

**GUIDE TO GRADUATE STUDIES IN GERMAN
THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH**

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WELCOME

Welcome to the University of Pittsburgh and congratulations on joining the ranks of graduate students here! You are here because you are an intelligent, capable, and motivated student. You have much to offer the program at Pitt and the profession at large, just as Pitt has much to offer you. This guide aims to give you an overview of your studies in German at Pitt. Please read it carefully and refer to it often. To get an overview of graduate studies in general and official school-wide policies at Pitt, please refer to the University's Graduate Handbook and the Graduate and Professional Bulletin (available at <http://www.asgraduate.pitt.edu/forms-policies>). You are expected to read and abide by the policies contained in both of these. Minor details in either may change during your time at Pitt, so always consult the latest version.

The purpose of graduate education is to give you high-level training in a field of specialization, in your case the field of German studies. The graduate program in German at the University of Pittsburgh prepares students for the PhD and the academic job market. Students beginning the program after a BA will be able to earn an MA en route to the PhD. The MA will prepare you for PhD study by offering a broad introduction to teaching and scholarship. After the MA, training in the PhD is more focused on preparing you for a career within higher education, although other career options are possible. The department is preparing you to compete in a highly specialized field and accordingly will expect much of you. The variety of opportunities that we offer (not only coursework, but also teaching opportunities, visiting speakers, hosted conferences and symposia, administrative service opportunities, etc.) are intended not to overwhelm you, but to prepare you for the various facets of this profession. As you pursue the opportunities in our program, you will develop more fully as a competitive scholar, teacher, and colleague.

SCHOLARLY TRAINING

General Principles

Your training as a scholar is one of the most important areas of your graduate studies. Please pay careful attention to the following sections as they will guide you through some of the most significant stages of this process.

Your training begins in your seminars, where you will learn with and from professors and other students. It will continue as you work more on your own and more closely with an advisor, until you produce a substantial scholarly work (an MA thesis or a PhD dissertation).

In contrast to an undergraduate major, where a field of knowledge seems relatively discrete and circumscribed, graduate studies will introduce you to both the breadth and depth of the field of German studies. As an undergraduate, you had to know enough information to pass a test, write a paper, or complete the project that would allow you to pass a course. Although that kind of information will be valuable at the initial stages of your graduate studies, it alone will not be adequate in the later stages. You will learn quickly that the amount of information available in this field can be overwhelming—there is always something more to learn, always another source to track down, more background information to research, more theoretical knowledge to acquire. You will also learn that other scholars will expect you to know more than what one learns in a graduate seminar, that they will expect you to have developed areas of expertise within the broader field of German studies.

To succeed in graduate school you must **take responsibility for your own learning**. It will be impossible for you to learn all that there is to know about German studies. But there are basics that you should learn, and your seminars will introduce you to many of these. Beyond these, you need to draw on your own inquisitiveness, interests, and areas of expertise to guide you in what to study. Taking responsibility for your own learning should translate into some of the following behaviors:

- Study beyond what is required: In seminars, professors will give you bibliographies or suggested readings. They may mention significant primary or secondary works in passing that are not on the syllabus. You cannot possibly read all of these, but it is important that you familiarize yourself with a few of these that pique your interest. Similarly, if in your seminar readings you encounter references to texts that intrigue you, take the time to locate them and read something from them. In addition, take time beyond your regular seminar assignments and read around in areas that you don't know as well. There are excellent general reference works on German literature available—just ask any of your professors for a recommendation. Educate yourself in areas where you feel you need to be stronger. This will not only help you acquire more knowledge in the short term, but it will also establish valuable habits that will serve you well in your long-term scholarly career. In addition, there will be multiple opportunities for you to attend lectures or be involved with visiting scholars. Approach these as an opportunity to learn more about the field and to make connections with other scholars.

- Learn where and how to find information: The Internet has made vast amounts of information readily available, yet it is not exhaustive, nor is it fully reliable. It is certainly not adequate for the type of knowledge you should acquire at the graduate level, although it may be a good starting point. Learn how to use the reference section of the library and the PittCat online catalog, how to use databases such as the MLA bibliography, citation indexes, and Books in Print, and also how to use German databases, libraries and archives. If you have questions about these, ask your professors or a librarian—they can guide you in the right direction. The more you know about how to find various types of information, the better a scholar you will be.
- Challenge yourself: During the course of your studies, it is likely that you will encounter a text, a professor, a theory, a seminar, or something else that proves very difficult for you. Do not shy away from this. Instead, take this opportunity to learn and to prove to yourself that you can master a difficult situation or difficult material if you devote the necessary time and energy. If you do this, subsequent challenges will be less intimidating and will make you an even better scholar.
- Ask questions: As Socrates demonstrated, the question is an invaluable tool in seeking knowledge. Don't be afraid to ask questions, whether in or outside of seminars. It is likely that if you have a question, other students will have it, too, even if they haven't verbalized it. Questions not only help you learn, but they also help your professors teach better, as they allow your professors to better gauge your understanding of the subject matter.
- Structure your time: There will be numerous demands on your time during your graduate studies. Not only will you take seminars with heavy reading and writing loads, but you will also teach and prepare classes of your own, all of which will require many hours each day. And that is all in addition to your daily life: eating, sleeping, socializing, etc. It is very easy to allow one of these areas to dominate the others (teaching and class preparation is a frequent culprit in this regard). It is your responsibility to structure your time so that you balance these various demands and give each their due. This may mean that no single one of them is done to perfection, but that is preferable to over-emphasizing one to the detriment of the others.

Coursework

Your graduate study will begin with coursework. All full-time students should register for at least three courses (9 credits) at the graduate level per term. Your coursework establishes a foundation of knowledge on which your later examinations and projects will build. To make the most of them, you should take a variety of courses; that is, you should not only pursue the areas that interest you, but also acquire a stronger background in areas that might not seem relevant to your primary interests. If you are primarily interested in eighteenth-century literature, make a point of taking a course in twenty-first-century cultural studies, and visa-versa. This will benefit you not only during your graduate studies, but also when you enter the job market after graduate school. Use your coursework to acquire fundamental knowledge of cultural-historical periods, literary and cultural theory, language pedagogy, philosophical issues, individual artists and thinkers, and whatever else will give you the broadest possible grounding as a scholar. You can specialize when you write a dissertation—at this point in your studies, you need to give yourself a strong foundation.

If you wish to explore an area not offered in a specific semester, you are welcome to sign up for a directed study course. To do so, you will need to find a professor with expertise in the subject who is willing to supervise the project and draw up a written agreement with her or him as to exactly what work will be done and how it will be evaluated. Be aware, however, that such courses may not count as “organized coursework” as required in the overall credits toward your degree, so select them judiciously and consult carefully with the director of graduate studies.

