dissertation that meets the expectations of the full committee.

It is acceptable for one or more committee members to participate in a proposal defense without being in the room. You are responsible for arranging and testing the appropriate technology to ensure that long-distance members can participate. Public Policy staff can help if you contact them at least one week prior to the event.

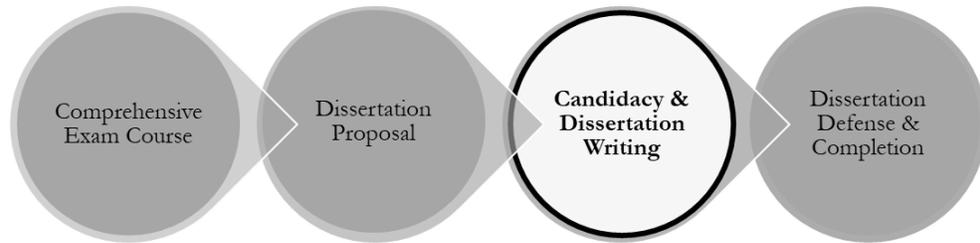
Paperwork at the Defense

Following a successful dissertation proposal defense, students may advance to doctoral candidacy. Some forms need to be signed by the full committee, so it is helpful (but not required) to bring paperwork to the defense to collect signatures.

Paperwork Checklist for Dissertation Proposal Defense

- ✓ Approval of Dissertation Proposal Form
- ✓ PhD Final Exam Committee Nomination Form
- ✓ CV for all any committee member who is not listed as UMBC graduate faculty here: <https://gradschool.umbc.edu/faculty/>

STAGE 3: CANDIDACY AND DISSERTATION WRITING



OVERVIEW

Doctoral candidacy is a major milestone on the path to a PhD. Students formally apply to the Graduate School for Ph.D. candidacy upon successful defense of a proposal. During the candidacy stage you will complete the empirical work of the dissertation, write a publishable narrative, and have it reviewed by committee members. This stage can last anywhere from two semesters to four years. Extensions beyond four years require permission from the Graduate School.

PAPERWORK FOR CANDIDACY

- ✓ Application for Admission to Candidacy

Visit the <https://gradschool.umbc.edu/students/candidacy/> to complete and submit these forms.

ENROLLMENT

Students who have officially advanced to candidacy must enroll in PUBL 899: Dissertation Research each semester until completion. This is a fixed 9-credit course, but students are only charged for two credits per semester at either the in-state or out-of-state rate. You must enroll in PUBL 899 for at least two semesters prior to defense. Ask your adviser for permission to register.

FUNDING FOR CANDIDATES

The Graduate School offers dissertation funding through an application process (https://gradschool.umbc.edu/files/2015/09/Dissertation_Fellowship_Summary.pdf). Talk to your adviser about other opportunities in your field.

DEADLINES AND FORMATTING

Completed dissertations must be in the format required by ProQuest. Candidates should be familiar with deadlines, styles, and required formatting. UMBC rules and formatting templates are available at the Graduate School website:

<https://gradschool.umbc.edu/graduation/dissertations/>

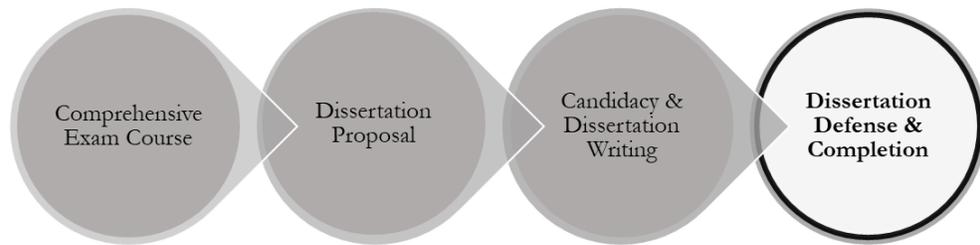
Dissertation style guides are available from the Graduate School:

<https://gradschool.umbc.edu/graduation/dissertations/guides/>

RESEARCH ETHICS

Students conducting human subjects research are fully responsible for the IRB process at UMBC. Keep track of reporting and renewal deadlines throughout your research process.

STAGE 4: DISSERTATION DEFENSE & COMPLETION



OVERVIEW

When your dissertation research and written report are complete, the final step is the oral dissertation defense. The defense is a public event that must be attended by the candidate and all committee members. Traditionally, the defense is your opportunity to defend your qualifications for a Ph.D. More appropriately, the defense is the culminating experience of many years of doctoral study and research.

TIMING OF THE DEFENSE

Graduate School policy dictates that the dissertation should be completed within four years after admission to candidacy.

Several benchmarks must be reached before you schedule a defense:

- ✓ At least six months prior, get your committee approved by the Graduate School by submitting the “Nomination of Members for the Final Doctoral Dissertation Examination Committee Form”:
https://gradschool.umbc.edu/files/2017/05/phd_final_exam_committee_nomination.pdf
- ✓ Students must complete at least two semesters of PUBL 899. The earliest you can defend is the second semester of PUBL 899 enrollment.
- ✓ The candidate and dissertation committee chair agree that the dissertation is complete and ready to defend
- ✓ Two committee members designated as “readers” agree that the written dissertation is complete and ready to defend
- ✓ At least two weeks prior, submit the “Readiness to Defend Form,” signed by the chair and two readers to the Graduate School:
- ✓ https://gradschool.umbc.edu/files/2018/06/dissert_cert2018.pdf
- ✓ All other committee members have been provided with a complete draft and been given the opportunity to offer feedback on readiness to defend

SCHEDULING THE DEFENSE

Once your committee agrees that you are ready to defend, you can schedule the event. While dissertation defenses are an important part of faculty work, it can be challenging to find a time to meet.

