

McGill School of Social Work
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL
WORK MCGILL
UNIVERSITY

Dissertation Project

The Dissertation Project is the main research project carried out by Joint PhD Program students.

The approval of the dissertation project proposal (see guidelines below) is not a course requirement, but is a formal stage in the progress of the PhD candidate, indicating that the proposal is acceptable and the student may proceed with an REB (Research Ethics Board) application and their research project. Once the doctoral committee approves the dissertation project proposal, the supervisor completes the Dissertation Project Proposal Approval form and submits it to the Social Work Office.

- [Dissertation Proposal Approval Form](#)

Timeline for Completion of the Dissertation Proposal

Students and faculty PhD Committee members are expected to work together so that students can begin their data collection by the Fall or Winter semesters of the third year of their program (PhD 4). Our intention is for data collection to begin while students benefit from either university or external funding. When drafts of the Dissertation Proposal are submitted to committee members, two weeks is considered a reasonable maximum for feedback.

Fall PhD 3	Complete the Comprehensive Exam
Winter PhD 3	Register for Dissertation Seminar and begin developing the Dissertation Proposal
Spring PhD 3	Present draft Dissertation Proposal to PhD Committee and receive detailed feedback (iterative process). Student and committee should agree on timeline for drafts and feedback.
Fall PhD 4	Finalize Dissertation Proposal, receive committee approval and submit Ethics application

Ethical Requirements for Research

All students conducting research involving human subjects must meet the requirements set out in the [McGill Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Subjects](#).

Guidelines for the preparation of a Manuscript (Article) Based Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation proposal is a crucial step in the Joint PhD Program. These guidelines aim to assist in providing a framework for writing your proposal. A dissertation proposal should be clear and concisely written and be no longer than 10-12 single spaced pages (12-point font, with 1 inch margins). The dissertation proposal should include the following key components: i) research questions; ii) a statement of the research problem; iii) purpose statement iv) brief literature review; v) the theoretical or conceptual framework informing the work; (vi) methodology and research design ; and vii) identified relevance to social work practice, policy and/or research.

If your plan is to produce a manuscript-based dissertation you must outline the planned papers and their relationship to your overall project at the proposal stage. This document outlines how you should adapt your thesis proposal in such a way as to ensure all the components required above are still present. Should a student elect to pursue a manuscript-based thesis after the proposal stage that option and a process for paper approvals can be discussed with the student's supervisor and committee members.

Similar to the traditional format for a dissertation proposal, the manuscript based dissertation proposal is expected to include sections (i)- (vii) listed above to provide a guide for the whole work. Given some of these elements will also be included in the outline of each planned paper it is possible that these sections look slightly shorter than the traditional format. A **concise overview** of the planned manuscripts with an explanation of how they link together to address the overarching question(s) should also be provided.

Manuscript Outlines:

Following a cohesive overview of the full body of work, an outline for each paper should be presented beginning with the specific questions or concepts that will be addressed or discussed. Depending on the plans, it may be useful for students to think of presenting this work in a series of different steps or stages.

For non-empirical papers (i.e. conceptual papers, methodological papers, or systematic reviews of literature) elements to be included are: the subjects to be addressed, the central thesis or argument to be posited; the theoretical or conceptual framework that underpins the manuscript, and a detailed account of the literature that will be reviewed and integrated. Systematic literature reviews should also include a detailed search design.

For empirical papers (i.e. papers based on student led research projects, meta-analyses ; secondary data analyses) elements to be included are: specific research questions; theoretical or conceptual frameworks informing the paper, a methodology and research design section informing the paper.

Please remember that a manuscript based thesis must include at least three papers of which two must be empirically based. For further information about the SSW guidelines for manuscript based theses go to

https://www.mcgill.ca/socialwork/files/socialwork/ssw_guidelines_for_an_article-based_thesis_0.pdf

