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Lunenburg, Fred C. and Irby, Beverly J. (2008) *Writing a Successful Thesis or Dissertation*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Corwin Press.

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Reviewed by James A. Vornberg
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During 40-plus years of working with doctoral students, this reviewer has encountered a large number of manuscripts written by various professors who give advice to doctoral students in writing their research in dissertation styles. None comes close to comparing to this work done by Lunenburg and Irby, who have developed their book with a plethora of examples of every sort in order to demonstrate to the student many ways of dealing with a host of issues that are encountered in writing a dissertation. The authors take a methodical approach in all the processes and start from the beginning of the journey. For that reason this volume could be helpful to the new doctoral or masters student who is just starting to take courses but knows that they need to begin organizing their activities to ultimately lead to a successful research project. This journey usually is enhanced by understanding where studies are headed early in the process. So, reading

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the first two chapters by the second semester of coursework would be beneficial.

In their organization of issues, Lunenburg and Irby start from the beginning in terms of process and focus on factors important in selection: both of a topic for one's research and in an advisor and committee who will oversee and assist the novice researcher in developing their work. Numerous points are made that most graduate students have not considered until they are well along into their studies, so by reviewing these early chapters near the start of studies, greater appreciation can be developed for the research effort that will be made.

Next, the authors discuss the importance of understanding and selecting design methodology suitable for the study that the researcher has selected. This becomes most important in the reviewers' eyes as it is important to consider a wide variety of possible techniques, rather than to adopt a design that the student has been interested or most focused on through their current knowledge base. So the focus becomes on selection of techniques, including quantitative, statistical, and qualitative designs. Each of these chapters helps the student better understand what should be considered in making choices in this important process. What is really helpful is the variety of examples that are supplied to the reader in better understanding the methods available and the usefulness of these designs in making appropriate selections for the proposed study. The examples, succinct and yet detailed, are also excellent examples of how a student can develop an abstract in their own work. As the graduate student is completing courses in research design and methodology, reading this section of the work would be appropriate to better appreciate the nuances of the methodologies available to the researcher. Then when the details of the methodology become firmed in the visioning of the research project, the novice researcher should revisit these chapters again as they work in developing their proposal.

Next, the authors give rich explanations and details for developing the chapters and topics that are necessary in both the proposal and the final report of the research dissertation. Although these sections are very common in any treatment or discussion of doing research, Lunenburg and Irby provide not only the traditional listing of topics

considered but also detailed discussions of issues that are most difficult for novice researchers to deal with such as theoretical frameworks, reconciling conflicting theories, multiples sources of data, and researcher discussion of the findings. In each of these, and a plethora of other topics, examples of how to handle varied situations and illustrations of complete reporting help the new researcher to understand what is needed to present a complete picture of the various parts needed in the report. In these chapters, the researcher will find points that have not been considered before, thus being able to avoid difficulties that are likely to surface.

Concluding chapters help the student researcher move to the more stressful experience of defending the research orally to the committee and how to get the most from the final product in presenting at professional meetings, job interviews, and publishing the results in academic journals, books or chapters, popular press, and the Internet. Advantages and issues encountered are discussed in these to help the new graduate make these most productive for their selected career and purpose. These chapters offer solid advice to the new doctoral or masters graduate in getting their work out to be considered by others. This reviewer personally found the planning of the writing process to be very helpful for the graduate who is often over stressed when they reach this stage, which includes setting predetermined writing times and writing even if one knows that what they are doing is not high quality at that point as it can be revised and polished many times if need be. Pressure doesn't help writing generally and production needs to have sustained effort over an extended period.

Appendices are quite useful in this work to all researchers but especially those who are working on or completing their degree's culminating project. Outlines are provided to assist one to ensure that all chapters have the needed contents and that no critical aspects are missing even to the point where various research designs have all the specific information to make that design's details complete, i.e., analysis of variance and regression, multivariate analysis of variance, correlation, qualitative. Sample letters of contact for collecting data from subjects are included in the appendices. Proposal checklists are detailed and there is also an agreement document between

the advisor and student so there is no misunderstanding of some specific requirements as the student prepares to reach each critical juncture in the dissertation journey. This list alone is an important item for advisors to consult this resource.

Lunenburg and Irby provide an excellent resource for the ABD researcher to complete their degree. It is also a superb source of information from a practical standpoint for the researcher completing their work, but it is not a replacement for the well-written research text that covers in detail the designs and technical aspects of research in the social sciences. For all professors, whether just beginning their career in working with graduate students or very experienced in advising doctoral students, this work is an excellent source of important items to call to their advisees attention as they write chapters and consider having completed various phases in the research report.

About the Reviewer

James A. Vornberg is professor of educational leadership at Texas A&M University—Commerce, having joined that faculty in 1974. He has completed 85 dissertations as advisor and has served on more than 150 dissertation committees during his career. He has taught the doctoral level research course as well as a seminar which works to help each doctoral student launch their dissertation project (where he began using this reviewed text last year). His primary teaching area has been the principalship course during his 37 years at A&M-Commerce. He has served as department head and interim dean of the college of education and launched and directed the Principals Center, now in its 25th year of operation. He has edited and coauthored 2 books (1 in its 12th edition). His PhD is from the University of Arizona. He also served as a public school teacher and administrator in the American international school at São Paulo, Brazil.

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