



DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Doctoral Project Phase Student Handbook

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Doctoral Project Phase

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is designed to guide Doctor of Ministry (DMin) students through the doctoral project phase of the degree: from the initial planning and proposal process, through writing the project, and graduation. This handbook is required reading for all DMin students before they can officially begin working on their project and should be used as a guide throughout the doctoral project phase.

If you have any questions about the doctoral project phase or anything found in this handbook, please contact the Doctoral Projects Administrator: dmin-fpcoord@fuller.edu.

UNDERSTANDING THE DOCTORAL PROJECT

The doctoral project is the capstone of the DMin program. It is an opportunity for students to connect knowledge gained from their coursework with the concrete realities of their ministries: (1) identifying a challenge they face in ministry and situating that challenge in their context, (2) reflecting theologically on that challenge, (3) and designing a new ministry initiative to address that challenge which must then be implemented and assessed.

DOCTORAL PROJECT OPTIONS

Students may choose from two options for their doctoral project (a project may also be a hybrid of the two):

The standard option is a **Program Implementation** in which students identify a challenge they face in ministry, reflect on that challenge, and design a new ministry initiative to tackle that challenge. A new ministry initiative could be a workshop, leadership training, retreat, small groups, etc. The new ministry initiative must be implemented and assessed by the student in their written project. Projects are 150-175 pages in length. This is the option pursued by most DMin students.

A second option is to a **Curriculum Design** or some other concrete written material (study guide, training manual, etc.) for use in ministry. This written material must be mostly original writing created by the student. In this case, parts one through three of the project are the same, but are shorter in length. A sample of the curriculum is then included in the appendix. Curriculum projects range from 100-125 pages in the body, and includes parts of the curriculum which is typically 20-60 pages. Students are required to assess their curriculum either with a group of key leaders or a pilot group.

A project may also end up being a **hybrid** of the two options. The student doesn't need to make a clear distinction between the two. The student can also use a term that is more fitting to their actual project such as workshop, training, retreat, etc.

TIMELINE FOR COMPLETING THE DOCTORAL PROJECT

On average, the doctoral project phase takes 1 to 2 years to complete. Due dates are set individually for each student and can be extended as needed so long as the student is not in danger of reaching the 6-year expiration date of their program.

Here is a sample timeline for completing the doctoral project phase:

- **DM710:** ten week, online doctoral project proposal writing course, offered every fall, winter, and spring quarter.
- **2-4 weeks after completing DM710:** typical timeframe for receiving feedback on the proposal and (if approved) instructions to register for the doctoral project (DM706 Doctoral Project Writing).
- **4-6 months after registering for DM706:** initial due date for the first submission.
- **6-8 weeks:** time needed for feedback on the first submission.
- **4-6 months after feedback is received:** initial due date for the *edited* full draft.
- **6-8 weeks:** time needed for feedback on the full draft.
- **1-2 months:** time typically needed to incorporate feedback into a pre-final version of the project. [This step can be skipped in the instance that minor changes are needed on the full draft].
- **4-6 weeks:** time typically needed to receive and incorporate pre-final feedback, schedule oral defense, complete graduation-related forms, and turn in the final version of the project.

The Doctoral Projects Administrator tracks all students through this process, setting and adjusting all due dates to help students complete the degree on time. Students who have questions about the timeline or who need extensions at any point in the process should contact the Doctoral Projects Administrator: dmin-fpcoord@fuller.edu.

GUIDES FOR THE JOURNEY

The **Doctoral Projects Administrator** serves as an advisor to students throughout the doctoral project phase. The administrator secures content readers for students, guides students as they think through their initial project ideas, and tracks their progress toward completion of the program.

The DMin Associate Dean (Dr. Kurt Fredrickson) serves as **Theological Mentor** to students – serving on the proposal committee and working with students to revise and improve their doctoral project proposals. He is also on hand to mediate conflict between the student and their content reader.

Every student works with a **Content Reader** during the doctoral project phase. The Content Reader evaluates all drafts of the project and provides written feedback to the student. The reader is primarily responsible for approving the content of the project and will assign the final grade.

The **Editor** reviews and prepares the full draft of the student's project to meet style and format expectations. Each student is required to hire a DMin approved editor and is responsible for direct communication and payment with their editor. The total cost averages around \$500-\$750 USD for a full draft. Students that need more support in their writing can expect that editing services will require more time and cost.

CHAPTER TWO

The Doctoral Project Proposal

INTRODUCTION

The doctoral project proposal is the first major step in the doctoral project phase. The proposal should serve as a roadmap, giving outside readers a clear understanding of the project from start to finish, and providing students with a clear plan for successfully completing the project. A strong proposal will lead to a strong project.

