

## Dissertation Proposal Protocols

### What is the Dissertation Proposal?

All doctoral students of OU SLIS are required to prepare and successfully defend the dissertation proposal. The dissertation represents a piece of original research that contributes to the knowledge base of the field. The proposal establishes the foundation on which the student will undertake dissertation research.

The student's advisor is their primary guide for putting together a solid proposal. While other members of the Advisory Conference Committee may provide advice in their areas of expertise, it is expected that the student will work most closely with their advisor to make sure the proposal is ready for committee review. However, doctoral students are advised to also work with their committee on drafts of the document, allowing sufficient time for reading and revising prior to the formal defense.

The dissertation proposal forms a blueprint for the dissertation itself and serves as an agreement between the Advisory Conference Committee and the student about the research that needs to be done for the dissertation. It has a typical length of 20-40 pages. The proposal should detail the research methods and techniques to be used in conducting the dissertation topic. It also should address the relevance of the dissertation topic to the field of information science, describe the conceptual and research content in which the proposed study is located, specify the originality or uniqueness of the proposal, and review the research and other literature relevant to the topic.

The proposal should include research goals and objectives; a literature review; methodology to be used; timelines for the work; potential limitations; and any other elements deemed appropriate by the Advisory Conference Committee.

The dissertation proposal should be considered a draft of the first three chapters of your dissertation, with the following:

#### Cover Page

**Chapter 1: An Introduction** that is a clear introductory statement of the problem to be researched. The dissertation must represent an original contribution to the field, which must be made clear in this section. The introduction should include an overview of the problem; the significance of the research problem; identification of a gap in existing research; and the rationale for the current study, including research goals and objectives. This section should also include research questions to be addressed or hypotheses to be tested.

**Chapter 2: Literature Review:** This section contains a review of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature in the specific areas of the dissertation. Contrasting existing work with the proposed work, the literature review should show why and how there is a gap in the research.

**Chapter 3: Methodology:** This section describes the research methods that will be used for the dissertation, including reasons for using the methodology and citations to appropriate sources; and the research plan, including data collection and protocols, types of data to be collected, if doing human subjects research, how many people will participate and how the student arrived at that decision; data analysis methods; and approximate timelines. It is important to be realistic about the data collection plan. As well, this section should include potential challenges and contingency plans if the research plan does not work.

## **Defending the Proposal**

The defense is an oral examination presented to the student's Advisory Conference Committee.

While the proposal is being written, the student and the student's advisor should consider the best time for the student to defend. As the timing is not prescribed by the OU Graduate College, it will be up to the student and the advisor to determine what is most appropriate.

Once the proposal is written, the student will send it to the Advisory Conference Committee no less than one month before the student would like to defend.

When the Advisory Conference Committee determines that the proposal is ready for defense, the student will schedule the defense, which includes arranging for the date and location. Other faculty members and students are encouraged to attend the proposal defense meeting.

During the proposal defense, the student will provide a brief presentation of up to 40 minutes to outline their proposed research. After the presentation, the Advisory Conference Committee will ask questions and provide feedback. As well, the Advisory Conference Committee, in conjunction with the student, will decide in advance if the general audience will be permitted to ask questions and/or make comments after the Committee's questions and feedback. After all questions have been asked and suggestions made, the student and general audience will be asked to leave the room while the committee deliberates. The process will take no more than three hours.

## **After the Defense**

The Advisory Conference Committee will discuss the relevance and efficacy of the arguments and methods stated. The Committee may approve the proposal for continuation or recommend revisions to be completed prior to approval. The student may be required to significantly revise the proposal and even hold a second proposal meeting before proceeding with the research.

When the Advisory Conference Committee has accepted the proposal, the student is then expected to complete their study according to the proposal as written and approved. Any changes to the goals, objectives, methods, plan, or other major element of the dissertation work must be approved by the Advisor in consultation with the other members of the committee.

## **Timeline**

It is expected that the dissertation proposal defense will occur within one academic year of successful completion of the student's General Exam. However, that timeline is flexible as long as the student is making progress as determined by their Advisor. If an extension is needed, it is incumbent upon the student to clearly explain why the proposal is delayed.

## **Continuous Enrollment**

From the Graduate College (<https://www.ou.edu/gradcollege/forms/bulletin/doctoral-info#8.2.4.1>):

### **8.6.1 Enrollment Requirements for Dissertation Research**

- A student who is working on the dissertation during a regular semester or summer session must enroll in at least two hours of 6980, regardless of the total number of hours in which the student is enrolled.
- The number of credit hours for each enrollment in 6980 will be determined by the student's committee chair on the basis of the amount of faculty and university services required by the student during that enrollment.
- Students are required to enroll in 6980 during the summer session if any of the following apply:
  - The student is actively working on the dissertation during summer.
  - The student is seeking committee advice on the dissertation during summer.
  - The student is otherwise using university facilities during summer, and has previously enrolled in 6980.
  - The degree will be conferred in the summer session.
- After the first enrollment in 6980, the student must maintain continuous enrollment in at least two hours of 6980 during each fall and spring semester until all degree requirements are completed.
  - The continuous enrollment requirement will be waived only for a student who is not working on the dissertation *and* who is enrolled in at least nine graduate credit hours during a regular semester.
  - If a student has not maintained continuous enrollment in doctoral dissertation hours, the student must retroactively enroll in the number of hours of 6980 for each semester that would have been completed with continuous enrollment.
  - The student must pay a late enrollment fee for each semester that would have been completed with continuous enrollment. Retroactive fees and tuition are assessed at the current semester rates. The collection of the appropriate fees is the responsibility of the Office of the Registrar and Bursar Services.

*Approved by Faculty 12-6-2021*