

Overview of the ATS D. Min Final Doctoral Project Dissertation

(revised June 2015)

1. Differences Between a Ph.D. Dissertation and a D. Min. Final Project Dissertation

Area of Comparison	Ph.D. Dissertation	D. Min Dissertation
Length	300+ pages	100-120 pages
Committee	Chosen by chair, requiring experts in a variety of fields to cover all aspects of the dissertation	Consists of only three people: (a) first reader / advisor (b) second reader / examiner (c) D. Min. Director
Focus	Scholarly research: intent is to extend what is known; findings must be absolutely repeatable and therefore generalizable	Action research: intent is to discover information about a ministry problem important to the researcher; findings are repeatable only to a degree and need not be generalizable
Structure	Free-style, though involves a hypothesis supported by data	Specified Structure, requires a hypothesis supported by data
Level of Research required	Exhaustive	Broad and deep, but not exhaustive
Type of data for hypothesis	Can be archival (discovered by reading historical records), or empirical (discovered through instrumentation)	Empirical (discovered through instrumentation) , not archival (e.g. exegesis of biblical texts)
Level of Tolerance for Grammatical and Spelling Mistakes	No tolerance for mistakes	No tolerance for mistakes

2. Principles of Good Topic Selection

- a. The “Structured Observation of Ministry”: topic must address a “ministry problem” and offers a plan to learn some information about this ministry problem, with a sound research design (show that you can do “ministry analysis”).
- b. Allows the student to exhibit some ministry expertise: topic showcases an area of ministry the student is good at, or where he or she has seen success.
- c. Because the student is on route to being a leader among leaders, the topic allows the student to speak to a defined audience of Christian leaders, among whom the students is establishing some leadership and credibility as a resource person.
- d. Topic contributes significantly to the “literature” on the ministry problem, the ongoing discussion of the problem.

3. Principles of sound hypothesis formulation:

- a. Good hypotheses make an assertion about a specific population (for whom your participants are a representative sample)
- b. Good hypotheses make an assertion about variables (measurable characteristics or qualities of the population). Often it is the relationship between two variables.
- c. Good hypotheses have terms that are easily definable, especially by your generated data.
- d. Often a hypothesis can be subdivided into smaller sub-hypotheses or research questions. For example, if the overall Hypothesis is: “Participants who undergo the evangelism training will be evangelism-ready,” then two Sub-hypotheses could be H1: “Participants will demonstrate the ability to start a conversation with strangers.” H2: “Participants will demonstrate the ability to present the basic facts of the gospel.” Research questions might be structured this way: RQ1: “Did participants demonstrate the ability to start a conversation with strangers?” and RQ2: Did participants demonstrate the ability to present the basic facts of the gospel?”

4. Some examples of recent project and hypotheses:

Student	Project Title	Hypothesis / Hypotheses	Type of Data / Instrument(s)
Michael Plunket (Cohort 101, graduated May 2014)	Assessing the College of Prayer International’s Ministry in Uganda 2007-2009 and Its Long-Term Effects	H1: Ugandan members of Parliament who participated in the College of Prayer Uganda’s prayer breakfast and follow-up mentoring (2007-09) believe the effects	Qualitative data only: 24 Interviews

		of this ministry's extraordinary spiritual impact continue to the present day.	
Eva Geddes (Cohort 102, graduated May 2014)	SHAPING AND SUSTAINING A COMMUNITY IN COVENANT: RETENTION OF SALVATION ARMY OFFICERS IN THE U.S.A. EASTERN TERRITORY	Hypothesis: There is a negative correlation between past and present experiences of community shared with fellow Salvation Army officers and future expectations of resignation from officership. That is, healthy community encourages retention; deficiency in community exacerbates attrition.	Mixed Methods: Survey of 527 current officers and 310 former officers and Interviews with 8 current officers.
Ronald Morrison (Cohort 101, graduated May 2014)	Utilizing Life Coaching to Transform Aspiring Church Leaders in Small, Urban Churches. Directing Them Toward Ministry Impact in Needy Communities in the Greater Cleveland Area	Hypothesis Three: The HABC coaching program will be successful in increasing participation in activities that connect with the community around HABC for the eight participants.	Researcher Observations Using a Predefined Checklist of Coaching Benchmarks
Roy Pembroke (Cohort 101, graduated May 2014)	Racism in the Church: Perceptions of Guyanese Pastors	H1: Guyanese Church Leaders have a High Perception of Racism in Society and in the Church H2: The Gap Between Guyanese Church Leaders Sense of Moral Imperative to Combat Racism and Their Sense of the Church's Compliance in Combatting Racism is Wide.	Quantitative Data Only: Survey of 159 pastors

