

## **Dissertation Topic Selection**

The Dissertation Topic Selection document is the first step in the dissertation completion, and will be used in two ways:

- To identify a preliminary topic for your dissertation. 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 member(s) who will guide you throughout your dissertation completion process.

### **Completing the Dissertation Topic Selection document**

The Dissertation Topic Selection document consists of four parts: topic, problem statement, approach for the study, and references.

Your primary goal for the topic selection is to narrow your dissertation topic such that you have provided 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.

Your Dissertation Topic Selection document should follow APA sixth-edition guidelines and/or The Society of Biblical Literature Handbook of Style (SBL), and should be saved in either a .doc, .docx, or .rtf file format.

### **An Annotated Outline Title Page**

The recommended title length is 12 words to include the topic, the variables and relationship between them, and the most critical keywords. Double-space the title if over one line of type and center it under the word Topic. Include your name, your program of study (and specialization if applicable) and Student ID Number, double-spaced and centered under the title.

#### **Title**

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

#### **Problem Statement**

Provide a one- to two-paragraph statement that is the result of a review of research findings and current practice 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 three to five key citations that highlight the relevance and currency of the problem.

### **Approach for the Study**

Select a possible research approach that is appropriate for the tentative topic identified in the problem statement:

- ☐ Quantitative
- ☐ Qualitative
- ☐ Mixed Methods, primarily quantitative
- ☐ Mixed Methods, primarily qualitative
- ☐ Other: Specify

### **References**

Include references for all citations made within the Dissertation Topic Document.

### **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 towards such a contribution is to first identify a doctoral research problem with the four hallmarks noted here.

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?** Does the problem reflect a meaningful gap in the research literature? 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.

## **Dissertation Topic Selection [Template]**

Topic

[insert your initial dissertation topic here]

[insert your name]

Doctor of Philosophy – Theological Studies

America Bible University

Student Portal ID: [insert your studentID]

Topic:

The research question:

The research claim(s):

The research gap to be filled or significance of your research:

The research Methodology:

