



DISSERTATION POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

PH.D. PROGRAM IN HEALTH SYSTEMS AND SERVICES RESEARCH

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UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS FOR MEDICAL SCIENCES

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The dissertation for the UAMS Health Systems and Services Research PhD Program must be the product of a theory-informed, empirical research study conducted by the PhD candidate that uses health services research methodology to address an important health policy, health services, or public health issue. Dissertations in health systems and services research are expected to address at least three empirical questions involving the organization, financing, delivery, and/or impact of health-related services, programs, policies, and/or interventions. Purely etiological studies of disease or behavior generally fall outside the scope of a dissertation on health systems and services, unless the research findings have clear and compelling implications for health systems and services that are well developed by the student. The dissertation should be written in a scholarly style, including thorough literature reviews and development of relevant theoretical frameworks, and it must include detailed descriptions of research designs, analytic methods, measurement strategies and data. The dissertation research may include analysis of existing, secondary data and/or analysis of primary data collected by the candidate.

The dissertation must be the product of valid scientific research designed to produce *new* and *significant*, generalizable knowledge about an important issue in health policy, health services, or public health. Students are expected to employ rigorous research designs and analytic methodologies that are generally accepted to be valid, state-of-the-art scientific approaches in health services research. The dissertation research should be significant in that it is expected to produce evidence that supports causal inferences about a phenomenon of interest or that makes significant contributions to the progression of evidence in support of such inferences. Research that is purely formative or descriptive in nature may not be judged as significant unless the phenomenon of interest and/or the methods being tested are extraordinary in their novelty and innovation. Moreover, the dissertation research must produce evidence that generalizes to settings and populations beyond those directly observed in the investigation, recognizing that there are necessary trade-offs among internal and external validity imposed by logistical and ethical constraints in all empirical research projects. The dissertation

committee will be the ultimate judge of the significance, and the internal and external validity of the dissertation research.

The dissertation also must be innovative, in the sense that an existing methodology is being applied in a new way or to a new question or problem area, or in the sense that a methodology is extended or modified in a significant way. Heavily theoretical dissertations must still include empirical testing and a substantial demonstration of their applicability to a real-world, contemporary issue in health policy, health services or public health, and this application should be the major focus of one or more papers or chapters. By virtue of being innovative, the dissertation should produce *new* knowledge in that it resolves gaps, uncertainties, or controversies in the existing empirical and/or theoretical body of knowledge.

All dissertations must conform to the policies established by the UAMS College of Public Health. The dissertation can take either of two formats, a three-paper format or a monograph format.

Three Paper Format

The first format consists of three publishable, empirical research papers relating to a health policy, health services, or public health issue. The papers are typically related, either by their substantive content or by their methodology, but this is not a requirement. It is recommended that at least two of the three papers be related, either by content or methodology, but this is left to the discretion of the student's dissertation committee.

While publish-ability is a necessary condition for the acceptability of the dissertation, the fact that a paper has been published in a peer-reviewed publication does not necessarily make it acceptable for the dissertation. Each paper must be an empirical research paper that includes a valid research design, valid data, and appropriate analytic methods of sufficient rigor as deemed by the student's dissertation committee. Review articles, research design articles, and purely theoretical or conceptual articles generally will not count toward one the three required dissertation papers. Material such as literature reviews, theoretical frameworks, detailed description of analytic methods and data—which may be excluded from published versions of papers due to page constraints—must be included in the dissertation, possibly as appendices or as separate background papers.

On occasion, one or more of the papers may have been published prior to submission of the dissertation, and the published version may be included in the dissertation in lieu of a typescript. However, none of the papers may have been published prior to the student's matriculation into the program, and the majority of the work on the dissertation must be completed after matriculation.

The dissertation must include an overview paper that introduces and summarizes the topic addressed by the dissertation research and presented in the three papers. It must contain material that describes, in non-technical terms, the implications of the papers' findings for the real world of health policy, management and practice, as well as directions for future research that are suggested by the papers' findings and/or limitations.

Monograph Format

The second format alternative is a traditional monograph-style dissertation. Such a dissertation must either (a) contain at least three units of empirical research which are independently publishable or (b) be suitable for subsequent publication in book form. The sections of the monograph are as follows: Introduction, Background/Literature Review, Methods, Results, Discussion (interpretation and implication of results and limitations), and Conclusion. The rules described above for the three-paper format, regarding prior publication, apply to a traditional dissertation as well.

Key Content of Dissertation

Regardless of which of the two formats is chosen, the dissertation must include several key elements of content:

- (1) A clear description of the problem under investigation, at least three empirical research questions of interest, and why these questions are relevant and important from a health policy, health care management, or public health perspective.

- (2) A thorough and comprehensive review(s) of the existing theoretical and empirical literature related to the problem and research questions of interest. The review must make clear what is known about the problem already, what is not yet known, and what are remaining areas of uncertainty or controversy. In doing so, the review must make clear how the dissertation research will contribute new knowledge to the existing body of literature.

- (3) Development of a theoretical/conceptual framework(s) based on relevant social, behavioral, and/or biomedical theories that guides the investigation, elucidates hypotheses to be tested, and justifies the research design and analytic methodologies used.

- (4) Description of the research design and analytic methods used in the investigation, the hypotheses to be tested, and the measurement strategies and data used.

(5) Description of the key results from all analyses and hypothesis testing.

(6) Interpretation of the findings and discussion of the implications of the research for health policy, health management, clinical or public health practice, and future research. This discussion should also include an assessment of the limitations of the research and their implications for how results should be interpreted and used in the research, policy, and practice communities. The dissertation should translate and apply research findings as clearly and concretely as possible in the form of considerations, recommendations, scenarios and options for the full range of health system stakeholders likely to share in the benefits and/or costs of the phenomena studied, including policy-makers, clinicians and providers, health care and public health administrators, payers, patients, and the public at large.

