

The Dissertation Prospectus Workshop

Once students complete the Portfolio examination, they should begin work on a dissertation prospectus. This document of approximately 15-20 pages should outline the topic, approach, and implications of the dissertation project. Once completed, the dissertation prospectus will be submitted to the student's committee, usually the same group that participated in the portfolio process, as the basis for the Dissertation Prospectus Workshop. During this 2-hour workshop, the dissertation committee will respond to the prospectus in order to help the student complement and refine the project. The committee can request the prospectus be revised and resubmitted on the basis of the workshop discussion if deemed necessary. The dissertation prospectus must be approved by the committee before full-time research and writing on the dissertation can begin.

The Prospectus should address:

1. **Specific Issues to be explored:** Outline the issues to be explored and state their significance. Specify the relationship of the proposed dissertation to other research in the field, and identify the gaps that the proposed thesis is intended to fill. Briefly describe the most significant previous work related to the dissertation's central issues.
2. **Approach, Methods, Techniques:** Describe the special aims of the thesis, and the theoretical perspectives that will help to shape the research. Identify questions that remain to be answered more broadly in the field, and articulate the specific questions you will ask and answer. State why the proposed methodology is most appropriate for this research project.
3. **Core materials:** Briefly outline the central materials (texts, images, music, manuscripts, etc.) that will form the core of the investigation. Set out the general organizing principle by which they will be discussed (sections or chapters of the dissertation).
4. **Limitations/Pitfalls:** Indicate the potential limitations and pitfalls to the approaches and methods proposed, as well as the challenges presented by the issues you propose to investigate.
5. **Thesis timetable; travel (if needed):** Indicate how your time will be organized to complete the different stages of your thesis research and writing. If your thesis requires you to conduct research outside of Duke University, provide details, justification, and plan for carrying out that travel. Indicate whether you have competence in the languages needed to examine the primary and secondary materials that will be studied in the project.
6. **Bibliography:** This bibliography should be specific to the dissertation, not simply drawn from the bibliographies submitted with the Portfolio. It should demonstrate familiarity with the recent publications in the field, as well as major writings that have contributed to its current state.