

UVic Department of History  
PhD Dissertation Proposal Guidelines

Students are required to present their dissertation proposal to the supervisory committee at a meeting chaired by the graduate adviser. This process will normally occur during the spring term of a student's second year in the program. The proposal is graded on a pass/fail basis and entered as the student's grade for HSTR 695. Students are allowed one further attempt within three months of the original dissertation meeting should they fail the process on the first try. A second failure will normally result in withdrawal from the PhD program. Students must pass the dissertation proposal before registering in the dissertation (HSTR 699). With permission of the graduate adviser, students who have satisfied normal program requirements may be allowed to present their dissertation proposal before the spring of their second year.

It is preferable if the defense occurs before April 15 of the candidate's second year in the program, given the difficulty of coordinating availability of faculty due to summer research travel.

Six weeks before the defense, the candidate is responsible for informing the graduate adviser of the composition of their supervisory committee (normally a supervisor, a second member/co-supervisor from History, and a third member who may or may not be a History faculty but is normally a registered member of the UVic Faculty of Graduate Studies). Committee members who are not UVic faculty must receive approval from the Faculty of Graduate Studies before they can serve.

Candidates are required to circulate their completed dissertation proposal to all members of the supervisory committee, the graduate adviser, and the department graduate secretary TEN days before the scheduled defense.

A dissertation proposal is normally 15-25 pages long and addresses the following topics:

- Open with a 200-word abstract that captures the heart of the project
- Clear research question
- Literature review/historiography of the question to date
- Anticipated scholarly contributions and possible lines of argument
- Significance of the project (Why is it important?)
- Theoretical approach (social, cultural, military, post-colonial, microhistorical, Foucaultian) and its literature
- Anticipated primary sources (including feasibility of access)
- Methodological approach (methods for collection and analysis of source material)

- Research plan (Timing of research trip? What series in the archives?)
- Tentative chapter outlines
- Timetable with specific completion dates for research and writing of the chapters
- Bibliography

### Writing the proposal

- Remember that this document is a way of providing you with a path forward and will be subject to discussion and amendment during the defense and during the research/writing process. It will not be perfect and shouldn't be
- Do a series of exercises in which you force yourself to complete the following sentences:
  - This research question seeks to explore...
  - My dissertation poses key questions about...
  - My most important sources will be . . .
  - This research is innovative and important because....
- Start writing on a day when you are feeling confident and excited about the project.
- Try to identify an elevator pitch of your project—you have one minute to convince someone that your project is worth doing and interesting and that you are the right person to do it
- Leave the writing of the abstract until the very end