

Student

Dissertation Handbook

Leadership, Learning, and Educational Change EdD

Missouri State University

Spring 2026

SECTION I: OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION PROCESS

1.1 Purpose of the Dissertation in Practice

The dissertation in the EdD program is a Dissertation in Practice (DiP) designed to:

- Address a meaningful Problem of Practice (PoP)
- Generate actionable knowledge to improve educational settings
- Integrate research, theory, and professional practice

1.2 Dissertation Structure

The program uses a five-chapter model:

1. Chapter 1: Introduction (Problem of Practice)
2. Chapter 2: Literature Review
3. Chapter 3: Methods
4. Chapter 4: Findings
5. Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

1.3 Guiding Principles

All dissertations should demonstrate:

- Alignment (PoP → Purpose → RQs → Methods → Findings)
- Rigor (methodological soundness)
- Relevance (impact on practice)
- Clarity (coherent academic writing)

SECTION II: LEADER SCHOLAR COMMUNITIES (LSC) MODEL

2.1 Purpose of LSCs

The LSC structure provides scaffolded support for dissertation development through four one-credit courses:

LSC	Focus	Outcome
LSC I	Chapter 1	Problem of Practice + Purpose + RQs
LSC II	Chapter 2	Literature Review + Framework
LSC III	Chapter 3	Methods
LSC IV	Pre-Defense	Finalize Chapters 1-3 + Defense Preparation

During the LSCs and the writing process, students will use the book called *Scaffolding the Language of Power* by Kathy Strom as a guide to develop the skills to complete the dissertation.

2.2 Transition After LSC IV

After successful completion of LSC IV:

- Students complete the proposal defense
- Upon approval, students submit IRB applications
- Students begin data collection and analysis
- Students complete the two remaining chapters of the dissertation

SECTION III: DISSERTATION CHAPTER GUIDELINES

3.1 Chapter 1: Introduction (Problem of Practice)

Purpose

To define and justify a meaningful Problem of Practice and present the study design.

Required Components

- Background and Context
- Problem of Practice
- Purpose Statement
- Research Questions

- Significance
- Alignment

3.2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

Purpose

To synthesize research that informs and frames the Problem of Practice.

Required Components

- Thematic literature synthesis
- Gap identification
- Theoretical/Conceptual Framework
- Implications for the study

3.3 Chapter 3: Methods

Purpose

To present a clear, justified, and feasible research design.

Required Components

- Research Design
- Participants and Setting
- Data Collection
- Data Analysis
- Trustworthiness / Validity
- Ethical Considerations
- Researcher Positionality
- Limitations

3.4 Chapter 4: Findings

Purpose

To present analytic findings that answer the research questions.

Key Expectations

- Organized by research questions
- Clear claims supported by evidence
- Use of Claim → Evidence → Explanation structure

3.5 Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

Purpose

To interpret findings and explain their significance for practice.

Key Expectations

- Interpretation (not repetition) of findings
- Connection to literature and framework
- Actionable implications for practice

SECTION IV: ABSTRACT GUIDELINES

4.1 Proposal Abstract

Summarizes the planned study (future tense).

4.2 Final Abstract

Summarizes the completed study (past tense), including:

- Problem of Practice
- Purpose
- Methods
- Key Findings
- Implications

SECTION V: DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

5.1 Committee Composition

- Dissertation Chair

- Additional faculty members
- Enroll in the Brightspace site called Thesis & Dissertation to officially create the committee.

5.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Chair

- Guides dissertation development
- Ensures readiness for defense

Committee Members

- Provide feedback
- Evaluate proposal and final defense

SECTION VI: PROPOSAL DEFENSE

6.1 Purpose

To evaluate readiness to conduct the study.

6.2 Defense Components

- Schedule the date and time for the defense
- Oral presentation
- Question-and-answer session
- Committee deliberation

6.3 Decision Outcomes

- Pass
- Pass with Minor Revisions
- Revise and Re-Defend
- Not Ready

SECTION VII: IRB AND DATA COLLECTION

7.1 IRB Approval

Students must obtain IRB approval before collecting data. See [CITI Program](#) & [Cayuse](#).

7.2 Data Collection

Begins only after:

- Proposal approval
- IRB approval

SECTION VIII: EVALUATION AND RUBRICS

8.1 Key Evaluation Criteria

- Alignment
- Synthesis (Chapter 2)
- Methodological rigor
- Feasibility
- Clarity of communication

SECTION IX: STUDENT SUCCESS GUIDELINES

9.1 Common Challenges

- Misalignment across chapters
- Weak literature synthesis
- Vague methods
- Overly ambitious designs

9.2 Strategies for Success

- Focus on alignment at every stage
- Seek feedback early and often
- Prioritize clarity over complexity

SECTION X: FINAL NOTES

The dissertation is a process of refinement, not perfection. Students who succeed:

- develop clear, focused studies
- remain open to feedback
- maintain steady progress