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Manuscript-Style Dissertations: An Alternative to the Traditional Dissertation Style

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Manuscript-Style Dissertations: An Alternative to the Traditional Dissertation Style

Abstract

The dissertation is the pinnacle of a doctoral student's educational experience. We explore the history of dissertations; the dissertation process within counselor education; and three dissertation styles (traditional, companion, manuscript). Additionally, we provide a model of one institution's manuscript style dissertation. Implications and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

Keywords

dissertation, dissertation styles, counselor education

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Manuscript-Style Dissertations: An Alternative to the Traditional Dissertation Style

The projected number of individuals expected to earn doctoral degrees in 2020-2021 is 185,000, with a projected growth to 188,000 by 2026-2027 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). In 2018, there were 479 doctoral graduates in Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited programs (CACREP, 2019). The increasing number of individuals earning doctoral degrees results in a larger production of research, as the final requirement for the doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.), for example, is the dissertation process, which involves conducting a research study. An increase in research equates to an opportunity for advancing knowledge and practice and the dissemination of research results is a necessary component of this process; yet, publication rates for articles based on dissertation data are low (26%) in counseling related fields, such as psychology (Evans et al., 2018). Thus, it is crucial for counselor educators to evaluate the dissertation process to ensure the dissemination of doctoral research to the larger counseling community.

We propose that matching an appropriate dissertation style to the student facilitates the development of necessary research competencies, which in turn, helps with the publication process. Within this manuscript, we will discuss (a) the history of the dissertation process; (b) dissertations within counselor education; and (c) various dissertation styles including traditional, companion, and manuscript, with a brief overview of each style and a discussion of their strengths and challenges. We will also outline a model of the manuscript style dissertation used within a counselor education program at a large, research intensive university and discuss the implications of using a manuscript style dissertation.

History of Dissertation

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The word dissertation derives from the Latin word, *disserto*, which is a form of the infinitive, *disserere*, both meaning to make an argument. Historically, a dissertation consisted of discussions and debates to test a student's knowledge. Medieval dissertations did not involve original research, instead candidates orally defended their answers to a series of questions posed by the faculty. For instance, to receive a doctorate in theology, students were featured in a series of lectures and question and answer sessions with the entire school present (Daly, 1961). These critical arguments were common for a doctoral student during this time, as their studies focused on mastering techniques and memorizing works rather than contributing to a body of knowledge (Barton, 2005). Centuries later, a shift in higher education standards reflected a new emphasis on empirical research influenced by 19th century positivism (Barton, 2005).

German universities were the first to fuse teaching with research functions (McClelland, 1980). German scholars thought students should contribute something valid and useful to scientific knowledge creating the new standard of a dissertation. The written dissertation was modeled from the scientific method, resembling an extensive lab report (i.e., methodology, results, analysis of findings). To obtain one's doctorate before the end of the 18th century in Germany, it was a requirement to complete this type of dissertation (Barton, 2005). Graduates from these universities disseminated this scientific dissertation style as they rose to administrative positions in American institutions (Lucas, 1994).

At the end of the 20th century, the Council of Graduate Schools began discussing flexibility in the traditional dissertation format (CGS, 1991). The Council acknowledged some science disciplines allowed students to include scholarly articles published during their doctoral program in their dissertation, but insisted these articles should be cogently connected and integrated in the dissertation. In 2005, the Council again noted the shift in dissertation styles as

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some institutions allowed a dissertation in the format of a manuscript(s) to be submitted for publication (manuscript style dissertation; CGS, 2005). In 2016, the Council held a two-day workshop entitled “The Future of the Dissertation”. The workshop included discussions on various dissertation formats, such as manuscript style dissertations (e.g., Smith, 2016). Presenters described the value of the dissertation, in its current form, as oftentimes determined by its completion, and commented on the declining citation impact of dissertations (Larivière et al., 2008; Sugimoto, 2016). Additionally, the call for change in the dissertation style reflects the heterogenous job market for doctoral graduates, and the need for dissertations to prepare students for their post-graduate work. For example, alternatives to the traditional-style dissertation in the arts and humanities include a portfolio model, “digital” thesis, and group-based capstone projects where students combine theory and practice to collectively solve a real-world problem (Loss, 2016). Hence, the evolution of dissertation styles continues; yet, the traditional style dissertation (i.e., five chapter model that includes an introduction, literature review, methodology, results, and conclusion) remains the gold standard in most doctoral programs, including counselor education (Borders et al., 2015).

