

Challenges and Joys of Earning a Doctorate Degree: Overcoming the “ABD” Phenomenon

Dr. Bahaudin G. Mujtaba
Nova Southeastern University
Email: mujtaba@nova.edu

Dr. Michael M. Scharff
Limestone College

Dr. Frank J. Cavico
Nova Southeastern University

Dr. Mustafa G. Mujtaba
Florida Gulf Coast University

Abstract:

Earning a doctorate degree is one of the highest honors in one's journey of academic progress; yet very few candidates actually achieve this rank. Part of the reason for some of the challenges in achieving such a rank can be the time requirement, the rigorous and focused research process, passing the comprehensive examinations, a publication requirement, and successfully finishing the journal of the dissertation. Of course, the dissertation journey can be an unpredictable and an uncertain trip as it involves many uncertainties. Two of the critical elements of successfully completing the doctoral program are to effectively layout the requirements for the comprehensive exam and dissertation process so students begin their work with an appropriate committee in the early stage of their research process. This document, which is prepared for administrators and new doctoral students, provides a review of the demand for doctorally qualified faculty members in tertiary education, discusses strategies for doing well on the comprehensive exam, and highlights some of the main requirements and ingredients for successfully initiating and completing the doctoral dissertation process.

The document transitions to comp examinations used for purposes of learning assessment and other such variables that impact the success rate of learners in higher education. Finally, the document provides suggestions and recommendations for students to successfully initiate and complete their dissertation process. Given the fact that about 30-70% of most students who enroll in a doctoral program tend to become ABDs (all but dissertation), successfully initiating and completing the dissertation process becomes very important. The authors, based on their combined thirty years of personal experience with this process, briefly state their recommendations, as well as best practices, and offer suggestions for new doctoral students who are about to begin the dissertation process.

Key Words: Higher education, doctoral, motivation, earning a doctorate, challenges in doctoral programs, doctoral programs, assessment.

Motivation for a Doctorate Degree: Its Joys

A colleague once said that “I joined the doctoral program because I needed two things for my continued happiness: first, intellectual stimulation; and, then physical stimulation. Years ago when I first got married, I received both forms of stimulation from my husband; shortly after, I needed new sources of excitement and invigoration which the doctoral program fulfilled.” Another colleague named Kelvin A. Massey mentioned that he was pursuing graduate studies, not necessarily for improving job potential, but to learn the vocabulary and language of business and high education research. In his real estate law practice, he was frequently called upon to resolve disputes and negotiate contracts between parties as well as implement the terms and conditions of previously negotiated agreements and contracts. During the course of his solo practice, he learned the concepts of managing a business such as marketing, organizational structure, financing, accounting, and strategic planning. Although he operated a highly successful practice, the limited business education relegated him to decision-making based on “what made sense” and other intuitive factors. After the sale of the business, he decided to satisfy a long deferred personal goal as well as satisfy his craving to learn “the language” of business and higher education regarding research and enrolled in the graduate business program.

While everyone can use intellectual stimulation, there are many ways to get it, and a doctoral program is just one possible source. However, intellectual stimulation is not the only reason people pursue a doctoral degree. As previously mentioned, there are many reasons for pursuing a doctoral degree. One of the biggest may be the shortage in qualified terminally-degreed faculty members on college campuses. Regardless of the reason, studying for a doctoral degree is entirely different from the previous education. Some experts believe that doctoral study differs from earlier educational pursuits in two ways: intellectual and psychological. In terms of intellectual, doctorate study must produce scholars; as such, it involves doing a number of intensive researches and completing area-focused studies. In addition, there are a number of psychological aspects unique to doctoral studies. In some cases, doctoral students also have to deal with difficult feelings such as boredom, frustration, and loneliness. Planning to get a doctoral degree, students should evaluate and ask themselves why they need a doctoral degree. Not being able to adequately identify one’s personal motivation for pursuing the degree may lead to additional stress and frustration and ultimately to dropping out of the program during some of the more difficult moments...yes, there can be challenging moments that make one think and stretch beyond his or her original abilities and boundaries. Of course, it is often the desire and objective of wanting to know more about a specific topic that people start their journey of education and higher levels of learning as demonstrated by Professor Mustafa’s (last author) statement:

The reasons for why I chose to obtain a higher education, as in obtaining a doctorate degree, are many. Growing up I was always under the impression that in order for me to understand the world around me, I must attend school and continue learning. I assumed, maybe subconsciously, that by the time I finish high school, I would know everything there is to know about the world. However, I was negatively surprised! Once I graduated from Columbia High School in Lake

City, Florida, and stepped into the "real world," I felt as if I was going back to kindergarten. I felt that I did not know anything, or the things that I should have known by then. Of course, I knew how to solve calculus problems, do basic and advanced chemistry problems, and even write short stories. But, I was still missing something. And that was the yearning for more knowledge. That is when I knew I had to start kindergarten again, and thus I began my college years. Again, I thought, by the time I have my bachelor's degree, I will be set. However, I was wrong! I learned much, yet I still did not know what I wanted to have known. From the beginning of mankind, infectious diseases have existed, and we have always been haunted by them. How could a bacterium that is not even visible to the naked eye cause so much harm! The more I learned, the more questions I had. Just like new computers are being introduced each year with bigger hard drives, similarly my brain capacity was being upgraded with every year I spent at the university level doing graduate research. Thus, I continued my research and doctoral studies in Microbiology at the University of Florida. Those years were time well spent. Truly, I did gain much understanding of the microscopic world, yet I still did not know. I was left with many questions. But, it took a doctoral degree for me to realize that I will never understand any topic fully no matter how long I research it. For me, it is the satisfaction of gaining that extra knowledge and "know how" that drove me to get a higher education and learn to research.

