Dissertation Format Policy
PhD Program, Public Policy and Administration
School of Public Service, Boise State University
Adopted April 2017

PPA PhD Student Profile The PhD program in Public Policy and Administration (PPA) primarily admits students interested in conducting applied policy analyses in the fields of public administration and/or public policy. As a result, the majority of our students enroll in the program in order to master applied research skills that will enable them to advance in careers they already have, or because this training will open up additional career opportunities for them. At the same time, PPA faculty expect, and the Graduate College policies and procedures clearly articulate, that doctoral candidates will conduct independent research, using evidence, that makes a contribution to the state of knowledge in their chosen field:

Original research carried out by a student at the doctoral level is documented by a dissertation. A dissertation is characterized by a clearly stated proposition or hypothesis that is investigated using analysis and synthesis of data or other scholarly evidence. The dissertation must demonstrate mastery of the relevant literature and the ability of the student to independently and successfully address a substantial intellectual problem with concepts and methods that are accepted in the major field of study (2016-17 Graduate Catalog).

Traditional Format Given the PPA PhD student profile, in practice, faculty in Public Policy and Administration advise the majority of PPA PhD students to write their dissertations in what might be considered a traditional or “monograph” format. This format often includes sections such as an introduction, literature review, methodology, presentation of data, and discussion of implications.

3-Essay Format Justification However, there are rare cases in which a student would be better served by an alternative dissertation model. For example, although the student profile described above is the most common in PPA, occasionally the program admits students who have, or over the course of their studies develop, an interest in careers in academe or other organizations where peer-reviewed research is expected. In these cases, it may best serve the student and his or her committee to adopt a 3-essay model, with the outcome being that a student would be able, at some point, to turn these essays into peer-reviewed articles.

3-Essay Format Guidelines The student’s Supervisory Committee is largely responsible for ensuring the student is doing quality, doctoral-level research. The PPA PhD program Director and Graduate College Dean and staff perform checks to ensure policies and procedures are being met. As a result, committees are responsible for ensuring that all dissertations meet the requirements stated above in the Graduate Catalog, regardless of format.

However, the PPA program has agreed on some general guidelines for students wishing to adopt the 3-essay alternative format:

1) The doctoral candidate and his or her committee must have articulated an appropriate and convincing reason for adopting the 3-essay format (e.g., the student is interested in
applying for a position where having publication-ready chapters will make the student more competitive on the job market).

2) The 3-essay format typically consists of an introduction, a minimum of three related essays (each of which is of publishable quality in a peer-reviewed journal), and a conclusion, along with whatever other materials committees may deem necessary. Committees should take into careful consideration the student’s training, abilities, and timeline before agreeing to a 3-essay format.

3) The decision to use the 3-essay format needs to be approved by the Program Director.

4) In PPA, the expectation is that the student will be the sole-author of each of the three essays. However, the program may make rare exceptions to this rule, such as when a student is working on a collaborative project (as is often the case with funded research) where other contributors need to be acknowledged as secondary authors. Even in these cases, though, students and their committees must be able to demonstrate that the bulk of the research and writing was conducted independently by the student, and students must be first-author on all work submitted for the dissertation. Authorship agreements must be approved by the student’s supervisory committee and the Program Director.

5) Each of the 3 essays in the dissertation will need to feature the elements of a typical peer-reviewed article in the student’s discipline. Elements in one essay may not repeated (i.e., cut and pasted) into another essay, though some overlap in sections such as literature review or methodology may be expected, as they would for any scholar publishing multiple pieces in the same area. In short, committees must ensure that students working under the 3-essay format are completing independent, quality work that they agree is potentially publishable according to standards of peer-review.