



ASPEN
UNIVERSITY

2023-2024

**Doctor of Education in
Leadership and Learning
Handbook**

4615 East Elwood Street
Phoenix, AZ 85040

Doctoral Program Administration

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The Dean of the School for each Aspen Doctoral program holds an equivalent degree from a recognized and accredited college or university and enough academic experience to warrant such a position.

Dean of the School of Education

Dr. Eva Ballard Ed.D
Eva.ballard@aspen.edu

Faculty and Faculty Mentors

Every Professor/Faculty Mentor who teaches Aspen University doctoral students holds a PhD or other doctoral-level degree from appropriately accredited college or university.

Certified as true and correct in content and policy by

Joanne Weiss, Provost

August 31, 2023

Dissertation

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All students in an Aspen University Doctoral program are required to successfully complete the dissertation, which entails producing a research project that is approved by the Advisory Dissertation Committee appointed by Aspen University. The dissertation courses provide a comprehensive template for producing the dissertation project. A dissertation is a record of original research conducted by the student in contribution to earning a Doctoral degree. While this course is broken up into 8 modules just like other Aspen University courses, finalizing a research topic, finding a Faculty Mentor, and forming the committee can be time consuming and it may take additional time to complete the course requirements. Students are encouraged to do as much preparatory work as possible prior to the start of the class so time can be spent developing the details of the dissertation research. Students will work closely with his/her Faculty Mentor throughout the process.

The dissertation is scholarly work based on a combination of existing and original research that contributes to the body of human knowledge and field of practice. It demonstrates the Doctoral Student can collect, analyze, and report data based on critical, analytical, and synthesis skills. Each Doctoral Student must write a dissertation that presents the results of a research project carried out by the student. An appropriate research project involves a substantive piece of original and independent research grounded in an appropriate body of literature. It is relevant to the education field as practiced in the past, the present, or in the potential future. It presents a significant contribution or advancement in that field.

It is the student's responsibility to work with the Advisory Dissertation Committee as determined appropriate in collaboration with the Faculty Mentor. The student bears full responsibility for a successful outcome. As additional expert resources and guidance are believed necessary, the student explores and acquires any such assistance. For instance, an academic advisor may become a lifeline. Such advisors may be found through recommendations from peers or other experienced individuals. Typically, advisors charge students a fee for their services, but the assistance can be valuable.

As a student enters the last stages of the doctoral program,

the expectation is that they need little help in conducting research, writing the dissertation, or obtaining the advice needed to complete the dissertation journey. Doctoral students are scholars in the making, with clear goals, adequate investigative tools, solid research agendas, and the determination to achieve the goals they set forth in the beginning stages of the doctoral journey. If the student attends instructional dissertation training outside Aspen University, the matter should be addressed with the Faculty Mentor. The Advisory Dissertation Committee will accept the resulting dissertation for completion of Doctoral Program requirements after a final review and approval. Training, editing, and other forms of assistance are acceptable and recommended, but under no circumstances may someone other than the student produce a dissertation.

The most recent edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) guides the Dissertation writing style. The APA writing style is followed consistently throughout the program in matters of form and style. Of critical importance, sources must be cited and properly referenced. Generally, the dissertation includes a title page, acknowledgements, abstract, table of contents, and list of tables and figures, followed by five distinct chapters: 1) Introduction, 2) Literature Review, 3) Methodology, 4) Results, and 5) Conclusions and Recommendations, followed by references and appendices. Additional dissertation guidelines can be found in the Doctoral Lounge.

Scholarly Writing Guidelines

Scholarly Writing Guidelines

The Aspen University dissertation follows the APA form and format. Writing must reflect doctoral level, scholarly-writing standards. The document should be well organized and easy for the reader to follow. Each paragraph should be short, clear, and focused. In general, every statement in a dissertation must be supported either by a reference to published scientific literature or by original work. Ideas must be referenced within the text and follow the author-date method of in-text citation. This means that the author's last name and the year of publication for the source should appear in the text, for example, (Jones, 1998), and a complete reference should appear in the reference list at

the end of the paper. Each sentence in a dissertation must be complete and correct in a grammatical sense. Moreover, a dissertation must satisfy the rigorous rules of formal grammar (e.g., no contractions, colloquialisms, slurs, or use of phrases that are common in the spoken language). The committee members are not obligated to edit documents. Students may need to identify a writing coach, editor, and/or other resource to help with writing and editing. Additional support materials regarding form and formatting can be found in the Doctoral Lounge and in the Writing/Resource Center from the D2L Classroom. Poorly written proposals and dissertations will be suspended from review if submitted with grammatical, structural, and/or formatting errors.