You will be required to write research papers each term. It may be a burden to write three or more quality papers in one term, and so most professors will give you the option of an alternative method of evaluation. Feel free to select this option for at least one course each term, but do not do much more than that. Professors will later write recommendations for you, often based heavily on your seminar papers, so give your best effort in writing these papers. They are one of the most important exercises in your graduate training and will be valuable to you later in your academic career.

To produce the best papers possible, you should begin the writing process early. Good writing is the product of frequent revision, so the earlier you begin, the more opportunities you will have to revise your work. In addition, it is imperative that your writing and research abide by university guidelines for academic integrity (these can be found at the Arts & Sciences Graduate School webpage). The department abides by these guidelines and expects the same of its students.

Finally, always do your best work, both in your written projects, your class presentations, and in your class participation. Your grades will determine eligibility for future scholarships, for continuing from an MA to a PhD program, and for other venues of evaluation. Since graduate studies presumes a higher level of competence, the grading scale is also higher than in undergraduate studies. A “C” is tantamount to failure. A “B” is a serious warning sign. You should strive to earn “A’s” or “A-’s” in each of your seminars. For many of the exams you take, a minimum grade of “A-” is required to pass. See the “General Academic Regulations” section of the Graduate Handbook for university policies on grades (available at <http://www.bulletins.pitt.edu/graduate/index.html>).

Typical Timeline for Graduate Study in German at Pitt

Students who are making consistent progress toward their degree can expect to complete the MA in two years. Students receiving a Teaching Assistantship can therefore normally expect two years of support.

MA Timeline:

- First Semester: Enroll in pedagogy and literary/cultural theory seminars; meet with the director of graduate studies to plan courses for second semester;
- Second Semester: Meet with the director of graduate studies to plan courses for third semester and to select MA advisor; select topic for MA thesis;
- Third Semester: Meet with the director of graduate studies to plan courses for fourth semester;
- Fourth Semester: Take preliminary evaluation in January (consisting of a 1-hour oral exam and the submission of two papers [one in English, one in German]) and submit thesis to advisor during week following Spring recess.

Students who are making consistent progress toward their degree can expect to complete the PhD in three to four years beyond the MA. Students receiving a Teaching Fellowship can therefore normally expect three years of support beyond the MA.

PhD Timeline

- First Year: Meet with the director of graduate studies on a regular basis.
 - For students coming to the University of Pittsburgh with an MA from another institution, they must pass a preliminary evaluation consisting of a 1-hour oral exam and the submission of two papers (one in English, one in German) by the end of the first year (ideally in January). These students should also enroll in the pedagogy and literary/cultural theory seminars in their first year.
 - For students completing an MA at Pitt, complete written comprehensive exam in the Spring semester.
- Second Year:
 - For students coming to the University of Pittsburgh with an MA from another institution, complete written comprehensive exam in the Fall semester and dissertation prospectus defense in the Spring semester.
 - For students completing an MA at Pitt, complete dissertation prospectus defense in the Fall semester.
- Subsequent years:
 - Complete any remaining coursework. Meet with full doctoral committee annually. Note: it is very common, and strongly encouraged, to spend time in Germany during these years. Speak with your advisor and the director of graduate studies about opportunities for this.
- Final year: Dissertation defense.

See the *Graduate and Professional Bulletin* for statutes of limitations for the MA and PhD degrees (usually 4 years for the MA and 8-10 years for the PhD) at

<http://www.bulletins.pitt.edu/graduate/regulations2.htm#Anchor-Statute-23240>.

Requirements for Advanced Degrees in German at Pitt

MA

- 30 Credits overall including:
 - 9 graduate seminars (27 credits) – at least 6 within the department;
 - MA Project (up to 3 credits of German 2000) of 35-50 pages;
- Successful completion of German 2110 (Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory) and German 2970 (Pedagogy);
- Completion of all courses with a grade of “B” or better;
- Submit for departmental approval at least one paper written in English and one written in German (by the time of the preliminary evaluation); and
- Demonstrate proficiency in an additional language (candidates can fulfill the language requirement by satisfactorily passing a translation exam, a two-term graduate reading course, or the equivalent of a fourth-semester language course with a grade of “B” or better. Other types of documentation may be accepted at the discretion of the Director of Graduate Studies).

PhD

- minimum 72 credits of course work, broken down as follows:
 - 30 credits from the MA
 - at least 12 seminars total (for students entering Pitt with an MA from another institution) / at least 18 seminars total (for students entering Pitt with a BA—seminars taken at the MA level count towards this requirement)
 - of these seminars, at least 6 seminars (for students with an MA from another institution) and at least 12 seminars (for students entering Pitt with a BA) should be taken in the German department
 - at least 6 of the above seminars should be in certificate-related courses
 - at least 2/3 of the seminars taken must be taken for a letter grade;
- Language requirement: High level of oral proficiency in German (superior on OPI scale, 3 on ILR scale); reading knowledge of another language (see MA language proficiency requirement);
- Comprehensive examination: Written examinations, evaluated by a committee of three faculty members. Demonstrates the student's foundation in German culture from the Enlightenment to the present, as well as the student's ability to situate a specific focus within this larger context. The PhD comprehensive examination needs to be completed with an average grade of A-. The examination may be retaken only one time and needs to be retaken by the next academic term. Before completing the PhD comprehensive examination, students have to submit to their examination committee two research/seminar papers that demonstrate their scholarly potential. The reading list and a statement of purpose for the examination topic should be developed in consultation with the faculty committee and approved by the beginning of January. The examination will be scheduled for the second week following the Spring Recess;
- Dissertation prospectus: 10-15 pages, submitted in the semester following the comprehensive examination. After approval by the doctoral committee, students are admitted to candidacy;
- Annual meeting with dissertation committee;
- Dissertation defense: The dissertation must be approved by the dissertation committee after a public oral defense; and
- Completion of a certificate program or work in a related area.

Projects, Exams, and Defenses

At specific points during your course of study you will demonstrate what you have gained through your studies by producing pieces of scholarly writing, taking written and or oral examinations, or defending your work in front of a group of faculty. A description of each of these follows.

MA Project

You should select an advisor for your MA project, in consultation with the director of graduate studies, by the end of your second term of study. While writing the MA project, usually during the fourth term, you will enroll in German 2000 (up to three credits). The completed paper should be about 35–50 pages and should be your best quality work, representing original research. You may select a topic of your choosing, although it is not unusual that a thesis might grow out of a previous seminar paper. It is also strongly

advisable to select a topic where your advisor has an area of expertise. You should plan on revising the entire project at least once or twice under the direction of your advisor before the final submission. You and your advisor should work out a timeline for the various stages of the project to allow you to complete it in a timely manner. The completed project should be submitted during the week following the spring term recess (of your second year) to the faculty advisor.

