

## PsyD Dissertation Guidelines, PsyD Program

### School of Psychology

The Fuller School of Psychology's PsyD program prepares psychologists for excellence in integrated clinical practice. This preparation includes an 8-unit clinical dissertation that:

1. is an original (this project cannot be based on work previously done by the student) scholarly work completed independently by the student under the supervision and guidance of the student's dissertation chair and committee; and
2. demonstrates the abilities to utilize the research literature and implement a sound scholarly process to analyze, evaluate, and/or provide new information relevant to the practice of psychology.

See the SOP Student Handbook for description of the chair and committee selection process, proposal colloquium, final orals, timeline, and relevant forms for this 8-unit dissertation. Dissertations will include a title page, abstract, reference section, and any relevant tables, figures, and/or appendices. See the latest APA Style Manual for formatting requirements.

### TYPES OF CLINICAL DISSERTATIONS

Types of dissertations include those utilizing traditional research methods (Empirical Research Study, Clinical Case Study, and Program Evaluation) and those designated as applied scholarship (Resource Development and Critical analysis of the Literature).

**Empirical Research Study.** Uses qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method approaches to collecting (or using archival datasets) and analyzing data regarding an issue relevant to the advancement of psychological practice and/or research.

**Clinical Case Study.** Uses archival clinical information to develop theory, practice and training in psychology (e.g., drawing attention to critical areas of practice, describing and analyzing new approaches to therapy, extending the interpretability of large-scale outcome studies).

**Program Evaluation.** Evaluates a treatment or mental health promotion or prevention program. This could include systematic analyses of community needs for professional services or process and outcome measures for service delivery.

**Resource Development.** Draws on a scholarly body of literature and translates these empirical findings into practice by using them to develop a professional resource (workshop, training manual, clinical intervention, etc.) for a specific applied setting.

**Critical Analysis of the Literature.** Includes synthesis, analysis, and critique (conceptual and methodological) of empirical findings and theory relevant to a focused clinical problem.

## FORMAT OF CLINICAL DISSERTATIONS

Dissertation proposal and defense documents contain the following sections:

TYPE OF DISSERTATION	PROPOSAL DOCUMENT	DEFENSE DOCUMENT
Empirical Research Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Method</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Method</li> <li>• Results</li> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>
Clinical Case Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Method</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Method</li> <li>• Results</li> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>
Program Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction/Description of Program</li> <li>• Evaluation Question</li> <li>• Method</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction/Description of Program</li> <li>• Evaluation Question</li> <li>• Method</li> <li>• Results</li> <li>• Discussion</li> <li>• Recommendations</li> <li>• Executive Summary (Appendix)</li> </ul>
Resource Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Literature</li> <li>• Method for Resource Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Method/Procedures</li> <li>• Results/Content Descriptions (e.g., sessions, workshops, etc.)</li> <li>• Discussion</li> <li>• Formatted Resource as Attachment</li> </ul>
Critical Analysis of the Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Review and Analysis Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Review and Analysis Procedures</li> <li>• Integration and Analysis of Literature</li> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>

## CONTENT, SCOPE, AND LENGTH OF CLINICAL DISSERTATIONS

The guidelines below are subject to change at the discretion of the dissertation Chair and committee. Examples of completed PsyD dissertations can be found on Canvas.

### EMPIRICAL RESEARCH STUDY

Empirical Research Studies include experimental, quasi-experimental, and exploratory studies utilizing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches for data collection and analyses. PsyD students may participate in empirical studies in groups of two to three, collecting data together or analyzing archival data within the same study. However, each dissertation must be written independently and provide a unique contribution.

Although the scope of this study can vary at the discretion of the clinical dissertation committee and depending on the study topic and information available, the following are suggested to maintain a workload of 8 units for the clinical dissertation: (1) the number, type, and complexity of research questions within a quantitative study should vary depending upon the amount of work it will take to collect the data, and (2) the scope and complexity of a qualitative study should vary depending upon the research question and type of qualitative method selected. Following are guidelines for the sections of an Empirical Research Study:

Introduction	Review the literature and set the argument based on empirical literature for conducting the study. Most Introductions for a clinical dissertation focus on literature within the previous ten years as well as primary seminal articles in the field before that time if they exist.
Method	Identify the research design or approach selected and provide the rationale for the way in which the project was conducted (may include explaining the underlying research paradigm, for example, in qualitative study). Also describe how you gathered and analyzed the data (e.g., participants, instruments, and procedures) and provide the reasons for your choices.
Results	Present data analyses in response to research questions (qualitative study) or hypotheses (quantitative study). Presentation of results may vary depending on nature of analyses. Organize data into tables or graphs where appropriate.
Discussion	Provide a brief summary of the study and discusses how the significant findings of the study answers the purpose of the research and the research questions posed in the introduction. Also address implications and conceptual and methodological limitations of the study, innovations and potential contributions of the project, and recommendations for future research.

