



Stage Three: Dissertation Proposal and Defense

Following the first round of Tutorial and Language/Methods coursework, students will be expected to complete their Comprehensive Exams (3 credits) and to defend a Dissertation Proposal (3 credits).

*Students are considered to be enrolled full-time with a credit load of 3 credits per term in Stage Three when enrolled for their Comprehensive Exams and, then, in the subsequent semester, the Dissertation Proposal Defense.

Length of Dissertation

Normally, the length of the Dissertation should be between 225 and 275 pages, not including a bibliography. The Dissertation will be prepared in accord with *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Supervision

The advisor will serve as the primary point of contact for the student. If another faculty member or external faculty will be assisting in the dissertation research, this should be done in consultation with the advisor. Normally, all faculty engaged in the dissertation research will remain throughout the writing and approval process and defense of the Dissertation. If a member of the supervisory committee is “on leave,” “on sabbatical leave,” or leaves the Faculty of the school, the need for replacement should be discussed by the advisor with the PhD Committee. If the advisor leaves, the PhD Committee will recommend a new advisor to the Dean.

Steps in the Dissertation Proposal Process

A. Selection of Subject

The student is expected to take the initiative in selecting the subject area for the Dissertation and should seek counsel from the advisor in making the choice.

The subject is delineated with consideration given to the following questions:

1. Is the subject significant? Does it contribute to the scholarly investigation of a topic that warrants serious attention in the academic realm? Will it make an original contribution to the field of scholarship in the area? Does it deal with the material in a way that takes account of scholarly research that others have engaged in?
2. Is the scope of the subject sufficiently limited to allow adequate in-depth treatment and to engage seriously with other scholars' research into the subject within the allotted time?



3. Is sufficient account taken of resources in languages other than English?
4. Is the study within the reasonable ability of the student or the timeframe of the program?

B. Selection of Methodology

The student should choose a methodology that will best fit the proposed argument or hypothesis in consultation with the Advisor.

C. The Proposal

Once the student and advisor have agreed concerning the subject and provisional title, the student prepares a dissertation proposal according to the guidelines below. Consultation with the advisor in this stage is crucial. It will be helpful to consult the criteria for evaluation of the Dissertation.

1. Guidelines of the proposal.

- a. State the title. Keep the title short and descriptive of the Dissertation. Include key words that you want readers to bring up on the computer in a topical search.
- b. Describe the rationale of the Dissertation. This involves setting forth the origin and background of the study, its implications, the reason for interest in it, and the need for it.
- c. Give a general statement of the Dissertation. Provide a clear statement of the Dissertation in the context of current scholarship in your area of specialization and describe the contribution this Dissertation is expected to make to theological scholarship more broadly. Define the area and scope of the study, and indicate the basic proposition, situation, question, or issue that the Dissertation will examine or address. State clearly the desired goal or outcome of the Dissertation: what are you trying to do? It is from this general statement that the specific formulation of the Dissertation will be derived.
- d. Indicate in a preliminary way the theoretical issues/foundations that will be developed in the Dissertation.
- e. Indicate previous studies relating to the Dissertation (aka “literature review”). Present a description of earlier studies that have bearing on the proposed investigation. This section should be based on the previous literature review you developed in stage one, although it will be expanded and updated.

You will want to take account of previous studies and show where your research fills gaps or responds to new questions or issues.



- f. The formulation and limitation of the Dissertation. This involves a precise statement of what you propose to do. In some instances, it will be helpful to clarify your intentions by adding to the positive statement an explanation of matters that lie beyond the limits of the study.
- g. State the procedures of investigation/research methods. Describe fully the procedure(s) to be followed in doing the research or in the development of the major argument of the Dissertation. This should include a clear explanation of the steps you expect to follow in carrying out the investigation. This is not a preview of conclusions, but a statement of the processes to be used in the various phases of the Dissertation.
- h. Include a tentative outline of the document. The outline should show at least the larger sections, such as chapters and major subdivisions. It should indicate how you intend to articulate the work and should reflect careful preliminary investigation and planning. Include a short description of each chapter and major subdivision.
- i. Working Bibliography. Identify sources and prepare a preliminary bibliography of major works already consulted in preliminary research. Indicate how source materials are to be handled.

Expect to revise the draft proposal several times under the guidance of your advisor/ committee before it is developed into the final form. The time spent is worthwhile because the proposal will be used as the yardstick by which you develop the Dissertation and by which the committee and faculty will eventually evaluate the final product.

2. Submitting the proposal

Your proposal must be submitted and accepted by the dissertation committee prior to moving on to Stage Four. Continue to submit drafts of the proposal until the advisor agrees that the proposal is ready for review by the supervisory committee.

At the defense meeting, the student will explain and defend the proposal. Following the PhD Assessment review form, the committee will decide whether to accept the proposal and may make recommendations on the development of the Dissertation. Following the meeting, the (revised) final proposal along with the committee assessment form should be submitted to your advisor and a copy sent to the registrar.

Students cannot proceed on to Stage Four of the program until they have passed their Comprehensive Exams and Dissertation Proposal.