Preliminary Evaluation

This evaluation occurs at the end of MA studies (at the beginning of the final semester) for those graduate students already in the Pitt program, and at the beginning of PhD studies (by the end of the first year, usually at the beginning of the second semester) for those students coming to Pitt with an MA from another institution. For this evaluation, a student should submit two research papers (usually seminar papers), one in English, one in German, that, in the student's judgment, represent his or her best scholarly work. In addition, the student should provide the director of graduate studies with a list of all courses taken at Pitt and all works read within those courses. Please note that no additional research or reading beyond what was learned in seminars is required for this exam—the student is to demonstrate his or her mastery over material already addressed in seminars. The director of graduate studies will arrange for faculty to be on the exam committee and schedule a time for the examination. Faculty members with whom the student has had coursework will provide a short text or clip selected from the list. An hour before the exam, the student will select one of the texts and prepare an analysis of it. The exam itself consists of a one-hour meeting with departmental faculty, beginning with the student's text analysis. Faculty members then ask the student about the works on his or her list. The student should demonstrate an understanding of the individual works, as well as of the larger historical, literary, cultural, and theoretical contexts that surround them. The faculty will consider the performance on the exam as well as the submitted papers and the student's overall performance in the preliminary evaluation.

Comprehensive Examination

The PhD comprehensive examination consists of a longer written exam. For students entering the Pitt PhD program with a BA, it should be completed in the Spring semester of the third year (one year after the MA). For students entering the Pitt PhD program with an MA, it should be completed during the Fall semester of the second year of studies in the PhD program. In consultation with the student, the director of graduate studies convenes the examination committee consisting of a total of three graduate faculty members from the department, with one designated as the Committee Chair. This committee is to be constituted by the middle of the semester before the Comprehensive exam. The PhD comprehensive examination needs to be completed with an average grade of A- (with no single question with a grade less than B and a minimum grade of A- on at least three of the questions). It must be approved by a majority of department members on the exam committee (if, in the unusual case that outside members are involved on a committee, two majorities are required: a majority of departmental members, and an outright committee majority). The examination may be retaken only one time and needs

to be retaken by the next academic term. Before completing the PhD comprehensive examination, students should submit to their examination committee two research/seminar papers that demonstrate their scholarly potential.

For the exam, the student develops a topic (expressed in an abstract of a few pages) and reading list (at least 40-50 works), which needs to be approved by the examination committee. The chosen topic for this exam should demonstrate the student's foundation in German culture from the Enlightenment to the present. Students should submit the final version of their reading list and statement no later than two weeks before the day of the exam. After submitting the topic statement and reading list to the committee, students will be given the examination questions to take home over the weekend and may then bring their notes with them when they come in on the following Monday to write the exam. Students will answer four two-hour questions over two days (two questions each day). Three of these questions will be devoted to specific centuries (18th, 19th, and 20th, each graded by the professor responsible for that section), and one question will be diachronic in scope (graded by all three committee members).

To prepare for the exam, students take one three-credit directed study with one of the three members of the examination committee. Unlike the preliminary exam, the comprehensive exam requires the student to go beyond his or her work in seminars and research both primary and secondary texts, relating both to the specific exam topic and to the larger context of German literature and culture from the Enlightenment to the present. The student should demonstrate expertise in his or her specific topic and be able to situate this topic within both a larger context and within a historical framework relating to earlier traditions and/or later successors. The university stipulates that students who do not complete all degree requirements within five years of completing their comprehensive exam may be re-examined at the discretion of the department.

Dissertation Prospectus Defense

The Dissertation Committee will be constituted only after the Comprehensive Exams are complete, and its makeup may or may not have any relation to the Comprehensive Exam Committee. Ideally, though, a student's comprehensive exam topics will lead into a dissertation topic, and the comprehensive exam committee might well provide the foundation for the dissertation committee. In contrast to the comprehensives, however, the dissertation committee must also include a member from outside the department. The dissertation advisor can assist in the selection of this member. Once a student has selected a dissertation topic and an advisor and constituted a committee, the student should prepare a thesis prospectus (10-15 pages) that gives a brief introduction to the topic, previous and related research done on the topic, and the specific lines of inquiry, including methodologies used, that the dissertation will pursue. After the advisor approves this prospectus, the student will defend the prospectus to the doctoral committee. This is usually done during the second semester of the second year for students entering Pitt with an MA and during the first semester of the fourth year (second year of PhD studies) for students entering Pitt with a BA. Upon successful completion of this defense, the student is admitted to PhD candidacy.

Dissertation

The dissertation is a detailed, monograph-length, original study that demonstrates the student's abilities as a scholar. It should offer detailed analysis of a specific topic, while situating this analysis within both the body of secondary literature on that topic and with larger cultural, theoretical, and historical contexts. The student should meet with his or her advisor whenever necessary to facilitate the progress of the dissertation. This should occur at least once a term. Do not wait for your advisor to follow-up with you, though. If you are stuck on a topic and need assistance, speak to your advisor. The student should also meet with his or her dissertation committee annually to discuss the progress of the dissertation and to benefit from any feedback the committee can offer. The student is responsible for following university guidelines in academic integrity, formatting the dissertation (available at the Arts & Sciences graduate website under ETD Format Guidelines), and submitting the dissertation. One tip on writing a dissertation: two of the greatest enemies to productive research are unstructured time and the feeling that you have to know everything about a topic before you begin writing. Make a work schedule for yourself that incorporates writing as a daily habit, and begin writing well before you have read every book on the topic. If you do this, your dissertation will progress rapidly.

Public Dissertation Defense

The final oral examination in defense of the doctoral dissertation is conducted by the doctoral committee, although it is open to the public. The date, place, and time of the examination should be published well in advance in the *University Times* and the *Pitt Chronicle*. Any member of the university community may attend the final defense, but only members of the doctoral committee may be present during the final deliberations and vote on the passing of the candidate. If necessary, the candidate may be asked to make additional revisions to the dissertation. The chair of the doctoral committee ensures that the dissertation is in final form before requesting signatures of the members of the committee.

Teacher Training

An important part of your training as a scholar and professional is your training as a teacher. You can find more detailed information about teaching policies and advice about teaching in the TA/TF handbook, available online at <http://www.cidde.pitt.edu/teaching-support/ta-services/ta-handbook-teaching-assistant-experience>, so the current guide will devote minimal space to that.

You will also receive valuable instruction and teacher training within the department, primarily in a pedagogy seminar associated with language instruction. Please take this seminar and this work seriously—your success as a job candidate will depend on it.

The Department Chair will make all teaching assignments after consulting with the Director of Language Studies and other faculty. In making these assignments, the chair will strive to balance the needs of the undergraduate program with TA/TF needs for teaching experience. The factors determining teaching assignments, specifically Summer teaching, include:

- the department's needs to offer specific courses within the program;
- the availability of faculty in the department;
- the TA/TF's level of experience;
- evidence of a TA/TF's teaching effectiveness;
- the TA/TF's progress in the program; and
- the need to further TA/TF professionalization.

