



Alternative option for dissertation in Human Development

This alternative to the standard single large dissertation manuscript project is one of a portfolio of manuscripts (at least 3) that are to be submitted for publication (do not have to be published at time of defense but some may be). At least two of the manuscripts must be empirical pieces, and ALL must have student as first author although there may be co-authors. The papers must form a cohesive program of research, with clear bridges and links between each manuscript, as well as a short introduction chapter that introduces the program of research, an overarching first chapter literature review and a summative conclusion chapter commenting on contributions, implications, limitations and future directions of the whole program. This manuscript based dissertation is an existing option at McGill. The suggested changes to standard program procedure for this "alternative" is centered more around how the dissertation committee will function and proposal defense expectations.

First, the student and supervisor must agree on this option (it is NOT for everyone). Second the dissertation committee needs to be informed about their role in this alternative model. Specifically, in the standard model the dissertation committee would read the student proposal which laid out the students' future plan for a research project and at the proposal defense stage the committee would advise the student on design and methodology of the project (suggesting changes around data collection, measures, as well addressing if it was feasible and sufficient for a dissertation, as well as more conceptual issues, and once the student had made the suggested changes the committee "signed off" on the proposal. Once the proposal is approved, the student would complete the project with little feedback from the committee unless the project did not work out (i.e., could not get participants). Subsequently when the dissertation was written it would be submitted to the dissertation committee who would basically check to see that what was proposed was done and that the final dissertation was an original and significant contribution. In this standard model it is understood that the role of the dissertation committee is to help the student design and plan their project so ideally no existing data is used and no projects/manuscripts have been started.

In the alternative "portfolio" model the committee supports the student in creating a portfolio of work that forms an original, significant and cohesive research program. In this model, the committee forms at the time of the proposal defense during which the student proposes a program/portfolio of research of



at least three manuscripts (some of which may have been started, using existing and/or to be collected data). The committee's role at this time is to evaluate and advise on (a) is the review of literature sufficient to support the notion that the proposed program is original and significant? (b) do the proposed manuscripts form a cohesive whole, c) is the proposed program sufficient for a dissertation? d) is it feasible and reasonable for a dissertation (i.e., too ambitious?) and e) does the student demonstrate a critical understanding of their field and the research methodology they are using/proposing? If the committee feels all of these are satisfactory they approve the proposal and the student proceeds.

Once a year the dissertation committee will reconvene to evaluate the student's progress in developing their portfolio, provide suggestions and support and agree on possible redirections as needed (e.g., if a study/manuscript did not work out and the student wants to substitute another). At the final point when the student and supervisor ask the committee to read the final dissertation the committee determines if this is an original and significant contribution, is a cohesive program of research and sufficient for a dissertation.