

DISSERTATION POLICIES & PROCEDURES

This document presents the various steps involved in arriving at a finished dissertation, from forming a committee, to writing and defending the proposal, to making changes (if necessary) to the dissertation's contents and to the constitution of the committee, all the way to composing and defending the dissertation.

I. COMMITTEE

A. General

By the end of the Autumn Quarter of his or her Fourth Year in the graduate program, a student is to assemble a dissertation committee.

The student is to constitute a committee with expertise appropriate to the chosen field of study and, in so doing, he or she should solicit advice from a broad range of faculty.

In particular, students should consider and consult with faculty members who have published or taught seminars devoted to topics or figures that are central to a student's selected field of study regarding the composition of an appropriate dissertation committee.

In addition, students should also consider and commit to developing an ongoing rapport with the members of the committee that is founded on substantive constructive critique and development.

The formation of the committee is to be the result of a consensus of all those involved.

B. Composition

The dissertation committee will consist minimally of three members, all of whom must be permanent, full-time members of the DePaul's Department of Philosophy. A director, or sometimes two co-directors, must be stipulated. Other members of DePaul faculties, or philosophers and scholars from outside the University, whose expertise is pertinent to the topic of the dissertation, may serve as extra readers upon the consent of the dissertation director(s) and the Director of Graduate Studies.

At least one of the Director(s) of the committee must be a tenured (Associate Professor or Professor) member of the Department of Philosophy. However, where the subject matter of the dissertation project warrants an untenured faculty member serving as the Director, the student may petition the Graduate Affairs Committee for an exception to this requirement.

The Readers may be tenured or untenured members of the Department of Philosophy.

Where the subject matter of the dissertation project warrants, and with the approval of the dissertation Director, the third Reader may be a faculty member from another department or from another institution.

C. Committee Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the dissertation committee are to advise the student on the formulation of an appropriate research topic and plan, assess the student's relevant skills (e.g., language preparation, current knowledge of the field, etc.), and review the progress of the student's ongoing research.

In pursuit of these obligations, the committee, under the guidance of the dissertation Director, shall assist the student in preparing a Dissertation Proposal and, when agreed, shall conduct an oral defense of the proposal (see section entitled Proposal for all requirements concerning the proposal).

Once the proposal has been successfully defended, the student is to prepare and submit a brief report of research progress to the entire dissertation committee once a year, corresponding with the Graduate Student Reviews (and the

document should be included with the review documents). This report is to be between 300 and 900 words and it is to describe both the work accomplished since the preceding submission and that which is projected to be completed in the foreseeable future. It may also include any issues or problems that have arisen in the course of conducting research or in writing.

When the student and the committee agree that the project is complete, the dissertation committee shall conduct a public, oral defense of the dissertation (see Dissertation Policies and Procedures, Section III. Dissertation for requirements concerning the dissertation).

Throughout the entire process, the committee shall have the authority, under the guidance of the dissertation Director, to require supplemental research as well as the revision or rewriting of any portion or of all of the Dissertation Proposal or of the dissertation itself.

D. Constitution

Once the dissertation committee has been agreed upon, the student is to submit a Dissertation Committee Constitution Form to the Director of Graduate Studies for review and possible comment by the Graduate Affairs Committee. A student making reasonable progress through the program will have defended his or her proposal by the end of his or her Fourth Year, and by the very latest by the Winter Quarter of his or her Fifth Year.

The Dissertation Committee Constitution Form should be submitted, with the signatures of all committee members, at least two weeks prior to the projected date of the proposal defense. As stated on the form, the student should also submit at this time an approx. 200 word précis of the dissertation project (a short summary of the projected dissertation's main thesis and argument, including the central figures and texts it will cover), as well as a brief chapter outline. Once it has been submitted, the Director of Graduate Studies will distribute the materials to the Graduate Affairs Committee, solicit its feedback, and communicate to the student and his or her dissertation Director any suggestions or advice about the committee or about the execution of the project that the Graduate Affairs Committee may have..

The Graduate Affairs Committee will then register the dissertation committee and finalized form and, upon the completion of this process, the dissertation committee will be officially constituted.

E. Changes to a Constituted Committee

In unusual and rare circumstances, the composition of the dissertation committee may be changed:

a. Changes in Readers

Should either a student or a Director come to believe that a Reader serving on a duly constituted dissertation committee is no longer participating in the work of the committee in a constructive critical fashion or that the focus of the project has changed such that the Reader is no longer deemed, by the student or a Director, to be best suited for the project, then the Director, in consultation with the student, is to seek to mediate and resolve any differences.

If a genuine effort has been made to affect this result, but to no avail, then the dissertation Director is to notify the Director of Graduate Studies in writing that a change in the composition of the dissertation committee is desired, providing an explanation for this action, and submitting a replacement candidate.

Should a Reader serving on a duly constituted dissertation committee come to believe that he or she is no longer able to participate in the work of the committee in a constructive critical fashion or that the focus of the project has changed such that he or she is no longer best suited for the project, then the Director, in consultation with the student, is to seek to mediate and resolve any differences.

If a genuine effort has been made to affect this result, but to no avail, then the dissertation Director is to notify the Director of Graduate Studies in writing that a change in the composition of the dissertation committee is desired, providing an explanation for this action, and submitting a replacement candidate.

The Director of Graduate Studies is to report any of these changes to the Graduate Affairs Committee for review and, where the Committee deems appropriate, any advice about the change will be communicated to the Director and the student.

In those cases where the committee member in question is also a member of the Graduate Affairs Committee, the faculty member must recuse him- or herself from the discussions of the Committee as it reviews the notice.

After any desired consultation by the Graduate Affairs Committee with the dissertation Director, the new composition of the committee will be registered and considered official.

In this situation, the student and the committee may continue his or her work from where it had been suspended.

b. Changes in Director

i. Student Initiated

Should a student change the focus of their research or come to believe that the Director is not participating in the work of the committee in a constructive critical fashion or that the relationship between the student and the Director has become unworkable, then the student may request that the Director of Graduate Studies and the Chair of the Department seek to mediate and resolve any differences.

If the dissertation Director is also the Director of Graduate Studies or the Chair of the Department, then the Director must recuse him- or herself from this process. The other administrative officer is then solely in charge of the mediation process.

If a genuine effort has been made to affect this result, but to no avail, then the student is to notify the Director of Graduate Studies in writing that a change of Director is desired, providing an explanation for this action, and submitting a replacement candidate.

The Director of Graduate Studies is to report this change to the Graduate Affairs Committee for review and, where the Committee deems appropriate, any advice about the change will be communicated to the Director and the student.

In those cases where the dissertation Director in question is also a member of the Graduate Affairs Committee, the faculty member must recuse him- or herself from the deliberations of the Committee as it reviews the notice.

After any desired consultation by the Graduate Affairs Committee with the student, the new composition of the committee will be registered and considered official.

In this situation, the previously constituted committee is considered dissolved and the student must begin the process of assembling a new committee again, including preparing and defending a Dissertation Proposal under the guidance of the new Director and the newly constituted committee.

ii. Director Initiated

Should a Director come to believe that he or she cannot participate in the work of the committee in a constructive critical fashion or that the relationship with the student or other committee members has become unworkable or that the focus of the project has shifted so significantly that he or she believes that he or she is no longer the best faculty member suited to direct the project, then the Director may request that the Director of Graduate Studies and the Chair of the Department seek to mediate and resolve any differences.

If the dissertation Director is also the Director of Graduate Studies or the Chair of the Department, then the Director must recuse him- or herself from this process. The other administrative officer is then solely in charge of the mediation process.

If a genuine effort has been made to affect this result, but to no avail, then the Director may notify the Director of Graduate Studies in writing that a change of Director is desired, providing an explanation for this action.

The Director of Graduate Studies is to report this change to the Graduate Affairs Committee for review and, where the Committee deems appropriate, any advice about the change will be communicated to the Director and the student.

In those cases where the dissertation Director in question is also a member of the Graduate Affairs Committee, the faculty member must recuse him- or herself from the deliberations of the Committee as it reviews the notice.

After any desired consultation by the Graduate Affairs Committee with the Director, the committee will be considered officially dissolved.

In this situation, the student must begin the process of assembling a new committee, including preparing and defending a Dissertation Proposal under the guidance of the new Director and the newly constituted committee.

c. Departure of Faculty Member from the Department

In the event that either the Director or a Reader leaves the department, he or she may, if willing and able, continue to serve on a duly constituted dissertation committee for up to one year after the end of his or her employment at DePaul. After which time, he or she may serve as an outside reader only. According to the already articulated policies regarding a change in director, this requires another official proposal and official defense. However, this requirement can be waived at the discretion of the new director.

II. PROPOSAL

Ideally, the dissertation proposal should be defended by the Winter Quarter of the Fourth Year, but in any case no later than the Winter Quarter of the Fifth Year. The student should speak with his or her Director concerning the aims, format, and length of the proposal. Different Directors will ask for different elements in the proposal, and there may even be requirements that are specific to a given project or student.

That being said, the following are some general guidelines concerning dissertation proposals.

A. The Aims of the Proposal

The dissertation proposal has two basic aims, as it relates to its two audiences—i.e., the student's committee members and the student him- or herself during the subsequent research and writing of the thesis.

On the one hand, from the proposal, the committee should come to understand very clearly the following five things:

- (1) the basic issue or question to be addressed in the dissertation;
- (2) the method that will be employed to address the issue;
- (3) a table of contents or chapter outline, presenting in some detail the contents of each chapter;
- (4) the scope that will be covered by the project;
- (5) the current state of the question in relevant scholarly discussion; and
- (6) the precise contribution the project will make to that discussion.

On the basis of these six pieces of information, the committee will be able to evaluate the intellectual merit, the viability, and the marketability of the proposed dissertation project.

On the other hand, the successful dissertation proposal will also serve to direct the student in his or her execution of the project. Because of the length of time over which this project must be carried out, this is an extremely important function of the proposal. The student will likely return to the proposal again and again, both to touch base with the original intention and structure of the project, as well as to make self-conscious alterations, additions, and subtractions to that project. The student should, thus, construct the proposal accordingly, keeping in mind that it will have to serve this vital, orienting function during the writing process.

B. Elements and Format of the Proposal

Although, as mentioned above, the elements required in a proposal may well differ to some extent according to the Director, the student, and even the project itself, a typical dissertation proposal will accomplish the above-stated purposes by including the following elements:

- Brief Abstract

The abstract should be approximately 200-350 words. It should summarize the thesis and main argument of the project.

- Outline

The outline should include all of the main steps of the argument, though not every single step. It should be clear from this what each chapter accomplishes as a unit, what it contributes to the argument, and why it contains the subsections it does.

- Summary Presentation

The summary of the entire project should be approximately 4500-6000 words. It should lay out, in clear terms, the single, unifying claim that the dissertation will make, situating that claim both in the broader philosophical discussion and clarifying the argument, chapter by chapter, that will be set out in support of it.

As stated above, the proposal should be sure to make perfectly clear, (1) the basic issue or question to be addressed in the dissertation; (2) the method that will be employed to address the issue; (3) the scope that will be covered by the project; (4) the current state of the question in relevant scholarly discussion; and (5) the precise contribution that this project will make to that discussion.

- Bibliography

The bibliography should include full bibliographic data for all primary and main secondary sources that the student anticipates using in the course of his or her research on the project.

As with the basic plan of the dissertation, this initial bibliography will surely change during the researching and writing according to the specific exigencies and interests of the student's project. However, at this point, the student must show that he or she is familiar with all the most important and central works pertaining to this subject.

C. The Proposal Defense

Once the proposal has been written, it should be reviewed by the Director and by all members of the committee.

Once the members have had the opportunity to request any changes or clarifications, a defense is to be scheduled in which the committee and the student will come together to assess the merit and viability of the project.

The student is to submit the final draft of the proposal to all members of his or her committee at least 2 weeks prior to the meeting, unless otherwise directed.

At the defense, the student will generally give a 10-minute summary presentation of the project, reviewing its central aim, argument, and contribution to the scholarly discussion.

The members of the committee will then ask questions and raise issues that they believe remain outstanding concerning the project. The student is required to address these concerns to the full satisfaction of the committee.

The proposal defense will typically last between 1.5 and 2 hours.

At its conclusion, the committee will determine whether or not the project is defined sufficiently to begin work on it, whether it is worthy of pursuing, and whether it can be completed in an acceptable time-span (between 2-5 years).

If the judgment is positive, the committee will sign off on the project and the student may begin work.

If outstanding issues remain in the judgment of the committee, then the student will be required to revise the proposal before the committee signs the required forms, and if the committee decides that there are serious reservations about the project or the student's ability to complete it, the student will be required to propose again and would then undergo another proposal defense.

III. DISSERTATION

A. The Completed Dissertation

The dissertation should be approximately 200-275 pages, including scholarly apparatus. The length of the dissertation will depend on the demands of the topic and should be determined in discussion with the dissertation Director. Ideally the defense should take place at the end of the Sixth Year but no later than the end of the Tenth Year. Exceptions will be granted on a case-by-case basis.

B. The Dissertation Defense

i. Planning of the Defense

Once the dissertation has been written, it should be submitted to the Director, whose approval is necessary for the setting of a defense date. This approval does not guarantee that the Director will vote for the dissertation's passing at the defense but it does imply that the Director deems the dissertation ready to be judged by the entire committee. The dissertation Director might call for revisions prior to the setting of a dissertation defense. All other degree requirements (course work, language exams, etc.) must be met prior to the setting of the defense date.

Before setting a date, either the Director or the graduate student in consultation with the Director should consult with the other members of the committee, ensuring that they are available to read the dissertation and participate in the defense (this participation can be electronic although it is not recommended that more than one committee member participate electronically). If a committee member can participate neither in person nor electronically, comments can be sent to the Chair ahead of time (only one such absent member is permitted).

The committee should be given at least a month to read the dissertation. The graduate student must submit the dissertation electronically to the committee members by the agreed upon date.

ii. Format of the Defense

The defense is typically 2 -2.5 hours long. It is a public event and should be announced to the entire philosophy department.

The defense begins with a 5-10 minute statement from the graduate student, offering a brief summary of the project and, typically, some comments about future research that will follow from it. This statement has a dual audience, both the committee and other attendees who may not have read the dissertation. The defense will then proceed with each committee member asking questions of the graduate student. The order of the speakers will be decided by the Director, with the Director typically going last. The Director will also decide whether committee members can ask follow up questions to each other's questions or whether they should complete their comments before another member joins in. Once all committee members have completed their remarks, the floor should be opened for other defense attendees to ask questions.

Once all questions have been asked or the time limits have been reached, the Director will conclude the discussion and the committee members will begin their private deliberations. The committee then votes, with a majority needed for any outcome (see below for possible outcomes). If there are 4 committee members a tie is not sufficient to determine any given outcome, so a majority vote must be negotiated. If a committee member is unable to participate, and so has sent in comments, a vote should be submitted ahead of time to the Director.

iii. Possible Outcomes

There are five possible outcomes:

- a. the dissertation can be passed
- b. it can be passed with honors
- c. it can be passed with the need for revisions
- d. the committee can ask for revisions needed for further review, prior to a decision being made on whether it will be passed
- e. it can be failed without the possibility of revisions

Once the committee's deliberations are completed, the members sign the Dissertation Defense Form, and then they announce the result to the graduate student.

If the committee has either passed the dissertation or a passed it with honors (a or b), the student should follow the procedures outlined by the LAS Graduate Office for its electronic submission, and graduation (<http://las.depaul.edu/CurrentStudents/GradStudentSupport/index.asp>). This includes submitting a dissertation abstract. The dissertation Director should change the student's PHL 699, Dissertation Research course grade from an incomplete to an A.

If the dissertation has been passed with revisions required (c), the revisions should be completed within a year and the revised dissertation submitted to the Director, whose approval is required before it can be submitted to the college. If revisions are required prior to a decision being made on whether the dissertation passes (d), the revised dissertation should be submitted to the Director and the other members of the committee within a year. The committee will review the revised dissertation and will, in a timely fashion, meet and judge the work (all 5 outcomes are once again possible). Only one attempt at a revision is allowed. If the attempted revision is rejected by the committee, this entails option (e) above.

If the dissertation is failed (e), and it should be noted that this is a rare occurrence, the student should meet with his or her Director in order to decide whether further work on the dissertation can bring it

into line with the committee's expectations. This would require a further dissertation defense. Only one further defense is allowed.

While the decision of the committee is made independently, any concerns that the graduate student might have should be brought to the Director of Graduate Studies (or to the Chair if the Director of Graduate Studies is on the committee; if both are on the committee such concerns can be brought to any other member of the Graduate Affairs Committee) who can relay them to the Graduate Affairs Committee.

iv. Celebrations

The department recommends that all successful dissertation defenses be appropriately celebrated, although, unfortunately, there are no department funds available.