Doctor of Ministry
(DMin)

Dissertation Guidelines

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The AGST Alliance-BCM-MBS DMin dissertation: An overview

This **Doctor of Ministry** program seeks to integrate structured theological reflection and critical thinking on ministerial practice, to provide a formative space for participants to learn, dialogue, challenge, discern and shape their ministry philosophy and practices.

Our DMin is designed to produce graduates who are more competent and passionate reflective ministry practitioners, and who …

> … have enhanced skills for ministry, e.g. in preaching, teaching, formation and discipleship.

> … are better equipped to assess analytically and think theologically about contemporary ministry issues.

> … have a deeper biblical and theological of pastoral ministry and leadership.

> … possess expanded leadership, relational and conflict resolution skills.

> … are realising their own personal formation and spiritual maturity.

To help achieve this objective, a **dissertation** is a significant component of the program:

> The dissertation is designed to demonstrate your competence to integrate the theory of the various disciplines drawn on for Christian ministry with your ministry practice. It will comprise an original applied research project that demonstrates sound Christian reflection and which is designed to enhance informed and improved personal and organisational practices. *[DMin Guidelines].*

As you commence your dissertation

Whatever form your dissertation takes, its **context is the Church in Asia**. While it is easy to see your research as an academic exercise, a requirement to complete your DMin program, it is important that you continue to sense your stewardship of the resources and abilities which God has given you to be able to complete this assignment.

Thus, maintain a sense of humility before God as you progress through your dissertation. Recognise that you are doing it ultimately for him. Allow prayer and reflection to permeate the process of your inquiry, from start to finish: From the Kingdom's perspective, this is unlikely to be time wasted!

Time commitment

The stated value of the DMin dissertation is 12 credits (for AGST Alliance) and 15 credits (for BCM and MBS). A person working diligently could complete the dissertation within about fifteen to eighteen months after completion of your coursework. You need to complete your dissertation within three years of the completion of the DMin coursework.

Form and expectations of the DMin dissertation

The expectations for DMin level study generally need to be maintained in your dissertation, so take time to revisit these in the separate DMin Guidelines, pp. 11-12. Note both the 'generic' expectations as well related to your doctoral study being undertaken within an evangelical Christian institution.

A successful DMin dissertation will reflect original research, in candidates' church/ organisational/professional sphere. The dissertation may take one of a variety of forms, tailored to your interests and ministry setting. While it may be conceptual-theoretical research, it will more likely be of an applied nature, with implications for senior leadership in professional and/or policy areas. Hence, it is likely to have a significant quantitative or qualitative research element to it.

'Original research' may seem a daunting prospect! But several writers have suggested what this means in practice. Think about these two lists, and relate them to your likely area of research.

Possible areas of originality:

- a new product/theory
- a development of – or improvement on – an existing product/theory
- a reinterpretation of an existing theory
- a new research tool or technique
- a new model/paradigm/perspective
- an in-depth study of a previously less-studied area
- a critical analysis
- a portfolio of work based on research
- a collection of generalizable findings or conclusions

(Pat Cryer, *The research student's guide to success.* Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996, p. 149.)

'These examples of originality were collected from supervisors, examiners and research students by Estelle Phillips:

- Carrying out empirical work that hasn't been done before.
- Making a synthesis that hasn't been made before.
- Using already known material but with a new interpretation.
- Trying out something in [one] country that has previously only been done in other countries.
- Taking a particular technique and applying it to a new area.
- Bringing new evidence to bear on an old issue.
- Being cross-disciplinary and using different methodologies.
- Looking at areas that people in the discipline haven't looked at before.
- Adding to knowledge in a way that hasn't been done before.'

(Zuber-Skerritt & Ryan, cited in Cryer, 1996, p. 154)

A successful DMin dissertation will give clear evidence that you have acquired skills in the criteria for study at the DMin level, which you have been honing up through the course work of your program. These skills include:

- Able to explicitly set out substantive aims and objectives for the study and have clearly defined its scope, assumptions and limitations.
- Mastery is reflected in the use and citation of primary and secondary sources.
- Able to clearly marshal the evidence and formulate the problems raised by it.
- Able to deal with the problems in an orderly and creative way.
- Demonstrates well developed analytical, critical and synthesizing skills.
- Arguments and supporting evidence are coherent and set out in a logical fashion.
- The methodology is sound and appropriate to the aims.
- Key terminology has been clearly outlined and consistently used.
- Originality, in either (a) enlarging or modifying previous knowledge and/or (b) giving significantly new interpretation of the work of other professionals.

(Adapted from http://www.roxborogh.com/Research/research_aids.htm)

What is a dissertation/thesis?
Joe Wolfe (University of NSW, Australia) has summarised the nature of a thesis/dissertation well:

> Your thesis is a research report. The report concerns a problem or series of problems in your area of research and it should describe what was known about it previously, what you did towards solving it, what you think your results mean, and where or how further progress in the field can be made.