A doctorate program can certainly fulfill one's desire for knowledge as well as provide the researcher with the understanding that there is so much more that can be studied in the coming years and generations as demonstrated by Mustafa's educational journey and experience. Mustafa finished his doctorate degree and then completed three years of fellowship at Harvard University before taking a research faculty position at the University of Florida. Today, he is teaching at the Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers, Florida. Of course, while Mustafa's reasons for higher education stemmed from a desire to gain more knowledge in hopes of researching and understanding what causes certain diseases and how to prevent them from hurting human beings, everyone else can have his or her own reasons for pursuing a doctorate or an advanced degree in his or her profession. For example, according to Dr. Nilofar Jamasi, dentist in Central Florida (Personal Communication with the first author, January 2007):

A dentist may pursue a postdoctoral dental degree because he or she enjoys performing specific procedures in dentistry and feels fulfilled while performing those procedures. While practicing comprehensive dentistry, a dentist may develop a rising interest toward a specific field of dentistry encouraging him/her to seek more education. This newly-gained knowledge will be invaluable to the patients, as more services can be provided to them. Another reason a dentist may pursue further education is to teach and research in the dentistry field at the university level. This high level of expertise will allow one to contribute effectively to the future generations of learners, and such experts will be able to participate in the creation and progress of innovative research projects. In addition, in the developed economies, now we have access to such great learning opportunities

that it often makes people feel fortunate and compelled to study and get more advanced levels of expertise. For example, a general dentist may seek a postdoctoral degree mainly because he or she is personally motivated to do so for his or her intrinsic reasons, concerned for the wellbeing of others, and have the desire to explore his/her interest further in one specific area.

Medical experts who are practicing dentistry, microbiology, or medicine, for example, often earn advanced educational degrees to provide more services to patients and/or to conduct clinical and academic research in hopes of discovering new knowledge and advancing their professions. Of course, most business, leadership and management professionals also seek higher levels of knowledge in hopes of gaining new knowledge and advancing their professions. At the mean time, they too wish to better serve their customers, employees, third party beneficiaries, and others in the community. Perhaps there are no wrong reasons for gaining more knowledge and pursuing a doctorate degree when such learning benefits society through the advancement of knowledge or prevention of catastrophes.

Bahaudin's reasons for earning a doctorate degree in business and management can be summed up as follows: personal and intellectual development, recognition of contribution, entrance into academia (research, professorship, lecturing), better employment opportunities, and social mobilization or networking with professional colleagues. Of course, regardless of the reasons, earning such an achievement also depends on many other situational variables such as time, money, parental status, martial status, and overall family support.

The Growing Challenges of Higher Education

The world of academia is growing and so is the need for faculty, especially the ones that are professionally and academically qualified. Competitive students select a university for a number of reasons and one of the important might be the faculty who facilitate the transfer of knowledge and assess student learning. Simply stated, the job of educators can be summed up as creating and validating knowledge. Educators create knowledge through research and publications, and they validate knowledge through continuous assessment of student learning and achievements. Assessment is a tool to help measure the knowledge or wisdom gained among the graduates of an academic program.

Some general goals of education can be thought of as replacing an empty mind with (hopefully) an open one, to recondition a biased mind with a tolerant one, and, finally, to fill one's time with a positive mindset to see boundless possibilities in this world of vast opportunities rather than being a pessimist or constantly complaining about the status quo. However, the goal of a doctoral or a higher education program is often more specialized and specific to a "focused" question of determining the answer to "why? Or, the goal can be geared on spending months and years of precious time on such endeavors as proving, supporting, or simply rejecting the notion that "something is, or is not" related to something else. While these goals and thoughts might seem boring and mundane to some individuals, a growing number of well educated individuals are spending much time, effort and personal income to have the opportunity to work on such endeavors through a doctoral program in their higher education journey. Of

course, while the numbers of “inquiring minds” entering doctoral programs are increasing, the demand for terminally-degreed candidates also seems to be growing at an even higher rate in the various fields of business and management. As such, many institutions around the world are offering flexible programs to meet such growing demands in higher education (Bisoux, 2006; Mujtaba and Preziosi, 2006a).

In the article entitled “AACSB Bridge Program Fast Tracks PQ Faculty,” the publication focused on the concern from business schools about faculty shortages. The publication further expanded on the fact that “AACSB has announced a program to encourage the transition of experienced business professionals into business teaching positions at colleges and universities” (AACSB, 2006). School leaders are encouraged by AACSB administrator to recommend qualified individuals for this new initiative and program to alleviate the shortage of qualified faculty members in academia. The program is called “The AACSB Bridge Program:” and it is “a five-day intensive seminar that provides a pathway for high-level senior executives to become candidates for faculty positions.” This program helps senior level business leaders to successfully transition from business to academia as their second career once they are ready for it. The participants of the AACSB Bridge Program study such topics as the academic culture and today’s student, what makes truly effective teachers, teaching skills and the fundamentals of course development and delivery, and the student learning process (AACSB, 2006). To be able to get into this program, participants must have a master’s degree and sufficient professional work experience related to the area of teaching assignment. Participants who successfully complete the Bridge Program receive a certificate with the seals of AACSB and the participating business schools.