Dissertation Committee

Doctoral candidates will be required to complete a minimum of 18 hours of dissertation research under the guidance of a Doctoral Dissertation Committee of faculty. The Committee must include at least five UAMS faculty members—including at least three active Health Policy and Management faculty members, with primary appointments in the Health Policy and Management Department. The Committee should be chaired by an active Health Policy and Management faculty member. Faculty with adjunct or secondary appointments in the Department of Health Policy and Management may serve as chair with approval from the Director of the Health Systems and Services Research doctoral program. Typically, a candidate works with the chair of their committee to identify other individuals who would be relevant to serve on the committee. A candidate may request that a faculty member from another institution serve on their Dissertation Committee. However, that request must be approved by the Director of the Health Systems and Services Research. The Committee can be appointed at any time after the student has progressed to candidacy. At the time of appointment, notification of the committee membership must be submitted using the COPH Dissertation Committee Membership Form. The form is available on the UAMS COPH Doctoral Degree Program forms page.

Although it is expected that members of a Dissertation Committee will be retained on the committee until completion of the dissertation research, there are some circumstances that may warrant a change in the membership of a Dissertation Committee. Examples of such circumstances include change in committee members' duties that restricts their ability to participate, committee members' change position and no longer meet membership eligibility, and philosophical or personal disagreements that prevents the dissertation research to progress. In the case of disagreements, the candidate should work with the committee chair, to try to resolve the disagreement. If the disagreement is with the committee chair, the candidate should work with the HSSR program director to resolve the disagreement. If the disagreement is with the program director, the candidate should work with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs to try to resolve the disagreement. Should a resolution not be reached, the candidate may request a change in the committee membership by submitting a change of committee form, which is available on the COPH Doctoral Degree Program forms webpage.

Dissertation Defense and Approval

At such a time that the majority of members of the Dissertation Committee agree that the candidate has completed the dissertation research and is prepared to defend it, a date for a public defense may be scheduled in consultation with all committee members. Public notice of the event must be made at least two weeks prior to the actual date of the defense.

Acceptance of the dissertation and award of the Ph.D. will require approval by at least 80% of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee after the candidate's oral, public defense of the dissertation. A completed public dissertation defense approval form must be submitted to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. The form is available on the COPH Doctoral Degree Program forms webpage.

Co-authorship

Co-authored dissertation papers or chapters are permitted. Order of authorship should follow the conventions found in health services research journals such as *Health Services Research*, *Medical Care*, or *Health Affairs*. The student must qualify as first author for journals where first authorship indicates primary responsibility for the paper. Faculty members and students are cautioned that a faculty advisor should be a co-author only if he or she contributes substantially to the development of the research design, measurement and data collection, and/or analytical methodology for the paper or chapter. If the faculty member is primarily responsible for the research design, data and methodology, then the paper probably does not qualify as independent work by the student. If the faculty member has developed the methodology in a previous or concurrent research study, then it is expected that the student will apply the methodology independently to a novel problem under investigation. If the faculty member has developed the measurement strategy and collected the data under a previous or concurrent research study, then it is expected that the student will apply a novel and independent analytic methodology to the problem under investigation.

Dissertation Proposal

As part of the dissertation research process, candidates must first successfully develop and defend a written proposal of their dissertation research. The dissertation proposal must address items 1-4 listed under the Key Content section above. These items should be in separate sections or chapters (although item 2, the background/literature review, and item 3, the conceptual framework, can be combined into a single section or chapter of the proposal). In addition, the chapter or section addressing item 1, the description of the problem and research questions, should describe the format the dissertation will take (three paper format or monograph) and clearly outline the three units of empirical research that is proposed. Acceptance of the dissertation proposal will require approval by all members of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee after the candidate's oral defense of the proposal. [The oral defense of the proposal](#) is not open to the public. The candidate must submit the completed Dissertation Defense

Approval Form to the CPH Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. The form is available on the UAMS CPH Doctoral Degree Program forms webpage.

Regulatory and Ethical Standards Review

Dissertation research proposals/ protocols must then be reviewed and approved by the UAMS Institutional Review Board (IRB) before candidates begin their research. If the candidate believes their research may fall under the category of research that it is exempt from IRB review, the candidate must submit a Letter of Determination to the IRB to confirm that the proposed research is indeed exempt before the candidate may begin their research.

Timeline

A candidate must complete their dissertation within 10 years from their entrance into the program.

Dissertation Formatting and Submission

The dissertation must be formatted according to the general guidelines outlined by the CPH Doctoral Program Directors Committee. These guidelines are available on the CPH Doctoral Degree Program Policies webpage. The process for submitting the completed dissertation to the UAMS CPH is also presented in these guidelines.

PhD in Health Systems and Services Research

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP FORM

(approved 01/27/2016)

The Committee must include at least five faculty members, three of whom must be active Health Policy and Management faculty members. The Committee must be chaired by an active Health Policy and Management faculty member. Faculty with adjunct or secondary appointments in the Department of Health Policy and Management may serve as chair with approval from the Director of the Health Systems and Services Research doctoral program. Approval must be obtained from the program Director for non-UAMS faculty to serve on the committee. Indicate chair of committee with (C) after faculty's name in first column.

NAME	DEPARTMENT	COLLEGE	UNIVERSITY	SIGNATURE

Note: Department, College and University should be for the location of committee members' primary faculty appointment.

Date: _____ Signature: _____
Student

Date: _____ Signature: _____
Program Director

