

Submission of thesis and dissertation materials

Introduction: Why we have a thesis and dissertation submission process

Many of our masters programs, and all of our doctoral programs, ask students to engage in large-scale, independent research as part of their degree requirements. In many cases for the M.A. and M.S. programs, and in all cases for the Ph.D. programs, this research takes the formal, written form of a thesis or dissertation. Students engaged in this part of their training have less formalized or required contact with their programs than students in coursework, and some leave Chicago all together. The Graduate School oversees certain aspects of the thesis and dissertation process as a means of ensuring some kinds of contact between students and faculty during this period, to monitor academic standards, and as one way of maintaining equity and some degree of uniformity across programs. These procedures are intended to protect both the students and the faculty members involved, to formalize and clarify educational and research goals and duties, and to provide one means to realize the pedagogical potential of a project like a thesis or dissertation. Students who do not follow these procedures, or who do them out of order, will probably find that they get less out of the process, so please read this manual and the accompanying materials before you begin.

You will need to interact with The Graduate School at three points during the process of preparing your thesis or dissertation: when you first form your committee, when you finish and submit a formal proposal, and when you finish, defend, and submit your completed thesis or dissertation. The Graduate School oversees the thesis/dissertation at each of these three points. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that all of the stages of this process, along with the accompanying paperwork, are complete and accurate. All of the necessary forms and instructions are available at The Graduate School, Granada Centre Room 400, Lake Shore Campus, and online at: http://www.luc.edu/gradschool/servicesandresources_forms.shtml

The Graduate School staff is also available to provide help and answer questions about the process. If you have problems or questions after consulting this manual and the related materials, please direct them to:

Nicole Lassahn, Ph.D.
Assistant Dean
nlassah@luc.edu
(773) 508-6044

We do ask that students read the materials before calling, as this helps us to maximize student service.

The Thesis/Dissertation Committee

Before you begin work on a thesis or a dissertation, you will need to form a committee. You should talk with faculty members in your department or field about your project,

and about their willingness to serve on your committee. All committees have a director; thesis committees need at least one additional reader and dissertation committees at least two (lakeside campuses) or four (LUMC programs) additional readers.

Once you have made these arrangements, you should submit the Thesis/Dissertation Committee Recommendation Form, with the appropriate signatures, to the Graduate school. Keep in mind that thesis and dissertation committees have official standing only upon appointment by the Graduate School. That is to say, you do not have a thesis or a dissertation committee until this paperwork is finished and approved. Note that a committee which is not yet approved cannot approve a proposal; the Graduate School will not accept signed ballots from students without formal committees.

The form asks for two things: information about you and your committee members, and signatures from various persons involved which signify formal, official consent. In particular, please notice that you will need to provide a c.v. for any member of your committee who is not a full or associate member of the **graduate** faculty (not all LUC faculty members are graduate faculty members). This ensures that the members of your committee have the credentials and expertise to advise you in your field and on your project, and also that your degree, when you get it, meets national standards. There are also some other policies about who may or may not serve on a committee, detailed in our catalog; most of these policies are designed to ensure that the degree you earn at Loyola University Chicago is earned mostly with Loyola University Chicago faculty members. That is to say, while it is often very productive and exciting to consult with scholars outside the university, and these relationships can even be formalized using this form, if all of your committee comes from elsewhere, you are in some sense no longer earning a degree here. The University and the Graduate School also have fewer options for resolving difficulties and problems, should such arise, if the faculty members on your committee are not appointed here.

The other feature of the form is the place for various people to sign it. Your dissertation or thesis director is the first: this person signs the form in order to indicate his/her willingness to serve as your director. This means that you and s/he both have certain rights and responsibilities, and your relationship is formalized in this way. Obviously, the Graduate School will never approve a committee without this formal consent from its director. Your Graduate Program Director will also sign this form. This is a way of keeping you in touch with your department or program, and also of checking to see that your committee is appropriate to your particular research interests. Your GPD will notice if, for example, you sign up to write a dissertation about Greek lyric poetry with faculty members who specialize in the Victorian novel. Such information is discipline specific, and the Graduate School takes the recommendations and opinions of the individual programs very seriously.

Finally, a Graduate School Officer will ensure that the form is complete and complies with all the relevant policies. The Graduate School will notify the student, the Graduate Program Director, and the thesis or dissertation director that the Committee has been approved (or of any problems or questions) via email (students should use their LUC

email accounts for such communication). If you do not receive this notification, you should not assume that your committee has been approved; please contact Dean Lassahn in this instance. As with all formal paperwork, the student and the program should make and keep copies of this form for their records before submitting it to the Graduate School.