THE PROPOSAL PROCESS

There are several steps involved in the proposal process:

1. Meet with the Doctoral Projects Administrator in person or over video to discuss your Doctoral Project idea.
2. Register for the ten-week, online course DM710: Developing the Doctoral Project Proposal.
3. During DM710, continue to write and revise your proposal in light of feedback you receive from the instructor of the course.
4. At the end of DM710, submit your proposal. If you would like to request a specific person to serve as your content reader, be sure to notify the Doctoral Projects Administrator.
5. Allow up to four weeks for the DMin office to render a decision on your proposal.
6. Once you receive the decision from the DMin office, follow the instructions provided in the decision letter to register for the doctoral project or revise your proposal.

DM710: DEVELOPING THE DOCTORAL PROJECT PROPOSAL

This online course guides students step-by-step through the process of developing and writing a doctoral project proposal. Students will be introduced to the doctoral project and given templates and samples to aid in developing their own proposals. By the end of the course, students should have a workable proposal. DM710 is offered every winter, spring, and fall quarter.

THE APPROVAL PROCESS

After DM710 comes to a close, DMin personnel meet to review all proposals. The Doctoral Projects Administrator will send feedback to you via email once it is available.

There are three possible outcomes from the approval process:

- **Approved:** Proposal is strong and requires little or no changes. Student can register for the doctoral project and begin writing.
- **Approved with Changes:** Student must incorporate feedback into the proposal before they begin writing. There is no need to resubmit the proposal. Student can register for the project.
- **Resubmit:** More substantial changes are needed to the proposal, which must be reviewed and approved by the Doctoral Projects Administrator before the student can register for the project and begin writing.

REGISTER FOR DM706: DOCTORAL PROJECT WRITING

While there is no in-class component to the doctoral project writing phase, students still receive units for writing the project and must therefore register as if it were a course.

There are three steps in the registration process:

1. Carefully review the instructions contained in the Doctoral Project Proposal feedback letter. Failure to follow these instructions could cause delays in your program.
2. Register for the doctoral project (DM706) online with the CRN provided by the Doctoral Projects Administrator.
3. The Doctoral Projects Administrator will verify that you are registered. The Administrator will double-check your registration on their end and set a due date for your first submission.

RS890: DISSERTATION WORK (FULL-TIME) AND RS891 DISSERTATION WORK (LESS THAN HALF-TIME)

Students with loans or loan deferment must register for continuation in order to be reported as full-time or less than half-time. Students must register for RS890 each quarter they need continuation after DM706 for up to one academic year. After the first year, students can register for RS891 each quarter until they complete the doctoral project and all other degree requirements. RS891 is reported as less than half time enrollment. RS890 and RS891 will be 0 unit registrations. Students will be charged a continuation fee for each quarter.

CHAPTER THREE

The First Submission

INTRODUCTION

Once students have registered for the doctoral project, the next thing they will need to turn in is the **first submission**. Comprised mostly of the introduction, ministry context, and literature review, the first submission allows students to get feedback on their content and the quality of their writing, which they will then incorporate into the rest of the project.

WRITING THE FIRST SUBMISSION

Students are typically given four months from the time their proposal is approved to write the first submission. Students who need more time should contact the Doctoral Projects Administrator and request an extension.

Here are some suggestions for writing a strong first submission:

1. Do your research. Gather the sources and data needed to write the first submission and review them thoroughly.
2. Stick to the outline in your proposal. While it is okay for a doctoral project to deviate slightly from the proposal, following the proposal during the writing process usually makes for a smoother ride.
3. Consult the *DMin Style and Format Guide* and the 9th edition of Turabian's *A Manual for Writers* for help in formatting the document.

4. Explore the DM706: DMin Doctoral Project Canvas page. There are useful resources there to help guide students through the writing process and beyond.
5. Back up all your work, preferably on an external hard drive and a cloud. Losing what you have written can be a disaster.
6. Proof-read everything before submitting it to the DMin office.
7. Bear in mind the due date of the first submission and be sure to contact the DMin office before that date if you need to request an extension.

TURNING IN THE FIRST SUBMISSION

Once the first submission is finished, it should be uploaded on the DM706 Canvas page. Be sure to include the following in one MS Word-compatible document:

- Title page
- Full table of contents (it's okay at this point to leave out the page numbers for later portions of the project, but the names of all chapters should be included)
- Introduction
- Ministry Context
- Literature Review
- Bibliography

Students should carefully follow all directions on the Canvas page when turning in the first submission.

GETTING FEEDBACK ON THE FIRST SUBMISSION

The review process for the first submission typically takes six to eight weeks. The Doctoral Projects Administrator will download all new first submission uploads from the DM706 Canvas page on or around the 2nd and 16th of every month. Once the academic integrity of the first submission has been verified, it will be sent to the student's Content Reader for review.

