

## DEPARTMENT OF THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE

### Dissertation Proposal Guidelines

We recommend the following format for the dissertation proposal. Although the organization and focus of many dissertations change substantially during the process of research and writing, we have found that attention to these issues in the early stages greatly facilitates the development and execution of the project.

**The proposal should be no more than 3600-4500 words (i.e., 12-15 pages, double-spaced, 12-pt font), not including the bibliography; it is to be submitted for approval by the Department within six months after the student passes the General Examination.**

1. **Thesis statement:** Give a clear and concise description of the particular historical problem or problems you intend to address in your dissertation, and explain why they are important. You are not expected to have complete answers for all the questions you will be asking, nor a fully worked-out argument, although you are encouraged to propose hypotheses. Make as clear as possible your own perspective and approach. Include a tentative chapter outline, with tentative chapter titles and brief one-paragraph descriptions of the material you intend to cover in each chapter. (Approximately 3-5 pages).
2. **Historiographic context:** Place the dissertation problem in a broad historiographic context by critically assessing secondary works of relevance to the project. This section should reflect a thorough review of writings that pertain to the topics and issues you address. Indicate how your dissertation may build upon, or challenge, themes and interpretations proposed by other scholars. You may combine this section with the next one if you wish. (Approximately 3 pages).
3. **Methodological and theoretical considerations:** Describe the basic methodology for accomplishing the project. Review relevant historical literature that suggests critical approaches to analogous questions. It may be helpful also to identify relevant literatures from other disciplines (e.g., philosophy, sociology, anthropology, women's and gender studies). Where relevant, provide a critical assessment of theoretical questions implicit in the work. (Approximately 2 pages).
4. **Sources:** Assess and cite the primary sources you have identified to date to support the project. In preliminary fashion, identify and describe key archival repositories and other anticipated source materials, both published and unpublished. Where appropriate, indicate if you will be conducting interviews, compiling oral histories, or engaging in participant observation. (Approximately 2-3 pages).
5. **Schedule:** Devise a preliminary schedule for the various stages of the dissertation project, including time for research, travel to collections, writing, and revision of the manuscript. Where possible, indicate prospective chapters and the projected times for their completion. You may find it helpful to present this information in spreadsheet form, dividing each academic year into three phases: fall semester, spring semester, and summer. This schedule should reflect your best guesses regarding teaching, and research support. You should expect that your chapter outline, and the amount of time you need to devote to each section, may change over time. (No more than one page).
6. **Bibliography:** Include a list of primary and secondary sources your have used to date in designing the thesis. This is not included in the page limit for the prospectus.

*N.B. Michèle Biscoe, the Graduate Program Coordinator, maintains a file of approved proposals as a resource for students.*

## Submission, Review and Approval of the Proposal

This process falls into several steps, each of which must be carefully timed in order to allow you to make the six-month deadline:

1. Meet or otherwise consult with your principal advisor about your topic, your schedule, and the membership of your three-person *prospectus review committee*. This is often the same as the membership of your *dissertation committee*, which is also usually composed of three people. At least two members of both committees must be faculty in the History of Science Department. All members of the prospectus committee should ordinarily be available to discuss the prospectus at a meeting in late November; if a committee member cannot attend the meeting in person, he or she should arrange to be present by conference call (see #4 below). It may be helpful to provide your advisor with a copy of this sheet for reference when you discuss these matters.
2. With the aid of your advisor, and of the Director of Graduate Studies (Katy Park) if necessary, line up the other members of your prospectus review committee and submit their names to Michèle Biscoe.
3. Submit a complete draft of your prospectus to your review committee on or before **11/16** (assuming you completed your general examination in May or June).
4. Meet with all of the members of your committee together to discuss your draft prospectus; they have two weeks to review the proposal and are supposed to provide individual written comments and recommendations to you on the basis of that reading. These do *not* substitute for the group meeting, which is intended to make sure that you are not getting conflicting advice from different advisors, and to make sure that they have an opportunity to come to a consensus among themselves as to what you should be doing. You should be aiming for a meeting on or before **11/30**. This will give you at least two weeks to revise your prospectus to make the submission deadline. Michèle will help you in scheduling the review committee meeting and, if necessary, making arrangements for a conference call. *Please note that faculty members' schedules are extremely busy and that this meeting should be scheduled as far in advance as possible.*
5. Revise your prospectus as needed.
6. Submit your prospectus to Michèle Biscoe for docketing on the January department meeting agenda by **12/14**.

Michèle will notify you of the action taken by the department shortly after the department meeting.

After your prospectus is approved, you are encouraged to meet with your dissertation advisor regularly and with your dissertation committee as necessary; we encourage annual meetings with the latter, although we realize that this may not always be feasible. It is particularly important to meet with your committee in the final stages of your research and writing; thus you should schedule at least one group meeting in the last 6-10 months before you intend to submit your dissertation.

Please feel free to contact Michèle or Katy with questions about the process or about your particular situation. If you took your general examination in a month other than May or June, or if your schedule is unusual for some other reason (such as additional coursework or training in another field) you will be given an appropriate set of deadlines for the prospectus process.