

CUST Dissertation Proposal Guidelines

This document is intended to provide further context and direction for committee members (especially those new to the program) and students alike.

Overview

The Cultural Studies Department's Dissertation Proposal (CUST-6275Y) is an opportunity for PhD students to articulate the key research questions, methods, and components of their dissertation. It is typically completed and evaluated in December of the second year of study. This usually comes before the completion of the Special Field Exams, which are meant to be written before the end of the summer of the same academic year.

Formal requirements for the proposal, set by the graduate calendar, describe how proposals are "normally up to 2,000 words" and are "expected to provide a description of the purpose, content and structure of the dissertation."

The expectations for this document are instrumental. At this stage, students are expected to demonstrate a preliminary familiarity with the existing literature in their fields of study, but not yet to articulate with a high level of precision and confidence how their research will intervene in these fields.

Students work with colleagues in the CUST-6200Y course and their supervisor during the Fall of year 2 to refine and polish the proposal. Students should ideally submit a full draft to their supervisor before December for feedback before the proposal goes to the full dissertation committee.

Evaluation

The proposal is ultimately assessed only on a pass/fail basis. A passing proposal will be one that presents all the requirements of the proposal, describing a research program consistent with doctoral-level work that can be feasibly achieved within the time schedule of the program. A failing proposal will be one that falls below this standard. Students should ideally meet with their supervisor in advance of submitting their proposal to their full committee to avoid this outcome.

Sample Outline

A template is provided below, in hopes of simplifying students' development of the proposal. It should not be taken as definitive or sufficient to all cases. In some cases, each item may only need to be a paragraph long.

- I. Introduction to the research topic/problem
- II. Specific questions/direction of the dissertation
- III. Brief literature review
- IV. Project I
 - a. Key questions, sources, and directions
 - b. Methods (and justification)
 - c. Break down of specific subchapters (if applicable)
- V. Project II
 - a. Key questions, sources, and directions
 - b. Methods (and justification)
 - c. Break down of specific subchapters (if applicable)
- VI. Project III
 - a. Key questions, sources, and directions
 - b. Methods (and justification)
 - c. Break down of specific subchapters (if applicable)
- VII. Summary overview of dissertation's anticipated stakes and interventions
- VIII. Schedule for research, writing, and other key professionalization and administrative tasks (perhaps broken down into a timeline/table)
- IX. Bibliography (does not count toward word count)

Research-Creation

Cultural Studies allows research-creation to be integrated into the dissertation structure. Normally, this is taken to mean that one of the three projects can be a creative work, developed to a 'publishable' or 'exhibitable' standard per the relevant field of practice, rather than a conventional piece of academic writing.

Alternative approaches to research-creation may also be pursued, where the student uses creative practices or other methods of more-than-discursive research as a means of generating new research data, which is then analyzed within the dissertation text. This method research-creation may not be measurable through the same metrics as the fine arts (i.e. being of 'exhibitable quality') and does require the normal amount of academic writing.

Absent future directions from the program committee, further details and standards should be worked out between the student and their committee.

The Rest of the Dissertation

The dissertation is, administratively, broken up into 3 projects, intended to be completed at the end of the summer of year 2 (project 1), the end of the summer of year 3 (project 2), and the winter of year 4 (project 3). The final dissertation and oral defense are expected to follow at the end of year 4, and may include revisions and additions to the three projects to present them within a singular cohesive document.