When considering the timing of your defense, check the Graduate School's deadlines for submitting both your Application to Graduate and final dissertation. These deadlines occur before the end of the semester and must be met to graduate in your target semester.

Deadlines for Application to Graduate:

<https://gradschool.umbc.edu/graduation/apply/>

Deadlines for dissertation submission:

<https://gradschool.umbc.edu/graduation/dissertations/>

At least six months prior to defending

- ✓ Get your committee approved by the Graduate School. Include cv's for any members who are not UMBC faculty
https://gradschool.umbc.edu/files/2017/05/phd_final_exam_committee_nomination.pdf

At least one month prior to defending

- ✓ Provide each committee member with final a copy of the dissertation
- ✓ Contact committee members to identify a time (typically 2 hours) when all five members can attend a defense
- ✓ Ask Public Policy staff to book a room and arrange for any needed technology

At least two weeks prior to defending

- ✓ Email Public Policy staff with the details needed to invite the community to your defense (date, time, location, committee members, and title)
- ✓ Work with your chair to design the agenda for the defense
- ✓ Submit the Readiness to Defend Form
https://gradschool.umbc.edu/files/2018/06/dissert_cert2018.pdf
- ✓ Submit the Dissertation Announcement Form
https://gradschool.umbc.edu/files/2016/08/PhD_dissertation_defense.pdf

- ✓ If any members will attend virtually, apply for permission form the Graduate Schools (see policy here):
<https://gradschool.umbc.edu/graduation/dissertations/>

FORMAT OF THE DISSERTATION DEFENSE

Typically, the candidate presents a summary of the work – including key findings and major contributions to the literature, limitations, and plans for future work. Committee members and audience members should have sufficient time to ask questions and engage in lively debate and discussion with the candidate.

Following the presentation and public questions, the committee questions the candidate privately. Attendees who are not graduate faculty are excused from the room during this period.

Finally, the committee meets privately to discuss the outcome (pass or fail). The candidate and other attendees are excused from the room during this period.

It is common for the committee to request some revisions before formally passing a dissertation. In that case, your chair will coordinate feedback, the revision process, and a final deadline for submission. Note that you can minimize the need for revisions after the defense by soliciting feedback from all committee members earlier in the process.

FINAL SUBMISSION

The dissertation process is not complete, and you will not graduate, until you complete required Graduate School paperwork. Most importantly, your final written dissertation, with requested revisions, must be formally submitted to through ProQuest. Details on submission deadlines, instructions, and required formatting are posted by the Graduate School:

<https://gradschool.umbc.edu/graduation/dissertations/>

PAPERWORK CHECKLIST

Before the defense the following paperwork needs to be submitted to the Graduate School:

- ✓ [Certification of Readiness to Defend the Dissertation](#)
- ✓ [Announcement of PhD. Dissertation Defense](#)
- ✓ [Application for Diploma](#)

After the defense the following is required for completion:

- ✓ Report of the Examining Committee - brought to the defense by the designated Graduate School representative, a member of the dissertation committee, and submitted within 48 hours of the final defense
- ✓ Approval of Ph.D. Dissertation (signed by the dissertation chair and submitted with the dissertation)
https://gradschool.umbc.edu/files/2015/10/sample_of_approval_sheet.pdf
- ✓ Ph.D. Exit Survey <https://gradschool.umbc.edu/graduation/reqs/phd-survey/>

APPENDIX 1: DISSERTATION WRITING RESOURCES

SOME HELPFUL HINTS FOR DISSERTATION WRITING

- Familiarize yourself with the content, scope, and structure of the written dissertation before you begin. Example dissertations are available in the Public Policy reading room, the UMBC library, and ProQuest.
- Attend one or more defenses to prepare for your own.
- Use a consistent and standard citation and bibliography format (APA is recommended). All citations should appear parenthetically in the text (not endnotes or footnotes).
- Dissertations must be formatted according to UMBC and ProQuest guidelines. Using a style sheet from the beginning will make this easier (<https://gradschool.umbc.edu/graduation/dissertations/guides/>).
- Write the abstract, proposal, and the dissertation in a clear, straightforward essay or narrative form using Standard English.
- Remember that you are telling a story. Even the literature review should be written to support the ideas that your research is novel, fills a significant gap, and employs methods appropriate to the question you have investigated.
- Make sure you carefully proofread for typos and spelling and grammatical errors. Do not rely on spell-check or grammar check to find your errors.
- Illustrations may be used to where helpful. Figures should be sequentially numbered (e.g., Figure 1, 2, 3, etc.). All figures should be referenced and explained in the narrative.
- Tables should be used to present relevant data and results. Use a consistent table format that is attractive, clearly labeled, and easy to read. Table notes should be used for detailed explanations. Tables should be sequentially numbered and referenced in the text.
- Employ appropriate major and minor headings to divide the principal sections of the text of the proposal.
- The length of a dissertation proposal and dissertation will vary by disciplinary focus, topic, and scope of research. There is no set minimum or maximum length.

USEFUL GUIDES FOR DISSERTATION AND OTHER ACADEMIC WRITING

Writing and style:

William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White, 1999, *The Elements of Style*, 4th ed. (Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon)

Kate Turabian, 1996, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

General resources on writing and thinking:

Howard Becker, *Tricks of the Trade* (University of Chicago Press)

Howard Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists* (University of Chicago Press)

Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*

Joan A. Bolker, *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day* (Owl Books, 1998).

John Gerring, *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. Second Edition (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Carol Roberts and Laura Hyatt, *The Dissertation Journey*, 3d. ed. (Corwin, 2018).

Elizabeth A. Wentz, *How to Design, Write, and Present a Successful Dissertation Proposal* (Sage, 2013). Appendix 2. Application to take PUBL 609