Dissertations in Counselor Education

According to the CACREP (2015) standards, doctoral students in counselor education are required to complete dissertation research in areas related to counseling, counselor education, and/or supervision (Section 6.A.5). This standard allows programs the flexibility to instate their own dissertation requirements beyond the topic area. Dissertation guidelines may vary across programs depending on the terminal degree. Within the field of counselor education, programs may offer a doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) or doctor of education (Ed.D.) degree program. Traditionally, the Ph.D. is focused on research, while the Ed.D. encompasses a

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clinical/practitioner focus. Although individuals earning both degrees may seek positions in higher education, students in Ph.D. programs likely receive additional courses or mentorship in the area of research, and may seek positions related to this training (i.e., academic research position). For the Ed.D. degree, students may seek leadership positions in the counseling field with a clinical focus (i.e., agency supervisor), as the Ed.D. is a practice based degree (CPED, n.d.). Thus, it is important for counselor educators to consider how they may use the dissertation process to help students address their needs and meet their goals.

A paucity of literature exists on the dissertation process in counselor education programs. Del Rio and Mieling (2012) attempted to demystify the doctoral experience in counselor education and supervision programs, including the dissertation process. The section on dissertations scantily outlines the expectations of a traditional style dissertation, with no information on alternative formats. Other literature explores the experiences of doctoral students writing a dissertation (e.g., Flynn et al., 2012; Neal-McFall & Ward, 2015), with a modicum of research on content, methodologies, and styles of dissertations in counselor education programs (e.g., Borders et al., 2015; Richards et al., 2016).

The majority of research on counselor education dissertations involves the perspectives and experiences of doctoral students (e.g., Flynn et al., 2012; Neale-McFall & Ward, 2015). For example, Flynn et al. (2012) interviewed 42 counselor education doctoral graduates from CACREP-accredited programs and developed a theory of internal (e.g., personality traits), relational (e.g., competing influences), and professional (e.g., dissertation chairperson) factors that influence the initiation, management, and completion of the dissertation in counselor education. Additionally, Neal-McFall and Ward (2015) explored 122 counselor education doctoral students' satisfaction with their dissertation chairperson and found the greatest predictor

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of overall satisfaction was the student's self-perceived ability to collaborate with their chairperson. In other studies, researchers investigated methodological and content trends in counselor education dissertations (e.g., Borders et al., 2015; Richards et al., 2016).

Elucidating on the dissertation process, Borders et al. (2015) surveyed 38 counselor education faculty members regarding their programs' dissertation committees, methodologies, formats, and satisfaction with dissertation products and processes. The researchers found the number of committee members ranged from two to seven, but usually consisted of three or four members, with two or three members being counselor educators. The faculty participants overall reported being "mostly satisfied" with dissertation products and processes; yet, most agreed the rigor needed to increase. Lastly, only 16% of faculty reported their program offered an alternative dissertation style. The authors did not provide further detail about these styles as this was not the main focus of the study. Thus, while some scholars in counselor education have focused on the dissertation process and have recognized multiple dissertation styles, limited information is available in this area, warranting further discussion about different dissertation formats, particularly in counselor education.

Dissertation Styles

We identified three main approaches to writing a dissertation in the literature. The types are (a) traditional, (b) companion, and (c) manuscript. We provide an overview of each style and then discuss the benefits and challenges of each of them.