Advisory Dissertation Committee

Advisory Dissertation Committee

Each doctoral student must work with a qualified Advisory Dissertation Committee that is knowledgeable in methods of graduate-level study and research, as well as in the subject area concerned. The Advisory Dissertation Committee comprises the Faculty Mentor (Chair), Faculty Reviewer (Research Specialist), and Independent Reviewer (Content Specialist). The Faculty Mentor is also the course professor for all the dissertation courses acting as the Chair for the student. The Faculty Mentor assists the student in selecting an appropriate Faculty Reviewer and Independent Reviewer. The student will submit the formal requests for the two remaining committee members during the first dissertation course. The Faculty Reviewer must be an Aspen University professor who understands the University's dissertation process. See Faculty Request Form. The Independent Reviewer must have appropriate understanding and interest in the topic of the dissertation research project. This individual may be someone representing a different organization. See the Independent Reviewer Request Form. The individual may be a visiting scholar or professor representing a different program or another field of study. Selection of the Independent Reviewer should consider the relative fields or sciences involved in the research study. For instance, in a Doctorate in Education program, if the study were based upon the teaching field in psychology, medicine, business, or criminal justice, a professor involved in the relative discipline would provide valuable input. All members of the Advisory Dissertation Committee must hold a doctoral degree and one member must hold the Doctorate degree being sought, ensuring that all members of the committee are well versed on doctoral-level work as well as on the field of the program. The student is permitted to select the

committee members in consultation with the Faculty Mentor, but Aspen University makes the final decisions. To select committee members, the student sends a statement of request to the Faculty Mentor listing the individuals being solicited and explaining the rationale for the selection.

The professional relationship between the student and the Advisory Dissertation Committee is characterized by enthusiasm, professionalism, and regular and reciprocal communication. In the ideal relationship between the Advisory Dissertation Committee members, the student receives constant, timely, and quality feedback on progress. This type of interaction and feedback can be accomplished in a variety of ways. However, the emphasis of interactions and feedback is on both the frequency of interactions and quality feedback to maintain a dialogue on the issues and research questions raised by the student's investigative work.

The Faculty Mentor assists the student in formulating the Advisory Dissertation Committee and oversees its progress. The Faculty Mentor also serves the roles of advisor, director, counselor, coach, role model, guide, collaborator, facilitator, advocate, chair, and the like.

The Faculty Mentor facilitates communications and resource exchanges among all members of the Advisory Dissertation Committee and is accountable for the committee's work. The Faculty Mentor provides guidance and supervision for the entire dissertation process, timely and practical reviews including specific constructive critiques to the student, communicates appropriate concerns to the student, and communicates with all the members of the Advisory Dissertation Committee and Aspen University administrators. The Faculty Mentor is responsible for contacting and chairing meetings of the full Advisory Dissertation Committee. When there is a difference of opinion or conflict, the Faculty Mentor negotiates with all committee members and the student.

The Faculty Mentor serves as a guide and consultant to the student throughout the dissertation process and ensures the integrity of Aspen University's dissertation guidelines. The Faculty Mentor is an expert in providing guidance to the student about research including the research topic, problem statement, current literature review, research design and planning, data collection, analysis and reporting, dissertation document preparation, and the like to maximize the student's progress for successful and ethical doctoral research. The Faculty Mentor maintains documentation of all communication within the Advisory Dissertation Committee, ensuring that all necessary forms

are completed, signed, and submitted to Aspen University administrators.

If the Faculty Mentor is unable to serve for the entire duration of the student's dissertation process, the Faculty Reviewer may serve the role of Faculty Mentor and assist the student in selecting a replacement for either the Faculty Mentor role or the Faculty Reviewer role accordingly.

