

# A Counselor's Guide to the Dissertation Process

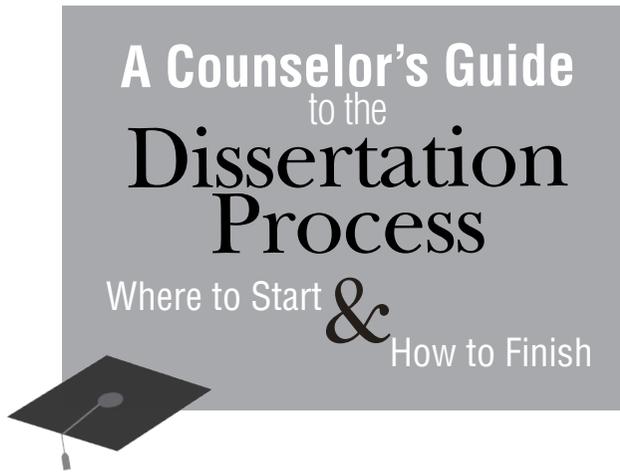
Where to Start & How to Finish

Brandé Flamez, A. Stephen Lenz, Richard S. Balkin, & Robert L. Smith



AMERICAN COUNSELING  
ASSOCIATION

6101 Stevenson Avenue, Suite 600 | Alexandria, VA 22304  
[www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)



Copyright © 2017 by the American Counseling Association. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the written permission of the publisher.

American Counseling Association  
6101 Stevenson Avenue, Suite 600 | Alexandria, VA 22304

Associate Publisher | Carolyn C. Baker

Digital and Print Development Editor | Nancy Driver

Senior Production Manager | Bonny E. Gaston

Production Coordinator | Karen Thompson

Copy Editor | Lindsey N. Phillips

Cover and text design by Bonny E. Gaston

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Flamez, Brandé, author. | Lenz, A. Stephen, author. | Balkin, Richard S., author.

Title: A counselor's guide to the dissertation process : where to start and how to finish / Brandé Flamez, Lamar University, A. Stephen Lenz, Texas A&M University Corpus Christi, Richard S. Balkin, University of Louisville, Robert L. Smith, Texas A&M University Corpus Christ.

Description: Alexandria, VA : American Counseling Association, [2017] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017003945 | ISBN 9781556203596 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Counseling psychology. | Dissertations, Academic--Authorship. | Research--Methodology.

Classification: LCC BF636 .F553 2017 | DDC 158.3071/1—dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017003945>

To my children, Evelyn and Braeden.  
Your laughs, snuggles, and our evening dance parties  
are some of the best things in life!  
Always remember I love you more than  
all the sand on the beach and the stars in the sky.

—*Brandé*

To Rachel and Hayes.

—*Stephen*

To Unk and Aunt Marilyn.

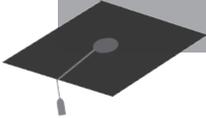
—*Rick*

To all of the professors who are mentoring doctoral students  
during the journey of completing a dissertation.  
And to the many doctoral students who have completed,  
or are now completing this exciting journey!

—*Robert*



# Table of Contents



Preface	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
About the Authors	xi
Chapter 1	
The Doctoral Dissertation	1
Chapter 2	
Staying Well Throughout the Dissertation Process	17
Appendix A: Example of a Student Wellness Plan	27
Chapter 3	
Selecting the Dissertation Committee and Narrowing Down the Topic	29
Chapter 4	
Writing a Proposal	57
Appendix B: Example Quantitative Proposal	74
Appendix C: Example Qualitative Proposal	83
Chapter 5	
The Literature Review	93
Appendix D: Example of a Literature Review Outline	107
Chapter 6	
Creating the Problem Statement, Purpose Statement, and Research Questions	111

*Table of Contents*

Chapter 7	
Research Methodology and Ethics	123
Appendix E: Subject Informed Consent	141
Appendix F: Subject Assent	144
Chapter 8	
Collecting and Analyzing Data	145
Chapter 9	
Presenting and Discussing the Results	157
Chapter 10	
Preparing for the Defense	171
Chapter 11	
Disseminating the Project to the Professional Community	183
Appendix G: Example Authorship Agreement	201
References	203
Index	209



