

## PROSPECTUS FOR DISSERTATION

*This material was originally an integral part of the Guide for Graduate Students*

Within one semester after passing the comprehensive examination you must present a prospectus of the proposed dissertation in a colloquy attended by the Dissertation Committee. You should develop your prospectus in close consultation with your dissertation advisor, and before you present you need to get the approval of your Dissertation Committee. Your chair should then e-mail the Graduate Coordinator with permission for you to present.

The presentation is not intended as an examination, but rather as an informal forum in which you can discuss ideas and receive suggestions and criticisms. Note that you may present your prospectus at any time after the comprehensive exam, even immediately afterward if you are ready to do so. The department schedules one or more sessions for this every semester, depending on need.

Your prospectus should not be lengthy (about seven pages of text and a three-page select bibliography should be a maximum; we may refuse to accept longer ones). It should begin with a clear statement of the question your research will answer, then go on to explain why that question is important to ask (its historiography), and how you propose to go about answering it (your methods, your sources). All discussion should center around your research question, so you should not include a sequential literature review or a detailed description of each primary source. Since you are at the beginning of your research, you do not need to include a full plan for the completed dissertation or a definite thesis. But you should include a bibliography of the most important primary and secondary sources that you expect to use.

Above all, you must explain how your research will make an important contribution to historical scholarship and our understanding of the historical period or subject that you are studying. Although your dissertation may use primary sources restricted to a very narrow time and place, you must always address the larger questions that you plan to answer through your research, and how those answers (whatever they might be) will contribute to our understanding of larger historical issues, and advance or revise scholarly interpretations. No local history or historical narrative suffices for a dissertation, no matter how much research is necessary to write it, unless it goes beyond the local or descriptive in its analysis. No oral history suffices unless it critically analyzes the collected material and uses it, and other sources, both primary and secondary, to construct a coherent argument that has value beyond the stories of those you interviewed.

Be sure your name and a provisional title appear at the top of the first page, as well as the names of the chair and other members of your dissertation committee, that the pages are numbered, and that you use footnotes (not endnotes) when called for. We realize that as your research proceeds, you may need to modify any provisional thesis, the scope of the project, or your methods.

All history faculty and graduate students are invited to this colloquy, and all other interested persons are welcome. The department schedules several dates during each fall and spring semester for these presentations. You should sign up for one of these sessions (but not a particular time) with the Graduate Coordinator or Graduate Secretary. In times of high demand you may have to postpone your presentation, but this should not delay your dissertation work, since you can obtain the approval of your committee for the prospectus.

At least a week before the colloquy you should send an e-mail to the Graduate Coordinator, with the prospectus as an attachment (with the name "[your last name] prospectus). The Graduate Coordinator will forward your e-mail, so that you should write it to the faculty and graduate students, inviting them to come. Be sure to include the date, time, and room.

Your oral presentation should last for no more than ten minutes, and must be purely oral, without a presentation of slides or other audio-visual materials, unless you have special permission from the Graduate Coordinator for exceptional reasons.