

## **DEVELOPING A DISSERTATION PROPOSAL**

The department expects that students will file their proposals within a calendar year following the completion of their oral exams. Copies of previously submitted dissertation proposals are available in the Sociology Program Office for perusal. Students may consult these documents to obtain a better understanding of the desired format and content of proposals. These copies are maintained for reference purposes only and may not be photocopied without the author's permission or removed from the office.

Because each proposal is to some degree unique, it is up to the candidate and the dissertation committee to shape the proposal to a point that it is finally acceptable to all members of the dissertation committee. The committee chair has the task of negotiating differences among the committee members, including the student, about what the dissertation should cover and how the work should be described in the dissertation proposal. There are, however, certain areas that all proposals should cover.

We generally expect a succinct statement at the beginning of the proposal that states the thesis problem, major proposition, theme(s), and the research question(s) that organize the proposed research. This introduction should also briefly situate the proposed research in the sociological literature, and it should briefly discuss the kind of data or evidence that will be used to develop and substantiate the thesis. A second section of the proposal develops in more detail the theoretical framework of the thesis, with further reference to relevant literature in sociology and concern for the problems of substantiating the claims advanced in the opening section of the proposal. The third section of most proposals focuses directly on research methods and attempts to answer questions of evidence and analysis that were raised in the previous section on theory and background. A concluding section of the proposal returns to the question of how the proposed thesis will make a contribution to sociology, as well as other contributions to knowledge it may afford. Normally, proposals include a tentative table of contents for the dissertation and a formal bibliography reflecting major contributions to and the current state of discussion of the dissertation's subject matter in the sociological literature.

The proposal should be a concise statement of approximately **5,000 words**, addressing the following questions:

- 1) The heart of a successful doctoral dissertation is its contribution to thinking about broad sociological problems. What theoretical controversies or issues does your dissertation address? How will your project advance sociological thinking about the subject it discusses?
- 2) What is the empirical reference point of your proposed investigation? What is the "empirical puzzle"? What is substantively problematic?
- 3) What kind of evidence will you use, how will it be generated or gathered, and by what methods will you analyze it?

## **DISSERTATION PROPOSAL REVIEW**

The student submits a dissertation proposal to his/her dissertation committee chair and other

committee members. After the student has incorporated suggestions for revision from the chair and other committee members, the whole committee must meet with the student to discuss the proposal and approve it. Such approval is indicated by the signatures of the chair and other committee members on the "Proposal Cover Sheet" (look under 'forms'), which also lists the title of the proposed dissertation, the names of the dissertation committee members, and the date the committee met with the student.

Once the dissertation proposal has been approved by the dissertation committee the student should submit 3 copies of the proposal (with a copy of the signed cover sheet attached to each copy) to the Program Assistant. An electronic version of the proposal should also be submitted to the Program Assistant at the same time. The proposal is distributed to FMC members in preparation for discussion at the next available meeting of the FMC. The FMC discusses a maximum of 4 proposals at any one meeting, so make sure to check in advance to ensure that the calendar will permit discussion of your proposal at the next FMC meeting.

FMC members prepare written comments on the proposal. The comments are distributed to the student and the dissertation chair at least three days before the scheduled FMC meeting. The student and the chair should be present in the meeting, or in unusual circumstances be available for a Skype or conference call. The discussion will ordinarily be postponed if the dissertation committee chair cannot attend, but may go forward if another committee member sits in for the chair.

At the beginning of the discussion of his or her proposal, the student responds for five minutes to the written comments from the members of the FMC. A discussion with the committee follows, during which the student is expected to respond to the criticisms advanced by FMC members. Following the discussion, FMC members vote to approve or disapprove of the proposal. Results of the vote shall be noted in the minutes of the meeting.

If a majority of the voting FMC members vote not to approve of the proposal, the student is advised of the reason for disapproval, and the decision shall be communicated to the Executive Officer of the PhD Program in Sociology. In such cases, the Executive Officer will consult with the dissertation committee in order to work out an agreement that will allow the student to move forward with the proposed research in a timely manner.