

# DISSERTATION

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## GRADUATE COLLEGE FIVE-YEAR RULE

By regulation of the Graduate College, a student has five years following successful completion of the Comprehensive Examination in which to finish all substantive requirements for the Ph.D..

## REGISTRATION AFTER THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

After a student has passed the Comprehensive Exam and is engaged in the preparation of the prospectus or doctoral thesis, he or she must enroll every fall and spring in the independent study course ENGL:7999 (for one or two semester hours) under the guidance of his or her dissertation director. Continuous enrollment in this course will bring the student to 72 s.h., which the Graduate College requires of all Ph.D. students at the time of graduation. If the dissertation defense examination is completed during the summer semester, the student must register for summer s.h.

For financial aid, with the GPC's assistance the student must submit a "short hours" webform to the Registrar's Office to be considered fulltime. Please contact the GPC for more information.

### A. The Dissertation Committee

This five-member committee consists of a dissertation director and three other full or jointly-appointed English Department faculty members. The fifth member may be either from the English Department or from another department within the University of Iowa. The Graduate College must approve any requests for a member from another institution or for an additional committee member. These committee members should play an active role in the formation of the dissertation. The nature of responsibilities for reading and responding to chapters will be decided at the meeting to approve the prospectus.

### B. The Topic

In most cases, the Article prepared for the Comprehensive Examination Portfolio provides a point of departure for the dissertation, but the questioning that produces a successful dissertation begins early in your course work. A dissertation topic may emerge from the materials of a specific course or from a conjunction of texts, themes, and theories encountered in several courses; often it receives its first formulation in a seminar paper. Because topics are constituted through the critical discourse that surrounds them, all topics are tied to a scholarly community. The aim of the dissertation is to enter this community in a way that is fresh, individual, and productive.

### C. The Prospectus

After passing the comprehensive examination, you must present a dissertation prospectus to a committee composed of the dissertation director and at least three secondary readers from the dissertation committee. **The prospectus meeting is approximately one hour long. It should occur no later than the semester following the Comprehensive Examination. You must turn in a copy of the prospectus to each member of the dissertation committee at least one week prior to the prospectus meeting.** At the meeting, you will discuss your project with your committee and they will determine

whether the prospectus is acceptable. If the prospectus is not approved at the prospectus meeting, a second meeting must be held by the end of the following semester. Although the prospectus should be precise enough to give your committee a clear sense of your proposed topic, argument, and aims, it is a working proposal, not a legal contract. Your prospectus should follow these two general guidelines:

a. **A prospectus** is a typed, double-spaced document approximately 10 pages in length (not including the bibliography). In addition to stating the main thesis, it should provide the most pertinent critical context for the argument and some idea of how the thesis will be developed chapter by chapter. In the end, the prospectus should be useful not only for launching research and writing the dissertation but also as an abstract to submit for possible internal or external fellowship support.

b. **A working bibliography** of primary and secondary sources should accompany the prospectus.

A copy of the prospectus and signature form must be signed by the dissertation director and committee members and submitted for approval to the DGS.

#### D. The Dissertation

Writing a book-length dissertation is the most sustained and demanding intellectual labor confronting a graduate student. Although research and writing are part of doctoral training from the start, the dissertation is the evidence on which academic employers will judge a candidate's potential as a publishing scholar. A student who has completed a dissertation has a claim to be not just an author but an "authority": someone who has addressed a significant topic with learning and thoroughness, someone whose arguments have weight and consequence, someone who has made a contribution to ongoing scholarly discourse. A successful dissertation combines a project worth doing, the preparation necessary to do it well, and the hard work and insight that can lead to a fresh and urgent argument.

Many students find writing a dissertation to be the hardest and most rewarding experience of their time in the program. Students are strongly advised to take advantage of the formal and informal resources available at the University of Iowa for doctoral candidates working on their dissertations. These include the Writing Center's Write-In and Write ON programs and its summer writing camps. Many students also find it helpful to form writing groups to share chapters-in-progress with their colleagues. Students are strongly encouraged to set a schedule for completing their dissertations with their directors. It is especially helpful to set and keep deadlines for completing and revising chapters. Above all, students should stay in regular contact with their directors to discuss their progress. **This is especially important for students who choose to leave Iowa City while writing their dissertations.**

Because the forms that a successful dissertation can assume are various and because a new topic may call for an unprecedented form, no canonical description of a dissertation is possible. Specific questions of form and content must be decided in consultation with the dissertation director and committee. However, regardless of the form of your argument, it is strongly recommended that your dissertation not exceed four chapters or 250 pages, and that you choose a topic that is attuned to the opportunities and constraints of the current academic marketplace.

Successful completion of a dissertation requires careful planning and active consultation with the director and committee members. Because very few manuscripts reach

publication without alteration from the criticism of colleagues and peers, suggestions from readers connected with a press, and the intervention of one or more editors, you might consider your dissertation committee to be your first—and most streamlined—band of editorial advisers.