5. Two Models for Projects:

- a. Model 1: Descriptive research. Project discovers information that describes the state of things in the world and does not claim to do anything more than this (e.g. Pembroke, Geddes). The findings, however, offer implications for an intervention.
- b. Model 2: Experimental research. Project introduces some intervention into the ministry problem situation and measures the resulting outcomes, in the hope that the state of things in the world have improved (e.g. Morrison, Plunket)

6. The Topic Approval Process

- a. In DML 801 The Proposal, the main assignment is an 8-10 page prospectus (format laid out in Sensing textbook, p. 11-12). Dr. Chan will communicate with the student if the topic is acceptable. (This topic need not correspond with what the student proposed at the time of application or during the Orientation Seminar DML 800)
- b. The student uses the prospectus to secure the agreement of an advisor to take on the project. The proposed advisor should receive and sign a contract with the D. Min. office.
- c. In DML 802/872 Instrumentation and Research Design, the student fills out a 26 question form for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval, which meets approximately once a month. Upon IRB approval, the student's topic is considered "approved." This in essence finalizes the "research protocol."

7. Principles of Sound Participant Selection

- a. Sufficient Pool Size: although sample pool is always to be considered in comparison to the size of the entire ministry target group population, a good minimum for a survey is 30. A good minimum for a set of interviews is 10.
- b. Participants are good representatives of the ministry target group population. There should be a "participants: characteristics" section in chapter 3. A summary chart is preferred, with participant (identified by participant number) in rows and characteristics listed in columns.
- c. Participant selection is free from researcher bias. There should be a "Participants: Recruitment and Selection" section in chapter 3.
- d. If there is an intervention, participants are all willing to comply to a specified minimum level of compliance

8. Principles of Sound Interventions for Model 2 Projects—the introduction of an independent variable into an "experiment group" (n = the number of participants)

- a. The intervention is a "treatment" of the ministry "problem." Your project seeks to "test" the treatment to see if it brings desirable results.
- b. Be sure the treatment is standardized, that is there is protocol that all participants in the experiment group agree to follow. For example, if the treatment is a six-week Bible Study group on Wednesday nights and meeting with a mentor, the standardization of treatment would be something like, "attending (being physically present) at the Bible study for at least five of the six weeks" and meeting with the mentor for at least an hour at least five of the six weeks. This would mean if someone attended only four sessions or met with the mentor for half an hour, he or she would be disqualified as a participant in your experiment.
- c. You must also show compliance—in the above example, an attendance record at the Bible study or a log of mentoring hours would do it.

9. Principles of Sound Instrumentation Selection and Research Design

- a. There are two main instruments in social science research: survey / questionnaires, which often can be “scored” *quantitatively*, and interviews, which are described in proposals and IRB forms by “interview scripts” (to which responses are reported *qualitatively*).
- b. In general, existing surveys that have been used in other studies are preferred over creating one’s own survey, if one exists and is applicable.
- c. In general, a “mixed methods” approach (both a quantitative component and a qualitative component) is preferred over a single approach.
- d. Instruments must be double-checked to ensure precision, so that response data can be used to establish a hypothesis statement easily.
- e. If the project requires a pre-survey and a post-survey, the student must ensure that a participant’s responses on a pre-survey can be paired with the same participant’s responses on the post-survey. This means avoiding “surveymonkey.com” or any other system that merely gives the aggregate responses and does not allow the student to identify an individual participant.
- f. If the project requires demographic information (age, gender, etc.), the student must ensure that a participant’s response on, say, a gender question (call it Q1) can be connected to that same participant’s response on the subject (call it Q5). You’ll have to be able to isolate only the male responses to Q5. Recording each individual’s responses to all questions on an excel sheet will do this. But simply receiving surveymonkey.com’s summary of the aggregate data (how many males total) will not do this.
- g. Audio recordings of interviews should be transcribed. Many schools have done away with the requirement because audio files are so easy to use nowadays. We still require it because it is useful in the event there is weak interview data and either the advisor or the D. Min. office needs to make a determination about the permissibility of the data.

