

## **Best Practices for Supporting Timely, High-Quality Dissertation Completion**

The purpose of this document is to highlight best practices shared by colleagues in the College of Education (COE). Feel free to incorporate any of the following content into your dissertation process. Note that these best practices apply to both faculty and students.

### **1. Faculty & Student Expectations**

#### **Faculty Responsibilities**

- Clearly articulate expectations for communication, drafts, revisions, and responsiveness.
- Establish and communicate a standard timeline for returning feedback (e.g., within two weeks of receipt).
- Require written materials (e.g., purpose statement, research questions) prior to meetings.
- Provide structured guidance (e.g., outline of Chapters 1–3).
- Differentiate feedback phases (e.g., first content, then APA/style).
- Provide guidance and ongoing support to students before data collection and analysis begin.

#### **Student Responsibilities**

- Select a chair within a reasonable timeframe after entering the program.
- Consider research alignment, methodology expertise, prior coursework, and advising style when selecting a chair.
- Speak with former advisees to understand faculty expectations.
- Clearly communicate needs, goals, and preferred working style.

### **2. Dissertation Topic & Research Focus**

- Develop a purpose statement and research questions early in the doctoral program.
- Use coursework to refine and test the emerging research focus.
- Consider concept mapping to clarify long-term research direction and identify a viable dissertation topic.
- Evaluate topics using FINER criteria: **Feasible, Interesting, Novel, Ethical, Relevant**.
- Carefully assess access to the sample and potential barriers to data collection.

### **3. Timeline & Process Transparency**

- Provide students with a comprehensive overview of the dissertation process from start to finish, including:
  - Proposal development
  - IRB submission and approval
  - Data collection and analysis
  - Defense preparation
  - Graduation deadlines
- Emphasize realistic timelines, particularly for IRB and recruitment.
- Encourage regular chair meetings and frequent committee consultation prior to proposal and final defense.
- Consider departmental milestone checklists covering all dissertation phases.

#### **4. Structural & Curricular Alignment**

- Link doctoral coursework to dissertation milestones (e.g., literature review course, proposal development seminar).
- Encourage slide development during proposal drafting to support conceptual clarity and defense preparation.
- Recommend foundational texts (e.g., Heppner & Heppner) to guide structure and expectations.
- Consider department-level editorial support to enhance writing quality.

#### **5. Logical Coherence & Scholarly Rigor**

- Ensure clear alignment: **Purpose** → **Research Questions** → **Methods** → **Results** → **Discussion**.
- Encourage students to “read backward” from findings to confirm internal coherence.
- Reinforce methodological justification at every stage.

#### **6. Mentorship & Faculty Development**

- Encourage new faculty to co-chair before independently chairing.
- Promote structured mentoring of dissertation chairs.
- Foster a culture of shared responsibility among committee members.

#### **Core Principle**

**Clarity + Alignment + Early Focus + Structured Mentorship = Timely and High-Quality Dissertation Completion**

#### **Reference**

Heppner, P. P., & Heppner, M. J. (2003). *Writing and Publishing Your Thesis, Dissertation, and Research: A Guide for Students in the Helping Professions (Research, Statistics, & Program Evaluation)*. Cengage Learning.

#### **Resource:**

Online APA Style Guide: <https://apastyle.apa.org/>