If you have a concern about a specific teaching assignment, please speak with the Chair.

From your first day of teaching, you should begin thinking about preparing a teaching portfolio. This involves a summary of your teaching philosophy, a collection of sample syllabi, and a sample of your teaching evaluations (remember to save these). Develop your own teaching philosophy not only by learning from your pedagogy seminar, but also by observing others' teaching styles and comparing and contrasting them with your own. Learn your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. You should also look at the many syllabi that you will encounter in the course of your graduate studies, and contemplate how you might adapt these if you were to teach such a course on your own. The more you reflect on your own teaching, the better a teacher you will be.

Finally, a note on balancing teaching and research. Teaching offers immediate rewards: smiling faces, immediate feedback, easily measurable progress of your students, etc. Research does not always hold these rewards, so it is often more appealing to invest a disproportionate amount of energy into your teaching. Be aware, however, that when you look for an academic job, some future employers may be more interested in your scholarly credentials than in your teaching accomplishments. In other words, although you need to do your best job as a teacher, you also need to balance this with your best work as a scholar. Set yourself time limits for how long you will devote each day to teaching and give yourself proportionate amounts of time to work on your scholarship.

PROFESSIONALIZATION

Graduate studies should make you more educated, but they should also help prepare you for a career; that is, to become a professional in your field. This involves gaining experience and knowledge in the three areas commonly associated with work in this field—scholarship, teaching, and service—as well as preparation for your first foray onto the academic job market.

Scholarship

From a professional prospective, it is important that your scholarship is not only high-quality and backed with solid research, but that it is also well-known and well-received. In other words, you should work to develop a professional profile as a scholar who does good work that is accessible to a broad scholarly audience.

Your graduate seminars will give you experience in producing high-quality, well-researched scholarship, but they will give you less experience in developing a scholarly profile. You can ask an advisor or another professor in the department for assistance or advice on this, but ultimately, it is your responsibility to create the image that the field of German Studies has of you. A few tips follow on how to do this successfully:

- Spend time studying in a German-speaking country. This is particularly important if you are a non-native speaker of German. Time spent abroad will help solidify your command of German, a necessary skill when you go on the job market. In addition, it will help make professional contacts across the Atlantic and give you insight into scholarship, higher education, and current intellectual and cultural trends in Germany.
- Become a member of scholarly societies. The Modern Language Association (MLA) and the German Studies Association (GSA) should be at the top of your list, but there are numerous others with more specialized focus, depending on your interests. The MLA and the GSA have their own journals where you can get a sense of the most current research in your field and where you might publish your own work one day. In addition, they also sponsor annual conventions where you can meet other scholars.
- Attend lecture series, symposia, graduate conferences, and similar meetings, both in and outside the university. These allow you to meet other scholars in your field and related fields. When attending such events, don't be shy. Ask questions after presentations, and introduce yourself to other scholars whose work appeals to you.
- Present your own scholarship in public. Oral reports in seminars are a beginning, but you should take opportunities to share your work with a larger audience. There are lunchtime lecture series in the department, graduate student symposia at the university, graduate student conferences at a number of institutions around the country, and regional conferences of the MLA that are great venues for starting out. Once you have had more experience in this and are confident in your own scholarly profile, you should present your work at a national conference such as the German Studies Association or the Modern Language Association conventions. Please speak with the director of graduate studies, your advisor, and the Department Chair about funding opportunities to help support such activities. See the passage on "Funding for Graduate Student Travel" at the end of this section.

- Foster relationships with other scholars. Personal relationships are invaluable in academia. It is likely that a co-panelist at a conference or a scholar you met at a cocktail party may one day be a co-organizer of a conference panel, a co-editor of a volume with you, or an editor of a journal in which you hope to publish. Do your best to foster these relationships and to maintain a lively intellectual exchange.
- Join listservs and discussion groups that send out regular Calls for Papers. Some of these include the Missouri Call-for-papers list (<http://po.missouri.edu/archives/german-cfp-1.html>), the Women in German list (<http://www.womeningerman.org/>), and h-german (<http://www.h-net.org/~german/>). These lists will help you become aware of what topics are most current and inform you of possible venues for presenting or publishing your own scholarship.
- Publish your work. You should aim to publish at least one paper in a refereed journal before finishing your PhD. Speak with your advisor about which piece of work might be most appropriate for this. This will demonstrate to future employers that you produce research that is recognized by outsiders as high-quality.

Teaching

From a professional prospective, it is important that you demonstrate success in teaching a variety of courses and that you have reflected on your own strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. This should be evident in the teaching portfolio you prepare when you go on the job market, but you should be thinking about it as you discuss future teaching assignments with the Department Chair. Some suggestions for strengthening your profile as a teacher follow:

- Learn from your teaching evaluations. Read your teaching evaluations carefully. There will often be a few exceptions (both negative and positive), but are there some comments that you find repeated frequently (both negative and positive)? If so, what steps can you take to improve upon your weaknesses or to offset them with your strengths?
- Draw on Pitt's resources to help you with your teaching. There are numerous resources at Pitt that can help you improve your teaching. The Office of Measurement and Evaluation of Teaching (OMET) can help you tailor evaluations to measure specific concerns that you would like to focus on. The Center for Instructional Development and Distance Education (CIDDE) can consult with you and help design or modify one of your courses to improve specific areas of your choosing, including incorporating technology in your teaching or encouraging more class discussion. They can also arrange to videotape your teaching. The Robert Henderson Language Media Center offers helpful workshops on using multimedia in language training. And of course, the department faculty members are great resources, too—feel free to consult them if you have questions about your teaching. There are multiple resources available to you, but you need to take the initiative in contacting them.
- Request a variety of teaching opportunities. Initially, you will most likely be teaching introductory language, but when you apply for a job, a future employer will want to know how you would teach other courses. Speak with the department chair about teaching assignments during the school year and in the summer to see if you might not get more experience in different types of classes. Such opportunities may not be available at first, but as you advance in your studies and demonstrate your teaching competence, more such opportunities will arise.

- Learn from others. Don't reinvent the wheel. There are many successful teachers among your fellow graduate students and among the department faculty, and there is a TA Mentor who is a great resource for information and suggestions. Draw on the experience of these various individuals when you have a certain issue. Consult their syllabi when making one of your own. The more experience you draw on as you plan a course and work on your teaching, the better a teacher you will be.

Service

One aspect of academic life that often escapes a graduate student's view is the large amount of time that faculty devote to administrative and service-related matters, whether at departmental, university, or professional levels. Future employers will expect this of you and are impressed when they see involvement in such activities during your graduate student years. You will need to determine which responsibilities you can assume without adversely affecting your teaching or scholarship, but some such activities might include:

- Serving as graduate student representative to the department. This allows you to attend faculty meetings and see how department administration works.
- Serving in organizations at the university level. There are multiple student organizations, clubs, and committees that always welcome volunteer assistance. Pursue your own interests to make Pitt a better place.
- Help organize a conference. The department hosts conferences or symposia on a regular basis, and has, in past years, also been involved in conferences held in Pittsburgh by national scholarly societies. Participating in such events allows you not only to see how a conference is run, but also to meet scholars and potential future colleagues in the field.