Caryn L. Beck-Dudley, currently serving as the Dean for the College of Business at Florida State University, states that the decline in business doctoral production and the doctoral shortage is a critical concern for the future of management education (Beck-Dudley, 2006). Among many factors such as better job opportunities in the private sector and the required time to complete a doctoral program, are the cost considerations for most public institutions. Dean Beck-Dudley states that “The conventional wisdom is that since doctoral programs are not ranked, business schools have focused on the financially lucrative and visible MBA program and either reduced, eliminated, or failed to start doctoral programs.” She says that one solution to the crisis of terminally-degreed faculty members is that “more schools to step up to the plate and produce” terminally degreed graduate. According to Beck-Dudley, Florida State University has chosen to keep a PhD program because it allows them to attract “strong faculty and to produce high quality research.”

Higher education, especially attaining doctoral degrees, throughout academic institutions across the globe, has been in high demand and more private schools are getting into this arena to fill the pressing need. While more higher education institutions are beginning to offer doctoral degrees, the percentage of students successfully completing the dissertation process still seems to be fairly low. As such, understanding the needs of higher education institutions and current doctoral students has become especially important for success in the new millennium. Furthermore, understanding the common denominator of technology available to distance education students can assist administrators and faculty members to appropriately design their admission, learning assessment, teaching, and curriculum requirements.

There has been an increasing trend with schools using part-time (adjunct) faculty members to teach in their doctoral programs. One reason for this is lack of sufficient funding to hire full-time faculty members, and another reason has to do with the fact that there is a shortage of qualified candidates available. Consequently the cost of recruiting the right individuals with the right credentials has dramatically increased. Nonetheless, while many schools are dealing with the current shortage of qualified doctorate faculty members, others are taking advantage of this opportunity to offer new Ph.D. and D.B.A. programs to fill this need. According to Jain (1997), business units introduce multiple brands to a market for two major reasons: 1) to grow by offering varied products in different market segments, and 2) to avoid competitive threats to a single brand/product. Jain adds that, "multiple brands must be diligently positioned in the market." So, there maybe many good reasons for schools to go forward with offering or adding more doctoral (DBA or Ph.D.) programs in the fields of business. The Communicator: Council of Graduate Schools (2004) stated that "With attrition from Ph.D. programs averaging 30% to 50%, the nation is losing an important resource of highly trained personnel" while the demand is rising. The article further mentioned that the attrition is much more severe for women and minorities since they tend to leave doctoral programs at a greater rate than the majority and international students. Furthermore, this is a concern because projections show that about 80% of the growth in college-age students will come from minorities. The Council of Graduate Schools statistics showed that 39,955 students graduated with doctorate degrees in 2002, and this number was the lowest total since 1993. Because many schools are cutting back their doctoral programs, fewer percentage of qualified students get the opportunity to enter and successfully complete doctoral degrees. In an article titled "Is There a Doctorate in the House" written by Tricia Bisoux at the March/April issue of BizEd (2003), the author stated that "replenishing the world's supply of doctorates in business has become imperative." While there is an increase in the demand for more terminally degreed educators (DBAs and Ph.D.s), many traditional schools have been downsizing their programs for cost-cutting purposes. As cost rises, "many Ph.D.-granting institutions are shrinking their doctoral programs in business, especially those in the U. S." (BizEd, 2003). As business schools reduce their Ph.D. Program enrollment, fewer qualified educators enter the pipeline. As the number of qualified candidates decreases in the doctoral programs, salaries will rise in the United States thereby attracting terminally degreed faculty members from other countries. As such, schools throughout the world will find themselves in a competitive compensation dilemma. The non-traditional schools are in a good position to offer doctoral programs and accordingly to economically fulfill society's needs for more research-oriented graduates. With today's internet age and advanced technology, making such programs available with a great quality should be much easier than ever before.

According to Eastmond (1998), the term "distance education" has become synonymous with instruction and facilitation provided through cyberspace technologies via the Internet. As such, many such programs are commonly referred to as online education. Eastmond discussed three different types of Internet-based courses: *first*, there is the distance learning programs which are supplemented by use of Internet technologies as a support mechanism as opposed to being the primary medium of delivery; *second*, there is the computer conferencing medium where Internet is the

primary delivery utilizing asynchronous discussions and emails; *third*, there is the virtual course from the virtual institution where all or most aspects of the course are delivered online. Today's institutions are able to use a variety of formats to deliver their doctoral programs in business administration where students can complete all of their requirements via synchronized, interactive formats, while using cyberspace technology in the process to enhance learning.

Assessment of Distance Education

Integrating a systematic testing and evaluation plan into the curriculum for student learning and learning assessment is a basic necessity in today's competitive world of education. Fortunately, many educators and administrators have successfully implemented effective testing and evaluation methods in their distance education programs. However, much more may need to be done to make this an ongoing process of continually enhancing the programs holistically. Accordingly, administrators should focus on the development, assessment, and implementation of comprehensive testing and evaluation strategies in their curriculums (online, on-ground, and blended formats of distance as well as traditional offerings) while focusing on effectively achieving learning outcomes equally well in all modalities. According to Bisoux (2006), non-traditional higher education programs are likely to continue growing around the globe along with their popularity among working professionals. This growth will afford more flexibility for working professionals to continue being students of higher education programs at the masters and doctoral level curriculums. Similarly, Tricia Bisoux states that this "scenarios could present an exciting challenge to business educators, as they work to create more innovative programs to meet students' constantly changing needs without sacrificing quality, or reputation, in the process" (2006, p. 27).

