

## **The Dissertation Process**

### Choosing a topic and an advisor

While students are encouraged to think about possible dissertation topics early in their graduate careers, the dissertation process starts only after a student has completed all other requirements for the PhD degree and formally advances to candidacy. At this point students should begin to talk with faculty members and the Executive Officer about the advisability of writing on a variety of topics and about choosing an Advisor. Any Graduate Faculty member may advise a student writing a dissertation.

### The committee

A dissertation committee consists of three Graduate Center faculty members, one of whom is the Advisor. All of the GC members need not be from the Classics Program, though generally they are. A fourth member or even a fifth can be added from outside CUNY at the discretion of the student and the Advisor. The Advisor will help the student populate the committee with other members. When the committee is fully formed and a working title for the dissertation has been agreed on, the Advisor should inform the EO who will in turn inform the Registrar. Titles can be changed later as the research goes forward.

### The proposal

With the committee now in place, the student should begin reading in the chosen area in order to prepare a formal, written proposal. The proposal, usually about 20-30 double-spaced pages with bibliography, should have the following elements:

1. Description of the project or prospectus. What issues will be addressed or questions answered? If the study were complete, this would be the abstract.
2. History of the question. An efficient review of the literature. Where does this project fit in? What is innovative about it?
3. Methodology. How will the inquiry be conducted? Include discussion of materials to be consulted, the methods of treating the relevant materials, and the order in which the research will proceed.
4. Outline of chapters. Include both chapter titles and contents as they are currently envisioned.
5. Bibliography

## The proposal defense

When the student and Advisor are satisfied with the proposal, it is circulated to the rest of the committee and a date is set for a formal review. During this meeting the student will defend the proposal and demonstrate knowledge of the area in which the research will take place. Committee members will ask questions, but in practice, most of the time is spent in making recommendations to the student about how to proceed with the research. The committee members will then agree that the project should go forward, or alternatively, may ask for a revised proposal.

## Research and writing

When the proposal has been approved by the committee, the student fills out a form required by the Graduate Center certifying that the research does not involve living, human subjects, and then may proceed with their research under the guidance of the Advisor. The student will show the Advisor drafts of the chapters, as they are completed, and on the Advisor's judgment, the drafts will be shared with other committee members

## The defense

When the student, the Advisor and the rest of the committee all agree that the dissertation is ready, a date is set for the formal defense, and communicated to the Office of the Provost. Visitors may be admitted to the defense at the discretion of the student, and if it clear in advance that there will be a number of visitors the Assistant Program Officer should be advised so that a suitability sized room can be reserved. Committee members who cannot attend in person can participate via electronic media. Committee members must receive copies of the entire dissertation at least four weeks before the defense to allow time to evaluate it.

The defense begins with the student's summarizing the contents and findings of the dissertation, and then each member of the committee has a set time for asking questions. At the conclusion, the student steps out of the room and the committee chooses one of four possible outcomes: accept as is, accept with minor changes (to be vetted only by the advisor), accept with major changes (to be vetted by the whole committee), reject. In practice the first possibility is rare, and the last is highly unlikely because an unacceptable dissertation should not be allowed to proceed to a defense. At the conclusion, members of the committee will sign a form stipulating the outcome, which will be forwarded to the office of the Provost.

## Depositing the dissertation

The student is responsible for making certain that the format of the dissertation conforms to the Graduate Center's requirements and that it is correctly deposited. As work on the dissertation goes forward, students should consult with the Dissertation Librarian at the Mina Rees Library about formatting and deposit procedures. The cover page must have signatures of the Executive Officer and the Advisor. If one or both of them are unavailable to sign in person, signed copies may be scanned and returned by email or faxed to the Program office.

## Deadlines

There are deadlines publicized in the official academic calendar for depositing dissertations for degrees granted in October, February and May. A student must be registered in order to deposit a dissertation and receive a degree.