The Thesis/Dissertation Proposal

Your program and committee will ask you to write and submit a formal proposal of the research and writing you would like to do. This proposal must meet the academic standards of both your program/discipline and the Graduate School. It must also meet LUC standards and federal guidelines for using animal and/or human subjects, if you are using either. Finally, when you finish your proposal and begin writing your thesis or dissertation, you must register and pay a fee with the Bursar. This fee subsidizes the binding of the final copies that live in the library and the University Archives, and the imaging of the dissertations through Proquest/UMI/Dissertation Abstracts. There is paperwork associated with each of these features of an acceptable proposal, and you should submit all of this paperwork to the Graduate School, and you should submit it all at the same time.

To ensure that the project is feasible and meets academic standards, you should first submit copies of the thesis/dissertation proposal to members of your committee. Your committee members have one month to review your proposal. If any voting member of your committee does not approve your proposal as submitted, you must make all necessary revisions and submit it again. Once your committee has agreed that the proposal is acceptable, each voting member should sign the Ballot for the Approval of a Thesis/Dissertation Proposal. The ballot must indicate unqualified approval from all voting members. In some cases, your committee will have a formal hearing about your proposal before signing the ballot. Your Graduate Program Director will also sign this ballot; this is one way of keeping your and your home program in touch with each other. Your Graduate Program Director is certifying only that s/he has seen the document and not that s/he approves of your proposal *per se*. **This signed ballot is one of the documents that you will submit to the Graduate School with your proposal.**

The proposal is an important academic milestone, but it is also an important pedagogical tool. Both students and faculty members should think of the proposal not as a contract, or not only as a contract, but also as a way of articulating the boundaries and goals of the student's first large-scale independent research project. That is, having a formal, approved proposal does protect both students and faculty in some of the same ways that a contract does: neither party can make a big change without some kind of discussion, for example, and the student cannot be asked to do a great deal more (or less) work than s/he originally agreed to. In this way, writing a proposal reduces time to degree and prevents problems later in the dissertation/thesis process.

On the other hand, a proposal does not mean that the student (or committee) will not

make any changes; it is expected that long term research will require adjustments and discoveries. The Graduate School also hopes to minimize the possibility that students, viewing the proposal as a kind of trial, performance, or means to winning faculty attention, will get hung up at this stage in extensive rewrites (or writers block). Part of the reason for forming a committee BEFORE beginning a proposal is to have those faculty members' help with the process of writing it. If a project starts to require multiple revisions at the proposal stage, it may be time to revisit the project, the make-up of the particular committee or, in some extreme cases, the preparation of the student for such research. Everyone should keep in mind that it is better to have such conversations, even if they are unpleasant, at an early stage in the process, rather than after the student has written several chapters.

Proposals obviously vary from program to program and discipline to discipline, but there are some features that any proposal should include. Students and faculty should keep in mind the research question or questions to be addressed, the method or methods to be used, the place of the project in the extant literature, and the focus and scope of the project. Many proposals include an outline of individual chapter topics, and students should confer with their committees about how much detail is appropriate in each individual case. Students should not feel that they need to have final conclusions at this point, nor should students undertake large-scale research or writing of their dissertations without an approved proposal, and the conversations with the committee that it represents. Students should also be able to articulate their ideas in a short form; this is good practice for applying for jobs and fellowships, and for engaging in professional activities like conferences. **You will submit an abstract of your dissertation or thesis with the other materials.**

To ensure that your financial obligations to the University are met, you should pay the dissertation or thesis fee (\$85 for dissertations, \$40 for theses). The dissertation fee covers the eventual publication of your dissertation (with ProQuest Information and Learning) and its abstract (in Dissertation Abstracts International) and also the binding of the hard copies which will be housed in the University Libraries, the University Archives and, in some cases, your program. The thesis fee covers only binding; you may opt to publish your thesis, but this publication is not required, and you will need to pay for it at the time you make the request.

There are two forms involved in paying this fee because there are two offices involved in it. One, the Form for paying the fee, is something the Bursar will keep in that office's records. The other, the Proposal form we will keep in your file. Fill out both forms, and take them to the Office of the Bursar with a check for the correct amount. The Bursar will stamp the proposal form and give it back to you, and you will bring it in as part of your thesis/dissertation materials. The purpose of this form is to keep track of this financial obligation: forms submitted without this stamp are not acceptable.

All projects involving human and/or animal subjects must be approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) and/or the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). Students are never granted

IACUC protocols in their own names, but the Graduate School does monitor some aspects of this requirement. You should discuss with your advisor or anyone in whose lab you are working the appropriate procedures for working with animals, and you will need to be formally added to an open, approved protocol as a staff member.

If you are working with human subjects, you must obtain IRB approval for your project, and you must keep your protocol open and active starting before you collect any data, renewing it as appropriate, until your project is complete. Normally this means until you defend your thesis or dissertation. The IRB approval process begins with a signed proposal ballot; this means you will have to finish your proposal before you can even apply for IRB approval. This process, too, has advantages, especially that students will have formal help from their committee members in preparing these research protocols for review. This means better research projects, and more student-mentor contact. This also means that students have the opportunity when writing a proposal to think through questions like their methods or the way their projects fit into the secondary literature before hurrying off to gather or interpret data.