Public and private colleges are viewed as public property; and this view reflects the centrality of the American institutions today, said Carol Christ who is the president of Smith College and a former provost of the University of California at Berkeley (Forum, 2004). She further stated that "If accountability is our end, then the means to that end lie in an ethic of greater transparency...we in colleges must be more open about our business practices and in our governance." Chronicles of Higher Education published a forum on its September 3rd issue titled "*How Can Colleges Prove They're Doing Their Jobs?*" which focused on accountability and assessment. The forum published thoughts and views from experts on accountability and assessment which included the following general topics: we need an honest conversation, no less than a cultural shift, a more systematic approach, focus on a larger context, the word 'public' is the key, and strive for openness (Forum, 2004). Charles Reed and Edward Rust Jr. suggested that "colleges should define goals for student learning and provide evidence that they have met them" (Forum, 2004). Material in the forum pointed out that "Private colleges aren't immune to calls for greater accountability...with tuitions continually rising, students, parents, and other constituencies are demanding proof that students are getting what they are paying for and learning what they need to know." So, some strategic planning, changes for the better, and documentation of improvement are needed in order for business schools to successfully move forward.

Gary Hamel, visiting professor of strategic and international management at the London Business School, states that "business schools can be notorious institutions of

habit” which has served them well for over a century but it is not going to get them through the next decade if they do not bring about appropriate changes. Business strategists in academia offer many suggestions for modern business schools wishing to be successful in today’s technology-driven environment, including the need to defy conventions, be innovative, and to try different strategies to get better results, not follow “fads,” create new competitive contexts, go beyond doing research by actually experimenting, globalize the curriculum and its focus, and form the future instead of just following it (Westerbeck, 2004). The modern business schools should be creating meaningful change if they are to survive and thrive in the world of demanding stakeholders. This change must be driven based on the assessment of what the school claimed to deliver as per their mission and its progress or intended application. Such assessment should be systematic, progressive, formal, and institution-wide if the organization is to receive a benefit from it. The role of learning assessment and evaluation to a university’s future success is important for its survival. For example, for a teaching institution, the primary measure of learning would be the degree to which students actually learn the intended material. Administrators could ask relevant questions to determine the effectiveness of each program. Do students know what they should know? Can students do what they should be able to do? Have students developed knowledge and skills appropriate to their professions? Was the achievement of students’ personal and professional goals enhanced by their experience at the university? Furthermore, faculty members should be asking such questions as: What did our students learn, and how well did they learn it? Do students simply acquire information, or do they learn to analyze, synthesize, and exercise critical judgment about the subject matter? Do they learn to write clear, grammatical, logical arguments? Do they learn tolerance for differing perspectives? Can they logically defend their own opinions in a rational way? Can they apply what they know to other areas of their work and life? Does their learning last beyond the end of the course and program? If a teaching university is able to demonstrate continuing accomplishment of such essential student-learning goals, the logical consequence will be their accomplishment of the other goals and purposes.

Assessment can be seen as the process of establishing and/or understanding the learning outcomes that meet the learners’ needs, assessing students to determine whether or not they have achieved the learning outcomes through factual evidence, documenting those results, and reflecting on how to continually improve the process of teaching, learning and learner assessment. The purpose of the assessment process is to continually improve and document or credential learning (Mujtaba and Preziosi, 2006a). A structured review of the assessment model can enhance the assessment process by providing a framework that supports thoughtful planning and communication to relevant stakeholders before and during the learning process, deployment of valid and reliable assessment strategies, informed reflection on the results, as well as improvement of teaching, learning and assessment in order to “close the loop.” When it comes to personal reflections for improvement, faculty members tend to have three formats for facilitation of learning: 1) the facilitation they plan to do; 2) the facilitation they actually do; and, 3) the facilitation they wish they had done. This type of reflection can certainly lead to improvement when the third format is put back into the loop thereby improving the next facilitation they plan to do. This closes the loop and

improves the learning process for the students. It has been said that some universities have three curricula: The one that appears in the catalog, the one that professors teach, and one that students actually learn. Along with the administrators, it is also the faculty member's responsibility to find out the degree to which the curriculum asserted on paper or imagined by academic leaders accurately portrays what goes on in the minds of students. Making the curricula visible so its usefulness in terms of demonstrated learning and results through students' performance can be documented as evidence is the business of *assessment*, an activity practiced by each faculty member teaching the course.

While each faculty member should take responsibility for improving his/her teaching to enhance the outcomes achieved, it is the responsibility of program chairs, directors, and other appropriate administrators to design assessment strategies for measuring learning across all courses at all locations for determining the effectiveness of distance education programs. Educators have a responsibility to students and to the public that depend on them to provide accurate information on how students meet their goals and objectives. Of course, this responsibility extends beyond reporting to actually improving and enhancing the program in a purposeful manner. In order to meet their responsibilities and document student learning, program directors and chairs along with their faculty members often strategically create an outcomes assessment plan for their programs. These plans are usually comprehensive, systematic, structured, and goal-oriented. The purpose of a comprehensive assessment process is to contribute to the pursuit of an institution's vision by assisting faculty, staff, and administrators in identifying the needs of stakeholders and adapting courses, curricula, delivery methods, and services according to these needs. The comprehensive exams, in addition to the dissertation and publication requirements for the program, provide evidence of students' success as to how well the program is achieving its intended outcomes.