Traditional Style

The traditional style of dissertation typically encompasses five chapters that include (a) introduction, (b) literature review, (c) methodology, (d) results, and (e) discussion. This style is well-known and commonly used in academia. In examining dissertation styles in CACREP-

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accredited counselor education doctoral programs ($N = 38$), Borders et al. (2015) found 76% ($n = 29$) reported that at least 95% of their students used the traditional dissertation format. As the name implies, the traditional style has a long history with its 18th century inception (Baron, 2005), and academicians, as well as the public, are generally most familiar with the five chapter format. The benefits of the traditional style include familiarity and acceptance of the format among the academic community (Thomas et al., 2016), depth of exploration of the topic (Graves et al., 2018; Robinson & Dracup, 2008), and evidence of competency in the research and writing process (Robinson & Dracup, 2008).

The traditional format also presents challenges, including concerns related to dissemination (Thomas et al., 2016). Following graduation, many individuals start a new job and may struggle with devoting time to edit their dissertation to fit the format for a journal. They may also lack the knowledge and skills to do this; and therefore, many dissertation studies may not be published as journal articles. Within psychology, researchers found only 26% of dissertation results were published in peer-reviewed journals, with publications occurring, on average, two to three years after completing the dissertation (Evans et al., 2018). The publication rate ranged among psychology areas of specialization with lower rates for clinical areas (e.g., counseling) compared to research areas (e.g., cognitive). Additionally, Thomas et al. found 57% of dissertations in instructional technology were not published. Furthermore, researchers reported that among nursing graduates, 40% that completed a traditional style dissertation did not disseminate their results through a publication in an academic journal (Smaldone et al., 2019). This publication rate is much higher than what researchers reported in the other fields; however, it still equates to a large percentage of graduates not publishing their dissertation data.

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A dissertation requires a significant amount of time and effort from students and their committee members, and not publishing the findings in a journal results in a missed opportunity to advance the individual's academic career (Smaldone et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2016). Many chairpersons also co-author manuscripts from students dissertation; therefore, not publishing an article from the dissertation data also results in a missed opportunity for a journal publication for them (Graves et al., 2018; Smaldone et al., 2019). Most important, not publishing dissertation data in an article can curtail the dissemination of significant findings to inform future research and practice, as the length of a traditional dissertation and difficulty accessing dissertations may limit readership (Robinson & Dracup, 2008).

Lack of author authenticity is another major concern in using a traditional style dissertation (Thomas et al., 2016). Although the five chapter model meets the goal of assessing a student's ability to successfully navigate the stages of the research process, it is limited in preparing students to write for academic journals. This is concerning because journal publications are generally the expectation for academicians. Additionally, the traditional dissertation lacks authenticity for individuals who return to practice after earning their Ph.D., as the process is limited in preparing graduates for clinical positions (Thomas et al., 2016). Thus, although established as a rigorous process well known within the academy, the traditional style dissertation presents some challenges yielding interest in examining other dissertation styles.

Companion Dissertations

The Carnegie Project of the Education Doctorate (CPED) was developed to critically examine the education doctorate, and the project has included the development of a framework to guide Ed.D. degree programs (CPED, n.d.), which helps to distinguish the Ed.D. from the Ph.D. The Ed.D. is a practice-based doctoral degree with a focus on developing scholarly

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practitioners, which has resulted in some universities allowing companion dissertations that involve multiple students collaborating on dissertations. The companion approach has various models including (a) meta-analytic, (b) multiple case study, (c) evaluation, (d) single case, and (e) subsequent replication (McNamara et al., 2008). Within the meta-analytic approach, students have the same research question and analyze the topic from different perspectives. In the multiple case study format, students collaborate to develop the research question and then present different case studies developed from the question. The evaluation model involves students having the same research question with different samples. In the single case approach, students use one setting or context and have different populations. Finally, within the subsequent replication model, students have the same topic and the same population with studies generally conducted chronologically instead of simultaneously (McNamara et al., 2008). In all of the five models, there are six components that should be the same for each dissertation within the companion set: (a) research agenda, (b) statement of inquiry, (c) design, (d) format of the narrative, (e) chairperson, and (f) abstracts that mention the companion dissertations (McNamara et al., 2008).