> Do not carry over your ideas from undergraduate assessment: a thesis is not an answer to an assignment question. One important difference is this: the reader of an assignment is usually the one who has set it. S/he already knows the answer (or one of the answers), not to mention the background, the literature, the assumptions and theories and the strengths and weaknesses of them. The readers of a thesis do not know what the "answer" is. If the thesis is for a PhD, the university requires that it make an original contribution to human knowledge: your research must discover something hitherto unknown.

> Obviously your examiners will read the thesis. They will be experts in the general field of your thesis but, on the exact topic of your thesis, you are the world expert. Keep this in mind: you should write to make the topic clear to a reader who has not spent most of the last three years thinking about it.

> (http://www.phys.unsw.edu.au/~jw/thesis.html#what. Accessed 05 February 2014)

What will the dissertation contain?
Before you settle on what sort of dissertation you will do, a good idea is to browse through other masters' and doctoral theses/dissertations, especially those in education and applied/practical theology. These should give you an idea of the commonly-used structure, and the range of research methods employed. Suitable theses/dissertations to peruse may be found in theological college and university libraries, and from on-line sources.

Generally, a dissertation will contain these elements:

1. **Sequence and details of contents**
   Present the contents of the dissertation in this order.

   FRONT MATTERS
   - Title page
   - Declaration of originality
   - Abstract (maximum 300 words)
   - Acknowledgments

- Table of contents
- List of tables and figures
- Notes and Abbreviations

MAIN BODY OF DISSERTATION
Chapter 1 Introduction (20-22 pages)
    a) Introductory paragraph
    b) Description of the ministry context
    c) Statement of the problem
    d) Statement of main research question and sub-questions
    e) Thesis statement (to be inserted when you have completed your project)
    f) Statement of the purpose
    g) Significance of the project
    h) Basic assumptions
    i) Definitions of important terms, delimitations and limitations
    j) Transitional paragraph

Chapter 2: Theological And Theoretical Underpinnings (30 pages)
(Literature review on what have others said and done that contribute to and support your dissertation)
    a) Introductory paragraph
    b) Description and analysis of theological themes pertaining to the project
    c) Description and analysis of relevant theoretical frameworks or models that contribute to the project. This can include theories and models in the other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, economics, humanities, history and contemporary findings.
    d) Application or integration of the theological and theoretical perspectives to the project.
    e) Transitional paragraph

Chapter 3. Methodology: (30 pages)
How have you studied the problem?
    a) Introductory paragraph
    b) Format of the project intervention (curriculum, sermon series, model of ministry training series) or field research study.
    c) Description of the project participants (how many, how selected? Their function in relation to you as the leader of the project?)
    d) Description of the project sessions (what kind, how long, how many, session objectives, session content)
    e) Evaluation methodology (what types of evaluation? How will evaluation be administered? How will data be collected? How results be interpreted?
    f) Transitional paragraph

Chapter 4. Findings And Results (30-40 pages)
    This includes the analysis, evaluation of your findings and results.
    a) Introductory paragraph
    b) Evaluation of findings
        1. A description of the results derived from the three angles of evaluation
        2. A description of the conclusions dereived from the three angles of evaluation
    c) Transitional paragraph

5. Conclusion And Implications: (30-35 pages)
Why is this study significant? It answers the research question, subquestions and makes recommendations for further studies.
a) Introductory paragraph
b) Interpretations

    c) Trustworthiness (in terms of applicability, dependability, credibility, reflexivity)
    d) Significance and implications [Main section]
       1. Sustainability
       2. Personal significance: Summary of personal and professional insights gained from the project
       3. Ecclesial significance: Summary of implications for further ministry, growth, additional study or for ministry leaders who may choose to replicate the project in the future
       4. Theological interpretations and significance of the data
    e) Questions still not answered or that warrant further research
    f) Concluding paragraphs

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES

Dissertation presentation style

The word limit for the DMin dissertation will normally fall in the range of 45,000-50,000 words (which includes footnotes, but excludes the bibliography/reference list and appendices), depending on the nature of the research. Precise guidelines for the physical layout of your dissertation are available separately.

AGST Alliance recommends the use of the *author-date referencing style*, although the *footnotes style* may be used with permission from the program director. Whichever style is adopted, consistent and accurate referencing is expected. For details on either of these systems, the key reference book is K. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 8th Edition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

The dissertation may include a significant creative, 'non-written' component: for example a folio of some form, computer software, video/DVD. In such cases, the elements listed in the section above may be modified. However, there will still need to be a significant 'critical component' in your dissertation. Your supervisor and program director will need to approve theses/projects with such a creative component.

