
Preface

Today, colleges and universities offer master's and doctoral degrees in increasing numbers. Many students enroll in these programs, and in many cases, they do not receive appropriate guidance and support in conceptualizing, conducting, and writing an original research study. This is evidenced by an estimated 40% to 50% of doctoral students nationwide who complete their course work but not the final act of writing their dissertation. They become ABDs (all-but-dissertation). This represents a tremendous waste of time, money, and energy.

In reviewing the literature, I discovered very few useful, comprehensive books that guide master's or doctoral students through the formidable and demanding process of crafting a high-quality research study. This book offers the practical guidance often lacking in doctoral programs and in the literature about planning, writing, and defending a dissertation. Doctoral students need to (1) get a clear picture of what it takes to write a high-quality research study and see it as doable; (2) understand it as a psychological and human relations venture as much as a research exercise; (3) feel encouraged and supported in their efforts; (4) experience the process as a satisfying, rewarding, and exciting journey; and (5) finish!

I wrote this book to satisfy the existing need for a clear, concise, cut-to-the-chase guidebook for completing a doctoral dissertation. *The Dissertation Journey* provides a step-by-step guide on how to plan, write, and defend a dissertation. Its structure parallels the dissertation process and presents detailed information about the content and process from conceptualizing a topic to publishing the results. It addresses the psychological and emotional barriers students confront and provides up-to-date information on using the computer and the Internet in the various stages of dissertating. The style is personal, informal, and conversational—much like a coach talking one-on-one with a student. To enhance learning and clarify concepts, I included a myriad of examples together with helpful hints, checklists, and quotations. Since writing a dissertation can be a bewildering and overwhelming experience for students, I use the metaphor of climbing a mountain for inspiration and to maintain interest and motivation to persevere in spite of obstacles.

For the past 22 years, I have had the opportunity to teach doctoral students at the University of La Verne—a premier doctoral program in California known for its innovative approach to educating leaders. The faculty provides a relevant, practical, and high-quality program focused on helping students succeed in completing their dissertation. The one-to-one coaching, group tutorials, videos, online discussions, webinars, and research seminars are exemplary techniques for teaching the dissertation process. As a result, our students' graduation rate is 81%—almost twice that of the national average.

The Dissertation Journey: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing, and Defending Your Dissertation incorporates many approaches and techniques taught in the University of La Verne's doctoral program. These techniques, plus the insights and knowledge I gained from years of experience teaching and guiding dissertation students, serve as a valuable road map for the dissertation journey and, hopefully, make the task more understandable, easier, more enjoyable, and less time-consuming. This is not a complete work on writing dissertations, nor could it be; the scope would be overwhelming. The book does not include detailed information on certain aspects of academic research, such as design and methodology, data analysis techniques, or writing style and mechanics. I reference appropriate books that concentrate on these technical areas.

This book is geared toward the specific needs and concerns of doctoral students as they proceed through each step of the dissertation process. It focuses primarily on the social sciences; however, graduate students in most academic disciplines desiring to complete a research study should find the book's content useful and applicable. Generally, the steps for writing a thesis and a dissertation are much the same regardless of the topic or discipline; they vary primarily in scope and complexity. Graduate faculty involved with student research should also find the book's ideas and suggestions beneficial. It eliminates the need to answer over and over again those questions that students routinely ask. Universities vary considerably in their dissertation requirements and procedures. In addition, there is considerable diversity among the preferences of advisors and departments within a university. The suggestions offered in this book should not be considered final, nor should they preempt the judgment and opinions of research advisors and committees.

Researching and writing a thesis or dissertation should be an enjoyable and rewarding experience—one students can comprehend and most of all complete. There is a better way than letting half or more of our nation's doctoral students become ABDs. It is my hope that this book, with its straight talk, step-by-step guidance, and practical advice, will make the journey to "doctor" smoother and, in the process, help beat the overwhelming odds of ABDism.