

## Introduction to an Integrated Article Dissertation

After completing course work and the qualifying exam, students are required to complete a dissertation in their area of specialization. The dissertation is designed to afford the student an opportunity to contribute to social work scholarship by conducting original research that makes a significant contribution to the field of social welfare and the profession of social work.

School of social work dissertations are expected to pose a question or questions for study that fall broadly within the area of social work or social welfare with substantive, theoretical and/or methodological significance. The School recognizes that there are many different forms of contribution to knowledge, theory, practice improvement, research methods and new syntheses or analysis of existing knowledge. Students are permitted to collect their own data or use secondary data. A dissertation must consist of a coherent and original account of a unified research project.

As such, students have the option to complete a traditional dissertation (approximately 200-300 pages) or to complete an integrated article dissertation. An integrated article dissertation is one where students integrate manuscript-based articles as chapters within their dissertation. We use the term 'manuscript articles' acknowledging that manuscripts are considered publishable by the time of defence. As noted in FGPA's Integrated Thesis Policy (Article 12.4), consistent ethical and quality standards apply for each option. The decision about which option to pursue occurs in discussion between the dissertation supervisor/committee and the student.

Students may switch from one format to the other with their committee's approval.

### 1. Rationale for an Integrated Article Dissertation

An Integrated Article dissertation has the following benefits:

- Provides an opportunity to acquire contemporary doctoral writing skills (i.e., publication-quality writing; selecting appropriate journals; adhering to journal style requirements, word and page limitations);
- Increases the possibilities of student's work being shared and mobilized through publication and citing;
- Enables a student to efficiently manage their dissertation work through establishing distinct manuscript articles that can be completed, and reviewed by their committee;
- Positions students well for their future career (postdoctoral fellowships, jobs).

### 2. Criteria for an Integrated Article Dissertation

- The Integrated Article dissertation comprises a minimum of three manuscript articles which must form a cohesive body of work that has clear and explicit connective threads, and in which the rationale for the integration of the articles must be clear.
- Students must be sole author or first author on all articles. Co-authorship with the committee chair and/or committee members is permitted in exceptional circumstances

(e.g., secondary data analysis). Authorship must be negotiated and agreed upon in writing as part of the completed dissertation proposal.

- The separate articles should be distinct and clear from one another and must be approved by the dissertation committee. Determining whether any overlap between manuscripts is excessive will be the responsibility of the student's dissertation committee. In these situations, it is a student's responsibility to make a compelling case for the distinctiveness of the three articles.
- A minimum of two manuscript articles must be based on empirical data which are analyzed by the student, with the option for the other manuscript article(s) to be a theoretical /conceptual analysis, or methodological paper.

One of the manuscript articles included in the dissertation can be a previously published article, if the following criteria are met:

- The article must have been published during the student's matriculation in the doctoral program;
- All authorship requirements must adhere to the guidelines above;
- The dissertation committee agrees to include the published article as an integrated and substantial chapter of the dissertation;
- The decision to include the article occurs during the thesis proposal development/approval process.

### 3. A Three Article Dissertation Proposal

A proposal for a three-article dissertation requires the following:

- An introduction laying out the importance and need for the dissertation, a rationale for three-article dissertation approach, and an explanation of how the manuscript articles are linked;
- An outline of the three (or more) manuscript articles. For non-empirical papers, this includes a detailed outline of the topics to be covered and an in-depth description of the main argument the student is planning to make; the conceptual framework the student is proposing; and the literature the student plans to cover. For empirical papers, a conceptual framework, a detailed methodology section discussing the proposed methodology and methods for this study and/or this analysis;
- A copy of any published article to be considered for inclusion in the Integrated Article thesis;
- A list of proposed journals (the manuscript articles are to be submitted to journals following the style requirements of those particular journals) and a timeline for completion of the work. Journals must be approved by the dissertation committee. The committee will help select journals that will challenge the student and offer a reasonable chance of publication success.

### 4. Guidelines for an Integrated Article Dissertation Proposal Defense

The committee must:

- Agree the proposed research is unique and will make an original contribution to the field of social welfare and/or profession of social work;
- Agree the Integrated Article thesis will consist of a coherent account of a unified research project;
- Agree that the proposed methodology, methods or concepts are rigorous enough to likely lead to 3 articles suitable for publication in refereed journals;
- Provide continuous feedback and approval of these pre-published articles.

## 5. Integrated Article Dissertation Format:

- An abstract synthesizing the manuscript articles (minimum three), as well as an introduction and a conclusion;
- Chapter 1 – The introductory chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature that establishes the student's familiarity with relevant work in the field; sets out the objectives of the thesis; places the research into the larger context of the candidate's discipline; and provides an overall thematic cohesiveness of the chapters (research manuscripts) to the reader;
- Chapters 2, 3 & 4 are the manuscripts (additional chapters are added if more than three manuscripts form the thesis);
- A bridging section which introduces each manuscript chapter. This section offers substantive commentary connecting each manuscript chapter to the dissertation as an integrated whole;
- Chapter 5 (or the final chapter if more than three manuscripts are included)– conclusion discusses the synthesis of what is learned from the three articles. The conclusion chapter synthesizes learning across the three articles, summarizes and critiques the research topic as a whole, offers an analysis of the limitations existing in the study, outlines the implications of the research, and suggests potential areas of future research based on the thesis contribution.

## 6. Three-Article Dissertation Defense

- Manuscripts submitted and accepted for publication by a journal do not constitute acceptance or approval of the manuscript as part of the dissertation by the dissertation committee. It is the responsibility of the examining committee to determine if a manuscript fully meets degree requirements.