Preparation for the Academic Job Market

When your dissertation is close to its final stages, you should consider entering the academic job market. The German department collaborates with other language departments to provide job market training. As you enter the dissertation stage of your studies, you should start attending these professionalization events. Please contact the Director of Graduate Studies to learn more about these.

Most jobs in our field are advertised in the *Job Information List* of the Modern Language Association. This list is available online to subscription members. The Pitt German Department has a subscription, and the department administrator can make the subscription code available to you upon request. There are occasionally additional offers available in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, so it doesn't hurt to check there, but most jobs in our field will be on the MLA list. A great deal of helpful information on the academic job search can be found in the *MLA Guide to the Job Search*, also available on the MLA website. Please consult that in your preparations. Some basic information on the job search follows:

Timing/Stages of the Job Market

The first jobs are usually posted in late September or early October (these jobs usually don't start until the following Fall). The list will be updated regularly, so you should check back every week or two. Departments soliciting applications will have different deadlines, but most will ask you to submit your application materials before early- to mid-December (some

as early as the beginning of November). After submitting your application materials, you will have to wait for your potential employer to invite you to an interview at the MLA Convention at the end of December/beginning of January. If you make the cut for an MLA interview, this means you are among a dozen or so candidates being interviewed (often out of more than a hundred applicants). After that interview, you will need to wait again (sometimes as much as a few weeks) to see if you are invited for an on-campus interview. If so, this means that you are likely one of three or so candidates in the final stage of hiring. After the on-campus interview, you will have to wait yet again (again, sometimes as much as a few weeks) to see if you are offered the job. If you are offered the job, congratulations! If not, do not despair. The *MLA Job Information List* appears in the spring, as well. These positions are usually for shorter-term, visiting, or adjunct positions, but these can be a good “foot in the door” for your later career.

Typical Application Materials

Institutions will vary in what materials they request of applicants, but the following are the most commonly requested types of materials. Please send only those materials that they request. You should prepare each of the following carefully:

- A letter of application. Ideally, this should not exceed one page, but occasionally it will run onto the second. It should state your intention to apply for the job, describe your research to a non-specialized audience, describe your teaching philosophy and experience, and indicate any other reasons why you might be a good fit for this position. The importance of this letter cannot be overstated—you should revise it multiple times and run it by several professors before sending it off.
- A current curriculum vitae (CV). This is similar to a resume, but its emphasis is markedly different. There is no single organizational rule here, but the CV should highlight the accomplishments that you feel are most significant and that will be most appealing to a future employer. Looking at others’ CVs is a good starting point in developing your own.
- A current transcript. You will need to request this from the university registrar.
- A teaching portfolio. Usually includes a one-page statement of teaching philosophy, sample syllabi, and a selection of your teaching evaluations. In some cases it may even include a video of you teaching.
- Letters of recommendation. Most institutions will request three letters of recommendation, although some have been known to ask for more. You should ask those professors to write for you who know you and your work best. One of these should be from your dissertation advisor, addressing the question of when you will finish your dissertation, and it is strongly advisable that at least one of the letters speak to your teaching ability. The earlier you request these letters from your professors, the better a recommendation they will be able to write for you. Please note: These letters carry more weight when they are confidential, so it is recommended that you waive your right to see them. Companies such as interfolio.com offer services that will gather your letters, keep them confidential, and send them to the schools you want.

- Writing Sample. Some schools will request a writing sample. Ideally, this should be a chapter from your dissertation, but it might also be a published article or even a very strong seminar paper. Whichever you select, it should represent your best work.

Interview Preparations

It is essential that you prepare for your interviews, whether at the MLA or on-campus. Practice is essential here, and the department can give you a mock interview to help you prepare (please arrange this with the director of graduate studies). Some things to keep in mind for your interview:

- Be able to summarize your dissertation research for a non-specialist in a few sentences. Practice condensing the complex web of ideas that constitutes your dissertation into a few crisp sentences that convey the complexity without sacrificing clarity and comprehensibility. If the interview committee asks for more information, and it is likely that they will, then you can go into greater, more complex detail.
- Be able to describe your future research agenda. Think about where you would like to be ten years from now. Will you publish your dissertation? What will your next project be? Do you have any more ideas for research, or did the dissertation dry up your intellectual well?
- Be prepared to discuss your teaching. You should be able to discuss your teaching philosophy and courses you have taught. But you should also be prepared to discuss the range of courses you could teach at their institution and how you would teach them. How would you teach your dissertation as a course? How would you teach a graduate seminar? How would you teach an undergraduate survey course? How would you teach an undergraduate course in translation? How would you teach an advanced undergraduate language course? There are syllabi in the department files for a number of these types of courses, and it is a good idea to review these during your preparations.
- Be prepared to address institutional and professional issues. Some future employers will face declining enrollments and will ask you how you would turn things around. Some may want to know how well you understand current trends in your field or in academia. To prepare for this, check the last few issues of the MLA publication, *Profession*, a few recent issues of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and then a number of journals in your specific subfield. Also check the “Surveys, Reports, and Other Documents” page of the MLA website for more information on the job search and on trends in your field. Demonstrate that you are not insulated from the larger world of academia, but that you have a clear grasp of the issues affecting both individual institutions and the profession at large.
- Be prepared to speak in German. It is not unusual that some, if not all, of the interview will be conducted in German. If you are a native German speaker, plan for some if not all of the interview to be in English. Prepare answers ahead of time and look up appropriate vocabulary so that you are confident and fluent in the interview.
- Have questions ready for them. They will want to see if you are inquisitive, if you pay attention to detail, if you have done your homework, and if you have plans for doing interesting things in their department. Visit the websites of the hiring

department and university and learn as much as you can. Use the questions as an opportunity to demonstrate your appeal as a future colleague.

- Do not discuss salary or other compensation at either the MLA or at an on-campus interview. Once a job offer is made, you can begin to negotiate salary, but doing so before then is premature and leaves the wrong impression.

Funding for Graduate Student Travel

The Department has a fund to support graduate students who are traveling to a conference to present their work. This is usually several hundred dollars each year, and the department may supplement that amount when budgets allow. Clearly, however, this fund will not cover all graduate student travel. For this reason, students interested in support for travel should apply to multiple funding sources when planning travel (not only the department, but also the graduate school, the EU Center, and any other institution on or off campus that might conceivably sponsor such travel—please consult with faculty for suggestions). Please check travel grants available through Arts & Sciences (<http://www.asgraduate.pitt.edu/travel-grants-conferences>) for a list of some of these.