You and your supervisor

You will be assigned a supervisor for your dissertation. The precise topic/scope of your dissertation will be decided in consultation between you and your supervisor, and endorsed by the program director.

You are invited to suggest names for a possible supervisor, and then a formal invitation will be issued by your program director. Frequency of meeting between you and your supervisor will be mutually agreed. At least initially, the meetings may need to be fairly frequent – both as face-to-face contact and by distance-communication modes (e.g. emails, phone/Skype calls – and even 'snail-mail'!). We recommend face-to-face contact at least one every six months, if possible – and with the first visit very early in the dissertation phase.

Completing your dissertation (and on time!) will be a collaborative effort. While final responsibility for completion of the work is yours, a good working relationship with your supervisor is a key to your success. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to this relationship, although the common strong images are those of *mentor* and *critical friend*.

Note: clear written communication is your responsibility. Even if English is not your main language, you cannot expect your supervisor to read drafts which are in poor English, or to adopt the role of editor.

Responsibilities
Both you and your supervisor have responsibilities if you are to thrive in, and complete, your research dissertation. Some of these responsibilities are:

You:
- Maintaining regular communication with your supervisor, as mutually agreed.
- Complete and submit tasks you commit yourself to. It is recommended you keep a record of your contacts with your supervisor.
- Frank and honest discussion of your progress, difficulties and concerns.
- Occasional reflection on the process of supervision.
- Completion – on time – of required progress reports.

Your supervisor:
- Monitor your progress.
- Provide critically constructive feedback within an agreed time frame. (See *'Turn around' of work* below.)
- Alert you to areas in which you are not handling your research competently, especially in English communication, argumentation, and use of resources.
- Point you towards appropriate resources (including key people for you to contact).
- Completion – on time – of required progress reports.

'Turn around' of work
We know the value of getting feedback within a reasonable timeframe; and we are encouraging supervisors to act responsibly to provide it. Realistically, we all face time/ priority pressures, and it is not always possible for a supervisor to respond immediately. We request your supervisor to work within the schedule below:

Item	Target response time
• 'Administrative emails' from you *(e.g. requesting clarification of process, a resource reference, contact address of another person, setting up a time to phone, etc...)*	Within one week
• An email/letter from you, raising a significant content issue *(e.g. working through the details of an aspect of the research topic)*	Acknowledge receipt: 1 week Substantive response: 2 weeks
• A major section of writing *(e.g. a draft chapter of the dissertation)*	Acknowledge receipt: 1 week Substantive response: 3 weeks
• Reading a complete dissertation draft	Acknowledge receipt: 1 week Substantive response: 5-6 weeks

Some issues may be most easily dealt with by a quick telephone call rather than a written response.

We will also request your supervisor to alert you if (s)he anticipates that (s)he will not be able to meet a target response time.

If problems with your supervisor arise
Difficulties and/or misunderstandings may arise between you and your supervisor. Seek to resolve such concerns directly with your supervisor as they arise.

However, if you feel that things have not been, or cannot be, adequately resolved directly, approach the program director to air your concerns and to discuss a way forward. Your supervisor similarly has an invitation to comment confidentially to the program director.

Costs
Supervisors will be given an honorarium from AGST Alliance-BCM-MBS for their supervision. However, direct costs incurred in your contact with your supervisor are generally your responsibility: Please don't presume upon the generosity (or affluence) of your supervisor.

Items you will need to arrange to reimburse your supervisor for (unless (s)he indicates otherwise) may include the cost of photocopied articles and travel for your meetings.

Examination of the dissertation

1. Pre-submission dissertation perusal
When you and your supervisor agree that your dissertation is getting very close to its final form, 1-2 readers internal to AGST Alliance will peruse it, in order to 'OK' it for final submission and sending out to the external examiners.

The internal readers will be looking at criteria for 'readiness to submit' which include:
• *Technical:* is the grammar/formatting/style of the dissertation accurate, appropriate and consistent?
• *Conceptual:* is there an appropriate/clear logical flow of argumentation through the dissertation?

- *Use of research evidence:* are the cited sources used appropriately, to complement the argumentation rather than to provide the argumentation; and is there any obvious evidence of plagiarism?
- *Academic:* overall, is the dissertation at DMin level?

The internal reader(s)' role isn't to agree/disagree with the specific argumentation content of your dissertation (which we assume will have been done by you with your supervisor). So it is more a general overview of the quality of the dissertation rather than a detailed critique that will be done.

After your dissertation draft has been received by the DMin Programs Director, it is likely to take two weeks or so to be perused.

2. Dissertation examination

Your submitted dissertation will be read by two competent external examiners. Although the final decision relating to the choice of examiners lies with AGST Alliance, you will have an opportunity (through your supervisor) to suggest the names of possible examiners and anyone you would prefer not to be an examiner.

An oral defence may be called for, to assess your understanding of aspects of the dissertation and/or to test your general knowledge in areas relating to the dissertation.