As with any dissertation style, McNamara et al. (2008) delineated both strengths and challenges of companion dissertations. The authors discussed strengths to include building a community of learners, conducting relevant studies for practice, and increasing completion rate. Students also gain the experience and skills to work collaboratively with peers and, in turn, future colleagues. In contrast, one challenge involves obtaining support from faculty and university administration due to lack of familiarity with the style and lack of interest in committing the time required for completion. An additional challenge is educating readers about the companion style since it is not well known, which may occur through an explanation within

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the dissertation. The approach appears to have some strengths that address challenges of the traditional style; however, to our knowledge, it is only used as an alternative within Ed.D. programs. Thus, a need also exists for an alternative within Ph.D. programs.

Manuscript Style Dissertations

A manuscript style dissertation is alternative to the traditional style that academics have used within Ph.D. programs. There are different approaches to writing a manuscript style dissertation, or multiple article format; however, there is a consistent emphasis on producing a publishable product or multiple publications. Broome (2018) described this format within schools of nursing to encompass one chapter being a conceptual article. This chapter may include the development of the theoretical framework, systematic review of the literature, concept analysis, protocol or methodology, or findings from a pilot study. The student typically publishes this article while they are in the second or third year of their doctoral program. The conceptual publication is then followed by subsequent manuscripts that are data-driven. Like a traditional style dissertation, Broome presented the manuscript style dissertation format to also include five chapters; however, the content of the chapters differs. The introductory first chapter provides an overview of the dissertation that includes the focus of the three manuscripts. The second chapter is the conceptual article, which might already be published and require permission from the journal to include in the dissertation. Then, the third and fourth chapters are data-driven manuscripts. Finally, the fifth chapter includes the discussion and recommendations.

Researchers have also examined manuscript style dissertation procedures. For example, Graves et al. (2018) examined practices for manuscript style dissertations in nursing schools and found among 56 schools, the number of manuscript chapters varied, with 61% of respondents reporting three chapters were required, 22% requiring two, and 6% requiring one. Additionally,

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regarding submission status before the defense, 45% required submission of one or more manuscripts, 10% required acceptance or publication of one or more manuscripts, and 12% did not require any manuscripts submitted prior to the defense. Furthermore, 22% required a submission, and 8% required acceptance or publication of a manuscript before graduation.

Thomas et al. (2016) also briefly described the manuscript style within the field of instructional technology, with three out of five institutions requiring three manuscripts ready for submission and a summary of the articles at the end of the dissertation demonstrating how the papers were connected. The researchers also stated that co-authors were allowed on the manuscripts, with one institution even allowing other students to be co-authors, but the student writing the dissertation was consistently required to be the first author. Furthermore, there was a lack of clarity among the institutions about the role of the committee and the defense when chapters were already published as manuscripts (Thomas et al., 2016).

Scholars have discussed several benefits of the manuscript style dissertation. First, the style helps facilitate an authentic process for the student. Specifically, students learn how to write for scholarly journals, have opportunities for greater collaboration, deepen investment from their chairperson and committee members, are more prepared for the job market, and strengthen their developing research agendas (Thomas et al., 2016). Psychologically, the student may view the process as more achievable and less overwhelming than the lengthy traditional style dissertation because the process is divided into smaller sections (DeJong et al., 2005), and they may also feel excited and motivated about having their work published or ready to publish (Thomas et al., 2016). Having a manuscript or multiple manuscripts ready to submit for publication is helpful because editing a traditional dissertation for publication can be daunting and time consuming, especially when an individual is starting their first job in academia (DeJong et al., 2005). It is

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also likely that the manuscript is well written due to receiving feedback from the dissertation committee, which may help yield a successful outcome from the journal (DeJong et al., 2005; Freeman, 2018). In discussing the publication process, the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) describes this process as the most efficient in publishing dissertation results.