Guidelines and Recommendations

According to Dr. Freda Turner, as mentioned by Mujtaba and Scharff (2007, p.70), there are a number of obstacles and hurdles in the doctoral journey and four of them are as follows: 1) the first year seems to be a major problem in regard to dropout of students since a good number of them leave in this initial year; 2) a student's relationship with his or her dissertation chair is another key factor in deciding to continue or withdraw, 3) the selection of the dissertation committee can also be stressful and problematic, and 4) lack of focus on the dissertation topic seems to be another major variable leading to the "ABD" phenomenon. While there can be many challenges and obstacles in higher education, one important hurdle in the doctoral program seems to be the successful completion of the comprehensive examination. The authors recommend that students should take their comprehensive exam as soon as they have completed the required courses. Furthermore, they should leave plenty of time to study for the comprehensive exam since successfully completing the courses may not be enough to earn a passing score.

Another important elements of a doctoral program is the selection and determination of a succinct research question that excites the student to get it answered. This research question should be important, timely, provide the foundation for the

building of existing literature in the field, and be of interest to existing journal editors. This research question forms the basis of the dissertation which begins with chapter one. The first chapter is basically the longer and more developed version of what is often known as the Prospectus or the Concept paper; and thus the initial chapter should parallel the Prospectus / Concept Paper.

The preparation of a prospectus or concept paper, preliminary literature, and Chapter I should be focused on answering such questions as the following (Mujtaba and Cavico, 2006b):

1. Why should this premise (idea) be researched?
2. Why is this research topic important?
3. Who would benefit from this research?
4. What key research, prior to this dissertation, has addressed this premise?
5. Which authors have done similar work on topics?
6. Who are the key (important) researchers in this field?
7. What is the contribution that these researchers have made?
8. What are the conclusions of key researchers concerning the topic?
9. How will the research follow or complement key researchers' work?
10. How will the research expand or add to the "body of knowledge"?
11. What are the potential "real world" applications of this research?
12. What established theory, model, methodology, and survey instrument will be used to provide a sound analytical approach?
13. Who is to be sampled, what is the sample size, and what is the expected return rate?

The researcher must have a clear and focused research question or problem statement. A good research problem must deal with something that student has a genuine interest in; it should not be trivial; the area needs to be researched; and it should be amenable to either qualitative or quantitative methods of research. Other questions to consider can include, but are not limited to: Can the student get the required data and the permission to get data? Can the student obtain specialist knowledge, especially statistical help? Is the student capable of doing the research, especially the statistical analysis? Can the student do the dissertation within a reasonable amount of time? Is the dissertation publishable through academic journals?

Almost all doctoral programs are concerned with the assessment of their students in the comprehensive exam and research areas. According to Beck-Dudley (2006), 'we continually evaluate the effectiveness of the program, which has brought us to the following conclusions: producing terminally-degreed students for the academic market, as well as creating excellent scholars, teachers and members of the academy.' Most doctoral programs require research activity the day the student enters into the university or course. Similarly, in most schools, producing sole-authored peer-reviewed research papers and journal paper submissions are expected. Of course, the dissertation process is established to help students become familiarized with primary research and the publication process.

Content and Format of the Dissertation¹

Chapter I. The first chapter should contain the following: purpose of the research, statement of problems and sub-problems, background and justification for the study, definition of key terms, some relevant and recent literature, delimitations of the study, assumptions, expected contribution, and how the student intends to add to the body of knowledge. Delimitations should not be confused with the “Limitations,” as the latter of which belongs in the last chapter of the dissertation. *Delimitations* of the study state what the student is not doing; for example, not surveying everyone everywhere, but only a class of participants at a selected geographic locale. Limitations, which are discussed in Chapter V, are in essence the student’s “confessions”; that is, now that the work is done, what should the student have done differently and why. One should remember that the research problem or premise is the general area to be investigated; the research propositions are more specific and state what one expects to find by means of the research; and the hypotheses are very specific statements, stated in the Null and then Alternative format, which the researcher will accept or reject based on his or her research findings. The research problem/premise is typically stated in Chapter I; the research problem/premise and the propositions are stated at the end of Chapter II; and the research problem/premise, propositions, and hypotheses in Null and Alternative forms are stated in Chapter III.

One must remember that the research problem is the purpose of the study, the student’s statement of intent, which must be stated in a clear and concise manner, as it will be the premise to be tested. The student should be able to answer the following question: Can the research problem be concisely and precisely stated, ideally in one sentence? If so, create this sentence which will be the research question; then study it, memorize it, know it by heart, and stay focused on it until it is answered.

The researcher should also know the difference between the problem statement and sub-problems which can also be studied now and also in future projects. “Problem” is broader formulation; the sum of sub-problems, which are narrowly stated, and which add up to the problem; but which are mutually exclusive, and thus each can be researched independently. Overall, the student must research the background of the problem and provide justification on why one should spend such a major part of one’s life in further studying it. One should fully provide justification for initiating this research by comprehensively answering the following questions:

1. Why should this premise (idea) be researched; why is the research topic important; and who would benefit from the research?
2. How will the student’s work follow or complement others’ work? How will the research add to or expand the body of knowledge?
3. What are the potential “real world” applications of this research?

With regards to the definition of specific terms, it is best to remember that specific and/or complex terminology must be clearly defined either in Chapter I or in the literature review section of Chapter II. Also, with regard to assumptions, one should clarify what facts are taken for granted in the study? Overall, with regard to the delimitations, the student must state explicitly what he or she is not doing (for example,

¹ The authors would like to extend special thanks to the following colleagues for their input, thoughts, and general contributions to the formation of these suggestions over the past fifteen years: Timothy McCartney, Barbara Dastoor, Preston Jones, Russell Abratt, Mike Bendixen, and others at the H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship.

certain sample size, geographic area, type and/or level of position sampled). To clarify once again, delimitations are “up front” constraints to the study, while limitations are shortcomings (‘confessions’) that have been revealed during the course of the study and which are addressed in Chapter V.

