AGST Alliance

Doctor of Education

Dissertation Guidelines

AGST ALLIANCE

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The EdD dissertation: An overview

AGST Alliance's Doctor of Education program is designed "to produce graduates who are able to integrate sound educational, social science and spiritual formation theory and their professional practice, by means of original applied research that demonstrates advanced theological reflection and which is designed to enhance informed and improved practice in their organisations." (*EdD Guidelines*).

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

> The dissertation is designed to demonstrate your competence to integrate educational, social science and spiritual formation theory with your professional practice. It will comprise original applied research that demonstrates advanced theological reflection and which is designed to enhance informed and improved practice in your organisation. (*EdD 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 EdD 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 EdD dissertation is 15 credits. A person working diligently could complete the dissertation within about eighteen months. You need to complete your dissertation within three years of the completion of the EdD coursework.

If you complete the coursework and critical engagement project but fail to complete the EdD dissertation, you may request to complete *either* a MTh(Ed) thesis *or* 4 extra module credits plus a MTh(Ed) 4 credit educational project, and be awarded a MTh(Ed). If you complete only the coursework and not the critical engagement project, you will be awarded a Postgrad Dip Ed.

Form and expectations of the EdD dissertation

The expectations for EdD level study generally need to be maintained in your dissertation, so take time to revisit these in the separate *EdD 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 EdD dissertation reflects **original research**, in candidates' 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 most likely be of an applied nature, with implications for senior educational leadership in professional and/or policy areas.

'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 EdD dissertation will give clear evidence that you have acquired skills in the criteria for study at the EdD level, which you have been honing up through the course work and critical engagement project 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?
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:

- **Introductory pages**

(Title page, declaration, acknowledgements, table of contents, abstract, etc.)

- **Introduction**

What is the topic and why is it important? How does it fit into the broader world of your discipline?

- **Literature review**

Where did the problem come from? What is already known about this problem? What other methods have been tried to solve it?

- **Middle chapters**

The exact structure in the middle chapters will vary among dissertations, depending on the research method being used. In conceptual/historical enquiries, the middle chapters will be structured in a way determined by the logic of the enquiry. In empirical (experimental) enquiries, the middle chapters are more likely to follow the form of methods being used for the research, results of the research, and discussion of the results and their significance in your enquiry.

- **Final chapter**

What are your conclusions? What are the practical implications of your work? What further interesting avenues of research does your work point to?

- **References**

All the resources you have cited in your writing (= reference list) and perhaps a list of significant resources you used in your research but have not specifically cited or drawn from

in your final written submission (= bibliography). Both 'hard form' (books, articles) and 'soft form' (internet resources) resources need to be included.

- **Appendices**

Material that is relevant to your dissertation, but which distract the reader from the major flow of the writing. Use appendices with caution: they are not designed to give you an undercover means of exceeding the word count for your dissertation!

Appendix 1 (*Research Methodologies*) on pp. 13ff gives a brief overview of various research possibilities.

There is a wealth of resource material available on educational/social science research methodologies, in both hard- and soft-copy formats. The following titles are known to be helpful:

Creswell, J. 2007. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five approaches* (2nd Ed.). London: Sage.

Creswell, J. 2011. *Educational Research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research. 4th ed.* New Jersey: Pearson Educational International.

Swinton, J. & H. Mowat. 2006. *Practical theology and qualitative research.* London: SCM Press.

Yount, W. R. 2006. *Research design & statistical analysis in Christian ministry, 4th ed.* Available to download free of charge from http://napce.org/yount.html.

Dissertation presentation style

The word limit for the EdD thesis will normally fall in the range of 30,000-45,000 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, 7th Edition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

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* (akin to that of your mentor-coach in the EdD critical engagement project).

Note: clear written communication is your responsibility. Even if English is not your main language, you can not 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 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 EdD 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 ESF&D 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 criteria may be found here on the AGST Alliance website.

Your dissertation must receive at least a Pass for the EdD 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. 23f) 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 EdD program.