Feedback will be emailed back to the student by the Doctoral Projects Administrator as soon as it is available. If extensive content-related changes are requested by the Content Reader, the student may need to revise and resubmit their first submission. More commonly, feedback from the Content Reader can simply be worked into the full draft of the project.

The Doctoral Projects Administrator will set an initial due date for the full draft or revised first submission once feedback is sent to the student.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Full Draft and Pre-Final Version

INTRODUCTION

The **full draft** of the project is the *second* major element students will turn in during the doctoral project phase. If further changes are required once the full draft is reviewed, students will also be required to submit a pre-final version of the project.

WRITING THE FULL DRAFT

Students are typically given six months from the time first submission feedback is returned to write the full draft. This timeline includes 4 months for writing and 2 months for working with an editor. Students should procure the services of a DMin approved editor two to three months before their due date. Those who need more time should contact the Doctoral Projects Administrator to request an extension.

Here are some suggestions for writing a strong full draft:

1. Use the evaluations from your Content Reader to correct the first submission.
2. Research and write remaining chapters of the project. Continue to follow the proposal outline.
3. Continue to use the *DMin Style and Format Guide* and Turabian's manual to shape the full draft.
4. Back up your work. Losing what you've written can be a disaster.
5. Bear in mind that assessment is a required component of the doctoral project. Your full draft has to show evidence that you've put a new ministry initiative in place and gathered feedback on its effectiveness. Otherwise, your project will not be accepted.
6. Proofread everything before submitting it to the DMin office.
7. Bear in mind the due date of the full draft and be sure to contact the DMin office before that date if you need to request an extension.

EDITING

Two to three months before the student anticipates turning in their full draft they should contact and secure services with a DMin Approved editor. All DMin students are required to hire an editor. The editor will work with each student to make sure the project conforms to DMin academic standards in style and format. The average cost is \$500-\$750 USD and more for projects that need additional writing support. Prior to submitting to an editor, students should use the DMin Style & Format guide and resources available in the DM706 Canvas page to get their project in the best possible shape. Doing so will save students time and costs for editing. In addition, the [Fuller Writing Center](#) offers free consultations to students or it may be helpful to ask peers to help proofread the paper before editing.

Students are welcome to contact any editor on the DMin Approved Editor list to inquire about their rates and availability. Editors need one to two months to edit a full draft. Editing services, timeline, and payments are negotiated between student and editor. Payments are made directly to the editor. The DMin department is not involved in this process. Students are responsible for maintaining clear communication with their editor about due dates, how much the total editing will cost, and expectations for payment.

TURNING IN THE FULL DRAFT

The full draft must include the entire edited project from beginning to end. This includes all front matter, back matter, and chapters of the project—everything that will end up in the final version must be included.

Once the full draft is ready, it should be uploaded on the DM706 Canvas page in one MS Word-compatible document.

GETTING FEEDBACK ON THE FULL DRAFT

The review process for the full draft takes six to eight weeks. The Doctoral Projects Administrator will download all new full draft uploads from the DM706 Canvas page on or around the 2nd and 16th of every month. Once the academic integrity of the full draft has been verified, it will be sent to the student's Content Reader for review.

Feedback from the reader will be emailed back to the student by the Doctoral Projects Administrator as soon as it is available. The draft will be assigned one of four possible grades based on the Content Reader's feedback:

- **Approved with Distinction:** The student demonstrates academic excellence and makes a significant contribution to the field. Content is approved with no/minor changes. Student may incorporate any minor changes and submit the final version.
- **Approved with Changes:** The student demonstrates a solid understanding of their area of study and contributes critical insight into their ministry. Manuscript is approved with changes. Students may incorporate the changes and submit the final version.
- **Satisfactory:** Manuscript requires more extensive changes. Student will be required to incorporate feedback into a pre-final version, along with a letter detailing the changes they have made, both of which will be reviewed by the Content Reader.
- **Unsatisfactory:** Manuscript does not meet the expectations of the DMin program. The full draft must be revised and resubmitted.

The Doctoral Projects Administrator will set an initial due date for the final version or pre-final version once feedback from the reviewer is sent to the student.

SUBMITTING THE PRE-FINAL VERSION

For those required to submit a **pre-final version**, the pre-final is an opportunity to revise your project and receive one last check before moving on to the final version. Once it is ready, the pre-final version should be uploaded on the DM706 Canvas page in one MS Word-compatible document.

The review process for the pre-final version is typically a bit quicker than previous reviews, depending on the extent of the changes. The Doctoral Projects Administrator will download all new pre-final uploads from the DM706 Canvas page on or around the 2nd and 16th of every month and send them out for review.

If the pre-final version is approved with little or no changes, the student may proceed to submit the final version. If more extensive content changes or editing are required, the student will need to revise and resubmit the pre-final version until it is approved.