To apply for department funds, students must submit a “Graduate Student Funding for Travel” Request Form (a copy is included at the back of this handbook). This form requests the following information:

- A description of their proposed travel, including dates, location, and an abstract of the paper/project associated with the travel;
- A detailed budget request. Speak with the department administration if you need additional information for this. If receipts are available, please include copies of these;
- A list of other funding sources to which the student has already applied and amounts awarded, if applicable; and
- A list of all previous travel support received from the department and the university.

There are two application deadlines for department funds, September 30 and January 31. Applications should be submitted to the department chair.

IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS

The success of your graduate studies will depend, in part, on the degree to which you foster positive and professional relationships with the various people you encounter: other students, administrators, faculty, and most of all, your advisor. Note: This section deals with professional relationships, not with non-professional, romantic relationships. For more information on these, please consult the Arts & Sciences graduate website (specifically the graduate handbook and the Faculty-Student Relationship Policy, both available at <http://www.asgraduate.pitt.edu/forms-policies>).

Other Graduate Students

Draw on the experience of graduate students who have been here longer than you to help you with the various hurdles of graduate studies. They can give you advice on your teaching, exam preparation, seminar papers, and some language issues. They are your colleagues and if you treat them as such, you will all benefit. One warning is appropriate here, though: do not rely solely on fellow graduate students for official departmental or university policies or other crucial administrative information. Always check the necessary university or departmental source to make sure when it comes to degree requirements, exam guidelines, etc.

German Department Administrator

Ms. Alana Dunn carries a heavy load as the sole office administrator in the German department. Both students and faculty members need to respect her boundaries. Be aware that she is first and foremost an administrator for the department as a whole, with primary responsibility to the department chair. If you have copying or other work that you would like for her (or a work study student) to do, please ask her well in advance, for your job may be lower on her priority list than something that the Department Chair has asked her to do.

Along similar lines, she is very friendly and happy to talk, but be aware that she should not be your personal confidante. Her role is as a professional administrator, not a personal counselor, so please be professional in your interactions with her. (If you would like to talk to a counselor, please visit the University Counseling Center listed in the “Resources” section of this guide.)

Spaces

Just as you foster professional relationships with the individuals in the department, so you should also learn to treat the spaces in the department with a similar degree of respect. The university and the department make spaces available to assist you in your teaching responsibilities, your studies, and in socializing. Please use them for the purposes for which they are intended and make a point to clean up after yourself. There is a graduate student lounge on the 12th Floor where you can socialize with other graduate students, eat lunch, get coffee, and check e-mail. This area is for socializing, relaxation, and similar non-work-related activities. The spaces in the department are primarily for profession-related activities. Cubicles are for meeting with students and teaching-related functions, and should be maintained accordingly; if your students sense that the department is a professional space when they meet with you there, they are more likely to behave professionally towards you. The seminar room is primarily for graduate seminars and departmental meetings. Please abide by the policies governing use of space in the department.

Faculty Members

Developing strong personal and professional relationships with a range of departmental faculty will foster memorable and valuable exchanges, both formal and informal. Ultimately, your professors are the most likely candidates for letters of recommendation for jobs or fellowships. But departmental faculty are also a resource for conversation about your research or teaching and for advice about the department, university, or discipline. Faculty office hours give you the opportunity to continue conversations begun in seminar outside of class, to ask for feedback on a paper or project, to draw on their expertise for an exam or a course you are teaching, and for a myriad of other professional interactions. Informal events such as receptions and formal events such as department-sponsored lectures, film series, and seminars provide additional opportunities for interaction with the faculty.

As personable and as encouraging of your work as a faculty member may be, or as unpleasant as an occasional faculty member might seem to you, please remember that the student-faculty relationship should always be professional. A faculty member should evaluate your work on a professional, not a personal, basis, and maintaining a professional relationship with all departmental faculty helps to clarify and sustain this ground of evaluation.

This does not mean that you cannot disagree with a faculty member or protest when you feel that you have been treated unfairly, nor that you cannot socialize or be friendly with faculty. It means only that you should conduct your relationships, whether agreeing or disagreeing, in a professional manner. If you can't resolve an issue with a faculty member, then use the appropriate channels to address concerns (first director of graduate studies, then Chair, and then Dean, if necessary).

Additionally, the graduate student representative allows the graduate students to maintain clear communication with the faculty. If there is an issue troubling you individually or the graduate students as a group, you will be best served by having your representative bring it to the attention of the faculty.

Director of Graduate Studies

The director of graduate studies fulfills multiple roles. He or she advises you on your courses before you register yourself online; tracks your progress towards your degree and helps schedule your exams; advises you on your professional development; writes your annual evaluation; and serves as your liaison and advocate with the faculty and the graduate school. You should meet with the director of graduate studies regularly, at least once a semester—he or she will be your advisor until you have a dissertation advisor. If you foresee problems or issues affecting your status or any other part of your studies, please speak with the director of graduate studies immediately. The director of graduate studies will make every effort to ensure the success of your graduate career. Please work closely with him or her and take responsibility for your success, as well.

The success of your advising sessions, whether with the Director of Graduate Studies or with your Advisor, will depend to a great extent on your preparation. If you are prepared with questions, lists of possible courses and topics, drafts of your work or exam lists, or whatever else may be appropriate, the director of graduate studies/your Advisor will be better able to help you.

Advisor

This is without a doubt the most significant relationship you will forge during your graduate study, and possibly during your entire career. You will work closely with your advisor as you develop a topic for your thesis and then write the individual chapters. Your advisor will give you advice and guidance, but it will be your responsibility to implement it as you see fit. Fostering a positive, professional relationship here is extremely important, as an advisor's letter of recommendation carries great weight on the job market. For this reason it is crucial that you abide by time schedules and deadlines that you and your advisor set, and that you keep lines of communication open should you not be able to abide by these schedules.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER ISSUES

Most answers to administrative issues are available in official university publications such as the Graduate Student Handbook and the Graduate and Professional Bulletin. Please consult these frequently. A few points follow here.

Finances

Most financial support to graduate students comes in the form of TA/TF stipends. Please see the section on MA and PhD timelines for more information about the duration of these stipends.

Students may also apply for graduate tuition scholarships, Andrew Mellon Predoctoral Fellowships, the Lillian B. Lawler Scholarship/Fellowship, the K. Leroy Irvis Fellowship, the Provost's Humanities Fellowships, the Fellowships in Cultural Studies, and Exchange Fellowships with the University of Augsburg. Applications for these fellowships must be submitted through the department. If you are interested in applying for one of these, please contact the director of graduate studies.

The department and the university also have a small amount of funds available to support graduate student travel to present papers at conferences. If you are interested in these, please contact the director of graduate studies. And some funds for summer travel, either for research or language study, may be available through the Nationality Room Scholarships and the FLAS Scholarships.

