Doctoral Capstone and Dissertation Planning

What follows the completion of my normal course work?
Immediately following the completion of students’ core and specialization courses, students will take a Doctoral Capstone Seminar, as well as, Dissertation Planning I and Dissertation Planning II.

What is involved in the Doctoral Capstone?
This seminar provides students the opportunity to apply what they have learned in their curriculum to highly realistic case studies related to their fields of specialization for the doctorate. Through an asynchronous discussion among students and the instructor, students will review, analyze, and evaluate case studies emphasizing the practice of the content in their curriculum. The course will involve the analysis and evaluation of at least three case studies. Students will contemplate complex questions posed by their instructor, reply to those questions, respond to other students’ analyses and evaluations, and receive faculty feedback. Each student will submit a final assignment on each case, involving his or her critical thinking on the core issues presented in the case and the presentation and defense of an approach to addressing those core issues.

What is included in Dissertation Planning I?
In this course students begin the drafting of their dissertation under the supervision of the instructor. Students working individually on their own dissertation drafts focus on the description of their topic, refinement of their research questions, and outlining their review of the literature with feedback and recommendations for revisions from their instructor. Final approval of these drafts of portions of the dissertation rests with the student’s individual dissertation committees, as described in the current University of the Rockies Dissertation Handbook, as revised from time to time. Following the procedures outlined in the Handbook, students may form their committees before, during or after their enrollment and completion of Dissertation Planning I and II.

What is included in Dissertation Planning II?
In this course students continue the drafting of their dissertation begun in Dissertation Planning I under the supervision of the instructor. Students working individually on their own dissertation drafts focus on further refinement of the description of their topic, the final draft wording of their research questions, and beginning to write their review of the literature and research methodology with feedback and recommendations for revisions from their instructor. Students will exchange research concepts and proposed approaches about their research methodology with other students proposing similar methods (qualitative, quantitative, mixed, etc.). Final approval of these drafts of portions of the dissertation rests with the student’s individual dissertation committees, as described in the current University of the Rockies Dissertation Handbook, as revised from time to time. Following the procedures outlined in the Handbook, students may form their committees before, during or after their enrollment and completion of Dissertation Planning I and II.

Will I be able to take these courses simultaneously?
The Doctoral Capstone, Dissertation Planning I, and Dissertation Planning II are designed to build on the work of the previous course. As a result, students are not able to take any combination of these courses simultaneously. These courses must be completed prior to a student enrolling in their first dissertation term.
Resources

**What resources are available to me as I prepare for my Dissertation?**

In our continued efforts to be Best in Class, University of the Rockies has a wide array of resources available to students throughout their doctoral journey. Resources include the Rockies Research Center, the Writing Center (for formatting and APA resources), and SMARTLab.

**What is the Rockies Research Center?**

The purpose of the Rockies Research Center is to provide a place for students to obtain information that will aid in dissertation research, download additional outside resources, and access an open forum for discussions or to ask questions about the dissertation and research processes. It will provide students with information on qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research methodologies and a complete explanation of the different theoretical approaches.

**What is SMARTLab?**

SMARTLab is a statistics primer that is a compilation of interactive web-based course materials in basic statistics and is designed to prepare you for success in research courses and dissertation; SMARTLab is self-paced. SMARTLab consists of (9) nine lessons covering basic concepts and skills in statistics: Samples and Populations, Variables and Scales of Measurement, Charts and Graphs in Statistics, Measures of Central Tendency, Measures of Variability, Probability, Normal Distributions and z Scores, Hypothesis Testing, and Correlation and Regression.

**Who will have access to the Rockies Research Center (RRC)?**

All University of the Rockies faculty and students, both online and campus, may access to the Rockies Research Center (RRC).

**How will I access the Research Center?**

Students can access the RRC through the Student Portal and all dissertation courses. Faculty will be able to access via the online classroom login page and all dissertation courses. There is also a link to the RRC through the online library.

**Is use of the Rockies Research Center mandatory?**

Using the RRC is not a requirement for any University of the Rockies courses or the dissertation process. It is strongly encouraged, however, that faculty and students take full advantage of all of the resources provided.

**Who should I contact if I am having technical issues in the Research Center?**

Provided in the Research Center is a Contact Us page. Students are encouraged to utilize the contact information there if they encounter any technical issues with the site or if they have any suggestions, compliments, or comments. If students are unable to gain access to the site, they should email rockiesresearchinfo@rockies.edu.

**Am I able to submit documents for review via the Rockies Research Center?**

No. Documents such as the Dissertation Letter of Intent, Committee Request forms, or the actual dissertation itself will still need to be submitted as outlined in the Dissertation Handbook. Any documents or forms submitted to the research center will not be reviewed.

**What is the purpose of the RRC discussion boards?**

The Faculty Discussion Board has three distinct discussion threads:

- **Dissertation Policies and Procedures** – discussions include the roles and responsibilities of dissertation chairs and committee members, best practices, and information on assisting students in the dissertation process.

- **Quantitative Researchers** – include discussions around the various topics in quantitative research. Faculty will be able to share with their colleagues their particular research interests, potential research opportunities, and post questions, comments, or resources regarding research design, data collection, and data analysis.
Qualitative Researchers—include discussions around the various topics in qualitative research. Faculty will be able to share with their colleagues their particular research interests, potential research opportunities, and post questions, comments, or resources regarding research design, data collection, and data analysis.