Completing the Doctoral Project

COMPLETING THE ORAL DEFENSE

Once the full draft or pre-final version has been approved and a due date for the final version has been set, students should contact the Doctoral Projects Administrator to schedule the defense. More of an informal capstone to the DMin journey, the oral defense is a 45-minute debriefing with a DMin staff in which students are given the opportunity to field questions about their project. While it is not graded, all students must complete the oral defense before their graduation clearance can be approved.

Oral defenses take place via online video conferencing. The oral defense will be scheduled on an individual basis.

SUBMITTING THE FINAL VERSION

Submitting the **final version** of the doctoral project is usually the last step of a student's program. (Occasionally students may need to finish a final course or independent study). For students planning to participate in the June commencement and hooding ceremonies, the full draft must be submitted by **March 1** and the final version must be submitted by **June 1**. Any later and the student will not be able to participate in these ceremonies until the following year.

Once the final version is ready to submit, students should send a PDF and Word copy to the Doctoral Projects Administrator.

A digital copy of the project will be sent to the Fuller Library. If the student would like personal bounded copies of their project, they can order them through Thesis on Demand <https://www.thesisondemand.com/> (US only) or through a local printing and binding company.

Graduation clearances are usually processed the following quarter after receiving the final version, at which point the student will be considered a graduate. Students who need written confirmation of their program status in the interim for professional reasons should contact the Doctoral Projects Administrator.

CHAPTER SIX

Graduation and Commencement

GRADUATION

“Graduation” occurs once a student completes all requirements of the DMin program. Students can therefore graduate any day of the year. Students can apply for graduation once the first submission of their doctoral project is approved. Along with the graduation application, students need to complete a program clearance form as part of their graduation clearance.

Once all degree requirements are completed and all forms are submitted to the DMin office, the graduation clearance will be processed at the end of the quarter. The Registrar’s Office sends out diplomas about ten weeks into the following quarter in which the student graduates. For specific quarterly start and end dates, talk to the Doctoral Projects Administrator.

COMMENCEMENT & HOODING

Not to be confused with graduation, “commencement” is an annual ceremony celebrating all of Fuller’s graduates. Commencement happens once each year (always on a Saturday in June) near Fuller’s Pasadena campus. While DMin students are not required to attend commencement, our office encourages all students to consider participating in this once in a lifetime celebration.

On the Friday of commencement weekend, the DMin Office hosts their annual hooding ceremony. Unlike Fuller-wide commencement, the hooding ceremony is a more intimate celebration for professional doctorate graduates and their guests. The DMin office assumes that all students who indicate on their graduation application that they plan to attend commencement will also attend the hooding ceremony. If this is not the case, please contact the Doctoral Projects Administrator.

In order to qualify to attend the hooding and commencement ceremonies in June, students must submit the first submission by **October 1**, graduation application by **March 1**, the full draft by **March 1**, and complete all degree requirements by **June 1**. This is a Fuller-wide deadline and there are **no exceptions**. Students who miss the March and/or June deadlines may participate in commencement and hooding the following year.

Graduates will receive information about commencement and hooding from the Registrar’s Office and DMin Office, respectively, via email in early April.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AI Policy

Fuller Seminary Professional Doctorates AI Policy

Using AI tools thoughtfully and ethically is an essential skill for researchers. In this program, you are allowed to use AI tools to support your research processes in these ways: clarify or confirm your research ideas, assist you in searching for relevant articles, assist with content organization, analyze data, and/or check grammar, spelling, and formatting of your written work. Since critical thinking and analysis are key skills required in a doctoral program, you are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the content that you produce. **You may not use paraphrasing software or AI writing software to generate any content in your paper.** The writing and content of the research paper needs to be of your own work. When final papers and drafts of your doctoral work are submitted, the paper is run through both a plagiarism checker and an AI checker. Note that programs like Grammarly, Copilot, and similar apps use AI to paraphrase your work and are flagged by the AI checker.

In terms of proper citations, please note: (1) If you used AI for any aspects of your work, you need to include a declaration statement in the Appendix to disclose which AI tool and how you used it. (See an example of a declaration statement at the bottom.) (2) If you used AI for specific methodological or analytical processes related to your qualitative research (e.g., coding data), you need to cite your use of AI tools in the paper and include it in the reference list. This is in addition to the disclosure statement. You can refer to the [Chicago Manuel of Style Guidelines](#) for citing AI.

Violations of the AI policy include: using AI to generate any part of your work or failing to disclose the use of AI properly. Any of the above acts will be considered as violations of the Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) and will be reported to the AAC Committee and may result in failure of the course and/or a delay in the completion of the program.

Example: Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies

During the preparation of this work, the author used [ChatGPT] to [search for relevant articles for the review of literature], [content organization], and [troubleshoot data analysis]. After using this [tool/service], the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the dissertation/doctoral project.