

The Dissertation Proposal: Practical Theology

A dissertation proposal should be a statement of approximately 20 double-spaced typed pages (plus bibliography and appendices) that includes:

- A concise formulation of the problem to be examined in light of previous research.
- A statement of the hypothesis being investigated or the thesis being argued.
- A summary of the argument and/or structure of the dissertation.
- A description of the hermeneutical and empirical methods to be employed in the dissertation; students using empirical methods with human subjects must provide in the proposal all information required by the Institutional Review Board and evidence of its approval.
- A literature review pertinent to the topic of the dissertation.
- A discussion of the resources that will be employed in the dissertation.
- A statement of the scope and limitations of the dissertation.
- A brief discussion of the importance of the dissertation as an original contribution to knowledge of both theory and practice. By submitting a dissertation proposal, students attest that they have made a thorough investigation that has convinced them that the proposed research has not been previously carried out in the manner being proposed.
- A chapter by chapter outline of what the dissertation will include.
- The proposal must be written in a style appropriate for the discipline and agreed upon by the student and the Dissertation Committee. The student must follow current guidelines for the chosen style, for example: Chicago, SBL, or APA. The student should consult a Thesis Secretary regarding an appropriate manual.

Preparation and Approval of the Dissertation Proposal

The process of preparation and approval of the dissertation proposal is as follows:

- The student submits a preliminary draft of the dissertation proposal at the oral qualifying examination.
- After the qualifying examinations are successfully completed, the student develops the dissertation proposal in consultation with the chairperson and other members of the Dissertation Committee.
- Students proposing research with human subjects must apply to and gain the approval of the Institutional Review Board prior to submission of the proposal to the Dean.
- The Dissertation Committee certifies that the proposal is finalized by signing Ph.D. Form #6. The student meets with the Thesis Secretary to discuss form and documentation requirements; the Thesis Secretary signs Ph.D. Form #8 to certify that a consultation was held.

The Dissertation Proposal: Religion

A dissertation proposal should include:

- A concise formulation of the problem to be examined in light of previous research.
- A tentative statement of the thesis and summary of the argument of the dissertation.
- An indication of the methods to be employed.
- A discussion of the resources which will be employed in the dissertation.
- A statement of the scope and limitations of the dissertation.
- A brief discussion of the importance of the dissertation as an original contribution to the knowledge of the field, whether theoretical or practical. By submitting a dissertation proposal, the student attests that she or he has made a thorough investigation that has convinced her or him that the thesis has not been previously argued in the manner being proposed.
- A chapter by chapter outline of what the dissertation will include.
- The proposal must be written in a style appropriate for the discipline and agreed upon by the student and the Dissertation Committee. The student must follow current guidelines for the chosen style, for example: Chicago, SBL, or APA. The student should consult a Thesis Secretary regarding an appropriate manual.
- The Dissertation Committee evaluates the proposal to ensure that the student follows the appropriate form in elaborating a thesis and that the methodology is clear and appropriate to the purpose of the dissertation. The Dissertation Committee determines the acceptability of the proposal.

Preparation and Approval of the Dissertation Proposal

The process of preparation and approval of the dissertation proposal is as follows:

- After the qualifying examinations are successfully completed, the student finalizes the dissertation proposal in consultation with the Dissertation Committee; the Dissertation Committee may meet as a whole with the student to evaluate the proposal for final approval.
- The Dissertation Committee certifies that the proposal is complete by signing Ph.D. Form #6. The student meets with the Thesis Secretary to discuss form and documentation requirements.

NOTE: Page length and due dates for submission of the draft of the dissertation proposal vary from concentration to concentration so please note those specifics below.

Hebrew Bible

A draft of the dissertation proposal, approximately seven pages in length, should be submitted to the faculty members of the Qualifying Exam Committee at the Oral Defense of the Qualifying Exams. The dissertation proposal will be discussed during the oral defense with recommendations made by the committee members. The final version of the Dissertation Proposal must be submitted to the committee members one week following the oral and Form #6 must be completed and returned to the Registrar by the same date.

New Testament

A draft of the dissertation proposal, approximately seven pages in length, should be submitted to the faculty members of the Qualifying Exam Committee at the Oral Defense of the Qualifying Exams. The dissertation proposal will be discussed during the oral defense with recommendations made by the committee members. The final version of the Dissertation Proposal must be submitted to the committee members one week following the oral and Form #6 must be completed and returned to the Registrar by the same date.

Process Studies

The fifth qualifying exam is a final draft of the dissertation proposal, which should be submitted no later than the date of the last written exam. Each student meets with his or her dissertation advisor and the dissertation committee members to develop a full dissertation proposal. The dissertation proposal is a 20-page paper (not including bibliography) that serves as a blueprint for writing the dissertation. The proposal includes the general topic area, the problem or problems to be addressed by the dissertation, a statement of the core thesis and central arguments of the dissertation, the research methodology to be used, and a chapter-by-chapter proposal of what the dissertation will include. A substantial bibliography written in compliance with the Chicago Manual of Style should accompany the proposal; it is not counted in the page length requirement of the proposal. The proposal assesses student competence in identifying cognate ideas, connections and tensions in historical and contemporary theologies, philosophies, cultures and ecologies, and utilizing the elements of process studies in conducting new research on culture, ecology and/or religion. The dissertation proposal also serves as a tool for assessing student acquisition of information literacy in Process Studies. Students are expected to consult with the advisor and committee prior to the time of submission. When the advisor and committee members perceive that major issues have been clarified or resolved in the dissertation proposal, approval is granted for the student to submit the dissertation proposal. The dissertation proposal is submitted no later than the date of the last written qualifying exam. The last hour of the qualifying exam oral defense is dedicated to the oral defense of the dissertation proposal. Each member of the student's dissertation committee independently reviews the student's dissertation proposal according to a particular rubric (provided to the student by the faculty advisor). Students must receive a "pass" or "excellent pass" before proceeding to dissertation stage.

Religion, Ethics and Society

Before determining the topics for qualifying exams, students set up a meeting with their dissertation committee to discuss the qualifying exam areas and topics as well as the dissertation topic. At least one week before this meeting, the student should provide the members of the committee with a dissertation prospectus (approximately 7 pages in length). The student should then come to the meeting prepared to discuss it with the committee, who will offer advice on the project with an eye to formulating the dissertation proposal and preparing for the exam on this topic. After the completion of the qualifying exams and successfully defending the exams in the Qualifying Exam Oral Defense, the student has one month to submit the final dissertation proposal (approximately 25 pages in length). Once the Dissertation Committee members have approved the dissertation proposal, the student submits the completed Form #6 to the Registrar.