

Dissertation Guidelines

Graduate Group in Performance Studies · University of California, Davis

Preparation for the Dissertation Prospectus and Its Role in the Qualifying Examination

- 1) Select your dissertation committee. The committee has three members, one of whom will be your major professor. The two other members of the committee are determined by you and your major professor. They must agree to serve on your committee preferably six months before your qualifying written exam and the oral exam, usually by the end of June before a December date for the exams, and normally no later than three months before the exams.
- 2) Meet with the three members of your dissertation committee to discuss your prospectus plans and your development of the qualifying examination areas. All members must approve the reading and performance list and prospectus with reference sources, that is the bibliography and theatre or dance-ography, that you submit to the graduate administrator.
- 3) Prepare the draft prospectus with reference sources, and the reading and performance list. The prospectus is usually between 15 and 30 pages long, normally outlining the chapter breakdown of the work. If practice as research work is to be included, this should be specifically addressed and a timeline for completion should be made. See Guidelines for Dissertation Prospectus below.
- 4) Five weeks prior to taking the qualifying exam, submit the approved reading and performance list and prospectus with reference sources, along with the signed approval form, to the graduate administrator. The administrator will complete the Request for Qualifying Examination for Graduate Studies, and will obtain the signature of the PhD graduate faculty adviser and send the request to Graduate Studies. If you are doing a designated emphasis, the administrator will give you the form to obtain the signature of your designated emphasis director. You would then return this form to the administrator, who will obtain the graduate program adviser's signature and forward the request.
- 5) The qualifying exam consists of at least three papers, and a possible fourth if the candidate, with the agreement of their major professor, wants to add a practice as research element to the exam. The exams take place on three separate days over one week. Any practice as research element must be made available to all members of the committee and be accompanied by a journal of process, a documentation of the practice, and a critical evaluation of the intellectual, knowledge-based and theoretical developments achieved.
- 6) In the week following the qualifying exam, you will take the oral exam. This will be scheduled by the graduate administrator in consultation with the chair of the qualifying examination committee.
- 7) The qualifying exam will take place, and will normally be two to three hours. See Advice on the Conduct of the Qualifying Examination.
- 8) Once the student has successfully passed both the written qualifying exam and the oral exam, they should request the Advancement to Candidacy form and instructions from the graduate administrator.

Composition of the Committee

The major professor must be a member of the Graduate Group in Performance Studies. There should be at least one other member of the Graduate Group on the dissertation committee, and a third member should come from outside the Graduate Group membership. In relevant cases it is possible to apply to have a third member of the committee come from within the Graduate Group.

Should the student and major professor agree to invite a non-UC Davis member onto the committee, they

must advise the graduate program administrator and apply to the Office of Graduate Studies in the approved way. Keep in mind that non-UC Davis people will all need to liaise over the dissertation and all be present at the oral examination for the qualifying and dissertation examinations. The Graduate Group cannot pay for the costs of committee members to attend the oral examination, and members who live at a distance are usually telephone or video conferenced in.

The dissertation committee is also usually part of your qualifying exam committee, and the two elements of qualifying exam and dissertation prospectus are closely linked. At least one written exam paper will usually focus on the area of the dissertation, and part of the oral exam emphasizes material from the dissertation prospectus.

Note for Designated Emphasis Candidates

You must have a designated emphasis faculty member appointed to the dissertation committee. The initial application for designated emphasis must be on file with Graduate Studies. The designated emphasis director must sign the Application for Qualifying Exam before the oral exam, and Advancement to Candidacy after the oral exam.

Please ensure that throughout the procedure you keep in close contact with your major professor. This person is ultimately responsible for advising you to proceed with the examination, and you should not take any decisions without running them by the major professor first.

Guidelines for the Completion of the Dissertation

- 1) A dissertation committee should be no smaller than three people. During the research process a student may want to add members to the committee in relevant areas. A student may normally choose, with agreement from the major professor, up to five members if necessary.
- 2) The dissertation proceeds to completion usually over 18 months. The student should discuss with the major professor how to proceed in terms of consultations and liaising with all members of the dissertation committee.
- 3) To complete the dissertation the student needs to register for 299D courses with the major professor or another member of the dissertation committee, at 12 units per quarter.
- 4) Should fieldwork be necessary to complete the dissertation, the student should discuss the needs with the major professor and approach the Graduate Group program adviser for advice on how best to arrange this.
- 5) Students may normally take Planned Educational Leave, usually for financial or family reasons, for three quarters, and in rare cases may apply to extend it. Application (with agreement from the major professor) should be made in the first instance to the graduate program adviser and then through the graduate program administrator to the Dean of Graduate Studies.
- 6) Students who wish to maintain health insurance and library and email rights at UC Davis may apply, with agreement from the major professor, for In Absentia research leave, in the first instance to the graduate program adviser and then through the graduate program administrator to the Dean of Graduate Studies.
- 7) Should there be an irreconcilable breakdown of communication between the student and the major professor, the graduate adviser in the department, where relevant, or the Graduate Group program adviser should be consulted by both student and faculty member, and a different major professor agreed upon.

