DOCTORAL STUDY PREMISE

Doctor of Public Health
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THE PREMISE

The *Doctoral Study Premise* document is used in two ways:

- To **identify a preliminary topic** for your doctoral study. This topic should be the product of initial investigation on your part, but will be subject to change and refinement as you develop your prospectus and then your proposal.
- To help **identify the faculty members** who will guide your development of the *Doctoral Study Prospectus*. This process varies across different programs, so please follow the guidance in your program of study.

Completing the Premise

The *Doctoral Study Premise* consists of six parts: **title, problem statement, research question(s), approach for the study, possible secondary data types or sources of information, and references**. An annotated outline is included in this guide and can be used to create your premise document. You will also find a sample premise herein to serve as a guide for your work.

Your primary goal for the premise is to narrow your doctoral study topic to provide a general sense of the direction of your research. At this point, you do not need to know everything about the research project, especially the details of your methodology. Many of those specific decisions are made during the proposal development phase of your doctoral study, although some consideration of how you will execute the study is appropriate from the beginning.

All documents related to your doctoral study, including the premise, should follow APA sixth-edition guidelines and should be saved in a .doc, .docx, or .rtf file format. When completed, please follow the submission guidelines for your program and MyDR system requirements. You may also want to review the *Litmus Test for a Doctoral-Level Research Problem* at the end of this guide.

My Doctoral Research (*MyDR*)

As you are working on your *Doctoral Study Premise*, you should also begin familiarizing yourself with the *My Doctoral Research (MyDR)* system and other resources on the Center for Research Quality website. The *MyDR* system was designed to assist you and your committee in navigating your doctoral research journey, from the very beginning through the final approval. The various landing pages in *MyDR* will track your progress and will serve as a central location for resources to support that progress. The TaskStream element of the *MyDR* system is used to establish a process flow tool in which you exchange and store faculty evaluations and feedback of your work as you progress along that journey.
Students are entered into the MyDR system when both chair and second member nominees have been approved by the academic program.

### Submitting the Premise

The premise will be completed in PUBH/HLTH 8246: Advanced Application of Practice-Based Research in Public Health or Health. The premise is used to form your supervisory committee, and the Doctoral Study Prospectus is completed in the PUBH/HLTH 8900: Research Forum course. In the quarter prior to starting your prospectus, you will submit your premise to the Program Director who will assign the chair of your supervisory committee.

**To assign a supervisory committee chair and member,** the Program Director will send the Committee Member Nomination Form along with your premise document to the Office of Student Research Administration. More information is available on the form, which can be found in the Forms area of the Office of Student Research Administration.

**Note:** The Doctoral Study Premise will be used to assign your doctoral study supervisory committee, but you finalize your topic with your committee at the end of the prospectus development process. Your Doctoral Study Prospectus will be the first document that you submit to MyDR, and a specific guide for creating one can also be found in the Forms area.
AN ANNOTATED OUTLINE

The premise document includes a title page (page 1) followed by pages containing the required elements in the premise. Follow the format in the premise template on the Writing Center website.

Title Page

The recommended title length is 12 words, to include the topic, the variables and the relationship between them, and the most critical keywords. Double-space the title if it’s over one line of type and center it under the word Premise. Please note that your doctoral study title will likely change as the project evolves.

Include your name, your program of study (and specialization if applicable), and Banner ID Number double-spaced and centered under the title.

Title

The title as it appears on the title page, double-spaced if it’s over one line of type and centered at the top of the page. The title follows the word Premise and a colon.

Problem Statement

Provide a 1- to 2-paragraph statement that is the result of a review of research findings and current practices and that contains the following information:

1. A logical argument for the need to address an identified gap in the research literature that has relevance to the discipline and/or area of practice.

2. Preliminary evidence that provides justification that this problem is meaningful to the discipline or professional field. Provide roughly five key citations that highlight the relevance and currency of the problem.

Research Question(s)

List the question or a series of related questions that are informed by the study purpose, which will lead to the development of what needs to be done in this study and how it will be accomplished.

A research question informs the research design by providing a foundation for the generation of hypotheses in quantitative studies.

Approach for the Study
You will use a quantitative research approach that is appropriate for the tentative topic identified in the problem statement.