The Faculty and Student Discussion Board offer faculty and students a means by which they can exchange ideas, discuss research tools and design, as well as, serve as an arena to share information on research topics of interest.

The Student Discussion Board give students an opportunity to have questions answers by the “Dissertation Doctor.” Students can pose questions regarding the research process or receive help with a particular research issue.

Students in all specializations in both schools (Master and Doctoral) have access to the discussion boards.

What is the expected turnaround time for questions submission response?
Students should allow 48 hours from submission to allow for staff and/or faculty to respond to inquiries or questions.

For specific questions, who do I ask?
Faculty and students can post questions concerning research to the appropriate discussion forum.
For technical issues, send an email to rockiesresearchinfo@rockies.edu.
Dissertation

What is a dissertation? How is it different from a long term paper?
The dissertation is designed to demonstrate pertinent knowledge, skills, research expertise and possible practical application in the student’s discipline. A dissertation is intended to enhance learning and to demonstrate students’ ability to design and complete an individual, original research project. As a complex and in-depth project, a dissertation is expected to include advanced research design and analysis, provide an extensive review of the professional literature, and make a significant contribution to the professional literature in the field. A dissertation must be scholarly, succinct, and of sufficient quality in order to be published in a peer-reviewed journal. Students should refer to the most recent iteration of the Dissertation Handbook, the Rockies Research Center, and the Dissertation Guidelines for a complete description of acceptable types of research.

How do I find a topic area?
A student should select a topic that he or she is interested in exploring and is willing to commit an extensive amount of time and research to follow the study through to fruition. Students are strongly encouraged to discuss their topic ideas with their instructors, potential Dissertation Committee Chairs, or faculty mentors to aid in this process of narrowing down their interest areas. The dissertation does not require an original research topic (although this is often preferable) and may include a meta-analysis, qualitative or quantitative research (or a combination of both), a project or program design, or a program evaluation. The nature of the topic investigated will determine the length and amount of work necessary. Please refer to the most recent iteration of the Dissertation Handbook and the Rockies Research Center for guidelines on Research Topic Selection.

Who supervises my dissertation? How do I find and engage a chairperson and other committee members?
Students will form a Dissertation Committee comprised of University of the Rockies faculty to supervise their dissertation process. It is important that students select committee members with whom they work well collaboratively. In addition, it is important for students to establish relationships with faculty during standard course work, discuss potential topics of study, and discuss the possibility of future committee chair or committee membership.

The Dissertation Committee is composed of a Chair and two (2) additional committee members. The Chair must be a University of the Rockies faculty member. Ideally the two (2) committee members should be University of the Rockies faculty members, unless there is a significant reason to have a committee member from outside the University.

All Dissertation Committees must have final approval from the University.

What if I don’t know who I want to serve on my committee?
If students are unsure of faculty that they want to serve on the committee, please feel free to submit the “Request for Dissertation Candidates” form in order to gain assistance. Students are encouraged to contact potential committee members to discuss their topic ideas.

Can qualified experts from outside the University serve on my committee? What if there is no one on the faculty who knows about my topic area?
Students may request committee members from outside of the University (see the section on Committee Members from Outside the University in the Dissertation Handbook and the Approval for Non-Faculty Dissertation Committee Participation form).

Do I get help on research design and statistics? Do I have to pay for it?
If a student is having problems with research design and statistics and the Chair cannot assist, the Chair can request the assistance and review of a Research Methodologist. If the results of the review require additional support from a third-party research consultant, the student will need to contract and pay for that resource independently.
How long will it take to complete my dissertation from start to finish?
Although the timeline to completion will vary, a general guideline is to plan for at least one year to complete your Dissertation. Please review the current Dissertation Handbook for a complete breakdown of the dissertation phases.

What are the stages of the dissertation process?
Once a student has completed all prior course work and is ready to start their first dissertation course, there are six (6) transition points along the way to complete the dissertation process. Please refer to the Dissertation Handbook for a detailed description of the process.

What if I fail my final oral defense?
Students who fail a first attempt at their final oral defense should work closely with their Dissertation Committee Chair and committee members to determine what is required in terms of revisions to ensure a successful second attempt.

Am I required to travel to Colorado Springs for my final oral defense?
Online students are not required to complete their final oral defense in Colorado Springs. A variety of virtual options are available (Class Live Pro, Skype, FreeConference.com, etc.) and should be explored early in the process to determine which one will be an acceptable option for all parties involved.

Do I need to be enrolled in a Dissertation course to complete the final oral defense?
Yes, students must be registered for credit (ORG/PSY 8990 Dissertation or ORG/PSY 8991 Dissertation Extension) at the time they complete their dissertation, to include the Final Oral Defense, subsequent revisions, and final submission requirements.

What happens if I do not finish my dissertation within the five, 9-week terms, or 45 weeks?
Students who do not complete their dissertation within the 45 weeks will register for ORG 8991 Dissertation Extension. This one-credit course may be repeated as many times as required to complete the dissertation process. There is a 7-year limit from the student’s first day of enrollment to finish the degree, including dissertation.

Who can I contact for questions concerning Dissertation?
Students should contact their Student Advisor with questions concerning dissertation courses or scheduling. Once students have selected a Dissertation Chair, he or she will serve as the main point of contact. For administrative questions concerning dissertation forms or process, students can email the Dissertation and Thesis Administrator at dissertation.campus@rockies.edu (campus) or dissertation.online@rockies.edu (online).

Note: It is the student’s responsibility to determine any individual state’s certification or licensure requirements.