A grade will be awarded your dissertation: Pass with distinction, Pass, or Fail. The grading system is as below:

Grade	Criteria
Awarded with distinction	The dissertation fulfils the requirements of an AGST Alliance-BCM-MBS DMin, and the originality of the research and the quality of presentation is significantly superior in demonstrating the criteria for an acceptable Alliance-BCM-MBS DMin (as outlined in the DMin Handbook).
Awarded	The dissertation fulfils the requirements of an AGST Alliance-BCM-MBS DMin, and the originality of the research and the quality of presentation adequately demonstrate the criteria for an acceptable Alliance-BCM-MBS DMin (as outlined in the DMin Handbook).
Fail	The dissertation fails to fulfil the requirements of an Alliance-BCM-MBS DMin, and the originality of the research and the quality of presentation fails to demonstrate the criteria for an acceptable AGST Alliance Alliance-BCM-MBS DMin (as outlined in the DMin Handbook).

Your dissertation must receive at least a Pass for the DMin to be awarded. If the examiners decide that a submitted dissertation is not passable, participants may be invited to revise and resubmit their dissertation.

Ethical clearance for your research

Internationally in recent decades, there has been an enhanced awareness of the ethical responsibilities of researchers towards research participants. Issues of integrity, respect for persons, beneficence and justice lie at the heart of this concern as theological issues too. So, as a Christian institution, AGST Alliance wants to ensure that people in its programs reflect these values also.

If you are involved in research which gathers 'live' data – the views of living people – then ethical issues will relate to such areas as:

- Aspects of anonymity and confidentiality
- Care for research subjects/participants
- Protocols for selection of samples
- Informed consent and rights of research subjects/participants

'Live' data sources may include the administration of questionnaires, interviews, observations, drawing information from current administrative records of an institution, etc.

If you envisage ethical clearance may be required, indicate this in your proposal. After your proposal is approved and prior to your data collection and/or interaction with research subjects, the *Ethical Clearance Form* (pp. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**f) will need to be submitted to the Education Programs Committee for approval. Your research cannot proceed until ethics clearance is given.

Dissertation timeline

This table indicates action and responses required for the duration of the dissertation phase of your AGST Alliance-BCM-MBS DMin program.

Phase	Time	Candidate's action	Committee response
Focus Phase	FOI approval to Supervisor appointment	• *Focus of interest* form submitted (see pp. 22) • Suggest possible supervisor • Dissertation fees paid	• Focus approved • Supervisor approached & appointed
Proposal Phase	*~6 months* Broad reading, Submit draft of literature review (Chapter 2)	• Contact with supervisor • Commence detailed research of focus area to determine specific topic • Broad reading on the topic • Complete a draft of Chapter 2	
	Submit detailed research proposal approval	• Detailed research proposal prepared & submitted (see p. 13)	• Proposal approved; or revisions/ amendments recommended
Research and Writing Phase	*~6 months:* Field Research: Gather and analyse data *~6 to 9 months:* Writing up dissertation	• Detailed work on the research • Submit *Ethical Clearance form* (pp. 24) for approval if required • Writing of dissertation	
Pre-submission phase	1 month before dissertation is likely to be submitted	• Submit *Notice of intention to submit a dissertation* form.	• Examiners approached
	Dissertation perusal	• A 'close to final' copy of your dissertation submitted for perusal.	• Dissertation approved for final submission.
Submission phase	Dissertation submitted	Copies of dissertation handed in. Include the signed *Declaration on dissertation submission*.	• Dissertation sent to examiners
Post submission phase	~ 2-3 months post-submission		• Examiners' reports received & considered • Oral exam date set (if required) • Decision conveyed to participant
	~ 3-4 months post-submission	• Oral exam (if required)	• Decision conveyed to participant
	~4-6 months post-submission	• Amendments/revisions made • Final dissertation copies bound and submitted	• Decision conveyed to participant • Graduation ceremony confirmed
	~6+ months	• Graduation fee paid • Graduation ceremony	

Dissertation submission process

When you get close to submitting your dissertation for examination, you will need to fulfil various requirements, outlined in a separate set of guidelines. It is worth perusing these guidelines early, to ensure you don't face a delay in your submission.

Dissertation proposal

Once you have had your 'focus of interest' approved, you will commence working to firm up your specific dissertation proposal. This will be done in close consultation with your supervisor. It will entail significant reading and research on what has already been done in your area of focus – and may form a substantial part of your final presentation (especially the review of existing literature).

Your *dissertation proposal* will be your plan for further, detailed research and writing. This needs to be approved by the AGST Alliance-MBS-BCM DMin Dissertation Committee before you can proceed further.

Produced in consultation with your supervisor, your proposal will include these elements:

1. A working title.

2. An unambiguous research question; and hypotheses to be explored. Provide an additional three or four research sub questions. Each sub research question will relate to each chapter of the dissertation.

