

## DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS GUIDE

The outline below is for reference purposes only; sections may be presented in a different order, depending on the research (e.g., placing the literature review after methodology). Page-length guidelines may also vary, based on the requirements of your research and/or dissertation committee. All text should be fully cited with footnotes, endnotes or in-text, author-date formats. Please note, students engaging in business dissertations may elect to write a three-essay dissertation, which has specific requirements not elaborated upon in this guide. Please contact your advisor and/or the methodology professor ([Anna.Seleny@tufts.edu](mailto:Anna.Seleny@tufts.edu)) for additional information on that format or for additional guidance with your proposal.

### I. **INTRODUCTION** (2-3 double-spaced pages)

#### A. **PROBLEM STATEMENT** (one to two pages)

1. In one to two pages, describe a genuine problem in the world that your dissertation seeks address. Here, simply focus on defining this problem in order to explain the relevancy of your research question. This part of the proposal should also address the “so what” test and should be clear to even non-specialists.

#### B. **RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS** (one to three paragraphs or bullet points)

1. Identify the primary question your dissertation poses, as well as any subsidiary ones. Each should be clearly stated. You may choose to use the notations  $Q_1$ ,  $Q_2$  and  $Q_3$ , etc., to make these distinctions. Often this is quite helpful.
2. Your primary research question should seek to address a genuine puzzle in social science that stems from the problem statement above. If more explanation is needed, elaborate briefly on why your questions are puzzling; for example, you may choose to identify a bigger puzzle in the problem statement, of which your question is only part.
3. Your hypothesis is what you believe could be the answer to your primary research question. If you have subsidiary questions, clearly state your hypothesis for each. You may use the notations  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$  and  $H_3$ , etc., to identify the various hypotheses for one or more questions.
4. Present evidence on how you plan to test or falsify your hypotheses in the following sections of your dissertation proposal: literature review, methodology, and information needs.

## II. **FALSIFYING/TESTING YOUR HYPOTHESIS** (10-20 double-spaced pages)

### **A. LITERATURE REVIEW**

1. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate support for your hypothesis; i.e., show you know the literature in your fields as they pertain to your specific area of research, to demonstrate that there is a gap in the literature that your dissertation seeks to address and thereby contribute to the field, and to falsify your research. Be sure to include citations in the literature review section of the proposal.
2. Present major schools of thought on the issue you are exploring. Indicate whether you are exploring the fields of political science, history, economics, law, business, sociology and/or anthropology. Please note that the Fletcher fields of security studies, conflict resolution, etc. are subfields of larger fields.
3. This section should not be an overview of all the theories of the general topic of your dissertation. It is an opportunity to state how either the puzzle you identify and/or research question has not been adequately addressed by the existing theories/literature in various fields, or that the research has never been done. If your research is breaking new ground, you must still present the various ways the research in your fields address the puzzle in order to demonstrate there is a gap.
4. Present the differing hypotheses that have already been written by others exploring the same problem and try to weave in your point of view. In other words, acknowledge what others have said; demonstrate what is lacking in their analysis and/or what you are building upon; indicate how you agree and disagree with their work.
5. Indicate when you conducted a dissertation abstract search. This may be done by you or by one of the Fletcher Ginn librarians. Indicate who has done the search, the dates the searches were done and the search terms used. You may use First Search on the Ginn A-Z journals and databases. If you find similar dissertations, indicate how they are similar/different from your proposal in the literature review section along with the other works you are evaluating, or indicate it when you discuss the dates, terms and person who conducted the search.

### **B. METHODOLOGY (THREE TO FIVE PAGES)**

1. Select the methodology that is most important/relevant to supporting your hypothesis empirically and theoretically.
  - a) You may employ more than one methodology.
  - b) Indicate clearly on what basis you selected your methodology and how it best assists you in falsifying your hypothesis.

- c) If a particular methodology would be very suitable but is not possible, indicate this and explain why; (e.g., limitation of time, access to documents/interviewees/respondents, lack of reliable data for quantitative, IRB restrictions, etc.).
2. Indicate which methodology you plan to use.
    - a) Specify if you will be employing qualitative, quantitative or both approaches and why.
    - b) If using qualitative: Is this a single case study or multiple? If a single, how did you select this case? Can it be generalized to others? If multiple, how do you account for case-selection bias? Are they comparable cases, if so, on what criteria did you select them? Are you using a historiography or process tracing? Will you be conducting interviews or surveys? If so, who and/or how many will be interviewed/surveyed? Will you have access to them? Do you have a questionnaire/survey – if so, provide it? What do you hope to gain from the interview/survey? How do you plan to select who will and won't be interviewed/surveyed?
    - c) If using quantitative: What databases will you be using and/or creating? Are there any problems/gaps with the information? Will you be running regressions? What specific statistical and/or economic formulas will you be employing?

