MARYWOOD UNIVERSITY
Ph.D. in HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
Dissertation Guidelines for a Quantitative Research Study

The guidelines presented in this document provide a framework for formatting your Dissertation based on a quantitative study method. There are several types of and variations to Quantitative research that include: case series, cross-sectional surveys, case-control studies, cohort studies, and experimental studies. Your Dissertation chair and committee members should be consulted to define the components and sequence of your Dissertation based on these guidelines. All students using a quantitative method in their research study must follow the

Marywood Dissertation Format:

a.) Title Page
b.) Copyright Page/Information
c.) Abstract/Statement by Author
d.) Dedications (Optional)
e.) Acknowledgements (Optional)
f.) Table of Content:
   a. Chapter 1: Introduction (broad overview of the problem)
   b. Chapter 2: Review of Literature (and Conceptual framework)
c. Chapter 3: Research Methodology

d. Chapter 4: Results/Findings

e. Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

g.) References

h.) Appendices

i.) List of Figures

j.) List of Tables

Guidelines pertaining to the ‘Table of Content’ have been elaborated in this booklet. When forming a Dissertation Committee, Marywood’s Ph.D. program requires the submission of a research proposal that includes all the items listed in Chapters 1, 2, 3, and the appropriate literature references, written in the future tense. Upon completion of the research study, then all chapters within the Dissertation are revised and written in the past tense. References included in the research proposal and Dissertation are written and listed according to the most current edition of APA (American Psychological Association).

(Note: The items listed below are not intended to be headings in the dissertation, but simply outline the elements that are included in a typical dissertation.)
Table of Content:

I. Chapter 1: Introduction
   a.) Overview of the study: Briefly explain the reason for carrying out the study and identify the main question(s) that will be addressed. This part should be very general as the specifics will be explained in the following sections.

   b.) Statement of the problem: Discuss the problem to be addressed. It may be some gaps/inadequacies in a theory, policy, practice, or knowledge. In a quantitative research study the problem is stated followed by the specifics intended to be addressed in the research. If there are any known underlying causes/consequences of the problem, then they should be briefly discussed as well.

   c.) Research Question and Hypothesis: A research question is posed to find answers to specific problems within the study. A hypothesis states the expected relationship/difference between the variables within the study. It should be discrete, measurable, related to definitions, and based on suggestions from previously reported research studies.

   d.) Purpose of the Study: In quantitative research the purpose of the study is to test the hypothesis and/or to answer a research question/problem.
e.) **Significance of the Study:** The potential significance of the study should be discussed based on the literature review in Chapter 2.

f.) **Conceptual Framework:** It is summarization of a theoretical foundation to better understand the problem and its dynamics. An already established framework could be used or the author may choose to build a custom, modified version based on the literature review in Chapter 2.

g.) **Summary of Methodology:** A brief summary of the methodology to be used in the study, which is described in detail in Chapter 3.

h.) **Limitations:** Limitations related to internal validity, generalizability and/or applicability should be stated and discussed with reason. Some limitations arise from delimitations of the study (such as only one sub-population of interest, addressing only part of a problem and examining only short-term effects), from accommodating ethical concerns within the study, or unpredicted shortcomings in the methodology. Some questions that may be helpful to identify common limitations in a quantitative research project are:

a. Were the participants from a sub-population rather than the full population of interest?
b. Did the sampling framework coincide with the targeted population or sub-population?

c. Were the response rates and item-completion rates substantially less than 100 percent?

d. Were all applicable constructs measured?

e. Were items within the informed consent materials likely to have biased some responses?

f. Were measurement scores less than highly reliable and valid?

g. Were the experiments biased by the Hawthorne effect and/or other “experimenter effects?”

h. Did quasi-experiments and statistical modeling fail to control for viable competing hypotheses?

i. Were the assumptions of the statistical procedures not fully met?

j. Did the low power from small sample sizes contribute to less than/no statistically significant results? “(UALR, 2013)

i.) Definition of Terms: Define any term used in the study including key variables, unusual terms, limitations or assumptions that may be difficult for readers to understand. An operational definition (i.e. how they will be
measured) along with a theoretical definition should be stated. All the sources for the definitions must be cited appropriately.

II. Chapter 2 : Literature Review

This chapter constructs a platform, using the known literature/ knowledge that will help to achieve a substantive knowledge about the problem being addressed. Review of literature involves exploring all the previous research studies and knowledge relevant to your anticipated research. It should be used to inform:

• The problem and its significance

• The theoretical or conceptual framework

• The research questions, hypotheses or problems

• The research methods

Advisors/Dissertation Chairs should be contacted to make sure that all the elements of the topic are being covered in the review and that the research studies are appropriate and thorough.