Proposal Chapter II. The major objective of Chapter II, which is the Literature Review or a historical summary of what has been written thus far, is to review succinctly the pertinent literature; that is, the literature that applies the theory to the research problem. The idea is not to “write a book,” but rather to focus on the literature that pertains directly to the research premise or problem, the research propositions, the hypotheses, and the variables therein. At the end of the Literature Review chapter, the student should include a succinct paragraph or two demonstrating how the review of the literature has logically led the student to examine the research problem/premise, propositions (that is, what the student expects to find), and hypotheses. It is not necessary in Chapter II for the student to state the hypotheses in Null and Alternative form, as that component of the work belongs properly in Chapter III.

While providing a brief summary of general literature; focus should be on the literature that applies the theory. The researcher basically answers: What key research has addressed the research problem or premise? What authors have done similar work on the topic? Who are the important researchers in the field? What are their conclusions? What contributions have they made? This chapter needs literature that explains how the theory applies to the research problem. Emphasis should be on the application of the theory, especially literature that helps to identify potential solutions to the research problem. The chapter also needs literature that justifies the research question, problem statements, and hypotheses. Do not merely “regurgitate” the work of others, especially if they are not related to the current research problem. Be systematic and chronologically, recognize any hierarchy to literature sources. Overall, remember that the:

- The major objective of Chapter II, which is the Literature Review, is to review succinctly the pertinent literature, that is, the literature that applies the theory to the research problem.
- Focus on the literature that pertains directly to the research premise or problem, the research propositions, the hypotheses, and the variables therein.
- At the end of the Literature Review chapter, the student should include a succinct paragraph or two demonstrating how the review of the literature has logically led the student to examine the research problem/premise, propositions (that is, what the student expects to find), and hypotheses. Note that it is not necessary in Chapter II for the student to state the hypotheses in Null and Alternative form, as that component of the work belongs properly in Chapter III (Mujtaba and Cavico, 2006b).

Proposal Chapter III. The goal of Chapter III is to propose a methodological “recommended path” for the dissertation through a number of hypotheses that will be tested. Hypotheses should be limited to a manageable number based on time constraints as well as the student’s statistical capabilities. The statement of five to six hypotheses, stated in the Null and Alternative format, is a good foundation for a dissertation research. Chapter III, in addition to the aforementioned components, should

include the following: population (sample size and who is being surveyed), sample methodology or design (e.g., random sample), survey instrument or questionnaire, or source of data, validity and reliability of survey instrument, and method of data analysis (that is, what is the student going to do with the data; and what statistical tools will be used to analyze the data). If a survey instrument is somewhat “old” or “outdated,” that is, 20 or more years old, the student will have to address the “validity” issue. For example, is the instrument still valid? Has it been updated? Do the questions and scenarios therein comport with current practices, usages, customs, and ideas? If the instrument is still fundamentally valid, but old, the student should point this out in Chapter I in the Delimitations section. The methodologist on the committee should be consulted before the student initiates and certainly before the student completely writes Chapter III.

In this chapter, one needs to restate the research question and problem statement from the previous two chapters. One should understand that hypothesis testing means that one is to assess the likelihood that a premise is true. Accordingly, formulate hypotheses in Null and Alternative formats. If Null format is rejected, then the Alternative format is accepted. The result is that one narrows the range of falsity and thereby expands the body of knowledge. The researcher should keep in mind that there is a difference between a hypothesis and a proposition. Hypothesis is a narrow and specific assumption that can be tested and accepted or rejected; whereas a proposition is more of a general plan or agenda for research, which is not necessarily tested. It is best not to have any complex or “mixed” hypotheses; that is, there should be one hypothesis for each variable. Chapter III should really clarify every question about this research and it should state the population, sample size, sampling method, and expected outcome. Be realistic about sample size, but attempt to secure a sample as large as practically possible (200 is recommended as a minimum). The researcher also needs a random sample so as to generalize results; otherwise, one should state the limitations and possibilities of the research. State the survey instrument to be used to secure research data as well as the questionnaire to be used with the survey instrument. How will you get permission for using the instrument or survey? Identify exactly what is to be measured by using this instrument.

Be aware that the terms validity and reliability must be clarified for each instrument that is being used for the study. Validity refers to the extent an instrument measures what one wants it to measure; whereas reliability means the measurement procedure is accurate and precise. That is, what evidence is there of measurement (validity), and how precise and accurate is the measurement (reliability)? There is also a difference between external and internal validity. External validity refers to the ability of the research to be generalized across persons, settings, and times; key factors are sample choice, size, and method (random), as well as credibility for qualitative research. Internal validity refers to the extent the measuring instrument provides adequate coverage of the topic. That is, what are the dimensions of a topic, according to the literature, what questionnaires have been used, and what questions have been asked? If a demonstrated survey instrument or questionnaire is being modified by the student, then the modified version must be demonstrated as valid and reliable. Thus, it is better to seek and to add the supplemental information separately when using an existing instrument. State explicitly the method to be used to analyze the data. Overall, reliability is the extent to which the instrument is free from variable error (random error), or the

degree of variable error in the instrument. Validity is the extent to which the instrument is free from systemic error (bias), or the degree of systemic error in the instrument. Accuracy is defined as the extent to which the instrument is free from systemic and variable errors.