Time	Candidate's action	AGST Alliance response
Focus phase	• *Focus of interest* form submitted (see pp. 21f) • Suggest possible supervisor • Dissertation fees paid	• Focus approved • Supervisor approached & appointed
After supervisor appointment	• Contact with supervisor • Commence detailed research of focus area to determine specific topic • Broad reading leading to a more focused reading on the topic	
Proposal phase	• Detailed research proposal prepared & submitted (see p. 12)	• Proposal approved; or revisions/ amendments recommended
Research and Writing phase	• Detailed work on the research • Submit *Ethical Clearance form* (pp. 23f) for approval if required • Writing of dissertation	
~1 month before dissertation is likely to be submitted	• Submit *Notice of intention to submit a dissertation* form.	• Examiners approached
Pre-submission dissertation perusal	• A 'close to final' copy of your dissertation submitted for perusal.	• Dissertation approved for final submission.
Dissertation submission	Copies of dissertation handed in. Include the signed *Declaration on dissertation submission*.	• Dissertation sent to examiners
~ 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 post-submission	• 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).

Two resources in the appendices provide helpful insights for this process: *Getting Started on Your Thinking/Proposal* (Appendix 2, pp. 16f) and *Developing a Research Proposal* (Appendix 3, pp. 18ff).

Your *dissertation proposal* will be your plan for further, detailed research and writing. This needs to be approved by the AGST Alliance Education Programs 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 theses/hypotheses to be explored.

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

9. 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?)

10. Indicate whether your research will require *ethical clearance.* (See p. 10)

11. 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).

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Appendix 1: Research methodologies*

This is a brief introduction to various research models, processes, and terminology… Once you have a basic understanding of different types of research and research terminology, you will be in a better position to seek your supervisor's advice as well as being better prepared for your initial supervision meetings.

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).

Empirical
This type of research requires that data be collected. Thus, empirical research is grounded in reality rather than in the some abstract realm. Data may be collected by observation or by experiment. The purpose of empirical research is to explain the data collected through the development of a model or theory that hypothesises about the relationship between the data and relevant variables of the environment. The results of empirical research should be able to be replicated as adherence to this method implies the use of objective, reliable and valid research methodology and criteria.

Theoretical
Provides explanatory principles for phenomena. It may remain on an abstract rather than a reality referred (data driven) level. In this type of research, theoretical principles are developed, proposed and described. Theoretical research is carried out in all disciplines.

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.

Experimental
This type of research uses quantitative methods and involves a formal control of variables. It may occur in a laboratory situation. *True experimental studies* investigate possible cause and effect relationships by exposing one or more experimental groups to one or more treatment conditions and comparing them to control groups who are equal in other respects but do not receive the treatment(s). This type of design allows a comparison to be made and a conclusion drawn about the effect of the treatment. For example, to investigate student learning from computers one group of students learn about a topic using the conventional teaching materials (the control group) while another learns about the same topic using the same information except the information is presented on a computer. Students would be randomly assigned to the groups or matched using some valid criteria. Variables such as intelligence, prior knowledge of the topic, familiarity with a computer and gender would need to be accounted for or controlled in this process. Other variables such as time of day and number of students in a learning group would be equalised or randomised across the groups in order that these variables are also controlled. After the learning period, the students' knowledge of the topic would be assessed using an identical test for both groups. Objective criteria would be used to establish the test results of the groups. A conclusion about the effect of using a computer for learning can then be drawn, as the other variables that would impact upon the ability of the students to learn have been controlled. Experimental designs demand scientific principles such as objectivity, replicability and validity be upheld.

Out of a laboratory it is often difficult to control all of the variables that impact upon an experiment. *Quasi-experimental designs* use experimental methodology without total control of relevant variables. Although the researcher in this situation compromises the internal validity of the experiment (since not all variables are controlled), they may gain some external validity as the results they have obtained would be generalisable to other similar situations in the real world.

Interventionist
As the term implies, interventionist studies involve some deliberate change in a particular process or situation so that the effects can be monitored and evaluated. Interventionist studies tend to have less control over variables than experimental studies. An interventionist study on student learning could involve the introduction of different teaching approaches to enhance learning. It may not be possible to achieve a control group (controlling all variables such as socioeconomic status, performance and prior knowledge) who are taught only using the old teaching approach and materials given factors such as ethics and real classes and courses. Action research is a type of interventionist research as all participants intervene to create change. Interventionist research also occurs in a more scientific research setting where change can be engineered by an agent external to the experimental groups.

