UTHealth Houston
Cizik School of Nursing

Policy Number: D7400

PhD Program Dissertation Policy

Subject: Dissertation

Scope: This policy applies to PhD program students.

Responsible Office: Department of Research

Effective Date: 08/1998

Date Reviewed/Revised: 01/2026

Next Scheduled Review Date: 01/2029

Responsible Executive:
• PhD Program Director
• Associate Dean for Research, Chair, Department of Research

I. POLICY AND GENERAL STATEMENT

This policy governs the completion of the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Nursing program at the Cizik School of Nursing (CSON). As part of the degree requirements, students must complete an original research dissertation that represents a substantial contribution to the nursing field. The dissertation must be conducted under the supervision of a dissertation committee chairperson, who must be a full-time, doctorally-prepared, research-focused member of the faculty at CSON.

The dissertation committee consists of a minimum of three members and a maximum of five members. The chairperson must be a full-time, doctorally-prepared, research-focused member of the faculty at CSON. The committee must include at least two doctorally-prepared, research-focused CSON faculty members; at least one must hold a nursing degree. The committee must include at least one doctorally-prepared committee member who is external to CSON. At least one committee member must hold a doctorate in a discipline outside of nursing.

Upon completion of the dissertation, the student must ensure that the relevant CPHS/IRB protocol is closed or transferred to the dissertation chairperson before leaving the university. All research data—whether digital, non-digital, or in the form of specimens—must comply with the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston HOOP Policy 92: Research Data Retention and Access.

Digital research data must be stored on secure drives or folders in compliance with current UTHealth Information Technology Policies, including ITPOL-007 Laptop Security and ITPOL-001 Portable Device Storage Policies. Graduates may retain a digital copy of their de-identified dissertation data only with written approval from the Associate Dean for Research.

II. DEFINITIONS

- Dissertation Committee Chairperson: The faculty member responsible for supervising and guiding the student's dissertation research. This individual must be a full-time, doctorally-prepared, research focused member of the faculty at CSON.

- Dissertation Committee: A group of 3 to 5 faculty members, including the chairperson, who oversee the student's dissertation research. The chairperson is a full-time, doctorally-prepared, research-focused member of the faculty at CSON. The committee must include at least two doctorally-prepared, research-focused CSON faculty members; at least one must hold a nursing degree. The committee must include at least one doctorally-prepared committee member who is external to CSON. At least one committee member must hold a doctorate in a discipline outside of nursing.

- PhD Council: The governing body within the PhD program that approves dissertation topics and committee members.

- CPHS/AWC/IRB: Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects/Animal Welfare Committee/Institutional Review Board, responsible for reviewing and approving research involving human or animal participants to ensure ethical standards are met.

III. PROCEDURE

1. **Dissertation Preparation:**
   Students may begin their dissertation after successfully completing both the written and oral candidacy examinations. It is strongly recommended that students utilize coursework, electives, and cognates to inform and develop their dissertation proposal. Students should obtain a copy of the Dissertation Manual available on the CSON website.

2. **Selecting a Dissertation Chairperson:**
   Students must select a dissertation committee chairperson based on mutual agreement and shared research interests. This should occur no later than the beginning of the N7552 course. The dissertation chairperson must be a full-time, doctorally-prepared, research-focused member of the faculty at CSON.

3. **Grant Applications:**
   Students are encouraged to apply for external grants to fund their dissertation research. Students should work closely with their chairperson and the Center for Nursing Research to ensure proper submission through CSON.

4. **Approval of Dissertation Topic and Committee:**
   When the dissertation chairperson determines that the student is ready to proceed with the dissertation, they will submit the working title and a list of proposed committee members to the PhD Council for approval (Form D1). This includes a rationale for the selection of committee members and their qualifications.

5. **Coursework Preparation:**
   The dissertation chairperson will assess whether the student has the necessary background preparation for the proposed dissertation and may recommend additional coursework as needed.

6. **Dissertation Proposal Review:**
   Once the PhD Council approves the dissertation topic and committee, and the chairperson approves the dissertation proposal, the student will schedule a proposal review with the

dissertation committee. This review ensures that the student has a solid plan and necessary resources to carry out the research. All committee members must sign the proposal form to indicate agreement (Form D2).

7. **Ethical Approvals:**
   The dissertation requires approval from the CPHS/AWC/IRB (or relevant equivalent) before the research can begin. The student is responsible for obtaining all necessary ethical approvals before proceeding with the dissertation research.

8. **Registration Requirements:**
   Students must register for at least 12 dissertation credit hours to complete the dissertation process. At least 3 credit hours per semester must be registered until completion. Students must be enrolled for at least 3 credit hours during the semester of graduation. A grade of “P” (Pass) or “F” (Fail) is recorded for dissertation credits until the defense is completed.

9. **Final Defense:**
   A final oral defense of the dissertation is mandatory. The committee members must confirm in writing that the dissertation is complete and that the student is ready for the defense. The student must schedule the defense at least 4 weeks before the last class day of the semester.

10. **Defense Presentation:**
    The student must prepare and provide a formal presentation of the methodology, results, and contributions of their research. After the presentation, committee members and guests may ask questions. Guests will leave the room for the subsequent examination by the committee.

11. **Committee Deliberation:**
    After the defense, the committee will deliberate and vote on whether the student passes, passes with reservations, or fails the defense. If the dissertation is approved with reservations, the chairperson is responsible for guiding the student in making necessary revisions.

12. **Final Submission:**
    Following a successful defense, the dissertation chairperson and committee members will sign the title page of the final dissertation. An electronic version of the final dissertation must be submitted to the Office of Academic Affairs by the end of the semester.

13. **Changing Committee Members:**
    If a change to the dissertation committee is necessary, the student must consult with their dissertation chairperson. The dissertation chairperson will submit a revised Form D1 with the rationale for the change to the chair of the PhD Council for approval. Upon approval of the change by the PhD Council, the student files the revised Form D-1 with the Office of Academic Affairs.

14. **Changing Dissertation Chair:**
    If the dissertation chairperson needs to be changed, a written request signed by the student is sent to the PhD Program Director. The PhD Program Director sends the written request to

the current chair for signature and then sends the written request to the chair of the PhD Council for approval. This written request explains the rationale for changing the chair and includes the name and qualifications of the faculty member being recommended as the new chair. A revised Form D-1 is attached to the written request. Upon approval of the change by the PhD Council, the student files the revised Form D-1 with the Office of Academic Affairs.

15. **Changing Dissertation Topic:**
If a change to the dissertation topic is necessary, the student must consult with their dissertation chairperson. The dissertation chairperson will submit a revised Form D1 with the rationale for the change to the chair of the PhD Council for approval. Upon approval of the change by the PhD Council, the student files the revised Form D-1 with the Office of Academic Affairs.

For more detailed information, refer to the Dissertation Manual and the sample forms available through the Office of Academic Affairs.

IV. CONTACTS

Contact	Telephone	Email/Web Address
Meagan Whisenant, PhD Program Director	713-500-2279	meagan.whisenant@uth.tmc.edu

V. EXHIBITS