The university and program, the clinical and scholarly community, and the chairperson may further benefit from the manuscript style dissertation. Specifically, the university and program receive credit for the publication, which facilitates a strong reputation within the field of counselor education. In addition, the success of students in completing their doctoral degree may contribute to program recruitment efforts, as potential students often base their ability to be successful on the success rate of current students (DeJong et al., 2005; Graves et al., 2018). Additionally, the publication may benefit the counseling field by contributing to the knowledge base and informing practice in a timely manner. Through publication, the student also honors the commitment to participants through the use of their data to advance the field. Lastly, the chairperson may also benefit from the manuscript style dissertation by having success in publishing these works with students, which may also support the faculty member working towards promotion.

The manuscript style dissertation also has challenges. One of these challenges is related to quality, or perceived quality, related to a lack of depth and greater scope compared to the traditional style (Graves et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2016). A manuscript requires a shorter literature review and introduction than a traditional style dissertation, thus students may not delve into the literature at the depth required to fully grasp the area of study, which could present a challenge in using their dissertation to launch a research agenda. This may also create a challenge for the committee in being able to gauge whether or not a student fully comprehends

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the area of study and their unique contribution. An additional concern related to quality is lack of expectations or guidelines for the manuscript style dissertation (Thomas et al., 2016). Since doctoral students experience high levels of anxiety and burnout (Marshall et al., 2017), clear expectations are developmentally appropriate. Additionally, faculty may not be familiar with the manuscript style dissertation, and might not want to invest the time in learning about the process, or serving on a dissertation committee using this format (Freeman, 2018; Graves et al., 2018). Faculty reported the manuscript style required increased faculty load with more time needed for mentorship (Graves et al., 2018).

Some faculty may also struggle with writing for publication themselves, which would make mentorship for this style particularly difficult (Graves, 2018). Moreover, it is also possible that some faculty members are not motivated or interested in publication, which poses additional challenges for this dissertation style. Faculty, and department and university administrators, may not view the manuscript style option as rigorous or acceptable for a dissertation. Students also reported concerns that potential employers may not view the manuscript style dissertation favorably, due to lack of familiarity with it, which may affect their ability to secure an academic position (Thomas et al., 2016). Finally, at the student level, the manuscript style dissertation may require more time due to the precision required to have chapters that are ready to be published, which may be particularly challenging for students that struggle with writing (Graves et al., 2018). Having awareness of these limitations may help counselor educators address them when using a manuscript style dissertation within their counselor education doctoral program. Furthermore, the potential benefits warrant further exploration in how counselor educators may integrate this model.

A Model of Using the Manuscript Style Dissertation within Counselor Education

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The counselor education program at one university has implemented the manuscript style dissertation as an option, while still offering the traditional style dissertation. Multiple factors lead to this decision, including student preparation for academic positions, faculty and student interest, as well as the need for dissemination of counseling research. Due to limited information available about the use of this model in counselor education, the faculty relied on existing dissertation manuscript models and literature regarding dissertations from other disciplines (e.g., nursing, counseling psychology), as well as their university policies regarding the dissertation process, in developing the criteria for eligibility, format, and policies guiding the implementation of the manuscript style dissertation. The counselor education faculty worked with the support of the College of Education Dean, Associate Deans, and the Graduate School to determine a model that fit university, college, department, and program requirements, and then developed written expectations and guidelines for this dissertation option. This development process helped ensure the manuscript style format would result in a rigorous dissertation that would help promote acceptance of the format among the program faculty, university community, and broader counselor education field. Faculty discuss the expectations and guidelines for both the manuscript style dissertation and the traditional dissertation format within doctoral coursework. The faculty also note how the styles are not hierarchical, as each has its own set of challenges. The expectations and guidelines are also available on the program website.