Phenomenological
This approach investigates ordinary human life experiences within their context to discover meaning. Thus, an individual's 'life world' or 'living experience' is studied as he or she experiences it rather than looking to categorise the experience or theorise about it. Examples are frequently used in this approach to illustrate the significance of the 'life experience' being described. An example of a research question using this approach is "what is the nature of the experience of becoming a nurse?" and the aim of this research would be to understand this experience (Munhall, 1994).

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.

Developmental
Investigates patterns and sequences of growth and/or change as a function of time.

Correlational
Investigates two or more existing situations in order to determine and explain their differences and similarities.

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.

Grounded Theory Research
Data is gathered and analysed to generate hypotheses that are grounded in practice.

Interpretive
Data is gathered that generates 'thick' description & interpretation and that allows theory building.

Historical
Reconstructs the past objectively and accurately, often in relation to the tenability of an hypothesis.

Descriptive
Systematically describes a situation or area of interest, factually and accurately.

Evaluative
Determines whether a particular program or procedure is providing the expected outcome.

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* 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.

Appendix 3: Developing a thesis proposal*

MODES OF ENQUIRY

There are two main ways of pursuing enquiries, conceptual and empirical. Each has in common:

1. Identify a problem

What is an area of interest you have, perhaps one which has arisen from your previous studies and related to your own church/ethnic context? It is likely to involve reading in one part of the field to become clearer about the problems it raises. Such reading will probably appear later in your writing as part of a *literature survey,* so it is important to take good notes and file bibliographical details as you go so that this work can be retrieved at the later stage of writing up. Ethical concerns of autonomy, privacy and integrity should be considered too.

Clarifying the specific problem you would like to explore will lead you to formulate a *research question*, which will become the main focus of your enquiry. Make sure that your research question is something you are genuinely interested in finding an answer to, to give you added motivation to complete your dissertation.

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2. Develop a hunch

From your research question, a number of more specific 'sub-questions' (or, hypotheses) will be derived, as hunches to be investigated. These will involve thinking of ways of getting answers to these sub-questions, and at this point you will need to confirm the primary methods of enquiry you will be pursuing. You will probably find that you are drawn to one or more of the modes of research described below:

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Conceptual Enquiries These may include philosophical studies of language, logic and the use of models, ethical enquiries into the justification of certain aims or values in education, and curriculum design in its conceptual phases. In short, they involve the consideration of problems requiring the marshalling of convincing arguments to support a normative point of view.	***Empirical Enquiries: (a) Psychometric*** Studies in this mode involve the accumulation of empirical data relevant to one's hypotheses, with a view to processing them by statistical means. Such research may be undertaken in laboratories, classrooms, other learning environments, and on samples drawn from -the general population.
Historical Enquiries Studies which utilise historical methods of research fall between the conceptual and the empirical. They begin with an organising idea much like conceptual enquiry, but they then proceed with the collection of testimony and documentary data like an empirical enquiry. Then comes a kind of interpretive analysis more like the marshalling of arguments to defend a view. The goal is to generate a plausible and illuminating interpretation of events.	***Empirical Enquiries: (b) Ethnographic*** Psychometric studies seek objectivity by trying to keep the scientific observer out of the equation. Ethnographic studies factor the observer in by emphasising the collection of data through participant observation. Ultimately, however, this kind of enquiry, like psychometrically controlled enquiry, collects and processes data in the real world with a view to solving problems of observation and method. Its biggest problem is reliability.

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3a. Formulate theses	***3b. Formulate hypotheses***
It is now necessary to formulate the ideas which you will be clarifying and defending in the study. They need to be stated as specific and original insights or *theses* which will steer and integrate the course of your enquiry. Even in historical research, mere description of a sequence of events is not enough; interpretive ideas give point to the enquiry, and their credibility will be measured by the extent to which they illuminate and account for the events and trends you are describing. (Note: a *thesis* is a proposition to be proved/ disproved. A number of such theses will drive the shape of your dissertation.)	It is now necessary to formulate the ideas which represent the hunches you have about how that part of the world you are investigating works. This calls for useful *operational definitions* of terms to be used in your *hypotheses,* which in their turn are best framed in the form "If X, then Y", on condition that they are in a genuinely testable (or falsifiable) form. Wrestle with this phase of your proposal, because muddy work at this point will dog you for the rest of your study. Don't aim to fix them later.