The following elements are the framework for the process and components of a literature review and are not intended to be subheadings of Chapter 2:

A.) Introduction: (Topic, Purpose and Method of Literature Review)
Begin with an indication of the topic to be addressed and the purpose of the review. Methods of review are described briefly. The literature reviewed should be current or published within the last ten years relative to the authors research study. Key literature from earlier years, if needed/relevant to your study, can be used after consulting with your dissertation chair. A review should address each element/variable applicable to the problem. Literature should be selected based on how it applies to your proposed research question/hypothesis.

B.) Description and Critique of Scholarly Literature:

Keep in mind that scholarly review of literature focusses on primary sources such as peer-reviewed research and journal articles rather than secondary sources like textbooks. Each literature should be described and briefly critiqued identifying their strengths and weaknesses, for example:

- “For theoretical discourses, indicate: source of theory, overlap/disparity with other theories, how well they have been empirically verified.”
- For conceptual discussions, indicate: sources of concepts, overlaps/disparity with other concepts, how well they have been empirically verified.
- For empirical studies, indicate: research questions, strengths and weaknesses of methodology, results, conclusions and implications.”

(UALR, 2013)

The written review/studies should be organized under major topics, theories, research questions or methods. Be careful, not to create a biased review by covering only prior literature that supports your predispositions and disregards other literature. Literature should be consistently critiqued as failure to do so is likely to compromise your research. Pay attention not to ignore weaknesses in studies that support your predispositions and not to over-critique studies that contradict your predispositions.

C.) Inferences for Forthcoming Study:

The review sources should be carefully analyzed to draw inferences that are applicable to your anticipated research. Inferences are
generally made about the research problem/its significance, research questions/hypotheses, theoretical framework and the methodologies.

D.) Conceptual/Theoretical Framework:

This section includes sets of theories/constructs that provide an outlook on the research problem being addressed that helps to narrow down the research. The included theory/construct provides a basis for either the method, selected variables, or to test the theory itself.

III. Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The type of method to be used in a research study is dictated by the literature review and the research question/hypothesis, i.e., what is the author planning to test? In this section, provide a brief overview of the study followed by the proposed type of study (e.g., experimental, quasi-experimental, longitudinal, or survey). The information provided in the research proposal related to methodology is written in the future tense, however after conducting the study and data collection Chapter 3, it is then converted to past tense. (NOTE: Participant recruitment and data
collection cannot start until you have received an approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB)).

A sample brief outline is shown as follows:

**A.) Overview of study:**

a. Re-introduce the topic and hypothesis/research question

**B.) Research Procedure/Method:**

a. Research design

b. Sample
   i. How obtained?
   ii. Inclusion/Exclusion
   iii. Size
   iv. Consent Forms

c. Variables
   i. Independent
   ii. Dependent

d. Data collection
   i. Justification for the variables being measured
   ii. Types of measures being used
   iii. Tools/instruments being used (established/created own)
iv. Procedure for data collection

e. Data Analysis/Statistics
   i. Data entry/verification procedures for suspicious/outlying data
   ii. Coding procedure for open-ended responses
   iii. Data analysis procedures/stats that will be used
   iv. Justification of the proposed statistical methods that will be used to analyze the data

The proposal should summarize the potential risks to your subjects/participants from whom data will be collected, and the precautions that will be taken to minimize those risks.

IV. Chapter 4: Results or Findings

This chapter contains the results/findings by performing data analysis of the data collected from the research study. The results are presented in the order of the hypothesis/question mentioned in Chapter 1. Statistically insignificant outcomes could be stated briefly. Important and significant results of the research can be displayed using graphs, charts, and/or tables,
and described in detail. The concluded results that supported/unsupported the hypothesis/research question are also stated in this section.

V. Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

In this chapter provide a brief summary of the problem along with the main results of the research followed by the interpretation of the results compared to the current literature and theoretical background. It is also important to include and describe any limitations of the study. Provide an interpretation for the statistically significant results. The conclusion of the research study may be included within the results section or it could be a separate heading within the document. Recommendations/Implications should be made based on the findings for modifications or new additions to a related field of practice, policy and/or theory. Suggestions for future research could also be made based on some new problems that may have become apparent during the course of the study. A brief outline of chapter 5 is as follows:

k. Results Summary/Discussion

l. Conclusion

m. Recommendation/Suggestions
[Note: This dissertation outline is adapted from Doctoral Student Dissertation Guidelines by College of Education of University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR). The dissertation guidelines by UALR are a modified version of the Doctoral Student Handbook of Graduate School of Education of the George Washington University. UALR acquired permission to adapt this document from Dr. Mary Futrell and Dr. Janet Heddesheimer of The George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development.]