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**PhD Program in Social Welfare**

**DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS COVER PAGE**

**Please complete the cover page, attach it to the Dissertation Prospectus, and submit the original plus 1 additional copy to the Doctoral Program Chair along with 2 copies of the Prospectus Reviews from each Reading Committee member of the Supervisory Committee.1 (Each member must complete the Prospectus Evaluation Form.)[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Student Name:**

**Dissertation title:**

**Qualifying Paper Submission data (Paper must be submitted for publication prior to approval of the Dissertation Prospectus; see PhD Program Manual):**

Paper title:

Journal submitted to:

Date of Submission:       [ ] Accepted [ ] Under Review

**Supervisory Committee Department**

Chair:

Member:

Member:

Member:

GSR:

Type Double asterisk (\*\*) next to the chair name and single asterisk (\*) next to the two members of the Reading Committee.

**Estimated completion date for the dissertation:**

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*Signature, PhD Student Date*

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*Signature, Chair of Supervisory Committee Date*

**Program Office Use Only:**

Reading Committee Officially Instituted:

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*Signature, PhD Program Coordinator Date*

**Dissertation Prospectus**

The dissertation prospectus is a brief document (10-15 pages) prepared by PhD students who have advanced to candidacy and are prepared to undertake their dissertation research. This prospectus, which is developed and written in consultation with the Supervisory Committee, is regarded as a proposal for dissertation research that provides the Social Welfare Faculty with enough information about the candidate’s plan of dissertation research to assess its appropriateness, originality, rigor, and feasibility. Preparation and approval of the dissertation prospectus is a required preliminary step before the implementation of dissertation research. The dissertation prospectus serves as a critical benchmark for evaluating the adequacy of the candidate’s dissertation. **The Prospectus should be approved by the supervisory committee and submitted to the PhD Program Office.**2

***Structure of the Dissertation Prospectus***

Although each prospectus will have unique content, all must follow specific structural guidelines and elements of content to ensure that the prospectus addresses all PhD Program and Graduate School criteria for dissertation research.

* **Cover Page[[2]](#footnote-2)**Contains the proposed title of the dissertation, the candidate's full name, the names of all committee members, and the name and signature of the candidate's Supervisory Committee Chair. The Committee members who compose the Reading Committee are designated on this form. This subcommittee consists of at least three members of the Supervisory Committee (two of whom must be Social Welfare Faculty). The GSR does not serve on the Reading Committee.
* **Statement of the Research Problem and Major Questions**This part of the prospectus describes a research problem that is clearly relevant to the field of Social Welfare with a logical progression to the candidate's research aims. The research problem must be described in sufficient detail to ensure that any Social Welfare Faculty member reading the prospectus can become acquainted with the problem and its relevance to the field. After the introduction of the problem, a brief review of the state of theory and knowledge about the problem in the field of Social Welfare is provided, along with citations from the most pertinent literature. This section concludes with a small set of research questions and research aims that are clearly linked to the problem and to the field's state of theory and knowledge about the problem.

The dissertation prospectus should clearly articulate how the dissertation is relevant to social work's mission to enhance social justice. For example, a student may illustrate in the prospectus, as well as in the dissertation or the oral defense, some or all of the following: a)working knowledge of social justice theories relevant to the paper topic and substantive area, b) reflective practices to understand self as scholar in the context of power dynamics, c) articulation of just methodology, d) understanding of social justice implications at each stage of the research process, e) conceptualization and completion of research that has the potential to contribute to social work practice that advances social justice values.
* **Methodology**
This section explains how the candidate plans to produce original knowledge that is clearly responsive to the research questions posed. Although a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods may be appropriate, this section must provide a detailed and unambiguous description of the research methods to be used. The exact methods chosen must be consistent with a clearly established epistemological perspective and must be of sufficient scope and rigor to clearly show strong potential for a significant advancement in the state of knowledge relevant to the research questions. Whether primarily qualitative or quantitative methods are used, key concepts are to be clearly articulated and defined in operational terms. Sampling methods, measures, data collection, and data analysis techniques must be described in sufficient detail to allow some assessment of their appropriateness, both to the questions and the overall epistemological approach. Where human subjects are involved in the production of data, the candidate needs to identify the sources of risk to the subjects and the methods that will be used to ensure the participants are protected from harm and abrogation of basic rights. The SSW Human Subjects Office must be contacted early in the planning stages to help the student with submission for any necessary IRB approvals. (See website [Human Subjects](https://depts.washington.edu/myssw/human-subject-review) section.) The section should demonstrate a critical evaluation of the social justice implications of the proposed research methods.
* **Plan for Dissemination and Community Engagement[[3]](#footnote-3)**
In keeping with social work’s mission, students are expected to consider how the proposed dissertation contributes to social justice. In this section, the student should provide a plan for how they will engage with relevant communities before, during, or after completing the dissertation. Examples may include the use of participatory research methods, creating a dissemination of research findings to communities, or engaging in public scholarship. The plan should list concrete methods or opportunities that the student will pursue, explain how the activities connect to the program’s social justice training goals (see [Social Justice Learning Objectives](https://socialwork.uw.edu/content/social-justice-learning-objectives)), and should identify support and resources the student needs to engage in the proposed activities.
* **Timeline and Resource Considerations**This section provides a timeline for the completion of all phases of the dissertation and the resource requirements of each phase, thereby providing a series of benchmarks for both the candidate and his/her committee to assess the progress of the dissertation research. The timeline and resources required will vary by the type of dissertation research, and the candidate is encouraged to be both thorough and realistic. In particular, some margin should be built in for the unanticipated difficulties that are common to this level of research. The resource requirements that should be identified at each stage of the dissertation include such items as the cooperation of outside agencies, research assistants, software and computer access beyond that routinely provided, consultation, and internal/external funding sought or received.

***Evaluating the Dissertation Prospectus***

In assessing a student's prospectus, the Supervisory Committee will bear in mind the following criteria:

* relevance of the research for the field of social welfare, including relevance to social work’s mission to pursue social justice
* the rigor of the proposed study
* the originality of the research
* the feasibility of the overall proposal.

The dissertation prospectus must be independently reviewed by all Supervisory Committee members who are to be on the Dissertation Reading Committee.[[4]](#footnote-4) When the committee members are satisfied that the proposed research is of sufficiently high quality to meet the standards of the Social Welfare Faculty, the Supervisory Committee members will approve the prospectus and complete the evaluation form. The chair and student together will review the evaluations and use the appropriate section on the chair's evaluation form to outline a plan for how any concerns raised in the evaluations will be addressed and how changes will be monitored. The prospectus cover page will be signed by the student and the Chair of the Supervisory Committee. Before actual work on the dissertation begins the candidate submits two copies of the approved prospectus along with copies of the Reading Committee evaluations to the PhD Program Assistant Director.

The PhD Assistant Director places one copy of the Dissertation Prospectus and evaluations in the student's official file and one copy of the Prospectus in the PhD Program Office Public Dissertation Prospectus Binders.

Following Supervisory Committee approval of the prospectus, the Social Work PhD Assistant Director officially establishes the Reading Committee with the Graduate School through MyGrad.

1. Request for written committee reviews instituted by PhD Steering Committee, 5/26/98 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Approved by the PhD Steering Committee, 5/3/2011; revised May 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Approved by the PhD Steering Committee, 5/3/2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Structure approved by Steering Committee, 5/26/98, revised `10/21/1999, 8/11/2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)