



The Dissertation Writer's Handbook
Rhetoric, Composition, & the Teaching of English

2008-2009

Department of English
University of Arizona



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1

What is a Dissertation?

[brief essay (250 words?) about what a diss is]

From the Handbook

Finding a Topic

It is crucial to find a good topic, a topic that will do more than allow you to get a dissertation written. The dissertation will, ideally, open out into further research. In the eyes of hiring committees, the dissertation will define who you are as a potential colleague and your possible future contribution to the field. It pays to find a topic that may do well by you in all these respects.



You may have heard that you should begin thinking about your topic for your dissertation fairly early in the Program. Here are some specific ways you can help this thinking along:



- * Volunteer as a CCCC bibliographer (see Director), or look through Dissertation Abstracts International.

- * Examine the programs for the CCCC, NCTE, and MLA conventions.

- * Review journals for last ten years.

- * Think of papers written for classes as ways of investigating possible topics. If papers for classes can become chapters in your dissertation, you are way ahead.

- * Continue to discuss your research agenda from your Qualifying Exam with your mentor.

- * Use the Comprehensive Exams. You can develop your reading lists in such a way as to advance your work on your dissertation. Comprehensive Exams are intended first of all to examine general knowledge of the field to show readiness to do more specialized work, but it is often in preparing these lists that a topic comes into focus.

- * Look at the papers you have written for classes to see what themes or threads you find.



* Consult sample dissertation proposals on file with RCTE Program Assistant.

* Look at dissertations (available through the UA library and in Modern Languages, Room 453).

You should be able to declare your topic (though not to offer your specific Dissertation Proposal) by the time you complete your Comprehensive Examinations.



2

Putting Your Committee Together

Select your director first, based on her or his expertise (primarily), availability (on sabbatical? already has lots of doctoral students? is an administrator? is away on lots of research projects?), and the ease with which work with her or him.

Your proposal--even in draft form--can help you recruit committee members.

You need three RCTE committee members, your Director must be from RCTE, and you can have additional outside members. These members can be from other academic institutions, and they can also be from non-academic organizations (e.g. community organizations, business leaders, independent scholars, etc.). All outside members must be approved by your director, the program director, and the graduate college.



Material from Handbook

Per the Graduate College:

The Graduate Council and the Faculty Senate have approved a central requirement of a minimum of three members from the major, all of whom must be University of Arizona tenured, tenure-track, or approved by the Graduate College as equivalent. Many departments require participation of faculty from the minor in addition to the three from the major, in which case one member may be a special member. If a committee has only three members, all must approve the dissertation. In departments that require four or five members, there may be one dissenting vote. All dissertation committee members are expected to attend the final defense.

This is the result of several long discussions in the Graduate



Council and a survey to all doctoral departments about their practices and preferences. Some departments see the minor as applicable to teaching, but not to the dissertation research; hence they do not feel the need for minor representation on the dissertation. The old policy allowed minor members to waive attendance. The Graduate Council felt strongly that all members should be involved and attend the defense.

All dissertation committee members must be approved by the student's dissertation chair as well as heads of the major and minor departments, so there is appropriate oversight without Graduate College's approval.

Doctoral students must identify their dissertation committee members on their Advancement to Candidacy Form. This notification allows the Graduate College time to verify that all members meet eligibility requirements.

RCTE Guidelines to Forming your Committee

You should form your Dissertation Committee as soon as possible after the Comprehensive Examinations are completed, but no later than the beginning of the semester after passing your Comprehensive Exams.

The chair is the most important member of the committee because she or he will be the principal reader of your drafts. Other members of the committee may read your drafts only on special occasions and for specific purposes; you should negotiate a clear understanding with each as to what they wish or do not wish to read.

You may not have a chair from outside the major.

Remember that committee members must be persuaded to serve and that the supply of faculty is finite. Think of all the professors you take classes from as potential members of your dissertation committee.

You should write up a draft dissertation proposal before forming your committee. A good proposal, or draft of one, can help persuade people to serve. At a minimum, you should give committee members a brief outline before asking them to serve.

After the Proposal is approved, changes in the committee must be approved in writing by the RCTE Director.





3

Your Dissertation Proposal

Planning, researching, and writing your doctoral dissertation is the culmination of your graduate studies. When successfully completed, your dissertation will represent the apogee of your scholarly abilities to date, demonstrating not only your advanced knowledge of a particular field of research and its related practices, but also your highly developed research, organizing, and writing skills.

**Purpose of the
Dissertation
Proposal**

The faculty do not expect you to undertake such a project without considerable preparation and guidance. Rather, you will be asked to take a semester between completing your Comprehensive Exams and writing your dissertation to brainstorm and explore some ideas, then to develop a fairly detailed description of the idea that most captures your imagination. This Dissertation Proposal is a document that advanced students compose in order to clarify for themselves and their advisors why and how they will research, organize, and write their dissertations. It is less like a blueprint—which is, by definition, a fixed and fully formed set of specifications—than an “architectural scheme,” that is, a somewhat detailed sketch that systematically captures the essence of a project and describes an action plan for carrying it out. Such a document can emerge in many ways and the writing and presenting of it serves many functions.

**Thinking about
& Planning the
Proposal**

Students typically find that through drafting the dissertation proposal—a process that is equal parts idea generation, sifting, selection, and description—they become keenly aware of when

Drafting



their theoretical frameworks need bolstering, when their research questions are too vague, and when they are being overambitious about their objectives. Once identified, such weaknesses can be addressed and corrected.

**Developing
Skills for the
Future**

Moreover, students begin to learn a fundamental skill that they will likely need several times throughout their careers: how to develop a convincing book proposal. While dissertation proposals are a bit different than those for books, many of the elements are the same. In writing the proposal with the help of your Dissertation Director, and in presenting it to your Dissertation Committee, you will gain excellent experience with a professional and rhetorical art that could have a profound impact on your ability to advance in the academy.

**Proposals Help
the Faculty**

For faculty, dissertation proposals are a chance to help students hone their professional academic skills and avoid some of the research and writing obstacles that can only be identified with experience. It also gives faculty a chance to get oriented to each particular student's way of thinking about certain kinds of problems, from philosophical paradoxes to time management issues. By discovering such information early on, faculty are in a much better position to offer helpful counsel throughout the actual dissertation writing process.

**Think about
Your Audience**

As you develop your proposal, be mindful of the various strengths and weaknesses of your committee members and assemble a document that will give each of them the most useful picture of your project as you envision it. Say, for example, that you are planning to write a dissertation on diaspora rhetoric under globalization. If you happen to know that one of your committee members is extremely well read in the area of pre-18th Century diasporic rhetorics while another member is really only familiar with the migration rhetorics characteristic of the Galician Diaspora, then you

might want to add a sentence or two that will help each of these members to understand your project given their scholarly strengths and limitations. To put it simply, write your proposal like the trained rhetor that you are.

One significant factor in the successful completion of both the dissertation proposal and the dissertation is careful stewardship of your time. **It is imperative that once you have completed your Comprehensive Exams that you consult with your Dissertation Director as soon as possible (within two weeks at the outside), preferably with a rough draft of your dissertation proposal in hand.** The Director will work with you on early drafts of the Proposal. (See the Program Assistant for Dissertation Proposal models.) **Dissertation Proposals tend to be 5-15 pages long (single-spaced, 1" margins, MLA format) depending on the number of chapters anticipated for the completed manuscript.**

Timing &
Working with
Your Director

Sample Post-Comprehensive Exam Timeline for Completing the Dissertation Proposal

It is understandable that you will want to catch up on everything you may have been neglecting while preparing for your comprehensive exams: sleep, teaching and family responsibilities, and so on. This is why the writing of your Dissertation Proposal is stretched out over several months (one semester). This schedule should offer plenty of time to collect your thoughts, clarify the several dissertation ideas you have been contemplating over the past year or so into a single and doable project, undertake some preliminary research to flesh out that idea, and work through some of the organizational details with your Director and Committee.

Sample Post-
Comps Exam
Timeline

Here is a **sample timeline** that takes you from finishing your Comprehensive Exams in the first month of the semester to your Dissertation Pro-

positional Meeting:

Week 2/3

- Finish Comprehensive Exams

Week 4

- Schedule your Dissertation Proposal Meeting for sometime in Weeks 13 or 14
- Meet with your Dissertation Director to discuss no more than three solid research questions or lines of inquiry for your dissertation. You can begin this process by taking an inventory of past and current research interests, successful seminar papers and conference talks you have done, and readings that captured your imagination. You will also want to think about what kinds of theoretical frameworks would support your project best.

Week 5

- Make a final decision about which idea to pursue for your dissertation and notify your Dissertation Director of this decision by email.

Week 6-7

- Develop a solid draft of your Dissertation Proposal—including all the required elements—and submit it to your Director. On the first page of the draft, provide a date (one week away) by which time you need your Director to return the draft of your proposal to you with substantive comments for revision.
- With a solid draft of the proposal completed, now is a good time to circulate it to select faculty members to see if they are interested and willing to serve on your committee.

Week 8

- Continue finessing your proposal while your Director reviews your draft.

Week 9

- Meet with your Director to review her or his comments on your draft proposal.
- Begin revising your proposal.

Week 10

- Finish revising your proposal and send it to your Director, again with a one-week deadline noted on the front page.
- *Optional:* At your discretion or at the request of individual committee members (or potential committee members) you may informally circulate the proposal the relevant faculty for their feedback. Committee members are under no institutional obligation to comply with your request for feedback on your draft proposal.

Week 11

- Review the latest feedback on your proposal and revise if necessary.
- Once this second round of revisions has been completed, ask your Director if you may circulate it to the Dissertation Committee and proceed to the final stage, the Dissertation Proposal Meeting.

Week 12

- If the proposal has been approved for circulation, assemble the necessary forms, signatures, and copies and give them to your committee members. Also, send out a reminder email message to everyone on your committee reminding them when and where your Dissertation Proposal Review Meeting is.
- If the proposal has not yet been approved for circulation, continue to work with your Director to get it into circulatable shape. This may require you to adjust your timeline for getting your proposal approved. If you will be postponing the Dissertation Proposal Review Meeting, email your committee members to let them know this.

Week 13-14

- Meet with your committee to discuss your proposal.
- If the proposal is approved, file the RCTE Dissertation Proposal Approval Form (available on the RCTE Website or from the RCTE Program Assistant) with the RCTE Office. This form must be completed by you and your Dissertation Committee and filed with the Program Assistant in order for you to be considered at the “All But Dissertation”

(ABD) stage.

- If the proposal is not approved, meet with your Director as soon as possible to arrange a new timeline for submitting a revised proposal.

Alternative Timelines

This is not only one way to move from finishing your Comprehensive Exams to filing your approved Dissertation Proposal. Some students may prefer a less regimented route, one that perhaps involves roughing out the dissertation's first chapter early in the semester, then converting that into the structured proposal toward the middle of the semester. In any case, use whatever brainstorming, researching, planning, and writing techniques that suit you best to develop a proposal that is exciting, doable, and promises to expand how we know the world.

Petitioning for Extra Time

While the faculty strongly discourage you from taking more than a semester to complete your dissertation proposal and have it approved, they recognize it is sometimes necessary. In such circumstances, you will need to petition the Program Director for an extension and request a letter of support for your petition from your Dissertation Director. Your petition letter should include (1) a detailed explanation of why the extension is necessary, (2) how much additional time is needed to complete the proposal, and (3) a timeline to completion of the Ph.D. **NB:** The longer the extension you request, the more likely the petition will be denied.

Dissertation Proposal Elements

Your Dissertation Proposal should have the following elements:

- **Description of the Project** (1 paragraph): This succinct paragraph provides an overview of the project's guiding questions, theses, and/or objectives. **If this paragraph is not superbly done—**

clear, direct, and doable—it is highly unlikely that your proposal will be approved.

- **Defense of the Subject** (2 paragraphs): The DoS provides evidence that the dissertation will make a significant contribution to a particular field of research.
- **Overview of Your Methods** (3 paragraphs): The OM includes a brief explanation of (1) how you will conduct your research according to a clear theoretical framework, (2) how you will organize the dissertation itself, and (3) why this is the best approach for your project.
- **Chapter by Chapter Breakdown** (1 paragraph per chapter): This section of the proposal explains both the basic content and argument of each chapter, as well as how each chapter contributes to the overall argument being made in the entire dissertation. In general, your dissertation proposal should indicate two kinds of arguments: (1) the dissertation's overall argument, and (2) chapter arguments, which are integral to the dissertation's overall argument. Consider the following example:

Overall Dissertation Argument: The rise of massively multicontributor online collaborative applications (MMOCAs) like Wikipedia, Flickr, and YouTube ,has generated a new type of rhetoric that is characterized by a multiplicity of voices that are ruled by an emergent, reflexive, and politically diverse communal ethic. This new rhetoric, which until recently was discernable only in online discourse, is increasingly to be found in the material discourses that govern workplaces, educational institutions, and religious organizations.

Chapter 1 Argument: MMOCA rhetoric not only exists, but it also has a well-documented history. Moreover, the most recent part of this history indicates that this new rhetoric is experiencing rapid popularization.

Chapter 2 Argument: Large and small companies

alike have often trumpeted their prowess at establishing workplace communication channels that allow good ideas from anywhere in the corporate hierarchy to trickle up to the Board Room for consideration. MMOCA rhetoric not only embraces this workplace practice but technologizes it at every level of the institution.

Chapter 3 Argument: Institutions of higher education in the U.S. were among the primary incubators for the technologies that lead to the development of MMOCA rhetoric. Ironically, they are now among its most renitent commentators due to institutional predilections to safeguard intellectual property and punish any behavior that appears plagiaristic.

Chapter 4 Argument: Virtually all major faith traditions the world over are in the process of negotiating the cultural impact that MMOCA rhetoric is having on their members' lives and their respective worship communities. While these faith traditions all have centuries of experience dealing with the integration or rejection of emerging rhetorical trends and established religious codes, MMOCA rhetoric has become particularly controversial among the four main Abrahamic faiths. In fact, so divisive are the effects of MMOCA rhetoric in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Bahá'í that it is arguably the basis of the major schisms that have occurred within each of these traditions in the last five years. Tellingly, however, these schisms have also led to an unprecedented rise in the establishment of interfaith social service agencies, which are often built around principles in accord with MMOCA rhetoric.

Chapter 5 Argument: Because MMOCA rhetoric is well established historically, digitally, and institutionally, rhetoric scholars need to inquire into the particularities of its influence. Such analysis becomes especially important in those spaces in which MMOCA rhetoric has not yet been fully materialized but is already beginning to exhibit signs of what Michel

Foucault calls “governmentality.”

In this brief overview of the two different types of argument that appear in dissertations and the proposals that precede them, it should be fairly clear how the two types mingle and support one another. Developing a comparable argumentative structure for your project will help make your Dissertation Proposal a breeze to organize and your resulting dissertation clear and convincing.

- **Preparation:** (1 paragraph and/or list): List here for your Dissertation Committee any coursework, job experience, life experience, and reading that you have done that has helped to prepare you for doing this project.
- **Projected Research** (up to 2 pages): This section includes lists of all the resources you imagine you will need to consult in order to complete this project. Such lists might include:
 - readings you expect to do (include all bibliographic information);
 - people you need to interview;
 - films, television programs, and videos you need to watch;
 - games you need to play;
 - recordings you need to listen to;
 - special libraries and archives you need to visit;
 - experiences you need to have.
- **Timetable:** Your timetable toward completion should include entries for the following:
 - completion dates for each chapter’s draft and revision;
 - the months in which you plan to be on the job market (most students find that working on the dissertation during these months—usually October through February—nearly grinds to a halt);
 - the projected date of the defense;

In developing your timeline, do not forget to take into account the buffer periods at the start and end

of each semester (during which faculty may choose not to respond to your chapters), as well as holiday, inter-term, and summer breaks.

**Purpose of the
7 Structural
Elements**

These seven basic elements are not meant to imprison your creative process as you design your dissertation. Rather, they are meant to provide a simple structure through which you can easily record for yourself and convey to your committee members the basic plan you have for doing your dissertation. Faculty members are well aware that this plan will gradually change as your research matures and your arguments become more clear. This is a common phenomenon when planning any major project.

**Deciding When
to Reassess
the Proposal**

There are occasions, however, when the divergence from an approved dissertation proposal becomes so great that the entire process needs to be reassessed. In such cases, it is up to your Dissertation Director and the Committee Members (and sometimes the Program Director) to determine how to proceed. Consider the following scenarios:

**Complete
Change of
Topic**

Scenario 1: After having a proposal approved and working on the dissertation for four months, a student realizes that his heart isn't in the project and worse, that it may be setting him up for a professional trajectory he does not want. He wants to start fresh, with a different project and possibly even different committee members.

Comment: This situation will clearly call for a new committee to be formed and a new Dissertation Proposal to be written. Assuming the student has the time and financial resources to allow for such a dramatic change, there is nothing necessarily wrong with making this potentially very wise—if difficult—decision. In this or similar cases,

both the student and Director will need to be in close conversation with the Program Director, as the issue of “Timely Progress” may need to be addressed.

Scenario 2: After having a proposal approved and writing the first half of the dissertation, a student realizes that one of her proposed chapters is too ambitious and now needs its claims and objectives to be scaled back.

**Scaling Back
an Overambi-
tious Chapter**

Comment: In this instance, the student can probably just send a note to everyone on her committee notifying them of the situation and asking if they have any objection to her scaling back the chapter in question. Unless the Dissertation Director advises otherwise, the approved Dissertation Proposal need not be revisited.

Scenario 3: After having a proposal approved and writing one chapter, a student realizes that he and his Dissertation Director are not working well together. In fact, the tensions are so high that the student is experiencing writer’s block. Worse, the Dissertation Director is the Program’s recognized expert on the subject of the dissertation.

**Committee
Tensions**

Comment: The first thing to do in this case is to get the lines of communication open again. This solution might require some mediation by the Program Director or Department Head, or perhaps a candid one-on-one conversation. If some resolution cannot be achieved through these means, the Program Director may—after consultation with all relevant people—elect to dissolve the Dissertation Committee and direct the student to form a new committee and to write a new dissertation proposal. As in any situation where there is signifi-

cant conflict between a faculty member and student, the Program Director should be put in the loop as soon as possible so that she or he can help change the student's situation into one that is more productive.

**Cutting a
Chapter Due to
Time Shortage**

Scenario 4: After having a proposal approved, writing two out of five chapters, going on the job market, and securing a tenure-track position, a student realizes that she does not have enough time to write three more chapters by the end of the semester. As a result, she wants to cut one of the chapters so that she can arrive at her new institution with her Ph.D. in hand.

Comment: This would be considered a major change to the dissertation without sufficient scholarly cause. Unless the student can provide a sufficiently compelling scholarly argument to her committee concerning the proposed dropped chapter, such a change will likely be denied. In this case, the Dissertation Proposal serves as a kind of contract specifying the work to be done. A major change like this one would require the entire committee's approval, as well as the filing of an amendment to the approved Dissertation Proposal.

**Cutting a
Non-relevant
Chapter**

Scenario 5: After having a proposal approved and writing two chapters, a student realizes that one of her proposed chapters no longer makes sense to include because it is not as relevant as she thought it would be when she wrote her proposal. She now wants to drop that chapter entirely and either spend more time working on the remaining chapters or add a new chapter that has a closer bearing to the latest direction of her research.

Comment: As in Scenario 4, this significant change to the structure of the Dissertation

as outlined in the Proposal would require the approval of the entire committee and the filing of an amendment to the approved Dissertation Proposal with the Program Assistant. This student has a significant advantage over the student in Scenario 4, however, because she has a defensible scholarly reason for dropping the chapter. Depending on the circumstances, the Committee might ask that other chapters be expanded to reflect the new situation, or they might ask that a new and more relevant chapter be proposed to replace the excised one. These changes would not require a new proposal, but rather a series of email messages among committee members and possibly the Program Director. When a new agreement has been made concerning the final shape of the dissertation, a note outlining the change (i.e., an amendment) should be sent to the Program Assistant so that this information can be added to your file.

If, after reading over the finished draft of your dissertation proposal, the outline of the project seems a bit misty and unclear, that may well be okay since writing the dissertation itself will inevitably clarify many things as you go. Nonetheless, you will know that you have a solid draft of your proposal—neither too sketchy nor too elaborate—when you have completed all of the sections listed above, read over the entire draft, and—perhaps in addition to feeling that the chapters are a bit misty—have the sense that it represents an exciting and manageable project given your timeframe and available resources. If you do not get this sense after re-reading it, keep working on it until you do. Then submit the draft to your Director to see if she or he thinks the proposal is ready to go to committee.

**Knowing When
the Proposal
is Ready to
Show to Your
Director**

Dissertation Proposal Review Meeting

As noted in the Sample Post-Comprehensive Exam Timeline above, your Dissertation Director will work with you on preparing your proposal and will decide when it is ready to go before your committee. This meeting is one hour in length and will be a chance for you and all of your committee members to meet and discuss your proposal in detail. Their comments may address issues such as:

- the soundness of your methodology;
- the clarity of your writing;
- the cohesiveness and clarity of your arguments, both those within individual chapters and the one that stretches across the entire dissertation;
- the importance of your project to the field;
- the reasonableness of your timeline;
- the lack of key resources noted in your “Projected Research” section;
- comments about how this project may help or hinder you on the job market and in your post-doctoral work.

Concerns Often Raised in the Proposal Meeting

Feedback by Committee Members

Timing and Outcomes

Major Proposal Revisions

[NB: It is at the discretion of individual committee members whether or not they will provide feedback on the proposal prior to the official Dissertation Proposal Meeting.] The proposal is sent to the committee at least ten days before that meeting. At the meeting the proposal is discussed. It may be accepted as is, returned for minor revisions, or returned for major revisions.

If the revisions are major, another proposal meeting must be held. Additionally, the student will likely need to discuss with the Dissertation and Program Directors the matter of not having an approved dissertation proposal until the second semester after the comprehensive exams.

Human Subjects Review

If you are proposing to do a project involving human subjects (interviews, oral histories, observation studies, and/or experiments), you should begin the process of receiving formal approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) as soon as your Dissertation Proposal has been approved. To learn more about this process and to figure out if your research will need IRB approval, see Appendix A.

**The IRB ,
HSPB, and the
CITI-SBS**

Unsatisfactory Progress

If, after one year from the date of the successfully completed Oral Comprehensive Exams, your dissertation committee concludes that a sound proposal has not emerged, it may recommend to the Program Director that you not continue graduate studies in the UA RCTE Program.

**Academic
Jeopardy**





4

Writing Your Dissertation

From the Handbook

Doing the Writing

Don't postpone writing until you are ready to deliver the last word on the subject.

Dissertations are never the last word on the subject and never as good as their writers want. They may reflect disparate demands by committee members more than the writer's viewpoint. They are almost never publishable without substantial revision.



On the other hand, your dissertation will play an important role in getting you a job, and if your dissertation is not something that can become the basis for your first book, you will be at a disadvantage in your efforts to get promoted or to move to another job.



Start writing early. Don't wait until you have done "all the reading." You will have to do the reading you will have to do, but if you are writing as you do it, your reading will be much more efficient and effective.

Set up a regular writing schedule. Keep to it. Allow yourself latitude in some matters, but not in keeping to your writing schedule.

Form a writing group with people on your timetable. Writing groups can give you valuable feedback and support. Being in a group helps you keep to your schedule, too.

Give yourself deadlines. Give a schedule to your Chair. This will also help your Chair budget time to read your drafts.

When you and your Chair feel that chapters or portions of the dissertation are ready for editorial response, the chapters or



portions of the dissertation should be given to all committee members at the same time. Use the Dissertation Chapter Review Form as a cover sheet for all materials submitted to the committee.

Primary responsibility for responding to drafts lies with Chair. Other committee members may or may not respond to drafts.

All submissions of drafts to committee members must have the official Chapter Review Form with the following information

- * Table of contents/outline of whole dissertation.
- * Candidate's sense of where the draft is in the writing process, what is left to be done to complete the writing.
- * What revisions have been done since last submission.
- * Specific questions about the drafts to which response is desired.

The Chair will read your drafts carefully. If you want other members of your committee to read your drafts, you should ask them specific questions. The other members will need to be focusing most of their attention on the dissertations they are directing.

Have a life. Come to talks, sit in on classes. It is easy to feel isolated when you stop taking classes.

If you plan to go on the job market the same year that you are completing your dissertation, you **MUST** have a major portion of the writing done by the beginning of the fall semester. Job hunting is a major distraction from dissertation work, and it takes a lot of time. If you can finish at least a completed draft in the fall before you go on the market, you will be in a stronger position all around.

Ordinarily, your dissertation should be done two years from the time your proposal is approved. The choice of methodology or problems in data collection may prolong the process by a year, as may an especially ambitious program of reading or writing.

Hiring committees will not be interested in you unless you can

convince them, with concrete evidence, that you will have defended your dissertation by the time you come to work. If they have doubts, they may ask for letters from your Chair or the Department Head.





5

Defending Your Dissertation

[brief essay about the defense.]

From Ed:

Here's how they do it at TTU, where everyone seems very happy with the procedure.

The committee and Barbara sat around a table in the center of the room, with various visitors (including her family and numbers of interested faculty and grad students) sitting in chairs on the periphery of the room. She began with a formal 20-minute presentation, followed by about 40 minutes of questions from the committee. After a break, all present were invited to raise questions or make comments, and many of them did. (I suspect that some of that was not as spontaneous as the rest.) At the end of a total of two hours, the committee chair asked Barbara and the visitors to leave so the committee could debate its judgment of the diss and the defense. We decided to ask for one more draft, with various minor changes and editing, to be approved by the chair, but approved the diss and thus granted the PhD.

This procedure had all the elements of ours, with additions that seemed to me very valuable. The formal presentation was important for many reasons (I was thinking job interviews, but you can see others), the public participation made the occasion more important, and the whole procedure had a good combination of seriousness and informality suitable for recognizing the importance of the dissertation and the degree. I'd like to see us do something similar for our grads. --Ed







6

After the Dissertation

[brief essay about what to do with the diss now that it's done.
e.g., articles vs. book, proposals to academic presses, etc.]





Appendix A

Human Subjects Research in RCTE

If you are proposing to do a project involving human subjects (interviews, oral histories, observation studies, and/or experiments), you should begin the process of receiving formal approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) as soon as your Dissertation Proposal has been approved. The IRB is a part of the University of Arizona's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) that is charged with reviewing all projects that involve human subjects. All researchers and research assistants who have contact with human beings under test or analytical conditions for the purposes of research must pass a test—the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative-Social and Behavior Science test (CITI-SBS)—on the legal guidelines established to protect these research subjects.

**The IRB ,
HSPP, and the
CITI-SBS**

The Program Assistant has copies of the manual on which this test is based (Cynthia McGuire Dunn and Gary Chadwick. *Protecting Study Volunteers in Research: A Manual for Investigative Sites*. Boston, MA: CenterWatch, Inc., 2001); you may also find copies on reserve at the Library under the title "Protecting Study Volunteers in Research." Passing this test will yield for you a Verification of Training Form (VOTF), which you will need to submit along with your IRB application. The faculty recommend that students doing human subjects research receive their VOTF prior to their Dissertation Proposal Review Meeting.

**Study Materi-
als and the
VOTF**

Timing

NB: Before you begin collecting data based on your human subjects, your project must first

**When You Can
Collect Your
Data**

be reviewed and approved by the IRB. If it is not, any data that you have collected will be prohibited from use in your dissertation and you may incur other penalties depending on the judgement of the IRB.

**Your Human
Subjects Advi-
sor**

As an advanced graduate student working on a dissertation, you will be registered as the principle investigator (PI) for your project. One advisor must also be listed on your VOTF who has undergone the CITI-SBS training, though this person does not have to be a member of your Dissertation Committee.

**The Writing
Program and
Human Sub-
jects Research**

Be aware that if your research involves students or instructors in the Writing Program, there is an additional approval process that you must complete; speak with the Director of the Writing Program to learn more about this process. Also, your Dissertation Director must have recently passed the CITI-SBS in order to oversee your work; be sure to request in writing a copy of her or his certification for your records.

HSPP Webpage

For further information, see the Human Subjects Protection Program Homepage, which includes all the University-level forms needed to gain permission to do human subjects research (<http://www.irb.arizona.edu>).

**Background on
CITI**

The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) is a national organization that develops protocols for training researchers in to effectively protect their research subjects. CITI was founded in March 2000 as a collaboration between the University of Miami and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center to develop a web based training program in human research subjects protections. At the University of Arizona, such training is required for any researcher—no matter their rank, field, or position—doing using human subjects.

CITI-SBS is the CITI test with a Social Behavioral Science focus (as opposed to a Biomedical focus). Students in the Humanities generally will take the CITI-SBS course. The online exam involves the following modules—each consisting of some readings and a short quiz—and can take up to six hours to complete:

CITI-SBS

- o Introduction (no quiz)
- o Students in Research
- o History and Ethical Principles
- o Defining Research with Human Subjects
- o Regulation & the Social & Behavioral Sciences
- o Assessing Risk in Social & Behavioral Sciences
- o Informed Consent
- o Privacy and Confidentiality
- o Research with Protected Populations—Vulnerable Subjects: An Overview
- o Conflicts of Interest in Research Involving Human Subjects

CITI-SBS Test Modules

Your progress through the test can be saved after each module so that you can return to the test later; this makes it convenient to take over a series of days and at your own pace. The test is not difficult, and many people find it quite interesting and edifying. Indeed, the faculty recommend that all graduate students take the test and become certified simply for the perspective it will give you on the history and ethics of human subjects research.

Saving Your Progress

Human Subjects Research Review Timeline

Human Information or Research on Humans?

1. While working on your Dissertation Proposal, determine if your project uses human information or is actually research on humans. If the former is the case, IRB review *may* be unnecessary. If the latter is true, your project will have to undergo some form of IRB review.

An easy way to determine if your project is likely to need IRB approval is ask yourself these three questions taken from the *Investigator's Handbook for the Protection of Human Participants in Social and Behavioral Research*:

How to tell if your project needs IRB approval

- i. Does my project involve living individuals about whom I am conducting research such that I obtain data through intervention or interaction with the individuals, obtain identifiable private information, or cause these individuals to become recipients of or participant in research involving experimental materials? If so, then according to U.S. federal regulations your research involves human subjects and must be reviewed. If not, then:
- ii. Does my project involve a systematic investigation (i.e., a predetermined method for studying a specific topic, answering a specific question, testing a hypothesis, or developing a theory), including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge (i.e., activities intended to be extended beyond the institution through publication or presentation, or could otherwise influence current theory or practice), but does not meet the definition of a "clinical investigation" (i.e., any experiment that involves test material and one or more human subjects and that is subject to the Food and Drug Administration regulations)? If so, then according

to U.S. federal regulations your research involves human subjects and must be reviewed.

- iii. Does my project rely on demonstrations given to particular audiences (e.g., teaching demonstrations) or on service programs (e.g., community literacy projects)? If so, then your project *may* require IRB approval and you should contact HSPP to ask for assistance in making the determination.
2. If you are pretty sure that you will be needing to get IRB approval for your project, obtain a copy of *Protecting Study Volunteers in Research: A Manual for Investigative Sites* (Dunn and Chadwick, 2001) from the RCTE Program Assistant. Read through this book to familiarize yourself with the issues before you take the online training.
3. Students who use human information and/or conduct research on humans for any purpose other than seminar papers (done within a graduate course) must take the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) with a Social Behavioral Science focus [CITI-SBS]. This is an online training module with self-paced lessons and exams. The entire training will take 6 or more hours for most people (and students can take the modules over several days). After completing the CITI-SBS, students must print out the verification of their training and the dates when the exam was passed.
4. The next step is to complete the Project Review Form and the Verification of Training Form (VOTF). It is necessary to have an advisor for both the PRF and VOTF who has completed CITI-SBS training. **Important: this advisor**

Study Guide

CITI Exam

VOTF

does not have to be the dissertation director or even a committee member.

Site Authoriza-
tion

5. Students must also obtain a “site authorization letter” for the location where the research (including recruitment) will occur (Writing Program, high school, community organization, church, etc.). The letter needs to come from the principal, director, or minister of the site.

SCENARIOS

For the purposes of research, information from students’ writings, experiences with students, and interviews with students are all considered human data or information. What matters to the HSPP is

- what you are using the data for, and
- whether or not you will gather it for research purposes.

What is research? Ultimately, the decision about whether or not the use of human information meets the definition of research is determined by the researcher. For example, scholars often get ideas about research simply by being in the midst of their academic environment. Scholars constantly use their senses to absorb information that might or might not turn into a theory that might or might not then turn into a research project. Always ask yourself what your purpose is in using human information. If you have human information to support a theory, if you have a collection of data that you can talk about, then you have probably conducted research.

Consider the following scenarios as a way to think about your own emerging project:

Scenario 1

A GAT wants to give an oral presentation or write a paper for a graduate course at UA and

wants to cite student work, conduct student interviews, and/or cite student experiences or incidents from her own class to support her argument.

This use of data falls under the purview of educational work and does not require the GAT to take the CITI exam nor get Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) approval. *However*, should the GAT later wish to use the information she collected for her graduate course in a conference talk or publication she would need approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Human Subjects Protection Program to do so.

A GAT wishes to anonymously quote a student conversation, narrate an incident from class he is teaching, or summarize something a student wrote on the mid-term exam in a conference presentation or publication.

Scenario 2

If the use of this data is a single event, it is probably not research. If, however, the GAT's observations are becoming part of a research agenda, then he should set up an open project with HSSP that will allow him to collect narrative observations, take notes, make recordings, and so forth over a period of five to ten years. The GAT would need to get disclaimer forms approved and take the CITI exam in order for this kind of human information to be used in later research projects (e.g., in a dissertation).

A GAT is giving a talk at a professional conference or is sending a paper off for review by an academic journal. The talk or paper contains anonymous samples of student writing, ex-

Scenario 3

cerpts from student interviews, and/or anecdotes about experiences the GAT has had with students over the past several years.

In this scenario, the GAT will need to take the CITI training because she is “using human information.” At this point, however, the GAT is not conducting research and so does not need to get consent from the students to cite their work because the information (data) has been rendered anonymous.

That said, the GAT will need to get Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) approval. This is because U.S. federal regulations recognize that scholars sometimes collect information for non-research purposes but then later decide to use the information in a publication or for presentation. This information is called “pre-existing data.” If the GAT wants to use this type of data she would need to complete the HSPP Project Review Form and indicate that some (or all) of the project’s data was initially collected for non-research purposes but that she would now like to use it for research.

Scenario 4

A GAT is giving a talk at a professional conference, is sending a paper off for review by an academic journal, or is writing his dissertation. In this project, the GAT is using work from his English 101 students at the UA to support his thesis (e.g., comparing two groups of students with different variables, collecting all student writing over one or more semesters in order to understand some aspect of writing, etc.).

The GAT needs to take the CITI training. In addition, the GAT must complete the Project Review Form and the Verification of Training Form (VOTF) prior to conducting his research. Because he is a graduate student, he must also have an advisor

who has CITI training and who will sign off on his work. This individual does not have to be his dissertation director or even a member of his committee. In addition, the GAT needs to complete the HSPP application before he gathers his data. Finally, he must obtain a site authorization letter from the UA's Writing Program Director who administers the site in which he wishes to conduct his research. If any of his students are under the age of 18—as sometimes happens in English 101 courses—the GAT will also need to obtain written permissions from both the minor students themselves and from their legal guardians.



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