### **C. INFORMATION NEEDS**

1. This section details the applied steps for conducting your research as dictated by the methodology you select. It should be in paragraph format, not in list or bullet format.
  - a) It is a detailed explanation of what you will need to do in order to obtain information (interviews, surveys, gathering data points, primary and secondary sources, travel, etc.).
  - b) You should explain any special access you may have to documents, interviewees, respondents, etc., to demonstrate that it is feasible.
2. Indicate how long you anticipate each step to take.

### **D. CONCLUSION (FOUR TO FIVE SENTENCES)**

1. An excellent conclusion is essentially a restatement of the prospectus as a whole, not a restatement of the introduction, which presents the problem that you hope to address.
2. An indication of how long you believe it will take you to complete your dissertation.

### **III. OTHER REQUIREMENTS**

#### **A. COVER PAGE**

1. Indicate clearly on your cover page the following items:
  - a) Title of proposed dissertation.
  - b) Your name and date of proposal defense.
  - c) Name of the members on your committee.
    - (1) In parentheses, indicate who is the chair, first reader, second reader, etc., as well as their affiliation/school and department.
    - (2) At least two readers must be from Fletcher. Provide CVs of other readers for the Ph.D. committee's approval.
2. Please note that changes to your committee and/or any change in your title (even one word) require that you receive approval of both your individual committee as well as the Ph.D. committee (via formal petition). Moderate to substantial changes in how you conduct your research may require approval as well.

#### **B. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. Provide a one to two page, executive summary along with your proposal. This should clearly indicate your question(s), hypothesis and methodology. It should not be a repeat of your introduction, but rather a synthesis of the proposal.

#### **C. IRB EXEMPTION OR REVIEW**

1. Indicate clearly whether you have received IRB exemption or not. Provide dates as well as a copy of the letter of exemption/approval. Forms and requirements are available on the Ph.D. website and through Jenifer Burckett-Picker. All questions re IRB requirements and procedures at Fletcher should be addressed to her ([Jenifer.Burckett-Picker@tufts.edu](mailto:Jenifer.Burckett-Picker@tufts.edu)).

#### **D. ADDENDUM OF MODIFICATIONS FROM DISSERTATION PROPOSAL DEFENSE**

1. Incorporate any clarifications that may arise in the dissertation proposal oral defense as an addendum to the proposal. This will save your time as well as that of the Ph.D. committee in determining what topics have and have not been addressed at your proposal defense.

#### **E. PETITION FORM TO THE PH.D. COMMITTEE**

1. Download the appropriate petition form from the Ph.D. website.

2. Fill out the form, sign it and have your committee sign it following a successful dissertation proposal defense.
3. Indicate whether or not the elected Ph.D. student representatives may view it in order to advocate on your behalf. If you elect this option, feel free to contact them on any information you wish to clarify on your proposal before the committee meeting so that they may advocate on your behalf at the meeting.
4. Submit the dissertation proposal petition form along with eight (8) hard copies of your dissertation proposal to Jenifer Burckett-Picker for dissemination to the members of the Ph. D. committee. Attach any addendums and/or CVs of non-Fletcher readers on the committee. Alternatively, you may send your proposal and post-proposal defense addendum via email to her attention ([Jenifer.Burckett-Picker@tufts.edu](mailto:Jenifer.Burckett-Picker@tufts.edu)) for electronic dissemination. If you choose this option, hard copies of the petition form must be submitted by the deadline to Jenifer Burckett-Picker. Please contact her directly for information on deadlines and scheduled Ph.D. committee meetings.
5. Following the review of your proposal by the Ph.D. committee, either Jenifer Burckett-Picker and/or the faculty chair of the Ph.D. committee will contact you with comments from the committee. The committee may approve your proposal, request clarifications/modifications, provide suggestions or reject your proposal. You may speak with the elected student members of the committee at any time regarding your proposal and comments you may receive.
6. A list of the current members of the Ph.D. committee, as well as the elected student members is on the Fletcher Ph.D. website at the following link: <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/phd/committee.html> Please note that the faculty and student members change yearly. Student elections are held in spring semester and are announced on the listserv. Faculty appointments are self-selected and then appointed by the academic dean during the summer term and are announced at the beginning of fall semester.