10. Principles of Sound Theological/ Theoretical Framing

- a. The ATS D. Min Dissertation does not ask that the student show proficiency in exegetical or theological analysis. It merely asks that he or she demonstrate “foundational knowledge” in the “theological / theoretical foundations” section of chapter 1.
- b. The “theological foundations” section merely establishes the theological convictions undergirding the project. For example, if the project is about enhancing evangelistic techniques, the theological / theoretical foundation section in chapter 1 should offer a biblical (Scripture texts) and theological basis (influential theological writers and their books) for the church engaging in evangelism. And if the technique for your project is a well-established theoretical idea, let’s say, seeker sensitive church services, then declare that your project relies on, and assumes, the theory of seeker sensitive evangelism (and discuss Bill Hybels and the Willowcreek philosophy).
- c. Another example: If the project is about racial reconciliation, the student should explain in the theological/ theoretical foundations” section why racism is considered by Christians to be immoral.

- d. Unlike other D. Min. dissertations at other schools where this section is an entire chapter, at ATS, this section need not be more than five to ten pages, depending on the project. The hypothesis in an ATS dissertation will never be an argument from the Bible, so theological analysis is usually tangential, not central, to the dissertation.
- e. There is often some connection between this section and the literature review of chapter 2.

11. Principles of Sound Literature Review (chapter 2)

- a. The style needs to be a review of literature—chapter 2 is not meant to resemble a research paper. The student in this chapter does not need to “teach anything” (and use the literature as documentation) about the subject matter to the reader. Sentences should highlight the existence of important works and their connection to the project. For example, if the project concerns measuring the perception of racism, “Daniel Hay’s 2003 excellent biblical theology of race (footnote here) does not discuss specifically measuring the perception of racism.” On the other hand, if your project is on the practice of lectio divina, you could write, “Richard Foster’s classic 2002 work *Celebration of Discipline* (footnote here) has a short section on the practice of lectio divina, but does not address it as positively as the present study does.” And that can be it --move on to the next work.
- b. If there are concepts that are potentially unfamiliar to the general reader, the student might have to have a subsection on it in the literature review. For example, if the ministry in question made use of “identificational repentance,” you might want to write, “For information on the concept of identificational repentance, the reader is directed to John Dawson’s 1994 work, *Healing America’s Wounds*.”

12. Principles of Sound Data Reporting (chapter 4)

- a. In general, each heading in chapter 4 should be a hypothesis or sub-hypothesis you are trying to demonstrate or a research question you are trying to answer (see point 3 above). This way it is clear to the reader what the data in that section “argues” for.
- b. In the case of quantitative data (scores), a summary chart is required. Often this chart will list participant (identified by participant number) in rows and scores in columns. If there are pre-scores compared to post-scores, present these in two columns side by side.
- c. In the case of qualitative data, a summary chart is preferred. Often this chart will list participant (identified by participant number) in rows and your “coding” categories of the interview data in at the top of the columns. In these columns, for each participant, you can either type the “keywords” he or she used in the interview, or an “x” denoting that he or she said something that “fits” that category. In the latter case, the reader is then looking for a chart with many “x’s.” It is also preferred after the summary chart that you write a paragraph that contains good direct quotes that help establish the hypothesis. If you use a direct quote from a given participant, then type a capital “X” in the summary chart for that participant.

13. Principles of a Sound Final Draft (Defense-Ready Copy)

- a. The draft must be complete and not appear to be “under construction.” If you created a footnote, but left to later the task of tracking down bibliographical information for it, make sure

you fill in the empty footnote before submitting the draft. If the draft appears unfinished, it will not pass initial inspection and will be sent back immediately.