3. A clear description of the area of research that you propose to explore *(up to ½ page).*

4. A statement of the potential significance of this investigation: why does it need to be done? What contribution do you think it will offer? What is 'new' about your investigation? *(up to 1 page).*

5. A detailed plan of your research, including the methods/procedures you propose to use to collect and analyse the data. Include a brief layout of your chapters *(up to 3 pages).*

6. An indication of the limits/boundaries of the proposed research – in terms of both the area to be addressed and method(s) to be used *(up to 1 page).*

7. A proposed time-line for your research and the writing of your dissertation.

8. A proposed overall chapter layout of your dissertation.

9. An initial bibliography of representative resources. Highlight the more important works and authors discovered so far.

10. Indicate the availability of resources necessary for you to conduct your research (e.g. which libraries? What groups of specific people for your data collection?)

11. Indicate whether your research will require *ethical clearance.* (See p. 12)

12. Your supervisor's comments on the viability and benefits of the research *(up to ½ page).*

The page length indicators above are a suggestion only: The optimal length of your proposal will be the minimum required to do the job well. Avoid padding!

Type your proposal, single line spacing on A4 paper, with 3 cm left- and right-side margins and 2 cm top and bottom margins. The preferred font is Times New Roman 12 point. Incorporate in-text referencing of sources you cite in your proposal and a reference list (as distinct from the initial bibliography of #8 above).

Appendix 1: Research methodologies*

This is a brief introduction to various research models, processes, and terminology that will possibly be used for DMin dissertations. This is not a comprehensive list but ones deemed most suitable for your use in this program.

The type of study you undertake will depend on numerous factors such as the type of data you wish to collect, your research question and aims. Ongoing discussions with your supervisor and more experienced researchers will also help you to pinpoint the type of study, or the research methodology which will be most suitable for your research question(s).

Qualitative and quantitative
Generally *qualitative research* focuses on the subjective experience and perception of the research subjects. In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument of data collection. Tools used include open ended interviews, field notes, 'conversations' with participants or journal diaries. The focus of qualitative research is not only to describe but also to analyse: it seeks to look at the *why* of events not just the *what* (Tuckman, 1988).

In contrast, the focus of *quantitative research* is objective measures rather than subjective experience. Data is collected in some objective and replicable manner; this methodology provides greater distance between the data and researcher than in qualitative studies. In addition, data is usually analysed statistically in this type of research. The tools of quantitative research include test performance scores, physiological readings, survey responses and spectrometer readings.

Action research
Used in applied settings such as the classroom or a health care environment, this approach involves the practitioner as researcher collaborating with students or work colleagues in order to bring about change, to develop new skills or to problem solve in a particular situation that directly arises from the setting. A distinguishing feature of this approach is its spiraling and cyclical nature typically involving stages such as planning, action, observation and reflection. An example of action research is the introduction by the researcher of self assessment criteria for student learners. The research would investigate the effect of this innovation. Collaborative and/or reflective aspects of such a project may include a discussion with students about their input, perceptions and evaluation of the innovation.

Case study
This type of research looks in depth at particular issues with a single or small number of subjects. Advantages of case study research are that the researcher can investigate a characteristic and/or its development in depth and at close range. This approach is also often used in fields such as neuropsychology to investigate cases of rare or unique pathology.

Ethnographic
Ethnographic research is a means of gaining insight into a culture or social process. It involves participant observation, which means the researcher becomes immersed in the daily lives of the people or community he or she is observing. Data for ethnographic studies may include field notes, interviews, taped conversations. This can be used as part of your case study.

Longitudinal

In this type of study data is collected repeatedly over a period of time in order to document or measure changes which have occurred in the population over the period of the study. For example, to investigate student's learning, students taught about the same topic using either a paper based or computer based technique for information presentation may be tested immediately after learning, one month after learning and six months after learning. This approach would investigate whether the learning benefits associated with a particular presentation technique continued over time. Longitudinal studies may also occur over many years and have a *developmental* focus or a *correlational* focus. Data for longitudinal studies can include surveys, interviews, diaries, test results, documents such as student writing.

Multi-Method Research
Data is gathered about a range of related issues using a mix of methods.

Triangulated data/triangulation of data
This involves the comparison of data relating to the same issue or phenomenon of investigation but from different perspectives or from different methods of collection: for example, comparison of data from different stages of research; comparison of data from different sets of participants; or comparison of data from different tests that purport to measure the same variable. Data is therefore crosschecked in order to confirm the hypothesis. Triangulation of data can show up disjunctions in the research results, as well as provide additional insights.

* This material is abstracted and adapted from *Research and thesis writing: 1. Research models and methods*, University of Wollongong, http://learning.uow.edu.au/resources/LD/thesis1.pdf. Accessed 5 February 2014.

