



*Managing Your
Dissertation From
Beginning to End*

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My "Study"

- Rather than give you opinions based on $n=1$, I decided to obtain a broader perspective.
- “What advice would you give first or second year PhD students on completing a dissertation?”

The "Sample" (n=13)

- **7 current PhD students in the dissertation stage**
 - 4 with proposal defended
 - 3 finishing up or just finished
- **6 faculty members**
 - 4 at doctoral granting institutions
 - 2 at MBA-focused schools

Student Reactions: The Big 8

- **S#1: Get it done!**
 - “Get it done! Work on it everyday.....don’t put it off.”
 - “Pick a topic you can handle, gather data for, and actually FINISH!”
- **How to do that:**
 - “Begin to establish routines that will work for you in your dissertation, as well as in your research.”
 - ”Start thinking and refining your topic early in the process...”
 - ”Develop your model and pull together the support literature in the two months after comps.”

Student #1: Get it done!

- **How to do that: (continued)**

- “Have a plan A, B, C and D for data collection if you want to finish on time.”
- “Schedule regular weekly or bi-weekly meetings with your chairman for feedback.”
- “Pick up and read one or two of the ‘completing your dissertation’ guides.”
- “Understand the boundaries of your dissertation. Don't spend time on stuff your committee doesn't want you to do.”

Student advice #2:

- **S#2: Pick an interesting topic.**
 - “The big downside to not working on a dissertation you are interested in is that you’re not going to be able to sell yourself or your research topic come job interview time.”
 - “Pick a topic you are interested in, since you will be living and breathing this project for 2 years.”
 - “Know what areas that are not of interest to you so you can eliminate them as areas on which to concentrate.”

Student advice #3:

- **#3: Pick your chair wisely.**
 - “Pick your chair wisely. Sometimes you'll need to manage your chair, and sometimes your chair will need to manage you. But its your chair's job to manage the committee, not yours.”

Student advice #4:

- **#4: Pick your committee wisely.**
 - “Choose your committee wisely. Make sure they all get along and they all offer some expertise to assist you.”
 - “Get to know professors with whom you will not take seminars to understand their areas of research and interest as they may also be potential chairs or committee members”

Student advice #5:



- **S#5: Think about a research stream.**
 - “Ideally, use your dissertation to extend work you've already begun in prior sole-authored papers; consider picking seminar paper topics that might develop into a research stream.”
 - “Keep a notebook of ideas (you should be doing this anyway). What I noticed over time was an emergence of themes, which helped me define my research interests and think long term about research streams.”

Student advice #6:

- **S#6: Cut the red tape.**
 - “Know the bureaucratic requirements. Go to your school's session that covers each and every requirement for dissertation completion.”
 - “Understand the particular requirements (oddities?) within your institution and department.”

Student advice #7:



- **S#7: Think about publications.**
 - “Choose a study design that will allow for multiple publications - Lay your publication plan out in advance.”

Student advice #8:

- **S#8: Seek student mentoring.**
 - “If you can, stay in close contact with one or two advanced students as they go through the dissertation process. It doesn't have to be someone in your department, but it should be someone within the school of business.”

Faculty Reactions: The Bigger 6

- **F#1: Get it done! Narrow the topic.**
 - “Narrow the topic to make it doable. The only good dissertation is a done dissertation.”
 - “Make it feasible. In most dissertation meetings, there is a higher likelihood that the committee will scale the dissertation down than it will add to it. The best dissertation is a do-able dissertation.”
 - “The topic should be doable in a reasonable period of time this means scoping it down to a manageable task.”

Faculty Reactions: The Bigger 6

■ **How to do that:**

- “Designate at least 15-20 hours each week (in your day-timer, real “scheduled” time—that means you are busy and can’t do anything else at that time) to work on your dissertation.”
- “Create a timeline for completing your dissertation and include all the major milestones (each chapter, proposal defense, data collection, analysis, dissertation defense) to keep you on track.”
- “It will take longer than you think. Pick your end date and add six months.”
- “Always be thinking about a possible dissertation topic in each and every seminar.”

Faculty advice #2a (tie):

• F#2a: Think about publications.

- “Think about journal manuscripts while writing the dissertation...that is, what is being written and where it might be published (that way, will get a jump start with some pubs while working on the big piece).”
- “The topic should have publishable value i.e. it is something that has a good chance of making an impact on journals.”
- “Make sure it has years of potential--launching you forward into a stream of programmatic research.”

Faculty advice #2b (tie):

- **F#2b: Pick an interesting topic.**
 - “Do a topic that you are interested in because you will be living with it for the next few years and even longer.”
 - “Find a topic you really love—as it will be your primary research area (hopefully, if all goes well) for the next 5-15 years.”
 - “Pick a topic you can live with and love for years! You'll be stuck with it!”

Faculty advice #4:

- **F#4: Choose your chair wisely.**
 - “Make sure your chair loves the topic and choose your chair carefully.”
 - “Don't argue with your advisor. Self explanatory.”

Faculty advice #5:

- **F#5: Focus on theory.**
 - “Focus on theory. Why is the study you are proposing of interest? What theoretical reasons do you have for including the variables that you include? What theories can you use to generate hypotheses?”

Faculty advice #6:

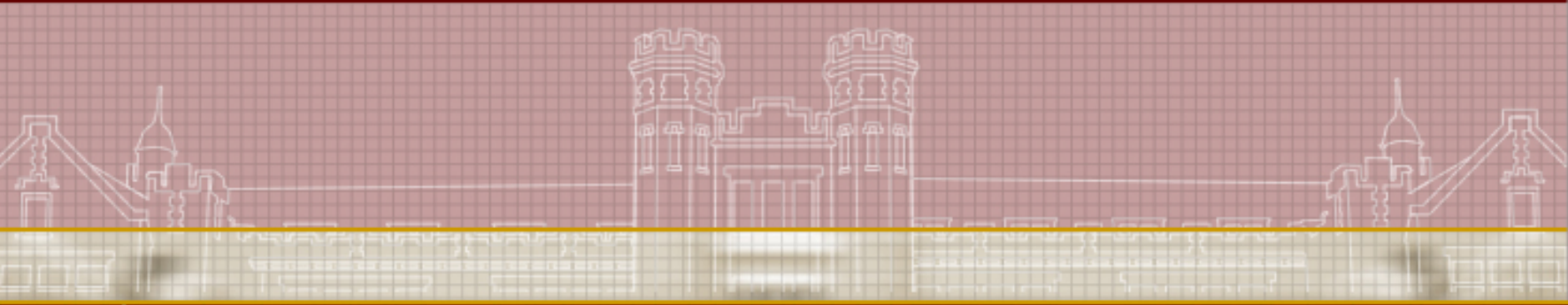
- **F#6: Tell a story.**

- “Tie the threads together. Many proposals read like a series of unrelated sections. Think through what your main themes are, and use them to tie the entire dissertation together. Writing a dissertation is not like writing fiction, but you need to tell a story. This is perhaps even more true of regular articles...”

A Recap



- **Best advice is to get it done!**
- **Second best advice is to pick an interesting topic.**
- **Faculty tend to emphasize publications (I'd go with them....)**
- **Choose a chair wisely.**
- **Think about a research stream.**



Thanks!