To be eligible for this option, students must submit a manuscript for review in a scholarly journal, where they are the lead author, before their candidacy meeting. This requirement is designed for the student to demonstrate competency in scholarly writing and helps ensure students are prepared for this dissertation format. All students have the opportunity to meet this requirement through writing mentorship integrated within the doctoral program, including

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manuscript writing within multiple courses. However, students must take the initiative to complete this process, which requires additional work and mentorship beyond the course requirements. If a student meets the manuscript submission requirement, then, during their candidacy meeting, they may ask their committee for permission to use this dissertation style. Prior to the candidacy meeting, the dissertation chairperson discusses with the student the expectations and guidelines for the manuscript style dissertation and the rigor required for the dissertation option. During the candidacy meeting, the committee must agree to allow the student to use this format. In making this decision, committee members may request to review the student's submitted article. This eligibility process has reduced the occurrence of challenges, regarding this format, discussed in the literature.

The manuscript style dissertation format consists of three chapters, per the Graduate School guidelines requiring three chapters as a minimum for dissertations. The first chapter is an introduction, which is similar to chapter one in a traditional style dissertation except shorter (generally 6-8 pages). This includes a brief background of the topic, problem statement, purpose and significance of the study, and the research questions and hypotheses. Chapter two is a comprehensive literature review that is similar to the requirements for a chapter two in a traditional style dissertation. The requirement of this chapter addresses criticism of the manuscript style lacking depth because it requires students to engage in an in-depth exploration of the literature related to the topic that is required in the traditional style dissertation. Finally, the third chapter is one manuscript on the study that is ready to submit for publication. This includes a shortened version of chapters one and two, as well as the method, results, and discussion sections of a research manuscript.

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Students are expected to identify a journal that would be appropriate for their manuscript and follow the author guidelines in writing chapter three. Therefore, students have their dissertation manuscript ready to submit to a journal for review by their defense date; however, they do not submit the manuscript for review until after their defense, and they have addressed any final edits from their committee members. In reviewing chapter three (manuscript), the committee members are asked to review it as if they were reviewers for a journal. Following final edits requested by committee members and submission to the university, the chairperson works with the student to submit the manuscript for publication. The chairperson is typically the second author and the student, in consultation with the chairperson, decides if any other committee members or other individuals that may have assisted with the research will be authors on the manuscript. The manuscript style dissertation also includes appendices that contain the documents approved by the institutional review board, as well as instruments used in the dissertation study, if they have permission to include them, and any other documents requested for inclusion by the committee (e.g., additional statistical analyses). Thus, this manuscript style dissertation has some similarities to the traditional style dissertation. The biggest differences are that it encompasses few chapters and a manuscript ready for submission to a scholarly journal.

Discussion

When considering if an alternative dissertation style is a viable option for a program, particularly a manuscript style, there are some crucial areas for consideration. First, in considering dissertation styles, it is important to have support from the faculty unit, college administration, and university administration. This involves all stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, university administration, broader field) being knowledgeable and understanding the manuscript style dissertation. It is not a less rigorous, easy, and quick approach to completing the

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doctoral degree, nor is it a series of random manuscripts within the dissertation (Graves et al., 2018). Instead, this approach is a well-planned, intentional process that encompasses a rigorous study, or series of studies, with the final dissertation document encompassing one or more publishable or published manuscripts.

Another important consideration is copyright, as the student will likely need permission to include an article in their dissertation that has previously been published by a journal (Graves, 2018). This is a concern for programs that use a multiple manuscript dissertation that encompasses one or more previously published articles. As discussed, our students may not submit a manuscript for publication from their dissertation until after their defense. However, the student may also experience difficulty with publishing an article in a scholarly journal that has already been published within their dissertation, through ProQuest for example, as some journals may view this as already publishing the manuscript. It is important to be transparent about the article being included within the dissertation by disclosing this information to the journal editor in the cover letter when submitting a manuscript for consideration in a journal. It is also important to include this information within the author notes when submitting the manuscript for consideration with a journal (APA, 2020). In navigating this process, students should understand university policies regarding copyright. This may include only releasing the abstract of the dissertation for dissemination through ProQuest for example, or having the dissertation held for a few years before releasing it for publication, allowing the student sufficient time to publish an article or multiple articles before the dissertation is available to the public. Faculty have a crucial responsibility to facilitate conversations about this process with the university in advance to determine the proper procedures regarding this issue.