- b. The draft must have not only chapters 1-5, but also the “front matter” (title page, approval page, abstract, table of contents, list of illustrations, list of abbreviations, acknowledgements, etc.) and “back matter” (appendices and works cited). See the Appendix in Turabian’s *Manual* for formatting and sample pages.
- c. All instruments used must be included in the appendix. All curricula you used must be summarized in the appendix.
- d. Be sure your headings for chapters, sections and subsections comply stylistically with Turabian’s specifications. See Kate A. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers, Seventh Edition* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2003), 397=399.
- e. Since most students write chapters at different times, the style can easily be inconsistent. Many students write chapter 1 with their data collection in the future and write chapter 1 in the future tense. Then they proceed to write chapters 3,4 and 5 after their data collection has already happened and write those chapters in the past tense. When they string together all five chapters for the final draft, they must go back and change the tense of chapter 1 to the past tense.
- f. Remove material that does not contribute to your hypothesis or hypotheses—either remove it or move it to an appendix. Think of the entire dissertation as an attempt to verify your hypothesis or hypotheses.
- g. Remember that you are writing as a researcher. You must speak with an objective, unbiased tone. Although you are arguing for a point (your hypothesis), resist the temptation to overstate your case, or to argue beyond your facts. Refrain from flowery , vague language, in favor of straightforward, precise language. Refrain from derogatory language, or exaggerated language. Refrain from hasty generalizations. Refrain from unwarranted claims.
- h. A defense ready draft NEED NOT BE FREE of spelling and grammatical errors. There is always time to send the manuscript to an editor AFTER THE DEFENSE. However, there must be clarity of argument. There must be a clear hypothesis and the data presented must clearly support it.

14. Inspection of a Final Draft for Defense Readiness (often two months before graduation)

- a. The D. Min office, either the Coordinator, or someone else authorized by the Coordinator (often the Director of the D. Min.) will do an “inspection” of the final draft.
- b. If the inspector is asked to render a decision: is the draft “defense ready or not?” “Will it most likely pass an oral defense?” (with the dissertation defense rubric in mind)
 - If the answer is “yes,” the Coordinator will schedule the oral defense.
 - If the answer is “no.” the inspector is asked to make a second decision: are the problems with the dissertation fixable within a short period of time (within a week)?
--if they are fixable in a short period of time, the Coordinator (with the help of the inspector) will email the student a list of required items to fix to render the manuscript defense-ready

--if the problems are not fixable in a short period of time, the Coordinator will inform the student that graduation must be postponed.

15. Principles of a Sound Oral Defense

a. 20 minute PowerPoint Summary:

- 1) PowerPoint slides must be minimalist in content: Please have only summary phrases that prompt your comments and do not have full sentences that you read off the slide. Remember, you are displaying your expertise and ability to do public speaking. Reading off a manuscript is unacceptable. Speak to the audience, making eye contact.
- 2) Practice your presentation at home before the defense and time yourself so that you do not go over 20 minutes

b. 30-minute Cross-examination

- 1) You do not need to have a full answer to every objection. Convince the second reader that you had at least considered the issue he or she is raising. After the defense, the readers may recommend a way for you to address the objection in your post-defense draft.

16. Principles of Sound Advisor Selection:

- a. Advisors must have written a dissertation of some sort, whether D. Min or Ph.D.
- b. It is preferred, but not required, that advisors have some expertise in the subject area. The stature of the advisor is a plus to the dissertation, as he or she “signs off” on the signature page.
- c. The best advisors have a personal relationship with the D. Min. Student. Past professors with whom the student had an extraordinarily good relationship and mentors, or even people with doctorates who go to your church, work much better than strangers and acquaintances. The lack of a personal relationship often means the advisor takes a less active role. It helps if he or she has some “stake” in the student finishing, because he or she loves or has a friendship commitment to the student.