While the form and content of acceptable dissertations cannot be effectively defined here, the duties and responsibilities of all persons concerned can be made clear. The director has major responsibility for the supervision of the planning and writing and for detailed commentary on the chapters in progress. The obligation to provide commentary also extends to the other readers, whose role as critics and advisers should be active. They and the director are responsible for returning drafts of individual chapters no later than one month after receiving them. You, in turn, are responsible for observing all required procedures and deadlines that relate to the dissertation and its defense. In particular, you must be certain that all members of the committee possess a full draft of the dissertation no later than **three weeks prior to the defense**. Any committee member may refuse to read the dissertation if this deadline is not met, and the defense will have to be rescheduled.

## DEFENSE OF THE DISSERTATION

- Doctoral candidates, having completed the dissertation, must pass a final oral examination called the “Thesis Defense,” “Defense of the Dissertation,” or “Final Examination.” This examination will be conducted by the dissertation director and the dissertation committee, with questions from the public as they are recognized by the dissertation director, who chairs the examination. There are two aspects of the defense of the dissertation that require clarification: the procedures that govern the defense and the nature of the examination itself.

- The procedures covering the defense are complex, partly because of official deadlines and partly because the Graduate College must approve the dissertation before its final defense can occur. It is your responsibility to assure that all deadlines and requirements are satisfied. The following timetable should be observed:

- 1.) The defense must occur no later than five years following successful completion of the Comprehensive Examination. In unusual circumstances, an extension may be granted by the Graduate College.

- 2.) Typographical conventions must follow the Graduate College Thesis Manual, available from the Graduate College (<https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/academics/thesis-and-dissertation/preparing-formatting>). You should choose a citation style customarily used in the humanities (i.e., MLA, Chicago, or Turabian), and you should maintain that style throughout the dissertation. Whichever citation style you pick, be careful to follow the most recent guidelines. For example, MLA citations should conform to the eighth edition of the MLA Handbook.

- 3.) You must file an application for receiving the degree before the deadline specified each semester by the Graduate College. Failure to meet this deadline means that awarding of the Ph.D. will be postponed for a semester. It would be in your best interest to apply for your degree in the semester you are planning to graduate and, if need be, cancel the application rather than apply after the deadline. Please see the GPC for further details.

- 4.) Following consultation with all five members of your committee, the next step is

to make a formal request through the GPC for a specific examination date. If a member of the examination committee is on leave, a substitute examiner must be requested at this time through the DGS. The request of an examination date must be made with the GPC no later than six weeks prior to the defense. If a committee member is via video connection, it's very important that this information is passed on to the GPC to make sure that adequate technology is available and ready to make sure that the meeting flows smoothly.

5.) **No later than three weeks prior to the defense**, every faculty member on the committee must be given a paper or electronic copy (check with committee members for preference) of the full dissertation. The completed draft of the dissertation distributed to the committee at this time need not be final, but it should be very close. **Major rewriting in the three weeks before the defense is unacceptable.**

6.) On the date assigned, the defense of the dissertation takes place. At the conclusion of the defense, each committee member evaluates the student as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Two or more unsatisfactory votes will make the committee report unsatisfactory. In case of an unsatisfactory report, the candidate may be reexamined only once at the option of the department and not before the next semester. At the time of defense, members also sign the Report of Final Examination: Advanced Degree and Report of Thesis Approval (<https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/academics/thesis-and-dissertation/submitting-fees-copies>). Before the single deposit is submitted, it is highly recommended that students discuss with their advisers whether or not to embargo their dissertations. Information on open access and embargo is available at this website: <https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/academics/thesis-and-dissertation/publication>.

7.) Following a successful defense of the dissertation, the student must electronically submit their "single deposit" according to the Graduate College Guidelines (<https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/deadlines>). Please follow the "Theses and Dissertation" electronic format guide (<https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/academics/thesis-and-dissertation/preparing-formatting>). The only textual changes permitted after the "single deposit" are those required by the Graduate College or by the examining committee. At that time, the student must also submit the abstract page, title page, and signed Report of Thesis Approval from his or her defense.

8.) It is advised that graduate students request the offered 2-year embargo on the ProQuest digital publication of their dissertation required for graduation by the Graduate College and Library. Once the 2-year embargo lapses, graduate students are advised that ProQuest offers continuations of the embargo. ProQuest can be reached via email, [disspub@proquest.com](mailto:disspub@proquest.com). If a PhD has a publication agreement in-hand at any point during the initial 2-year embargo, they may contact the Graduate College directly to request an extension of the embargo.

- The nature of the defense will vary with the composition of the examining committee and the nature of the dissertation. To some degree, the members of the dissertation committee serve a different function as examiners than they did as advisers. They confront in the finished dissertation not individual pieces of a work-in-progress, which is usually what they see as advisers, but a complete work implicitly asking for recognition from a larger

world of scholars, publishers, and readers. In approving the dissertation, the committee certifies that the student's completed act of literary interpretation, criticism, and/or scholarship is worthy to be made public not only inside but also outside the University of Iowa.