
Ph.D. Dissertation Prospectus in Literary and Cultural Studies

Following successful completion of their Comprehensive Exams, and prior to beginning formal work on their Doctoral Dissertation, each Ph.D. student in the Literary and Cultural Studies Concentration must submit a Dissertation Prospectus. The prospectus should be developed in consultation with the student's dissertation director and committee and should be defended orally no later than two weeks after submission. Students working on the prospectus should enroll in ENGL 8900: "English Colloquium."

The prospectus will ideally build upon the work done during the exams, refining the arguments, expanding the primary and secondary reading lists, and reconsidering critical position and methodology. Although certain dissertation projects will necessitate a distinct approach, each prospectus should be organized into the following seven sections.

Introduction (500 - 1000 words)

The introduction identifies the general topic and summarizes the *literary and cultural contexts* of the dissertation. What is the dissertation about? Why is the topic worth discussing and what are the broad stakes of the discussion? How does the literature and culture of the chosen period or place shape the discussion? To what broad research area does the dissertation contribute?

Scholarship Review (~ 1,000 words)

The scholarship review surveys recent or relevant work on the topic and discusses the *critical contexts* of the dissertation. How have previous scholars dealt with the topic? What critical debates will the dissertation engage? Are there gaps in current scholarship that the dissertation will fill? The scholarship review should cite and synthesize at least 10 scholarly or critical works and may take the form of either an annotated bibliography or a bibliographical essay. The review should not only summarize important articles, chapters, and books, but explain the significance of specific arguments to the dissertation research. It should thus be narrow in focus and distinct from the more comprehensive bibliography.

Core Argument and Audience (500 - 1,000 words)

The core argument and audience describe the *central question(s)* that the dissertation hopes to answer and explain the *thesis* and intended *contribution* to the field. What is the dissertation's particular take on the general topic? What is its unifying insight? What does it aim to prove and how will it change attitudes towards or assumptions about the literature and culture of a period or place? Who is the dissertation's intended audience? The thesis of the dissertation will almost certainly change over time, so the core argument should be understood as necessarily provisional—a statement to be revised and refined as the dissertation develops.

Scope and Methodology (500 - 1,000 words)

The scope provides a coherent *rationale* for the dissertation's treatment of its topic and explains the *selection criteria* for primary and secondary sources. What is the dissertation's archive and through what texts and contexts will it substantiate its argument? What does it take as its generic or historical or geographical purview? Which authors and works does it intend to discuss? Which authors and works will be omitted from discussion? Why? The methodology outlines the *critical or theoretical approach* to the topic. Through what means or mode will the dissertation conduct its analysis? From what perspective will it develop its core argument? Emphasis should be placed on *how* the dissertation will argue rather than *what* it will argue.

Dissertation Outline (~ 1,000 words)

The dissertation outline summarizes the *structure* and describes the *proposed chapters* of the dissertation. The outline should consider how best to organize texts and contexts. Will the substance of the dissertation be close readings of literary works or analysis of cultural attitudes and phenomena? Will it be structured around individual case studies or broad historical surveys? As with the core argument, the structure of the dissertation will likely change over time, so the outline should be understood as provisional. Yet it should nonetheless explain how the proposed chapters will illustrate the central claims of the dissertation. How does each chapter grapple with the topic and substantiate the thesis? How do the chapters relate to one another?

Timeline (~ 500 words)

The timeline provides a *workplan and preliminary dates for submission* of dissertation material. The timeline will also be provisional, but it should provide guidance on when particular sections of the dissertation will be written and when the project is expected to be completed.

Bibliography (25 - 50 titles)

The bibliography cites *primary and secondary sources* used in the preparation of the prospectus and titles relevant to the dissertation-in-progress. It should eventually form the basis of the dissertation's composite bibliography. The bibliographical format should follow the latest edition of either the *MLA Handbook* or *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

To allow time to research, write, and revise the dissertation, the prospectus should be submitted and defended within one semester of completing Ph.D. Comps. A student who fails the defense will be given the opportunity to revise their prospectus and defend it again no later than the following semester. A student who fails the prospectus defense a second time will be dismissed from the program.