17. Governance of, and Decision Making / Approvals for, a Given Dissertation:

- a. **Proposal Phase** – General Idea Approval (DML 871): The Coordinator is the Sole Supervisor at this point. He decides if a dissertation topic is a workable idea or whether the student should be advised to pursue another idea.
- b. **IRB Phase—Research Protocol and Methodology Approval** (DML 872): Supervision is shared by the Coordinator and the First Reader/ Advisor. The research protocol is recorded in the IRB approval application and the IRB, which meets once a month, is invested with the authority to approve, disapprove, or revise, the research method.
- c. **Data Collection and Writing Phase:** Supervision continues to be shared by the Coordinator and the First Reader. A project can be stopped or altered by either one. Ultimate supervision falls to the Director of the D. Min, who may be called upon to help make a decision.
- d. **Inspection of Defense Draft:** Responsibility for this falls primarily to the Coordinator, who has the authority to delegate the task of inspection to others, especially to the Director. The

inspector decides if (a) a draft is defense = ready and (b) an oral defense should proceed. This decision is essentially a decision about whether the student can graduate at the target date.

- e. **Oral Defense:** The verdict on the defense draft falls to a three person committee, who sign the approval page: (a) the first reader/ advisor (b) the second reader /examiner (c) the Director of the D. Min. program. The Coordinator will support the decision of this committee.
- f. **Post-Defense Copy (or Institutional Copy);** Responsibility for this falls primarily to the Coordinator, though aspects of it he may delegate to the oral defense committee.

18. First Reader /Advisor Duties:

- a. Advise on the formulation of the research method, in particular, the wording of the hypothesis, the choosing of an instrument, the arrangement for the participant pool, the analysis of the data (the IRB approval application)
- b. Assist the Coordinator in the governance of the dissertation during the data collection and writing stage.
- c. Offer feedback to the student, primarily through track changes and comments in a WORD document, on chapter drafts. The main need is for quality control. Comments on professionalism in presentation are especially appreciated. Chapter 1 (ministry problem), chapter 2 (literature review), chapter 3 (method), chapter 4 (findings) and chapter 5 (conclusions).
- d. Assist student with re-writes and revisions if defense draft does not pass inspection.
- e. Attend oral defense and sign signature page

19. General Comments:

- a. Better to stay in touch with advisors and Dr. Chan, than to not stay in touch.
- b. This program prefers that students not use the first person singular 'I.' On occasion, the first person plural ("we") is permitted, but the preferred style is "the present researcher" (instead of "I") and "the present study" (instead of "my study").
- c. Although Turabian's 7th edition lists formatting for both in-text parenthesis and for footnotes at the bottom of the page, this program prefers footnotes for citations.
- d. The D. Min. office needs to keep track of which students are on track to graduate by a target date and which ones are not. Staying in touch helps the office on deciding this. If a project is deemed to be in distress, Dr. Chan and the director may decide the student is not on track to finish and remove the student from the anticipated graduation list.
- e. Write chapters one at a time, but string them together as soon as possible (to close to a hundred page document), and have your advisor email you comments and revisions on a "working draft" of the entire dissertation as much as possible.
- f. Anticipate revising and revising many times. This is normal. The advisor should send comments and revisions on content. Dr Chan will send revisions and comments on formatting.
- g. At some point the D. Min. office will inspect an advanced stage of a working draft you submit for "defense-readiness" (not perfect, but good enough to defend). A defense will be scheduled once you are defense-ready.

20. Costs of the Dissertation Program, Beyond Regular Tuition

- a. Dissertation Fee: \$1000.00 to ATS (applied after fourth core class)
- b. Extension Fee (if necessary): \$1000.00. Extension fees are usually applied sometime after the deadline for a final draft has been missed. Extensions and fees associated with them are not to be considered automatic. They are contingent upon the student demonstrating to the Coordinator satisfactory progress toward completion.
- c. If a student, after the fourth year of the program, does not demonstrate satisfactory progress on the dissertation, the Dissertation Coordinator in discussion with the Director, may decide to demit the student from the D. Min. program.
- d. Publication Fee: around \$200 to ProQuest, to house and e-publish your finished dissertation and purchase a hard copy for the ATS Library. The library hard copy is considered a requirement for graduation.