# Preface

The journey to becoming a doctor of philosophy (PhD) is life changing. Although students spend countless hours working through the course work and acquiring knowledge along the way, up to 50% of doctoral students nationwide do not complete their dissertations and become “all but dissertation” (ABD). We have heard countless stories from colleagues who felt that they had not received proper support or guidance when it came time to write the dissertation. We have also found that many of our students often say, “I don’t know where to start,” “I am not sure I can do this,” or “I just can’t seem to sit down and write.” Our motivation to write *A Counselor’s Guide to the Dissertation Process: Where to Start and How to Finish* stems from our personal passion to help students plan, write, and defend a dissertation. Our aim is to provide step-by-step guidance, make the journey to becoming a PhD smoother, and create an experience that is both rewarding and exciting.

When we formulated our vision for this book, we decided we wanted it to be a resource that spoke to our readers. Although there are several useful and comprehensive books that help guide doctoral students, we found that many books did not account for the holistic wellness of students during the writing process; report practices that are consistent with American Psychological Association (APA) standards for conceptual, qualitative, or quantitative works; and include strategies for preparing the completed dissertation for subsequent submission to peer-reviewed journals. Our text includes these components through a lens that is specifically for counselors, counselor educators, and related professionals. Our style of writing is personal and conversational with its straight talk, and we offer practical advice much like a coach talking to someone one-on-one. To enhance learning, we have provided quotations from previous students, a realm of examples specific to the counseling profession, chapter exercises, and a checklist at the end of each chapter, along with additional resources. Our main hope is that this book will help students complete their dissertations.

## *Preface*

Graduate faculty working with student research may also find the content beneficial. Regardless of the topic or discipline, the steps for writing a dissertation are much the same. We aim to address the questions that students routinely ask. Our checklist will help students stay on track and not rush to the next dissertation chapter without including major components.

Chapters 1–3 of the book are dedicated to introducing readers to the doctoral program, providing tips for staying well throughout the dissertation process, selecting committee members, and narrowing down the dissertation topic. In Chapters 4–9 of the book, our focus shifts, and we take the reader through all the major components for the dissertation. In addition, these chapters include tables and activities for writing problem statements and research questions, collecting and analyzing data, and presenting results that align with APA guidelines. The book comes to an end by preparing students for their dissertation defense and discussing how they can disseminate their findings and remain active in the profession.

# Acknowledgments



Writing a book is a remarkable journey. This book is a true collaborative effort, and it could not have been accomplished without the support, encouragement, and assistance of many individuals.

Thank you to our families who loved and encouraged us during this process. We appreciate you graciously supporting us during our intense writing sessions. We are thankful for our friends and children for the humor and love they provided throughout this process.

We would like to thank those at the American Counseling Association who helped turn our vision into reality, especially Carolyn Baker, the associate publisher of the American Counseling Association. Your patience, guidance, encouragement, and support are invaluable, and this book would not have been possible without your involvement.

A special thank you to all our students who have been our greatest teachers. The contributions to this text reflect the practices and processes developed in collaboration with you, and they would never have been possible had we not met you. We are deeply grateful for your experiences and allowing us to share in your journey toward completing your dissertations.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge all the students who aspire to finish their dissertations. Your decision to pursue a graduate degree in counseling, counselor education, or some related profession is a gift to the many people who will benefit from your commitment, energy, and professional activities. There will be times when this journey seems impossible, but you can do this. The best way to finish your dissertation is to begin. This is your year; let's get started!