Note: The classical distinction between 'theses' and 'hypotheses' in educational/social science research is breaking down. Current educational and psychological research talks more often in terms of hypotheses (used when a researcher is fairly sure about the nature and direction of relationships between key variables) and research questions (used when a researcher is not so sure about the nature and direction of relationships but reasonably suspects that some sort of relationship exists).

The preferred terminology to use is research question *(= the main focus of the enquiry) and* hypotheses *or* sub-questions *(= hunches to be investigated, derived from the main research question.*

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4. Foreshadow your plan of attack and a provisional time-scale

You should now be in a position to foreshadow your plan of attack and estimate how its various stages will fit in to the time frame allowed for the degree you are working for. What are natural divisions in your enquiry which may become discrete chapters? Examples of plans in each of the three broad categories distinguished above are given below.

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5. Confirm your proposal

Now draft entries for the proposal, requiring details of your topic, a sample bibliography, methods of enquiry, plan of attack, and the anticipated time frame for each stage. Discuss these entries with your supervisor and then fill them in on the form.

* * * * * * *

* This article has been adapted from Brian Hill, *Developing a Proposal,* Murdoch University School of Education, W. Australia, undated.

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AGST Alliance EdD

Dissertation 'focus of interest' form

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

1. **My general area of educational interest:**

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……

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

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

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

……

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……

5. **Data sources I envisage I will need access to and preliminary bibliography**
(e.g. written records, several pre-school Sunday school classes, the pastors in a particular denomination, etc.)

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6. 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 (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 (if any): ……

(Note: you may wish to sound out possible supervisors about their likely availability, but do not make a commitment for/with them.)

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

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Name: …… Date: ……..……..……

AGST Alliance EdD

Ethical Clearance for Research with Human Participants

Ethical clearance needs to be approved if you propose to use living human participants in your research, and/or research data which are not accessible in the public domain. Use this template to complete the form. Ensure your answers are concise but clear. Ethical clearance must be obtained before you commence data-collection.

Main research question

Participants: identity

- Description of participants:
  (e.g. age group/ age range, inclusion/exclusion criteria, where from, etc.)
- Number of participants :
- Time needed by participants for their involvement:

Participants: risk and consent

- How will consent for participation be obtained?
  (e.g. voluntary response to a survey, consent forms, guardian's permission)
- What information will you give /what assent will you request from participants who are unable to give informed consent?
  (e.g. from young children).
- What unusual risks/vulnerability are likely to be present for the participants?
  (e.g. recall of past experiences, challenges to faith, commenting on significant adults, etc)
- What procedure will be put in place to deal with these risks/vulnerability?
  (e.g. independent person present, debriefing planned, etc)
- What expense reimbursements/inducements do you intend to offer to participants?
- What period will you allow for participants to change their mind about involvement and/or their data being used?
- Will information on your research findings be made available to participants? If so, when/how?

Researcher wellbeing and reputation

- What safeguards will be in place during the research process to ensure your well-being and/or reputation?

- What safeguards will be in place during the research process to ensure the reputation of your institution(s)/ AGST Alliance?

Data collection

- Proposed research methods:
  (e.g. questionnaires, interviews, observation, archives research, journaling, survey, etc)
- How do you propose to recruit and/or select participants?
  (e.g. by advert in church newsletters, personal contacts, denominational lists, etc)
- How/where/by whom will data be collected from the participants?
- Who needs to be informed about your research data collection?
  (e.g. church leaders, guardians, teachers, etc)

Data analysis & reporting

- How do you propose to analyse the data?
- To what extent will data be kept secure and/or confidential and/or anonymised?
- How will you ensure security of data and/or confidentiality and/or anonymisation?

Other ethical issues

(indicate other possible ethical issues raised by your research proposal – and how you propose to address them e.g. use of photos, recordings, etc)

Research documents

Attach copies of all forms/documents relating to the collection of your data
(e.g. survey, interview question template, participant information and consent forms, invitation letters, adverts, etc)

Name/signature (student): Date: / /
(dd/mm/yyyy)

Name/signature (supervisor): Date: / /
dd/mm/yyyy)

[When completed email/send to the Education Programs Director]

Office Use		
Assessment:		Program Director Approval:
Assessor:	Date:	Date: