

Department of Communication & Film

Ph.D. Dissertation Prospectus and Defense (approved 11/2023)

The dissertation reflects the systematic study of a significant question, problem, or issue relevant to the communication discipline. The document is evidence of your ability to independently conceive, execute, analyze, and summarize data pertinent to the scholarly investigation of a specific topic, within the context of current literature in the field. The exact nature of the dissertation – its depth, breadth, and method(s) – will initially be negotiated with your committee chair but will also be informed by guidance from your committee members in their areas of expertise. From those negotiations, you will write the dissertation prospectus, which is a written proposal of the research that you want to undertake. During the preparation of the prospectus, you will work closely with your chair. When it is completed, you will forward it to the full committee for their assessment and advice. Once you have satisfactorily responded to their comments, the prospectus is ready for a formal defense in front of your committee.

Prospectus Format

- Introduction —identifying problem, issues, and significance
- Literature review and synthesis
- Proposed research method(s)
- Situating oneself within the topical area (where appropriate)
- A timeline

Prospectus Process

1. Complete and submit the Thesis/Dissertation Committee Appointment form as soon as the committee is formed.
2. The committee is given at least two weeks to review the prospectus prior to setting a defense date.
3. If the committee agrees the prospectus is well-conceived, a defense date will be set.
4. The prospectus defense date/time/location will be announced internally to the department by the admin associate.
5. Committee will ask you pertinent questions to assess the strength of your knowledge of the subject matter and the proposed research methods.
6. If you pass, you begin your dissertation study.
7. If you do not pass, you will be given additional guidance, allowing you to revise the document and defend before the committee a second time.

Dissertation Process

1. After passing your prospectus defense, you must submit an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval if your study involves human participants.
2. Conduct your research.
3. Submit chapters to your committee chair for review.
4. Revise each chapter and resubmit it to your committee chair; expect several revisions.

- a. Some chairs/committees may require you to send each chapter to all committee members (after approval by the chair) for their review.
 - b. Some chairs/committee members may require you to send specific chapters to specific committee members (after approval by the chair) for their review.
 - c. Some chairs/committee members may expect only a complete draft of the dissertation to be distributed to the committee (after approval by the chair)
5. When your chair believes your document is in near final form, they will circulate the document to the full committee, who will be given two weeks to review the dissertation.
6. If the committee agrees the dissertation document is ready to be defended, a defense date will be set.
7. The dissertation defense date/time/location will be announced publicly, ideally two weeks in advance, but not less than one week in advance.
8. All committee members must be available and present for the scheduled defense.
9. The dissertation defense should be held in person unless there are extenuating circumstances that require a virtual defense.

Dissertation Defense Process

1. A defense typically lasts 1.5 - 2 hours.
2. You will be expected to demonstrate your knowledge of your study, general research area of interest, and inter-related disciplinary issues. You will demonstrate this knowledge by succinctly presenting your research and then answering rigorous questions intended to test the depth of your knowledge, the sophistication of your methods, and the significance of your scholarly contribution.
3. The defense typically follows the following format:
 - a. Committee members confer privately.
 - b. The PhD candidate gives a presentation of their dissertation project.
 - c. Committee members ask questions.
 - d. After the committee has asked all their questions, other faculty members will be given an opportunity to ask questions.
 - e. Finally, other attendees will be given an opportunity to ask questions.
4. The committee will then ask you and everyone else to step out of the room so that they can confer privately to decide the outcome of the defense: pass, pass with revisions, or fail.
5. If the dissertation passes or passes with revision, you will work with your committee chair and committee to make final revisions to the document before submitting to the graduate school.
6. If the dissertation fails, you will meet with individual committee members, collate their feedback, make necessary revisions to the document, and prepare for a second defense once you have the approval of your committee chair.
7. All UofM Graduate School guidelines and procedures must be followed.