Research with human subjects is defined in this way:

- (1) Research is any systematic investigation designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge (e.g. papers, conference papers presentations, articles, etc.)
- (2) A human subject is a living individual about whom a researcher collects data or obtains private, identifiable information. Even if your data are acquired through mediation like an archive or someone else's published data, if your subjects are living, it is the Office of Research Services which determines whether or not your project is exempt. **Err on the side of caution is seeking IRB approval and contact the Compliance Manager with any questions.**

Even if your data are acquired through mediation like an archive or someone else's published data, if your subjects are living, it is the Office of Research Services which determines whether or not your project is exempt. Because of this, we ask that both students and their faculty advisors sign the form certifying either that the project does not involve human or animal subjects according to this definition, or that there is an open, approved protocol connected to the research.

CONTACT : Malcolm Barth, Compliance Manager
(773) 508-2689
mbarth1@luc.edu

This office also has information on its website:
<http://research.luc.edu/net/public/policies/compliance/irb/IRB.aspx>

To recap, then, you should submit to the Graduate School the following items related to your dissertation or thesis proposal:

- an abstract of your project of one or two pages at most
- a signed ballot approving your proposal
- a form stamped by the Bursar indicating you have paid your fee (they will keep a second form when they stamp your form) and signed by both you and your advisor certifying your IRB/IACUC status
- a copy of your IRB approval or exemption letter, if applicable

Once the Graduate School receives all these materials, you will receive a receipt for your records at your LUC email address. The title of your thesis or dissertation will also appear on your transcript at this time; you should see it listed as it appears on the forms you turned in and as "In Process". The Graduate School will also conduct a doctoral candidacy review of every student who submits all his/her dissertation proposal materials.

The Oral Defense and Final Copies of a Dissertation or Thesis

Once you turn in your proposal materials, you will not need to contact the Graduate School again until you are finished with the project (unless, of course, you would like to, or you have questions or problems). This does not mean that you should go away and write without ever checking with anyone. You should be in touch with your dissertation or thesis committee about the process of researching and writing. Individual students should work out how and how much they will contact their committee members and departments, but all students should have some system for this communication. Students who go for several years without progress or contact with their programs and advisors will need, at a minimum, to go through the formal process of applying for an extension of time to degree, and may be subject to dismissal from their programs. Students who do not remain continuously registered during this time and do not arrange ahead of time for a leave of absence also risk being dismissed from their programs. Most programs also have yearly evaluations of students and their progress, and your advisor or GPD will submit a grade (P or NP) for each term for which you are enrolled in Dissertation or Thesis Supervision. These, too, are mechanisms to ensure contact between students and faculty; please take them seriously.

Once your thesis or dissertation is substantially complete, you should discuss with your advisor how and when to schedule a final oral defense. (Some programs do not require an oral defense of a thesis, but your committee will still need to sign a final ballot and you should still have some kind of conversation with its members about whether you are done and why. An oral defense is required for ALL dissertations.) If you and your director think you are ready, you should complete a reader's copy of the text, submit one copy to each member of the committee. The committee has one month to review the text.

You should also schedule a defense and have it publicized in your program. You should also make arrangements to submit a complete copy of your manuscript **which you have already formatted according to LUC's guidelines** to the Graduate School for a format check. You will need to do this before the posted deadline, so please try to plan ahead. You can have a manuscript format checked even if you have not defended your dissertation, but you should be substantially finished. If you are writing a thesis, you can submit a representative chapter for a format check, but you will need to include all the front and back matter, as well as sample tables and figures so that their formatting can be checked as well. You will receive the results and further instructions at your LUC email address.

After you have defended your thesis or dissertation (or had your thesis approved without a defense, if this is allowed), you should submit to the Graduate School a final ballot signed by all the voting members of your committee, and also by your GPD (again, this is not an approval of the project *per se*, but a way to keep your GPD in the loop). Once the Graduate School receives this ballot, your defense will be noted on your transcript by changing the text accompanying the title from "In Progress" to "Complete." If you earned distinction, this will also be noted at this time.

Your committee may require you to make some changes after even a successful defense. Likewise, the Graduate School may ask you to make changes to your formatting. After you have defended, you should make both of these kinds of changes, and submit final copies of your thesis or dissertation to the Graduate School by the posted deadline. You will receive detailed instructions about how and what to submit with the results of your format check; this information is also available in our *Manual for Theses and Dissertations*. Until your final copies are turned in, correct, and complete, with all their accompanying materials, the Graduate School will not confer your degree.