**Possible Secondary Data Types or Sources of Information**

Provide a list of *possible* types and sources of data for this study, such as test scores from college students, employee surveys, historical documents from state records, de-identified medical records, or information from a federal database.

**References**

Include APA-formatted references for all citations made within the *Doctoral Study Premise.*
THE LITMUS TEST

The Litmus Test for a Doctoral-Level Research Problem was designed to guide doctoral students and faculty in formulating a research problem. The distinguishing characteristic of doctoral-level research (versus master’s-level research) is that doctoral research must make an original contribution to the field; however, students may struggle to identify what research will authentically contribute to their field or discipline. The most critical step is to first identify a doctoral research problem with the four hallmarks noted here. Identifying a doctoral-level research problem is necessary, but not sufficient, to produce a doctoral-level Capstone.

Hallmarks of the Doctoral Research Problem

In Walden University’s scholar-practitioner model, a research problem shows promise of contributing meaningfully to the field or discipline only if the answer to all of the following questions is “Yes.”

1. Justified?

Does evidence support that this problem is significant to the professional field? Evidence—relevant statistics (e.g., expressing an inequality, financial impact, lost efficiency), documentable discrepancies (e.g., two models that are difficult to reconcile), or other scholarly facts—must point to the significance and urgency of the problem. The problem must be an authentic “puzzle” that needs solving, not merely a topic that the researcher finds interesting.

2. Grounded in the Research Literature?

Can the problem be framed to enable the research to either build on or counter previously published findings on the topic? For most fields, being grounded involves articulating the problem within the context of a theoretical or conceptual framework. Although many approaches can ground a study in the scientific literature, the essential requirement is that the problem is framed such that the new findings will have implications for the previous findings.

3. Original/Relevance to the Area of Practice?

Does the problem reflect a meaningful gap in the research literature that has relevance to the discipline and/or area of practice? Addressing the problem should result in an original contribution to the field or discipline.

4. Amenable to Scientific Study?

Can a scholarly, systematic method of inquiry be applied to address the problem? The framing of the problem should not reveal bias or present a foregone conclusion. Even if the researcher has a strong opinion on the expected findings, the researcher must maximize scholarly objectivity by framing the problem in the context of a systematic inquiry that permits multiple possible conclusions.
SAMPLE PREMISE

Premise

How Online Doctoral Students Develop a Doctoral Study Problem Statement

Alpha B. Gamma

Doctor of Public Health

or

Doctor of Healthcare Administration

Walden University

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Premise: How Online Doctoral Students Develop a Doctoral Study Problem Statement

**Problem Statement**

Conducting a supervised, independent research project is a unique feature of completing a doctoral degree (Lovitts, 2008). In their book on doctoral education, Walker, Golde, Jones, Conklin Bueschel, and Hutchings (2008) highlighted the need to develop more “pedagogies of research” (p. 151) to support teaching graduate students to be scholars. Although much is known about how research training works in traditional doctoral programs, emerging research suggests that the online environment offers some unique challenges and opportunities for doctoral students (Baltes, Hoffman-Kipp, Lynn, & Weltzer-Ward, 2010; Kumar, Johnson, & Hardemon, 2013). Of the many aspects of a research project, development of the problem statement is arguably a key step because it sets the context for the entire dissertation (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013; Luse, Mennecke, & Townsend, 2012). Many students are ultimately successful in defining the central argument for a dissertation, but little research has been conducted on how that process happens in a distributed environment. Using Perry’s (1970) theory of epistemological development as theoretical framework, this research will fill this gap in understanding by focusing specifically on the development of problem statements by students in online doctoral programs. This information should help members of supervisory committees to support the success of doctoral candidates.

**Research Question**

RQ–Quantitative: Based on objective ratings by doctoral faculty, are significant differences evident in the overall quality of problem statements as students progress through the doctoral study process?
Approach for the Study

Quantitative

Possible Secondary Data Types or Sources of Information

1. Problem statements written at four key points in a doctoral student’s career: the premise, the prospectus, the proposal, and the doctoral study writing stage
2. Ratings of problem statements by an expert panel of doctoral faculty
3. Surveys with a representative group of doctoral graduates who have successfully defended their doctoral studies and whose work was ranked highly by faculty
4. A measure of epistemological development, consistent with Perry’s theory, as a possible covariate
5. Surveys of doctoral faculty, who have helped students to succeed, as a possible source for triangulation

References