The researcher must also understand correlation and regression. Correlation means there is a relationship or association between two variables; it does not imply that one causes the other; whereas regression assumes causation; that is, an independent variable causes a dependent one. For example, does advertising cause sales (regression), or is there a relationship between advertising and sales (correlation)? Overall, the data secured must relate to and be tied into the research question/problems, so as to “answer” them. The research methodology and design process in Chapter III should clarify many issues including defining the research problem, premise to be tested, required information and data, and appropriate variables for the study. Know that statistical hypothesis is basically a statement about one or more parameters of the population. Hypotheses testing assess the likelihood that an assumption about some characteristics of the population is true. Rejecting or not rejecting the hypothesis means proving or disproving the hypothesis. Null hypothesis, the H_0 , is basically an assumption about the population that is tested, using sample evidence. Alternative hypothesis, the H_1 , is a statement about the population that must be true if the null hypothesis is rejected. The researcher must avoid complex or “mixed” hypotheses; in other words, one should only have one hypothesis for each variable. The researcher must then decide on whether the study will use a qualitative approach or a quantitative process to gather the data.

The biggest challenge for a dissertation study is to keep it focused and simple. One should not attempt to change the world as this project is only for the student to prove that he or she can conduct quality research and focus on one specific research question. So, keep the focus of the dissertation narrow, time-bounded, and, given one’s limited available resources, make sure the survey implementation and data gathering processes are easily doable. Overall, with regard to the entire study, make sure that the dissertation is a “do-able” one. Be keenly aware of time constraints; accordingly, allocate sufficient time; make an appointment with oneself; do a little every day, even if just writing a paragraph or a few sentences. Avoid the “Royal We” writing style as it is one person doing the research; instead use a neutral more modest approach, that is, “the author” or “this study” type of descriptions. It is always good to be humble. While the researcher might be the “king” or “queen” in his/her department, industry, or profession, it is best to remember that one is probably a novice in the research process; therefore, get as much help as possible and thank each person for his/her assistance and guidance. Overall, with regard to the study, seek the best approximation of the “truth” based on current knowledge.

Before beginning the research process, the learner should be aware of the institutions Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies regarding research requirements and prerequisites with human subjects. Most institutions have a policy stating that no pretests, “pilots,” or surveys can be distributed without approval; similarly, no “field work” can be conducted without IRB approval. IRB approval is often needed for any questioning of human subjects. However, for surveys, IRB approval can be obtained at the “center” level by the IRB representative, and thus petitioning the university’s IRB

may not always be necessary. The student can state in his or her Proposal that IRB approval will be obtained for any pretest or pilot, and then either option can be implemented; however, the full survey should not be distributed until not only after IRB approval, but also the approval of the student's dissertation committee.

In summary, remember that the goal of Chapter III is to propose a methodological "recommended path" for the dissertation. Hypotheses should be limited to a manageable number based on time constraints as well as the student's statistical capabilities. The statement of five to six hypotheses, stated in the Null and Alternative formats, is a good foundation for dissertation research (Mujtaba and Cavico, 2006b). Chapter III, in addition to the aforementioned components, should include the following: population (sample size and who is being surveyed), sample methodology or design (e.g., random sample), survey instrument or questionnaire, source of data, validity and reliability of survey instrument, and methods of data analysis. The methodologist on the committee should be consulted before the student writes Chapter III.

Draft Chapter IV. Chapter IV is basically the analysis of the results from the data gathered as a result of what was planned in the first three chapters. For most schools, the required statistical software seems to be the Numbers Crunchers Statistical Software (NCSS) (Student Version), or the other popular software known as SPSS. Of course, students who are advanced in statistical testing are not limited to using these packages so long as they are able to use statistical testing effectively.

Draft Chapter V. The last chapter simply summarizes the purpose of the study, the conclusions, provides a link about the benefits of the study, makes some recommendations for practitioners, and managers, discusses the limitations of the study, and provides guidance and questions for future study. Suggestions for future scholarly work should be provided, and should be tied into the limitation "confessions" where appropriate. Note that the student does not necessarily have to use all the data collected for the dissertation, as some data may be able to be saved and used for future scholarly work.

References. The references section must include all the works cited (if a work is cited within the document, then it must also appear in the references, and if a work is in the references it must appear in the body of the work as a citation). The bibliography, which appears after the reference section, includes all the references as well as all the works that the student used for the dissertation, for example, background books and articles, but which were not specifically cited.

Appendices. The appendix section can include copies of survey instrument, additional questionnaires, and "permissions" for using any copyright material. This section can also include any other data, figures, tables, or visuals that readers might to review to further understand a concept that is discussed within the dissertation.

Summary

As stated in the Huizenga School's 2006 Dissertation Guidelines, "A dissertation is an unpredictable process," as it can "involve uncertainty, ambiguity, and unexpected events." It is an uncertain process because the researcher is exploring unknown questions and topics. Therefore, one must be patient and persevere in achieving the

dream of successfully completing the comprehensive exam and the dissertation projects to earn a doctorate degree.

While there is no *perfect* institution, higher education and doctoral programs should have an infrastructure in place that ensures learning happens at a high-level consistently so their students can successfully achieve their academic dreams. There should be an emphasis on the development of high-level curricula that blends pragmatic and theoretical knowledge so doctoral students can pass their comprehensive exams and successfully complete their doctoral dissertations in the allotted time.

Today, cyberspace technologies offer many possibilities in the twenty first century but such possibilities cannot be realized without breaking the outdated industry rules of the past. Breaking industry rules requires effective training of both faculty members and administrative staff so they can jointly be more flexible in hearing their students' learning needs and so they can be empowered to be innovative in integrating student feedback in the education process while trying new learning strategies. This document offered suggestions for administrators and doctoral students regarding the dissertation process so new students can have a general vision of what this project should look like from the outset. It is hoped that doctoral program administrators, faculty members and students can use the content of this material to help new learner understand the comprehensive examination and dissertation completion processes and thereby successfully achieve their doctoral "dream" in an expeditious and productive manner.

