



Considerations for Selecting a Dissertation Committee/Chair

The selection of your dissertation chair and committee is a crucial step in the dissertation process and should be done with careful consideration. Your chair and committee will guide you through the process of curating your dissertation, and will ultimately, serve as the judges for the completion of this project.

We encourage you to consider the following when selecting your dissertation chair.

Subject-Matter Expertise. Consider researching what your potential chair's subject matter expertise consists of. You can look at their recent publications, courses taught, and what they wrote their own dissertation on and when. Having a chair that has expertise in the topic you chose will allow them to provide recommendations for literature that aligns with your study, speak on the relevance of your topic to what is already known in the field, offer suggestions for data analysis methods or way to control the study to enhance validity of the findings, and overall, be able to engage in directional conversations with you on your focus.

Research Background. Consider looking through your potential chair's research history to identify if they have primarily conducted quantitative or qualitative research and if that matches with the type of research you wish to conduct. Methodology is crucial to consider in selecting a chair as you consider the advice and guidance they are able to provide you in the process.

Responsiveness. Many times, students will select a chair that was at one point their professor. Consider how responsive your professor was in the classes you have taken with them. Did you get responses to emails in a timely manner? As your chair will be your main contact for communication on all things related to your dissertation, ensure that your conception of timeliness and responsiveness matches their definition of the same using prior experience as a measure.

Quality of Feedback. Consider the feedback you have received in the past from the individual you are considering becoming your chair. While your chair will be the main individual providing line-by-line and chapter-by-chapter feedback, you will also need to prove quality to the remainder of your committee, the dissertation director, and your program chair prior to receiving final approval. What this means is that professors who have provided limited feedback and overly positive feedback may not provide you with the insight needed to revise your work at the level that is necessary. Even though it can be daunting to select a professor who was more critical or rigorous in the feedback they provided you with, it is this type of feedback that shows you they: (a) read your work in depth, (b) are committed to your success, and (c) can help you to develop a quality document.

Connection. Collaboration with others is not always an easy feat. Consider how well you connect with the individual you are considering as your chair. Some important questions to ask



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yourself include, do you feel heard by the professor? Do you feel that they respect your perspective and ownership over your work? Do you respect their work and their viewpoint? Do you perceive their responses to you as thoughtful and with your best interest in mind? Feeling like your chair is on your side may go a long way in terms of maintaining motivation to complete your project.