Appendix 2: Getting started with your thinking/proposal*

A: PREPARATION
1. **Insight and Passion.**
What has fired my imagination and interest? From my reading, writing and experience is there an emerging focus? Is there an issue that I really want to think through more rigorously? One needs both insight and passion for a dissertation topic to emerge and to be completed within a reasonable time-frame . (Your study program is intended as a gateway to the next phase of life, not a career!)

2. **Disciplinary Knowledge.**
What disciplines will I need to draw on for my research? How can I build up the basic knowledge and skills to embark on my research?
- Use any postgraduate courses/modules that you are completing to help you get into the best possible shape for the writing process.
- If you need particular languages for your research make sure that you are well grounded in your knowledge of the language(s).
- If you are doing qualitative or quantitative research, make sure you have an adequate knowledge of the requisite methodologies.

3. **Technical Knowledge.**
Ensure you are familiar with the extended functions of your word processor, footnote/referencing software, and the technical requirements for the writing of theses (styles for endnotes, footnotes, bibliography, and grammar). It is essential that you use current anti-virus software and file backup mechanisms on your computer.

4. **Procedures.**
Familiarise yourself with the AGST Alliance procedures. If something is unclear, contact the education programs director or Dean of AGST Alliance.

5. **Research**.
A dissertation is meant to be an original piece of work, so it is extremely important to do a serious library search to ensure that no one else has written on the precise dissertation you are to pursue. Theses (dissertation) abstracts are available in printed form, online or as CD. Familiarise yourself with the ATLA Database, AULOTS, and other library research tools – ask the assistance of the librarian in a theological institution.

B: GETTING A PROPOSAL TOGETHER
Most people begin with a global theme which has to be refined over time into a *do-able* project that can be completed in a reasonable time: the *Filtration process* for writing a dissertation proposal. The following are some ways to aid this filtration process.

1. **Conversation (talking yourself into clarity).**
Talk through your ideas with friends and advisers. Conversation may help you clarify ideas and others, from their own background and knowledge, may well contribute to your project.

2. **Writing (writing yourself into clarity).**
Type a page or two on your area of interest. Read it aloud to see if it makes sense and there is enough material for a dissertation/dissertation. Think about the chapters that will be required and how they will cohere. Put this material aside for a week, and do something different, then take another look at the project. Eventually you should aim at being able to express the central issue of your dissertation in one complete (even if complex) sentence.

3. Reading (reading yourself into clarity).

There is no substitute for time spent in the library, or with material borrowed from the library, steeping yourself in works that address your area of interest. (If you take notes as you read, make absolutely sure that you have your notes fully referenced: there are few things more frustrating than trying to remember where you acquired that wonderful quote that you really wanted to use to support your proposal, or include in your dissertation).

4. Mulling (thinking yourself into clarity).

Leisure time is essential, not only during the writing time, but in getting it together for a proposal. Often issues that are on the backburner come to a greater degree of clarity when we give ourselves an appropriate amount of space and exercise.

5. Discipline (working yourself into clarity).

Use the keyboard to start to sort the potential chapters of your dissertation while constantly asking yourself the about the ways in which these discrete sections relate to the dissertation topic.

6. Bibliographies.

Begin the process of gathering bibliographies around areas of particular interest. If you find that very few people have written anything about your area of interest then proceed very cautiously.

7. View successful dissertations.

It can be very instructive to take a serious look at several of these so as to get a good idea of what is required both in terms of presentation and content.

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* This material is adapted from Michael A. Kelly, *One Approach to Writing a Dissertation Proposal and Completing the Dissertation*, http://www.mcd.unimelb.edu.au/forms/DissertationWriting2005.pdf. Accessed 2006.

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AGST Alliance-BCM-MBS DMin in Leadership

Dissertation 'focus of interest' form

[Complete this worksheet and send/email to the DMin Director]

1. **My general area of ministry interest and possible topic of interest:**

2. **A major problem/issue challenge I see in this area of ministry context interest that I would like to explore for my dissertation**

3. **To explore this problem/challenge, a possible research question and 2-3 related sub-questions could be**

4. **A possible way(s) I could seek to get answers to the research question/sub-questions is:**
   (e.g. by means of case study, action research etc)

5. **Data sources I envisage I will need access to:**
   (e.g. written records, literature, members of church/ministry, other case studies)

6. **Initial Bibliography (20-25 resources)**

7. **Possible supervisor:**
(Note: most likely, this person will hold a relevant doctorate and have experience in your field of interest. But if not, still suggest a name if you think the person may be suitable.)