References

- AACSB, (2006). *AACSB Bridge Program Fast Tracks PQ Faculty*. AACSB Communication: *eNEWSLINE*, Vol 5, No. 7.
- American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), (December 1992). *Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning*. AAHE Assessment Forum.
- Beck-Dudley, C. L. (July 2006). Why We Haven't Done Away with Our School's PhD Program. AACSB Communication: *eNEWSLINE*, Vol 5, No. 7.
- Bindixen, Michael (2004). *Supervising Doctoral Research*. NSU-Sponsored Seminar at the Huizenga School, April 29-30; Fort Lauderdale, Florida.
- Bisoux, T. (2006). *Flex-Time For the MBA*. BizEd, July/August issue. Pages 22-27.
- Bisoux, T. (2003). *Is There a Doctorate in the House*. BizEd, March/April issue.
- BizEd, 2003. *Is There a Doctorate in the House*. BizEd, March/April issue. By T. Bisoux.
- Business Week, 2004. *Is There a Doctor in the B-School? Universities are searching for ways to generate more business PhDs*. March 1st Issue.
- Eastmond, D. (1998). *Adult learners and Internet-based distance education*. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 78, 33-41.
- Forum, 2004. *How Can Colleges Prove They're Doing Their Jobs?* Chronicles of Higher Education, September 3rd 2004.
- Henke, H. & Russum, J. (2000). *Factors influencing attrition rates in a corporate distance education program*. Education at a distance, 14 (11), Article 03. Retrieved July 25, 2001 from http://www.usdla.org/ED_magazine/illuminative/NOV00_Issue/story03.htm
- Hesselbein, F. Goldsmith, M. & Beckhard, R. (1996). *The leader of the future*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Huizenga School Doctoral Program Retreat (May 2006). *Doctoral Program Updates, Changes and Dissertation Research Processes*. NSU-Sponsored two-day workshop. Fort Lauderdale, Florida.
- Huizenga School, 2004. Website visited on September 2004 at: <http://www.sbe.nova.edu/> and <http://www.sbe.nova.edu/about/faculty.cfm>
- Jacques, R. (1996). *Manufacturing the employee: Management knowledge from the 19th to 21st centuries*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jain, Subhash C. (1997). *Marketing Planning & Strategy*. 5th Edition, Cincinnati, OH: Southwestern Publishing, pp. 348-349.
- Levine, D. I. (1995). *Reinventing the workplace: How business and employees can both win*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Morgan, C. L., & Morgan, L. V. (1935, September). Effects of immediate awareness of success and failure upon objective examination scores. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 4(1), 63-66.
- Mujtaba, B. G. and Mujtaba, M. G. (2007). Challenges and Joys of Earning a Doctorate Degree: Overcoming the "ABD" Phenomenon. *Academy of Business Disciplines Proceedings*; November 1–3; Fort Myers Beach, Florida
- Mujtaba, B. G. and Scharff, M. M. (2007). *Earning a Doctorate Degree in the 21st Century: Challenges and Joys*. ILEAD Academy Publications; Florida, USA. ISBN: 978-0-9774211-3-8.
- Mujtaba, B. G. and Preziosi, R. C. (2006a). *Adult Education in Academia: Recruiting and Retaining Extraordinary Facilitators of learning*. 2nd Edition. ISBN: 1593114753. Information Age Publishing. Greenwich, Connecticut. Phone: (203) 661-7602.
- Mujtaba, B. G. and Cavico, F. (2006b). *Guidelines and recommendations for initiating and successfully completing the doctoral program: Dealing with the comprehensive exam and dissertation*. Proceedings of THE CARIBBEAN AREA NETWORK FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TERTIARY EDUCATION (CANQATE). November 21-23, St. Lucia.
- Neely, L., Niemi, J. & Ehrhard, B. (1998). *Classes going the distance so people don't have to: Instructional opportunities for adult learners*. T.H.E. Journal, 26(4), 72.
- Nova Southeastern University, 2004. Website visited on October 2004 at: <http://www.nova.edu/>
- NSU e-Bulletin, 2004. NSU Leads the Nation in the Number of Doctorate Degrees Awarded to Minorities. August 8. Retrieved on August 8th 2004 from: <http://www.nova.edu/cwis/ia/pubaffairs/news/july-sept2004/doctorates.html>
- Richards, C. & Ridley, D. (1997). *Factors affecting college students' persistence in online computer-managed instruction*. College Student Journal, 31, 490-495.
- Roblyer, M. (1999). *Is choice important in distance learning? A study of student motives for taking Internet-based courses at the high school and community college levels*. Journal of Research on Computing in Education, 32 (1), 157-71.
- Rossman, M. (2000). *Andragogy and distance education: Together in the new millennium*. New Horizons in Adult Education, 14(1), 3-9. Retrieved on October 20th 2004 from <http://www.nova.edu/~aed/horizons/vol14n1.htm>
- Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art & practice of the learning organization*. NY: Currency Doubleday.

The Communicator: Council of Graduate Schools (January/February, 2004). *Addressing attrition in Ph.D. Programs*. Volume XXXVII, Number 1.

The US Education Information Center (2004). *Doctoral programs in business*. Visited on October 23rd 2004 on URL: <http://www.useic.ru/> and their website on: <http://www.useic.ru/study/apply/business.htm>.