More information about various forms of financial support is available at the Arts & Sciences graduate webpage (see <http://www.asgraduate.pitt.edu/financial-assistance>).

Non-U.S. Citizens

There is, unfortunately, additional bureaucracy for non-U.S. Citizens. It is essential that non-U.S. Citizens work through the Office of International Services (OIS, <http://www.ois.pitt.edu/>) to ensure that all government requirements have been met. If you are a non-U.S. citizen, OIS can be a useful resource to you not only with international admissions and immigration issues, but also with everything from orientation to Pitt and to the U.S., to international and cultural programming, and to U.S. tax preparation.

Timing and Leaves of Absence

Excerpted from the *Graduate Handbook*:

“All requirements for MA and MS degrees must be completed within a period of four consecutive calendar years from the student's initial registration for graduate study.

From the student's initial registration for graduate study, all requirements for the PhD degree must be completed within a period of 10 years, or within eight years if the student has received credit for a master's degree appropriate to the field of study. A student who is unable to complete all degree requirements within a five-year period after passing the comprehensive examination may be re-examined at the discretion of the department or school.

Under exceptional circumstances, a candidate for an advanced degree may apply for an extension of the statute of limitations. The request must be approved by the department or departmental committee (master's or doctoral) and submitted to the dean for final action. Requests for an extension of the statute of limitations must be accompanied by a departmental assessment of the work required of the student to complete the degree as well as documented evidence of the extenuating circumstances leading to the requested extension. Students who request an extension of the statute of limitations must demonstrate proper preparation for the completion of all current degree requirements.

Under special conditions, graduate students may be granted one leave of absence. A maximum leave of two years may be granted to doctoral students or one year to master's students. The length and rationale for the leave of absence must be stated in advance, recommended to the dean by the department, and approved by the dean. If approved, the time of the leave shall not count against the total time allowed for the degree being sought by the student. Readmission following an approved leave of absence is a formality.”

Please be aware of these policies and plan accordingly. If you foresee a difficulty, let the director of graduate studies and your advisor know as soon as possible. Also, please be aware that while on leave, a student cannot receive TA/TF support, nor can he or she earn credit towards a degree or take an examination in fulfillment of a degree.

Graduation

Excerpted from the *Graduate Handbook*:

“In order to graduate from the University of Pittsburgh, a graduate student must be an active University of Pittsburgh student registered for at least 1 credit of full-time dissertation study within the past 12 months.

Students must file an application for graduation in the dean's office of their school early in the term in which graduation is expected. Each school establishes its own deadline by which students must apply for graduation. Students should check with their dean's office for the deadline. As noted above, students must be active. In exceptional circumstances, students who complete all the degree requirements at the end of a term but graduate in the next term may petition the dean of the school for a waiver of this registration requirement. The requirement that a student be on active status cannot be waived.

Prior to the end of the term in which they graduate, all doctoral candidates must submit to the dean's office a completed Survey of Earned Doctorates.”

Grievances

It is important that all members of the department community be treated fairly and that all abide by university guidelines. If, in the course of your study, you feel that this has not been the case or that there is a situation that requires correction, please bring this situation to the attention of the director of graduate studies. If that does not bring an adequate resolution, speak with the Department Chair. If you are not satisfied with the result, speak with the Dean responsible for Graduate Studies.

RESOURCES

University of Pittsburgh Graduate School (<http://www.asgraduate.pitt.edu/>):

5141 Sennott Square

210 S. Bouquet Street

Kathleen Blee

Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research

412-624-6094

bleegrad@pitt.edu

Linda Rinaman

Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies and Research

412-624-6094

rinaman@pitt.edu

Philippa Carter

Manager of Diversity Initiatives

412-624-6096

pkc3@pitt.edu

Position vacant as of August 2013

Coordinator of Graduate Student Services

412-624-6088

Lisa Kubick

Manager of Graduate Studies

412-624-6095

lisamp@pitt.edu

Associated Websites:

- Graduate Student Handbook: <http://www.asgraduate.pitt.edu/user/login?destination=/node/242>
- Graduate and Professional Bulletin: <http://www.bulletins.pitt.edu/graduate/index.html>
- University of Pittsburgh Policies and Procedures: <http://www.bc.pitt.edu/policies/>
- Graduate Forms and Policies: <http://www.asgraduate.pitt.edu/forms-policies>
- Fact Book: <http://www.ir.pitt.edu/factbook/index.php>

Office of International Studies (<http://www.ois.pitt.edu/>)

708 William Pitt Union

Immigration Services: 412-624-7120 or 412-624-7853

International Admissions: 412-624-7129

Administration – Director’s Office and Public Relations: 412-624-7123

Center for Instructional Design and Distance Education (<http://www.cidde.pitt.edu/>)

CIDDE Administrative Offices: (412) 624-3335

CIDDE Faculty Instructional Development Lab: (412) 648-2832

CIDDE Instructional Media Services: (412) 648-7240

CIDDE Photographic Services: (412) 648-9870

CIDDE Testing: (412) 624-7215

Office of Measurement and Evaluation of Teaching (<http://www.omet.pitt.edu/>)

G33 Cathedral of Learning

Dr. Carol E. Baker, Director

(412) 624-6440

Robert Henderson Language Media Center (<http://www.polyglot.pitt.edu/>)

G17 Cathedral of Learning

(412) 624-4153

Resources for Personal/Financial/Health Issues

University Benefits Office / Human Resources (Craig Hall, 2nd Floor)

Health benefits – (412) 624-8160

Payroll – (412) 624-8070

<http://www.hr.pitt.edu/>

Student Health Service

Medical Arts Building

Suite 500

3708 Fifth Avenue

Pittsburgh, PA 15213

(412) 383-1800

www.studhlth.pitt.edu

University Counseling Center

334 William Pitt Union

Pittsburgh, PA 15260

412-648-7930

<http://www.counseling.pitt.edu/>

Travel funds at Pitt

<http://www.asgraduate.pitt.edu/travel-grants-conferences>

Professional Resources

Modern Language Association: <http://www.mla.org/>

German Studies Association: <http://www.thegsa.org/>

University of Missouri Call for Papers List: <http://grs.missouri.edu/resources/gerlistserv.html>

Women in German (WIG) website: <http://www.womeningerman.org/>

WIG Listserv:

http://calmail.berkeley.edu/manage/list/options/women_in_german@lists.berkeley.edu

H-Lists (including H-Germanistik, H-German)

<http://www.h-net.org/lists/>

<http://www.h-germanistik.de/>

Chronicle of Higher Education: <http://chronicle.com/>

**APPENDIX I: GRADUATE STUDENT FUNDING FOR TRAVEL
REQUEST FORM**

This form should be submitted to the Department Chair each year.
Application Deadlines September 30 and January 31

Name _____

I. Description of Proposed Travel:

- Dates _____
- Location _____
- Abstract of the paper/project associated with Travel (please attach)

II. Detailed Budget Request:

- Detailed Budget (Please attach). Should include:
 - List of projected/incurred expenses
 - Per diem and mileage (<http://www.pts.pitt.edu/Travel/index.html>)
 - Copies of receipts (please attach)
 - If necessary, speak with Office Administrator

III. List of Other Funding Sources:

- List all sources contacted
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
- List all sources of funding awarded and amount
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

IV. List all Previous Travel Support Received from University and the Department

Source	Date	Amount
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

APPENDIX II: HOW TO WRITE A DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS

THE CHRONICLE

of Higher Education

Advice

September 11, 2011

Demystifying the Dissertation Proposal

By Leonard Cassuto

Before you can write a dissertation, you must write a dissertation proposal. How to do that is worth a closer look.