# About the Authors



**Brandé Flamez, PhD, LPC, NCC**, is a licensed professional counselor and clinical professor in the Department of Counseling and Special Populations at Lamar University. Dr. Flamez is also the CEO and founder of the nonprofit SALTworld (Serving and Learning Together), which provides donations and volunteer services to developing countries. Her clinical background includes working with children, adolescents, and families in community-based and private counseling settings. In addition, she helped design an outpatient program for court-referred adolescents. Dr. Flamez is active in the counseling profession. She has served on the American Counseling Association (ACA) Governing Council for the International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors (IAMFC), ACA Finance Committee, and ACA Investment Committee, and she has chaired the ACA Publications Committee. She is also the past president of the Association for Humanistic Counselors (AHC) and currently serves as the president of IAMFC, cochairs the AHC Bylaws/Ethics Committee, and is the secretary for AHC.

Dr. Flamez is on the editorial board for *The Family Journal*. She has presented nationally and internationally and coauthored several book chapters and articles. Dr. Flamez is the coauthor of the assessment textbook *Counseling Assessment and Evaluation: Fundamentals of Applied Practice* and the coeditor for *Diagnosing Children and Adolescents: A Guide for Mental Health Practitioners* and the forthcoming book *Practical Approaches to Clinical Supervision Across Settings*. She is the recipient of numerous national awards, including ACA's 2012 Gilbert and Kathleen Wrenn Award for a Caring and Humanitarian Person, IAMFC's 2012 Distinguished Mentor Award, ACA's 2014 Kitty Cole Human Rights Award, ACA's 2015 Counselor Educator Advocacy Award, and ACA's 2017 Dr. Judy Lewis Counselors for Social Justice Award.

**A. Stephen Lenz, PhD, LPC**, is an associate professor and clinical mental health counseling program coordinator at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. His counseling background has been working with children,

adolescents, and families in community-based, university, and private counseling settings. His research interests include community-based program evaluation, counseling outcome research, single-case research, instrument development, and holistic approaches to counseling, counselor education, and supervision.

Dr. Lenz is the past president of the Association for Assessment and Research in Counseling (AARC). He is also an associate editor for research with the *Journal of College Counseling*, and he served as the editor for the special issue Single-Case Research Design for the *Journal of Counseling & Development*. He currently serves as an editorial board member for *Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation* and is a past editorial board member for the *Journal of Professional Counseling* and *Journal for Creativity in Mental Health*. Dr. Lenz has authored several peer-review publications and has served on dissertation committees for a number of counseling and counselor education students. He is a recipient of the AARC's 2013 Exemplary Practices Award and ACA's 2014 Best Practice Award for his program evaluation activities within community-based counseling settings.

**Richard S. Balkin, PhD, LPC**, is a professor and doctoral program coordinator in the Department of Counseling and Human Development at the University of Louisville and a fellow of the ACA. He is the editor for the *Journal of Counseling & Development*, ACA's flagship journal, and past president for the AARC. His primary research interests include counseling outcomes, research methods, counseling adolescents, and cultural differences in counseling. He is a past recipient of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision's 2011 Counseling Vision and Innovation Award and ACA's 2012 Best Practices Research Award.

Dr. Balkin has published more than 70 peer-reviewed articles, books, and book chapters, with the majority being quantitative in nature. He is the author of *The Theory and Practice of Assessment in Counseling*, *Counseling Research: A Practitioner-Scholar Approach*, and *Relationships in Counseling and the Counselor's Life*, and has authored book chapters and articles on research methods.

**Robert L. Smith, PhD, NCC, CFT, FPPR**, is coordinator of the doctoral program in counselor education and supervision at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. He has chaired close to 100 doctoral dissertations at three universities. He is also the chair of the Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. His scholarly record includes more than 100 refereed publications and eight textbooks.

Dr. Smith is an international leader who served as the 63rd president of ACA and past president of IAMFC and the National Career Development Association. He currently serves as executive director of IAMFC. For several years, he taught courses and supervised research in Venezuela and has presented internationally in Nicaragua, England, Ireland, Canada, Malesia, and Singapore. His research emphasis includes theory and practice of

addictions counseling, achievement motivation measurement and training, predicting achievement, and an increasing interest in STEM studies. He lives on North Padre Island with his wife Susan and their rescues consisting of two dogs and four cats. They enjoy kayaking, jogging, and walking their four-legged family members.

