

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 the 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 10-15 double-spaced pages (12-point font, with 1 inch margins – 3000-4500 words). The dissertation proposal should include the following key components: i) research question; ii) a statement of the research problem; iii) brief literature review; iv) the theoretical framework informing your work; (v) research methods; and vi) identified relevance to social work practice, policy and/or research.

Below are further details of each section:

(i) Research Question(s)

Identify your key research question(s)

(ii) Statement of the Research Problem

This should take the form of a brief and concise overview of the general area of study, why this area is important to study (gaps in knowledge, practice-based relevance) and potential benefits of undertaking this research.

(iii) Identification of the Relevant Literature

In this section, you should develop your proposal to demonstrate that you are aware of the current state of knowledge related to your research problem. References to key articles and texts should be made to show that you appreciate their relevance to your research area. A PhD is an original piece of research and so you should demonstrate how your proposed area has not been studied before (identify gaps in relation to your research area).

(iv) Identification of the Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The theoretical/conceptual framework or key concepts that you intend to draw upon in your work should be identified, explained and justified. Why did you choose this perspective? How is it relevant and important to your research?

(v) Methodology

In this section, it necessary to detail the methodological approach chosen for your research and why this approach is the most appropriate. The proposal must include:

- Methodological approach and its relevance
- Details of your different methods of data collection (ex. sample, procedures, tools, data management for each type of data collected) are necessary.
- Method of data analysis
- Validity, reliability and/or authenticity strategies
- Ethical considerations

Reference to the relevant literature is necessary. In addition to explaining your method, it is important to highlight the timeframe and phases necessary for your research. If applicable, a budget should also be included.

(vi) Relevance and Implications for Social Work and Related Disciplines

In this section, you should address the implications of your work for theory, practice, policy and/or research, as well as possible avenues for dissemination of results.