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In considering the publication process and the development of multiple manuscripts, a fundamental issue is that the student must avoid a piecemeal or salami slicing of data, which involves separating the results into multiple manuscripts that is not necessary and misrepresents the data by giving the false perception of multiple studies (APA, 2020). It is also crucial that the student not duplicate the data in multiple manuscripts, which can create the misperception that the data is original (APA, 2020). Overall, the findings should be reported accurately with no misleading, distorted, misrepresented, or biased data (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014, Standard G.4.a).

It is necessary to have clear policies and procedures regarding this dissertation style. In examining the manuscript style, Thomas et al. (2016) found that four out of five (80%) institutions reported not having guidelines about the quality of the manuscript format, nor the expected quality of the journal for publication. Areas to consider when developing these policies include chapter formatting, required number of manuscripts within the dissertation, conceptual or data-driven manuscripts, and submission status (published article, submitted for publication, ready to submit). The university typically also has dissertation guidelines (i.e., formatting, number of chapters) that all students must follow. The academic unit may also decide that some of these decisions are made at the discretion of the committee.

Another consideration for policies and procedures is the eligibility requirements to allow a student to pursue this type of dissertation, as this option may not be appropriate for every student. A program considering adding the manuscript style dissertation as an option for doctoral students will need to determine if all students are allowed to use this style, and if not, what the eligibility criteria will be and who will decide if a student meets the criteria (e.g., counselor education faculty as a whole, dissertation committee, chairperson). As mentioned above, the

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counselor education program discussed in this paper requires students to have submitted a manuscript for publication where they are the lead author to be eligible for the manuscript style dissertation. However, the submitted manuscript is not included within the dissertation and it is not required to be on the same topic as the dissertation, as it is a measure of writing ability to demonstrate eligibility for the manuscript style dissertation. In addition, if the student has met the eligibility criteria, then the chairperson discusses the manuscript option with the student first, and then presents the option to the dissertation committee for the final decision. In our experience, many students select to complete the manuscript style dissertation if they qualify, and the committee serves as a useful place to discuss whether or not it is the right choice for the particular student. In that way, the dissertation process becomes more student-centered, which we believe is a strong match with the counselor education profession.

To promote the success of the manuscript style dissertation, universities may institute a writing mentorship program for students and faculty (Graves et al., 2018). This can be helpful due to the quality of writing required by the student to include manuscripts already published or publishable as first author. Students need assistance in developing writing skills, and some faculty may also struggle with writing and benefit from this support. Programs may also design coursework to help support students developing a manuscript style dissertation (Graves et al., 2018). This may include courses focused on scholarly writing, as well as research design and other components of the research process.

There is limited information about the manuscript style dissertation within counselor education, which warrants future research in this area. Research may include exploring counselor education students and faculty members' experiences with the manuscript style dissertation. Additionally, researchers may examine the effectiveness of this style in fostering research

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competency compared to the traditional style manuscript, which may be measured through the Authors Scale (Authors, 2016). Furthermore, researchers may examine the publication rate of manuscript style dissertations within counselor education.

The dissertation is an important component of the doctoral process. Offering an alternative to the traditional dissertation style may help address some of the challenges with the traditional style dissertation, most specifically, the low publication rates of counseling dissertations. However, it is important to remember that an alternative dissertation format may not be appropriate for every students. Thus, faculty work in a student-centered manner to identify the dissertation format that will best help students meet their goals, while also demonstrating research competency.

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