- 8) The student may apply to the major professor to change or add to members of the dissertation committee. Any changes should be sent to the graduate program adviser and the graduate program administrator for implementation.
- 9) The dissertation process completes with an oral examination of the student by the dissertation committee. The student should submit the final dissertation to the committee members at least six weeks in advance of the examination. Any practice as research elements must be completed at least eight weeks in advance of the examination.
- 10) The dissertation may pass, pass with minor revisions, usually to be completed in the following month, pass with major revisions, usually to be completed in the following six months to a year, or fail.

Ways of Working with the Committee

- Some students prefer to focus their dissertation work with their major professor, and refer to the other members of the committee only at the completion of the project.
- Some students focus on work with the major professor, consulting with other members of the committee when the research and writing moves into relevant areas.
- Some students discuss individual chapters of the dissertation with individual members of the committee.
- Some students liaise with all members of the committee most of the time, fielding different perspectives and coalescing feedback throughout.

Students should make clear to the members of the committee how they want to work from the outset, and respect the often differing opinions they will encounter in the spirit of intellectual conversation. Students should also agree with the major professor, or other members of the committee, how often they want to meet, and upon a schedule for producing the final dissertation.

Guidelines for the Dissertation Prospectus

The dissertation prospectus is a kind of scholarly writing that can take various forms, marked by different disciplinary conventions, and by the fact that the document may serve multiple purposes and be read by different audiences. The prospectus is not a contract about what you will include or prove in your dissertation. It is, rather, an attempt to persuade your various readers, and perhaps yourself, that you have an intellectually significant project that you are capable of completing in approximately two years of research and writing from the date the prospectus is approved.

The most immediate readers of your prospectus will be your major professor and the other members of your dissertation committee. They will help you to formulate your topic and will also help you shape the prospectus through the draft process. Very few people create a prospectus without several drafts and considerable feedback from others, so do not expect to do the prospectus over a weekend close to the deadline. And do not be offended or discouraged if your committee members ask for revisions: that is their job.

The closest generic relative to the dissertation prospectus these days is the fellowship or grant application, a kind of writing that you may well be doing throughout your career. You need to write your prospectus as you would a grant proposal, to address not only the specialists in your area who sit on your committee, but also other faculty members, both in your department and potentially in other departments and other universities, who may read your prospectus in the course of evaluating not only the dissertation but of assessing it for fellowship aid. Some version of the prospectus may well form part of your job application process, so it is useful to think from the start about defining your project for readers who may not know your special field as well as you and your committee members presumably do.

To be a persuasive intellectual document, your prospectus will probably need to be at least 10 pages long and

may be as long as 20 to 25 pages. It should include the following, as well as anything else you decide to include for the persuasive purposes outlined above.

A Statement of Your Thesis or Hypothesis

Either in the form of proposals or of questions you plan to address in the project. This part of the prospectus usually comes first and should not be a lengthy rehearsal of your current ideas about your topic. Instead it needs to clearly state your argument, and the main problems, questions or issues you hope to address with the project.

A Discussion of How This Thesis or Set of Questions Is Situated in the Field of Critical Inquiry

This part of the prospectus should include some account of your own critical approach and of how you will be extending or revising others' work in the course of contributing something new, synthetic or analytic or both, to debates that other scholar-practitioner-teachers have been formulating during the recent past. How you define the recent past of your field of critical inquiry will depend in part on the nature of your topic, and on whether the field is a traditional, albeit evolving, or an emergent one. A rule of thumb is to do a search for articles and books related to your topic that have been published during the last fifteen years. Through such a search, perhaps along with other kinds of search tactics suitable to your topic, and through your major professor's and your committee's bibliographic aid, you should be able to educate yourself about the longer history of your topic by the time you write the final draft of your prospectus. The interdisciplinary and contemporary nature of much research in the department means that you will need to educate your potential readers about the field as well as about your planned contribution to it.

A Discussion of Your Plan of Research

What tasks are you going to need to accomplish, and in what order, to advance your thesis or explore your hypothesis? Will you need to read or look at materials that are not easily available? In particular, will you need to attend and annotate performances, or search for visual and audio material that might be difficult to come by? Do you need special collections abroad? Do you need to interview or consult people who are not at Davis, and if so, will you need special funds for travel or for electronic communications? If you are including practice as research elements that involve new work, what provision will you need to make for funding? What venues will the production use, and how will you find and negotiate them? What production organization will you need to undertake, and how will you schedule it?

A Provisional Description of How You Plan to Organize Your Argument

The usual way of doing this is to suggest a list of chapters, but other tactics are possible. Practice as research elements should be fully integrated into the argument of the thesis, and the organization should demonstrate how it works sensibly into the schedule of research.

The Presentation of Practice as Research

Many elements of the presentation of practice as research will need to be negotiated with the major professor and dissertation committee. It is vital for the resulting agreements to be fully described in your prospectus.

Reference Sources

A bibliography that includes both works you have already read or consulted and works you know you will need to read, as well as a theatre, dance and performance-ography that includes major performance influences on

your thinking as well as works with which you know you will need to become acquainted as your dissertation progresses. This background need not be exhaustive, nor exhausting, to prepare, but to be a persuasive part of your prospectus it needs to be an intelligent survey into the performances, writings and commentary relevant to your topic.

Style Guide

Use a recognized style guide for the format of your notes, bibliography and theatre or dance-ography, such as the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. For preparation of the written dissertation itself, see Instructions for Preparing and Submitting Theses and Dissertations for Higher Degrees, on the web under UC Davis Graduate Studies, Current Students.