> *I suggest a suitable supervisor may be:*

> Name: Preferred title: Mr/Ms/Rev/Dr/Ms/

> Position/role: Church/organisation:

> Postal address: Postcode:

> Tel.: [home/office] (   )   [Hp] (   )

> Email: @

> Your relationship to this person (if any):

> *An alternative supervisor may be:*

Name: Preferred title: Mr/Ms/Rev/Dr/Ms/

Position/role: Church/organisation:

Postal address: Postcode:

Tel.: [home/office] (   )   [Hp] (   )

Email: @

Your relationship to this person (if any):

7. **Other aspects**
Further comments relevant to my area of interest/possible research focus are

Name: Date: (dd/mm/yyyy)

AGST Alliance AGST Alliance-BCM-MBS DMin

AGST Alliance

Human Participants Research Ethics Application

You require ethics clearance if you propose to use living human participants in research, and/or research data which are not accessible in the public domain.

Ethics clearance must be obtained before you commence data collection for your research.

Ensure your answers are concise but clear. The members of the Human Research Ethics Panel may not have the same background as you have for your area of study, so write in plain English.
- Avoid jargon.
- Define technical terms.
- Write acronyms out in full the first time they appear in this application and in other documents.

As you prepare this form, refer to the AGST Alliance *Ethics Clearance and Informed Consent* guidelines.

When your application is completed, upload the form into the Ethics section in EdBrite, and email that you have done so to:

> The Administrator
> AGST Alliance Human Participants Ethics Panel
> ethics@agstalliance.org

If you have questions about aspects of this application form, contact:

> The Administrator
> AGST Alliance Human Participants Ethics Panel
> ethics@agstalliance.org

SECTION A: PERSONNEL

A1 Researcher's name:

A2 Contact details:
Email: @   Phone: (   )

A3 Researcher's role:
☐ Student   ☐ Faculty   ☐ Other (   )

If you are a student:
Program enrolled in:

Name of supervisor:

Supervisor's email: @   Phone: (   )

A4 Is your research being supervised or reviewed by an appropriately qualified person?   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'no', explain.

SECTION B: RESEARCH FOCUS AND DESIGN

B1 Research project title

B2 Plain English title

If different from B1, for inclusion in material provided to research participants.

B3 Aims/objectives of the project

Describe the purpose, research question(s)/hypotheses and objectives of your research project

B4 Summary of the project

Provide a summary of your project, including placing it in perspective with existing research or practice.

B5 Project duration

Estimate how long you expect it will take for your data collection. The start date is when your application is approved.

B6 Description of the research design

Describe what will happen during the project – the data collection process, time line, interventions and/or measures, etc.

B7 Methods to be used for obtaining information:

List all the methods you plan to use.

Interviews   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', attach a list of proposed interview questions to your application.

Focus groups   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', attach the Focus Group questions to your application.

Questionnaires/surveys   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', attach the questionnaire/survey to your application.

- If a questionnaire is to be used, is it internet-based?   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

- If a questionnaire is to be used, is it an anonymous questionnaire?   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

  If 'yes', indicate how anonymity will be preserved.

Observations   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', explain how you will use observations, and attach an observation schedule to your application.

Action research   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', explain.

Existing data   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

For example, from existing records or databases. If 'yes', explain.

Other (specify)   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', explain.

B8 Who will carry out the research procedures?

B9 Where will the research procedures take place?

If permission is required to conduct the study at a specific location, please attach an appropriate Participant Information Sheet and consent form, or a support letter, to your application.

B10 Does the research involve a conflict of interest for you the researcher (or appear to others to be a conflict of interest)?   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', explain, and describe how do you plan to minimise the possibility.

SECTION C: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

C1 Who are the participants in the research?

Adults   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

Children or young people   ☐ Yes | ☐ No
under the age of majority in your country

If 'yes', explain in Section E2 and E3.

Pastors or church workers   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

Members of a church   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

Seminary students   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', you will need to provide approval from the seminary leadership.

People who are in a dependent situation (e.g. with a disability,
patients in a hospital, other)   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', explain in E2 and E3.

People with whom you have a special relationship
(e.g. colleagues, family or friends)? ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', explain if you will collect information of a personal nature, and/or whether participants will be able to be identified.

Other   ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', specify who they are.

C2 How many participants will be involved in your research?

C3 How much time will the participants need to give to the research?

C4 How will you identify potential participants and invite them to take part in your research?

C5 Will access to participants be gained with permission/consent of
any organisation?   ☐ Yes |
☐ No

If 'yes', explain, and attach an appropriate Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, or a support letter.

C6 Will information on the participants be obtained from a third party
(i.e. people other than the participants)?   ☐ Yes | ☐ No
If 'yes', explain.

C7 Will participants receive any payment, reimbursement or other benefit from
participating in the research?   ☐ Yes |
☐ No

If 'yes', detail the level of payment/benefit.

SECTION D: SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES

D1 Does the research involve participation of people selected on the basis

of their ethnic origin? ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', identify the group and explain.

