

Dissertation Guidelines

A PhD dissertation contributes new knowledge to one or more academic fields. To that aim, it must undergo a peer review process. Consistent with current best practices models, the dissertation requirement for the PhD in Urban Leadership and Entrepreneurship follows the cumulative dissertation model. Consistent with approved program guidelines, the program requires acceptance of two scholarly articles in peer-reviewed journals with the PhD candidate serving as lead or sole author for both articles. There are five stages to the dissertation process:

1. Dissertation Committee and Approval of Dissertation Topic
2. Qualifying Exam and PhD Candidacy
3. Dissertation Research and Writing
4. Proof of Publication
5. Cumulative Dissertation Defense

1. Dissertation Committee and Approval of Dissertation Topic

A Dissertation Topic and Dissertation Committee must be approved by the PhD program director who will assist students in assembling their committee. Typically, the topic will be approved first to ensure that the committee represents the requisite expertise to ensure the PhD candidate will be successful in pursuing their topic. The committee must consist of 4 members including the committee chair. The committee chair must hold a PhD degree and hold faculty- or land-grant appointment at UDC in a field appropriate to the proposed thesis research. A thesis committee may include one member external to UDC. All dissertation committee members must hold a terminal degree in their field. In exceptional cases, a committee member's professional record may be considered equivalent to the terminal degree.

2. Qualifying Exam and PhD Candidacy

The PhD Qualifying Exam marks the beginning of the dissertation phase of the program. Once a PhD student has completed their 48 credit hours of course work (see summary table) and has received approval for their dissertation topic and committee, they can schedule their Qualifying Exam. The Qualifying Exam consists of a written research paper of publishable quality that outlines the research question the candidate will pursue; the proposed methodology to be used to address the research question; and a thorough review of the literature within which the proposed research is placed.

In addition to the written paper, the PhD student must present the proposed dissertation research in the CAUSES Graduate Seminar, which is held every semester and is open to faculty, students, and the general public. All members of the dissertation committee and the PhD program director must be present for the qualifying exam. Following the presentation, the dissertation committee will deliberate and vote on the student's written paper and oral presentation. The vote will establish the level of 'approved', 'approved pending revisions' or 'not approved'. Once a PhD student has passed the Qualifying Exam, they are considered a PhD candidate ABD.

3. Dissertation Research and Writing

During the dissertation research and writing phase, the PhD candidate is not required to take any course work but will enroll in the program for dissertation credits only. The candidate's PhD committee chair in consultation with the PhD program director will advise the candidate on the proposed number of dissertation credit hours recommended for every semester following the qualifying exam. The candidate will also continue to enroll in the Graduate Seminar to ensure that they stay engaged with the program and other PhD students and candidates enrolled in the program.

4. Proof of Publication

Before being awarded the PhD degree eligible PhD candidates must be the sole- or lead-author of two peer-reviewed papers that have been accepted for publication in a reputable academic journal. It is recommended that PhD candidates also pursue a third, initial publication, for which they are a contributing or peer author. This initial publication will familiarize the PhD student/candidate with the publication and peer review process.

Peer reviewed publications typically inform a prospective author that their work has been 'accepted', 'accepted pending revision' or 'not accepted'. A PhD candidate's dissertation committee will determine whether an 'acceptance pending revision' will be counted as an acceptance based on the extent of the required revisions and feedback received from the peer reviewers and publisher. Once the cumulative thesis requirement has been met and the acceptance of two peer-reviewed articles has been documented, the candidate can schedule their thesis defense.

5. Cumulative Dissertation Defense

The thesis defense is a public lecture where the PhD candidate is the presenter and their thesis committee members serve as discussants. The presentation must summarize the two published papers and their contributions to the research question the candidate outlined in their qualifying exam. All thesis committee members and the PhD program director must be present for the defense.

Once the presentation and discussion is concluded, the thesis committee will consult and issue their evaluation of the candidate's publications and oral presentation in writing as 'completed', 'completed pending revisions', or 'not completed'. Should a 'completed pending revisions' or 'not completed' grade be issued, the committee must state in what work the candidate is expected to complete to meet all degree requirements. A 'completed' grade renders the PhD candidate eligible to recommend the candidate to the UDC Board of Trustees of the University for awarding of the PhD degree. The degree will be awarded at the earliest graduation date following the successful dissertation defense.

