

Research Procedures and Guidelines

The following guidelines apply mainly to culminating projects, theses, and dissertations. Because of the differences in procedures based on whether one is conducting research or a project, collecting data from human subjects or not, or conducting documentary or empirical research, these terms are discussed in detail at the beginning of this chapter. Follow the procedures outlined for the type of research selected.

Types of Research

At SAU, there are three basic types of research—projects, documentary/historical studies, and empirical studies. The research process may vary based on the type of research being done.

Projects

Due to the practical and flexible nature of a project, the form that planning takes, while necessary before acceptance, may vary based on the specific project undertaken. The document presented for approval may be shorter than the one presented for a thesis or a dissertation. Some projects include empirical research, and may be subject to stricter controls (Ethics Review Board, full proposal approval) than others that are more documentary in nature. Consult your advisor and check for any specific departmental/school guidelines that may apply. The exact steps your project must follow will be determined by your committee when your topic request is approved.

Documentary Research

Documentary research is typically done in the Division of Religious Studies, though it may be an option for some students in other Divisions of Studies as well. Because of the nature of this type of research, the proposal is usually much shorter than for an empirical study, but the research itself may take longer. Ethics approval is not generally necessary, and the organization of chapters is slightly different from that of an empirical study.

Empirical Research

Empirical research is usually done in the Divisions of Studies such as, Education, Science, Social Sciences, Applied Theology, etc. It includes the collection and analysis of data. Because this process involves the selection/ development of instruments and may involve human subjects, certain ethical controls are necessary that are not required for documentary research. The nature of empirical research also recommends a more complete proposal before data is collected.

Types of Additional Approval

All projects, theses, and dissertations must go through departmental/program approval as a topic request. Theses/dissertations and some projects require a complete proposal, as well. Check with your research advisor. Some studies also require the following approvals.

Administrative Committee

Any research that involves data collected on or about the Spicer Adventist University (SAU) campus must secure prior approval from the Research Affairs Committee (RAC) of SAU. This can be requested anytime after topic approval. It is, however, to your advantage to seek counsel from the administration as to the wisdom of conducting your study at SAU as early as possible in the research design process. Work with your research advisor to prepare a short (not more than one page) but complete statement on purpose of the study, research questions, the nature and extent of the involvement of SAU personnel or students, the nature of the data to be collected, and the reason why you feel this is advantageous for SAU, or at least not detrimental. Indicate how you will protect the privacy of those involved. The research advisor should submit this request via the office of the Vice President for Academic Administration.

Ethics Review Board

Any study employing empirical research methodology must be presented to the Ethics Review Board (ERB) for approval before data can be collected. This is normally done at proposal approval time. Once the committee has agreed the document is ready for approval, it may be submitted for ERB checking. If any change is made to the methodology, an amended ERB document must be filed. ERB approval must be secured *before* data is collected.

Steps in the Research Process

The process outlined in Table 3 is for research done at SAU. Where empirical research and documentary research vary in the procedures, they are described separately. Where procedures differ among various divisions of studies, these are also described separately. Table 4 summarizes the major steps in the research approval process for each different type of study.

Table 3

Steps in the Research Process

Steps	Details
1. Choosing a topic	Student should read widely, talk informally with professors and friends, and experiment with multiple ideas before settling on one.
2. Choosing an advisor	The committee advisor should be knowledgeable on the topic, interested in the research, and willing to serve. The student may write 1-2 pages about the envisioned research to share with potential candidates for advisor, and make sure they can work well together.
3. Topic request	Student develops a topic request with proposed research advisor and committee. This document is 5-10 pages long and details the scope of the study, methodology, and evidence that it will contribute new knowledge to the field. The structure of the topic request may differ depending on methodology; work with your advisor. Topic request is initially presented to the Board of Studies of respective Divisions of Studies and forwarded if further approval is needed.
4. RAC approval (for research done at/about SAU)	If the study is about SAU or if data from SAU is required, permission must be obtained from RAC. This is true for class-based research, faculty research, and projects/theses/dissertations. The need for RAC approval will be determined at topic approval. Work with your advisor to make a request to RAC if needed.
5. Writing phase	Once the approval phase is accomplished the student works chapter by chapter, first with the advisor, then with the other members of the committee, as directed by the advisor. Once approved and formatted or edited, it is wise to submit a chapter or two to the editor so that mistakes are corrected early, before they become habits.
6. Ethics Review Board (ERB) approval (empirical research)	All empirical research done by SAU faculty, as part of an academic program at SAU, or on behalf of SAU must be reviewed by the ERB. If it will not include human subjects, a waiver may be requested. The application is made after committee consensus that the document is ready for proposal approval. ERB approval must be secured before data is collected. If changes are made to the design, an amendment must be filed.

Steps	Details
7. Proposal	<p>All research requires a proposal approval, but the form is different for empirical and documentary research. The committee will meet to agree when a study is ready for proposal approval. The student presents and the committee asks questions (the public is not invited).</p> <p>Empirical: The proposal consists of the complete first three chapters of the thesis/dissertation. Permission to collect data is given by the advisor and methodologist after the proposal approval, once instruments are perfected. At least a week is allowed for the Dean to read the document presented.</p> <p>Documentary: The first complete chapter, an outline and a working bibliography must be presented.</p> <p>DMin: A DMin proposal contains the problem to be solved, justification, rationale, approach, end result. It will be partly documentary, but may include empirical data as well. After proposal, DMin students are given candidate status.</p>
8. Editing	<p>The advisor must approve all work that goes to the editor, and both the student and the advisor must sign the checklist (see Chapter 9) that must accompany it. As each chapter is completed and approved by the advisor, it should also be read by the editor. A date for the defense is not fixed until the work has been fully edited.</p>
9. Pre-defense steps	<p>The student's committee will meet when the work is nearing its conclusion to discuss its readiness for defense and possible external examiners. Once fully edited, the defense date can be set. The paper goes to all the examiners. In the case of a dissertation, this includes the external examiner, who is given 3 weeks to read it and prepare for the defense.</p>
10. Defense	<p>At the defense, the completed work is presented to the defense committee and to the general public. Examiners ask questions and usually suggest revisions. Minor revisions are supervised by the advisor; major revisions require the entire committee to review the document. In empirical research, the methodologist may choose to withhold signature if he/she wishes to review the requested revisions. If the advisor will be absent, another member may be designated to supervise the changes, and does not sign the approval sheet until satisfied that all stipulated revisions are complete.</p>
11. Editing/copying/ binding/ electronic submission	<p>The advisor indicates when the work should be sent to the editor for the final check, but does not sign the approval sheet until editorial approval is gained. The dean signs last, and this signature indicates approval for copying and binding, and electronic submission.</p>