Any additional human resources should be discussed with the Faculty Mentor. Such resources might comprise a dissertation editor, academic advisor, or a subject matter expert (SME), such as a statistics expert. All individuals associated with the dissertation process should be acknowledged for their contribution. Any expense incurred by the student for external services rendered is managed independently between the student and the service provider. Hiring a writer or buying a completed dissertation product is not acceptable and grounds for termination.

Institutional Review Board

Institutional Review Board

Aspen University established an Institutional Review Board (IRB) in 2013 to protect the interests of human participants in research. The primary role of the IRB is the review of all human subject research conducted at Aspen University to ensure that the research fulfills the requirements of the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP), meeting the requirements of OHRP's Division of Compliance Oversight (DCO) reviews institutional compliance with the federal regulations governing the protection of human subjects in Title 45 Part 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46). Also see the Informed Consent Form. Aspen University IRB follows the OHRP IRB Guidebook, which provides a basic understanding of the background and purposes of the IRB review system.

Federal regulations require that researchers give special consideration to protecting the welfare of certain subjects. Special provisions exist for research involving:

- Children and Minors
- Prisoners
- Pregnant Women and Fetuses
- Institutionalized Mentally Disabled

- Elderly
- Economically or Educationally Disadvantaged

In general, these regulations allow IRBs to approve research with populations that are of minimal risk or that benefit the subjects directly. Review and approval of research involving vulnerable (protected) populations may require additional time if outside expertise is needed for further evaluation of the study.

Before the student may begin to collect and analyze data, the application to the IRB must be submitted and approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Only the IRB has the authority to approve research. The student is responsible to acquire IRB approval to ensure that the research is conducted in the appropriate manner and that the participants meet selection and eligibility requirements. The IRB reviews research proposals based on the following queries:

- Are the risks to subjects and protected groups minimized?
- Are the risks reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits?
- Is the selection of subjects equitable?

The student ensures that the participant's informed consent is appropriately obtained and that the study is properly designed and scientifically valid. Informed consent is obtained before data is collected. Once data is collected, analyzed, and documented, the student is responsible to provide the participants with a copy of the dissertation, providing the participants with an opportunity to accept or reject the manner in which their data is applied. Participants reserve the right to retract their data up to the time of formal publication.

The IRB at Aspen University considers that the human participants (subjects) of the study are protected by demonstrating:

- Respect for persons (volunteers choose whether to participate in the research).
- Beneficence (doing no harm to research subjects).
- Justice (human participants have the right to be aware of the potential risks of research) as defined by the National Commission for the Protection of Human

Subjects.

The student must submit: 1) a copy of the approved proposal, 2) a copy of the approval form, and 3) the application to the IRB for its approval. A full list of each required form and additional documentation is found in the Doctoral Lounge. The research proposal provides a thorough and detailed overview of the research topic, the research problem statement including hypotheses or research questions, review of the relevant research literature, and a complete description of the research methodology. These are in essence Chapters 1-3 of the dissertation. The necessary IRB forms are provided in the Doctoral Lounge.

The Advisory Dissertation Committee in conjunction with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviews and approves a student's research proposal. The proposal must include IRB approval prior to contacting participants and collecting data.

Oral Dissertation and Defense

Oral Dissertation Proposal Defense

Development of the dissertation is accomplished as a part of the requirements within the required dissertation courses. Under direction of the Faculty Mentor, the student develops a research proposal for submission and approval by the Advisory Dissertation Committee. The proposal provides a thorough description of the proposed study, following proposal guidelines as directed by the Faculty Mentor. The student presents the proposal to the Advisory Dissertation Committee in an oral hearing via a one-hour live teleconference. Any professor or student affiliated with Aspen University may attend but should refrain from participating in the defense process. Upon Advisory Dissertation Committee approval of the proposal, the student is authorized to begin the study. The Faculty Mentor issues written approval to the student using the Approval of the Dissertation Proposal.

Final Oral Dissertation Defense

The Final Oral Dissertation Defense is the last formal step in the dissertation process. The Doctoral student produces and presents the dissertation research before the Advisory Dissertation Committee via teleconference. The Advisory Dissertation Committee determines the general format of the dissertation and the abstract based on the University's

general design guidelines. The Faculty Mentor should ensure that the dissertation is in final form before requesting evaluations from the other members of the committee. All the members of the Advisory Dissertation Committee produce an evaluation report following the Final Oral Dissertation Defense. Any professor or student affiliated with Aspen University may attend the defense process.

The student arranges the Final Oral Dissertation Defense live teleconference and solicits and coordinates the availability of the Advisory Dissertation Committee members. Based upon the student's presentation, one of three forms of status may be awarded:

- Accepted with no changes
- Accepted with changes
- Acceptance denied

Where changes are required, the student must make any iteration in a timely manner and submit the final copy to the Faculty Mentor. Where acceptance is denied or the student has not met the allotted timeframe, the student must retake dissertation courses. This option may only be exercised once.

Following the oral defense, the Faculty Mentor submits the findings together with the evaluation forms and a copy of the final dissertation manuscript to the Dean with a recommendation for final approval. The Faculty Mentor issues written approval to the student using the approval form provided in Appendix B: Approval of the Dissertation. If the decision of the committee is not unanimous, the case is referred to the Dean for resolution. If the decision of the committee is a failure recommendation, the Faculty Mentor and Dean formulate a course of action that may include re-registration in dissertation courses.

The Advisory Dissertation Committee must evaluate the dissertation and recommend the awarding of the doctoral degree only if the dissertation is judged to demonstrate the following qualities. The dissertation should demonstrate a host of characteristics, including:

- Establish a historical context for the presentation of an innovative and creative approach to the problem.
- Demonstrate understanding of the problem as

revealed by analysis and synthesis of a broad literature base.

- Articulate clarity in composition and careful documentation.
- Merit publication in refereed journals or form the basis of a book or monograph.
- Detail the design of the study so that other scholars can build on it in subsequent work.
- Prepare the author to assume a position within the profession.

Publishing Research

Publishing Research

Aspen University holds to the tradition that students are encouraged as a member of the scholarly community to make their research available to interested persons. This recommendation is met when the graduate submits the dissertation for publication to external indices or journals.

Upon final acceptance of the dissertation, the student submits the manuscript for publication. The information for submission of the Dissertation is provided in the Application for Publication.

If the dissertation is the result of a collaborative research effort, the project should be structured in such a way that the Doctoral Student has supplied a major effort. The contributions of the student and the other collaborators must be clearly identified. The student is responsible for defending the dissertation. Published articles authored by the student and based on research conducted for the dissertation study may be included in the dissertation, provided the published work is logically connected and integrated into the dissertation in a coherent manner. The student must be clearly delineated as the sole or primary author of the published work.

Program Requirements

Program Completion Requirements

Doctoral programs are designed to be completed in four years from the date of initial enrollment. Ideally, a student would complete the dissertation within two years after beginning their dissertation course sequence.

The student will need to meet the program completion requirements as outlined in the Academic Catalog.

Required GPA

Students must meet requirements for Good Academic Standing as outlined in the Academic Catalog.

Doctoral Residencies

Doctoral Residency I: All EDD and DSCS students are

required to attend a virtual residency within RSH900. This residency covers the Aspen Library, Student Support, and Advising Teams, Understanding Doctoral Resources, Time Management Strategies, and Self Care. Students reflect on the information and share their reflections as an assignment in the course.

Doctoral Residency II: All EDD and DSCS students must attend a weeklong residency within the D2L classroom with required discussion questions and assignments. The weeklong residency includes two live Zoom sessions with doctoral faculty and doctoral leadership, introducing the expectations and workshopping the topics covered in the residency. The goal of this residency is to allow doctoral students to collaborate and connect with Aspen faculty and peers. Completion of this requirement is due in **Module 7 of RSH912**. Doctoral Residency II is offered quarterly, and students may select one of the weeklong offerings to complete to meet the course requirement. Information on the residency dates and FAQs are located in the Doctoral Lounge.