D2 Are there any aspects of the research that might raise specific social and/or cultural issues (e.g. relating to cultural ethical values, informed consent, etc.)? ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', explain. For example, what consultation is required with the group(s), their support for your research, and how you will inform them of the results of your research.

SECTION E: INFORMATION AND CONSENT

E1 How and by whom will information about the research be given to potential participants?

E2 How and by whom will consent for participation be obtained?

For example, written consent, assent form for children, guardian's consent, voluntary response to an anonymous survey, verbal consent; and obtained by the researcher, a colleague, or someone else.

E3 Will the participants have difficulty giving informed consent on their own behalf? ☐ Yes | ☐ No

Consider mental or physical capacity, age, language, or other barriers. If 'yes', explain.

E4 Does the research involve participants giving oral consent rather than written consent? ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', explain.

E5 What period will you allow for participants to change their mind about involvement and/or their data being used?

E6: Is access to the consent forms restricted to the researcher and/or supervisor? ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'no', explain who else may have access to them.

E7 How will consent forms be stored securely?

SECTION F: STORAGE AND USE OF RESULTS

F1 Will the participants be recorded (audio or video)? ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', indicate the type(s) of recording.

F1a Will the recordings be transcribed or translated? ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', who will transcribe/translate the recordings? If a third party is involved in
transcribing/ translating, they should sign a Confidentiality Agreement.

F1b If recordings are made, will participants be offered
the opportunity to edit the transcripts of the recordings? ☐ Yes | ☐ No
If 'yes', explain the process.

F2 How will the data be used?
For example, in a thesis/dissertation, journal article, other publication, conference presentation.

F3 Will the participants be identified or identifiable in any report/publication
about the research? ☐ Yes | ☐ No

F4 Will information on your research findings be made available to participants? ☐ Yes |
☐ No
If 'yes', explain how and when. For example, will participants be offered their recordings
and/or transcripts, a summary of the research, etc.?

F5 How will the data (including any recordings) be stored, and for how long?

F6 How will the data (including recordings, consent forms, etc.) be destroyed?

F7 Who will own the data and results of your research?

SECTION G: RISKS AND BENEFITS

G1 What are the possible benefits to participants by taking part in your research?

G2 Is the research likely to place the participants and/or you as researcher
at risk of harm beyond that normally encountered in everyday life? ☐ Yes |
☐ No
For example, psychological, emotional, social, spiritual, legal harm, etc.
If 'yes', explain, and detail the safeguards put in place to minimise the risk of harm.

G3 Does the research involve processes that potentially could disadvantage
a person or group? ☐ Yes | ☐ No
For example, collecting information which may expose the person/group to discrimination.
If 'yes', explain.

G4 Does the research involve deceiving the participants, or lack of
full disclosure to them? ☐ Yes |
☐ No
If 'yes', give a justification, and note how you will limit the impact (e.g. debriefing).

G5 Will your data be kept confidential? ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', explain how you will protect the confidentiality of identifiable data.

G6 Will you anonymise your data? ☐ Yes |
☐ No

If 'yes', explain how you will ensure your data is anonymised.

G7 Does your research raise privacy issues? ☐ Yes | ☐ No

If 'yes', explain.

G8 Is it possible that your research could give rise to incidental findings? ☐ Yes |
☐ No

If 'yes', explain, and describe how you will manage the situation.

SECTION H: ETHICAL ISSUES

Summarise how the ethical issues arising for your research will be resolved.

For example anonymity and confidentiality, informed consent, participant's right to withdraw, conflict of interest, social and cultural sensitivity, minimisation of harm, privacy, incidental findings, etc.

SECTION I: APPLICATION DOCUMENTS CHECKLIST

Have you attached a participant information sheet(s)? ☐ Yes |
☐ No

Have you attached a consent/assent form(s)? ☐ Yes | ☐ No

Have you attached any advertisement, invitation letter or letter to
churches/organisations? ☐ Yes |
☐ No

Have you attached any questionnaires, interview questions,
and/or focus group questions? ☐ Yes |
☐ No

Have you attached a transcribe/translator confidentiality agreement? ☐ Yes | ☐ No

Have you attached other necessary supporting documents? ☐ Yes |
☐ No

SECTION J: CERTIFICATION

I certify that my research will be conducted in accordance with this ethics application.
    Researcher's name/signature:

Your name is sufficient if this form is submitted as soft copy.

If the researcher is a student, the supervisor needs to certify this application.

I certify that I have read this application and consider it to be complete.

Supervisor's name/signature:

Your name is sufficient if this form is submitted as soft copy.

Date of application *(dd/mm/yyyy)*:   /   /

The content of this application form has been drawn and adapted from numerous sources. Special acknowledgement goes to the National Healthcare Group (Singapore) and University of Auckland (New Zealand) for their comprehensive human participant research ethics resources.

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