

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION PROPOSAL AND ITS DEFENSE

September 2016

One of the main components of the Research Methods course is to help doctoral students formulate a Statement of Interest. This document, which outlines the research problem and proposed research design, acts as an initial draft of the Dissertation Proposal. This document will be substantially revised and expanded by the student following the completion of the Comprehensive Examination process. Unlike the comps, crafting a Doctoral Dissertation Proposal is done under the close guidance of the student's supervisor who will normally read, comment upon, and edit several drafts of the document before it is submitted to the supervisory committee members.

Doctoral Dissertation Proposal

The proposal is a relatively short document (between 3,000 and 4,500 words; plus references, tables, figures, and appendices, as appropriate) that normally includes a statement of the research problem (*what* you plan to do), information on the methodology (*how* you intend to do it), and a clear indication of *why* this issue is anthropologically significant. The proposal also usually involves a discussion of existing literature as a way of explaining the contribution the research will make. A short statement about research ethics should also be included, if relevant. We encourage students to include a timeline to help readers assess the feasibility of the research project.

Proposal Defense

Once the proposal is ready, it is circulated to the student's supervisory committee (supervisor, advisors) and to other people with relevant expertise, as appropriate. The student is then convened to a Proposal Defense. The defense is meant to provide students with an opportunity to explain the aims, methods, and prospective contributions of their research and to receive constructive feedback from a range of perspectives before they set out to do field or lab work.

The Doctoral Dissertation Defense is a formal procedure chaired by the Graduate Chair or designate. Following the procedures used in oral thesis defenses, prior to the defense the examiners will decide on the order of questioning, the number of rounds of questions and the time to be allotted per examiner per round for the questions and student responses. Unlike a thesis defense, however, the student's supervisor can ask questions and participates in the discussions.

The defense begins with some brief comments by the student and then proceeds to the formal rounds of questions. Following the defense, the student will be asked to leave the room so that the members of the supervisory committee can deliberate. The results of this deliberation, either pass or fail, will be recorded by the Chair or delegate on the Doctoral Dissertation Proposal Form.

Following the defense, students are required to make any necessary revisions and submit a clean copy of their Doctoral Dissertation Proposal to the Graduate Program Office, to be placed in their file.

Students who are undertaking research involving living human subjects must also obtain approval from the Non-Medical Research Ethics Board before beginning their research. A copy of the approval, or an expectation of when the approval will be granted, must be included with the proposal.