In my July 24 column, "It's a Dissertation, Not a Book," I emphasized the importance of viewing a dissertation in practical terms, beginning with the fact that it is, first and foremost, the credential for a Ph.D.

Questions about what a doctoral dissertation should look like are essentially teaching questions. Professors are finally starting to ask those questions, especially in the humanities, where they most need to be asked. Commentators like Louis Menand, a writer and Harvard professor, and Sidonie Smith, recent president of the Modern Language Association, have suggested that we revamp the dissertation into something radically different. Menand proposes —polemically, perhaps—that a single scholarly article stand in for the omnibus that we currently demand, while Smith calls more generally for a reconception of the traditional dissertation in light of new possibilities offered by technology and the kinds of work patterns (such as greater collaboration) that it engenders.

Certainly such conversations about the future of the dissertation should continue. But even as we seek to devise new and better approaches, we're stuck—for now—with what we have, and we have to figure out how best to work with it. The dissertation process is the longest stage of graduate education and it begins with the proposal, the crafting of which is dominated by a few central and simple yet elusive truths.

The purpose of a dissertation proposal is for it to be approved. Only then can you start writing. A lot of misunderstanding swirls around dissertation proposals. One foundational fact cuts through it: A dissertation proposal has no independent existence. It's a provisional document, a way station to an eventual goal.

In the laboratory sciences, the dissertation proposal—or, as it is often called, the prospectus—is increasingly viewed as an implied contract with the adviser (who will finance the work in his or her lab) and the committee. If the approved experiments are then conducted, the thesis will

usually be acceptable even if the results don't support the initial hypothesis. That understanding removes the incentive for publication bias or fraud, but it also attaches understandable weight to the experimental plan. The point is that it remains a plan. That sense of its provisional nature needs to be stressed.

A dissertation proposal is not an essay. In the humanities and some of the social sciences, a proposal looks a lot like an essay, but it differs in one fundamental respect: While an essay must prove a thesis, a proposal needs only to advance one. It's enough, in other words, for a proposal writer to demonstrate an argument and show how to prove it at a later date—given approval, space, and time.

A dissertation proposal is not a mini-dissertation. If a dissertation is a small world that you (as god of the microcosm) will bring into being, a proposal is a map of that space within the larger universe. The emphasis here is on the idea of mapping rather than creating. Before you can become a god and invent your own world, you have to become a cartographer.

That means that the goal in your proposal is not to create your world, but rather to suggest what it will look like when you do create it. Because you're mapping a world that doesn't exist (and here my metaphor becomes strained), you should imagine that you're diagramming a place you haven't been to yet.

It's a common mistake for a proposal writer to fall into writing the actual dissertation in the process of laying it out. That's not entirely a bad thing: It offers you a head start. But because students and faculty members too often misunderstand the nature of the project, most dissertation proposals take too long to complete. Students should ordinarily finish writing the proposal in three to six months, and their advisers need to recognize the point at which students should be turned loose to work on their actual dissertations. It's far too common for advisers to put students through needless extra drafts of the purpose, perfecting a document that doesn't need to be perfect because it's just a step on a long road. Extending the proposal stage only makes that road longer and more costly.

For their part, students generally don't recognize the proposal for what it is, either: a provisional document that marks a point of transition, not a polished work of compressed scholarship that need only be inflated to become a dissertation.

A proposal describes your project from both inside and outside. First, the inside stuff:

A proposal puts forth your argument. It points toward how it will be proved, giving well-chosen examples without unspooling them in detail. A few exemplary details will help illustrate your presentation, but a profusion of them will distract. Such details serve the purpose of demonstrating—not fully proving—your argument.

A proposal describes how your argument will fit together. What examples will you use, in what order, and why? How is the argument sequenced and subordinated? You will probably need to provide a chapter outline, but you should offer a clear and extended overview of your argument long before that.

A proposal outlines methodology. How will you make your argument? What theoretical, historical, contextual, and interpretative tools will you use? Will you employ any particular approach?

Your proposal should fit your dissertation topic. A proposal to edit a scholarly edition, to pick one exceptional possibility, will require a different presentation than a dissertation laid out in the model of a monograph (introduction plus four chapters on related topics). The shoe must fit the foot and not the other way around.

From the outside:

You need to show the place of your dissertation in the critical field. Which field and subfield conversations will your project enter, and how? Which critics will you be building on, and which ones will you be revising? Your dissertation marks your formal entry into the community of scholars, a world of intellectuals engaging in overlapping conversations of varying size and scope. Your proposal must show your awareness of those multiple discourses and show the place your research will occupy within them.

Accordingly, you should include a thorough bibliography in your proposal so that readers may look at what works you plan to consult, as well as those you have consulted already. Your committee will review that list and use it as the basis for further suggestions. Finally, I offer proposal writers a commandment and a postulate.

The commandment: Consult your adviser as you develop your proposal. The myth of the writer as solitary genius striving away in the garret has surprising persistence. I've seen many graduate students teach their undergraduates to collaborate without realizing that they're not following their own advice. (That is a mistake I made often enough myself.) You should not imagine that you will be writing your proposal on your own. Instead, draw on the experience of your peers, and especially your adviser, as you shape your topic so that it may be the most relevant, the most challenging, and the most marketable later on.

The postulate: Your dissertation will be different from your proposal. That's to be expected—and the differences can be substantial. Your proposal outlines a hypothetical dissertation: what your thesis looks like to you from where you stand now. The goal of a proposal is not that it should outline your future dissertation. Rather, it should outline one possible dissertation, and do so plausibly.

If you can offer up a credible possible dissertation based on your ideas, then it follows that the dissertation you actually wind up writing will benefit from this early exercise. Your proposal will get finished faster, and so will your dissertation—because unlike diamonds, dissertation proposals (and dissertations) are not forever. And graduate school shouldn't be, either.

Leonard Cassuto, a professor of English at Fordham University, writes regularly about graduate education in this space. He welcomes comments and suggestions from readers to lcassuto@erols.com.