Parameters for the Method, Results, and Discussion Sections are similar to other empirical studies (see Heppner & Heppner, 2004). Empirical clinical Dissertations are article length, approximately 30 pages.

## CLINICAL CASE STUDY

One of the distinctive strengths of the Clinical Case Study is that it has the potential to create a rich, credible, contextual knowledge base utilizing multiple sources of information. Based on the aims of the clinical case study (e.g., applying new theories or interventions, and/or assessing efficacy in untested populations), a clinical case is carefully selected within the parameters or rationale of the study outlined. Below are guidelines for the Clinical Case Study report format developed by journals such as Pragmatic Case Studies in Psychotherapy and Clinical Case Studies:

Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Case context (purpose for the clinical case study)</li><li>• Literature review: guiding conceptualization based on research and theory</li><li>• Rationale for the specific clinical case selection</li></ul>
Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Description and history of clinical case</li><li>• Formulation and treatment plan</li><li>• Plan for use of clinical case material</li></ul>
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assessment of the clinical case (problems, goals, strengths, and history)</li><li>• Course of therapy and/or treatment outcome</li><li>• Therapy monitoring and use of feedback information</li></ul>
Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Concluding evaluation of the process and outcome of therapy</li><li>• Implications and recommendations</li></ul>

Clinical case study dissertations are article-length, approximately 30 pages.

## PROGRAM EVALUATION

The Program Evaluation clinical dissertation is most effective when undertaken as a group project or as part of a larger evaluation project.

Clinical dissertation guidelines for the format of a program evaluation dissertation are similar to those for an Empirical Research Study with the following additional material: (1) description of the program or the need to be assessed in the introduction, (2) recommendations to the identified program in the discussion section, and (3) an executive summary included as an Appendix. Following are guidelines for the sections of a Program Evaluation clinical dissertation:

Introduction	Describe program evaluation question. Provide background and description of the program. Review the literature and develop the evaluation question based on empirical literature.
Method	Identify the evaluation design selected and provide the rationale for the way in which the project was conducted. Describe how data was gathered and analyzed (e.g., sampling, participants, instruments, and procedures).
Results	Present results of data analyses in response to evaluation questions. Presentation of results may vary depending on nature of analyses. Organize data into tables or graphs where appropriate.
Discussion	Provide a brief summary of the study and discusses how the significant findings of the study answers the purpose of the research and the research questions posed in the introduction. Also address implications and conceptual and methodological limitations of the study, and a series of recommendations for program stakeholders.
Appendix	Include an Executive Summary outlining key components of project and listing recommendations for stakeholders (1-2 pages in length).

Program Evaluation dissertations may be slightly longer than article-length to include relevant programmatic information, approximately 30-40 pages.

## RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The Resources Development clinical dissertation may include workshops, training manuals, or a mental health program intervention. Following are guidelines for the sections of a Resource Development clinical dissertation:

Introduction	The introduction for a Resource Development clinical dissertation must provide a solid rationale based on literature and evidence of community need for developing the resource. A description of the community and population for whom the resource is being developed should also be included.
Method	Method for developing the resource should be outlined, including criteria for literature review and plan for how the resource will be developed.
Integration and Analysis of Literature	Literature relevant to resource development will be analyzed with regard to best available empirical evidence and appropriate application for the particular community for whom the resource is being developed.
Results and Discussion	This section reviews findings within the context of the literature and suggests implications for clinical practice as well as for future research and program/resource development. If empirical data was gathered to evaluate the resource, it can be included in this section along with a discussion of the implications of the findings.
Appendix	The resource or training manual developed should be attached.

Approximate length of a resource development clinical dissertation is 30-35 pages of text (not including references, tables, or appendices). It is suggested, though not required, that information and/or data be included such as evaluations for workshops.

## CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE

A Critical Analysis of the Literature is a review article like those often found in the journal, Psychology Bulletin, synthesizing several bodies of literature. Following are guidelines for the sections of a Critical Analysis of the Literature clinical dissertation:

Introduction	Provides a rationale for the analysis of the literature of this clinical problem. It must also be demonstrated how this literature analysis is original.
Review and Analysis Plan (Procedures)	This section provides a plan for conducting the literature review and a plan for how it will be critiqued. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for literature review will also be included
Integration and Analysis of Literature	The integration and analysis of the literature will generate and select among possible views of the clinical problem based on the best available empirical evidence and theoretical literature. Limits of certainty inherent in different types of clinical and scientific data and scholarship should also be considered.
Discussion	Findings from the analysis of literature, including clinical and research applications will be discussed.

The length of the dissertation is at the discretion of the Clinical Dissertation committee; however, a suggested page length is no more than 40-50 pages (including references but not including tables or appendices).