

A student should understand that comprehensives are a preparatory stage for moving to the dissertation proper. The ACS faculty as a whole has the right to evaluate a student's progress at each stage. A student's passing of PhD comprehensives is not an automatic guarantee that she/he will be allowed to proceed to dissertation work. In certain cases additional work might be required of a student before proceeding on to the dissertation. In rare cases a student may be advised not to undertake the dissertation. It must be repeated that the Program always reserves the right to terminate a student's association with it for academic or other valid reason, clearly and duly stated.

### **Stage 3: Dissertation Proposal**

Before a dissertation project can be approved, a dissertation proposal must be written. This is done in close collaboration with the student's proposed Dissertation Committee Chair, who guides the process in consultation with other proposed committee members, including the external committee member. In general, the proposal must include:

1. A literature review
2. A section on methodology
3. Clear demonstration of the unique contribution to scholarship that will be made by the dissertation project
4. Proposed composition of the faculty committee
5. Structural outline of the dissertation (chapter headings, etc.)
6. A proposed timeline for completion
7. A bibliographic section

Proposals must focus on topics which are within the expertise of available faculty at the Institute. Topics that cannot be adequately supported by faculty resources at the Institute will not be sanctioned by the committee members, advisors or the Program Committee.

A student should be aware that the proposal stage is a very important step in the dissertation writing process. It will usually take a student more than one semester to do a dissertation proposal. The Registrar allows a maximum of three semesters on the proposal. Remember that a well thought through proposal gives a student significant momentum going into dissertation research and writing proper. In the Asian and Comparative Studies Program, all proposals are formally reviewed by the Research Director (Steve Goodman). After the ACS Research Director has approved the dissertation proposal, it is submitted to the Dean for final review. Once the Dean signs off, the necessary forms for "Advancement to Candidacy" are sent to the Registrar.

**(See Appendix B on the Literature Review for the dissertation proposal at the end of this document.)**

Students often wrestle with methodology and literature review at the proposal stage, so it is recommended to begin learning how to incorporate methodology and literature review into your term papers during the coursework stage. The Center for Writing and Scholarship is an excellent resource for learning these skills.

The proposal stage often reveals more about a student's capabilities than all previous work. It will take significant effort for a student to produce a polished dissertation proposal. It is quite possible for a proposal to take a year or more to reach a polished state. It is a general fact of academic life that students can and do falter at the dissertation proposal stage. Those who have had a clear notion of their

PhD topic from the beginning are at a great advantage here. The more the refining of a dissertation topic is left to the post comprehensive project period, the more likely it is that there will be significant difficulties with the proposal. The faculty will make every effort to support students through this stage, but this stage is traditionally a watershed one. Students can and do abandon their PhD work at this stage. On rare occasions a student might be advised to take a leave of absence here or to reconsider going on to the dissertation proper. The Program and its advisors always reserve the right to determine what is best for the student at these junctures.

In order to submit a dissertation proposal, the committee must be assembled formally, and a formal review of the proposal must be conducted by both the Committee Chair and the External Member. Students are encouraged to use the Thesis/Dissertation Proposal Assessment (often called the “Dissertation Rubric” or “PhD Rubric” by ACS faculty) form in order to understand the standards by which their proposal will be judged. Students are also encouraged to use the services available at the Center for Writing and Scholarship to ensure a strong proposal.

All forms for the proposal submission process are available at the Registrar’s office, or via MyCIIS (go to MyCIIS > Registrar > Registrar’s Office Forms > Thesis and Dissertation Forms headline). **Please note that students are responsible for obtaining all committee member and faculty signatures before submitting to the ACS Program Coordinator for final submission to the ACS Concentration Director. Students must submit both a hard copy and scanned electronic copy of their signed forms, together in one packet and one email.** The Coordinator will ensure that all papers are in order, and will reject submission if any forms or signatures are missing.

The ACS department prefers all forms for proposal, including approval of committee members, to be submitted together. In rare, exceptional circumstances, we may accept the approval of committee member forms separately, prior to the Assessment and Approval forms.

Once a dissertation proposal is approved by both the ACS department and the Dean, the student advances to candidacy, and their registration is automatically changed from Thesis/Dissertation Proposal Completion to Thesis/Dissertation Completion. After this point, candidates should register for Thesis/Dissertation Completion.

#### **Stage 4: Dissertation**

The specific requirements and criteria for a dissertation are included in the Institute’s Student Handbook. A dissertation in Asian and Comparative Studies should be between 200 and 300 pages in length, excluding references and bibliography. It is crucial to be aware of what completion of a PhD dissertation means within an academic context. It is not at all simply an expression or product of the individual student. It is understood by the outside academic and scholarly world as the product of the institution itself, and the academic expertise of the dissertation committee faculty members. It is, in other words, a collaborative document. For this reason, the dissertation receives the closest scrutiny of all student work, and usually requires extensive modifications and re-writing.

For the purposes of the dissertation, three committee members are necessary in Asian and Comparative Studies. Two must be internal members (one must be from Asian and Comparative Studies) and the third an outside committee member (in rare cases, an outside reader). It is generally understood that the dissertation chair is responsible for overseeing the dissertation work (see Institute Student

Handbook and School of Consciousness and Transformation Handbook). However, in Asian and Comparative Studies we advise students to deliver each chapter to each committee member as the dissertation proceeds (unless a committee member specifically requests otherwise). These chapters may be reviewed in turn by the Chair in advance, but this is not necessary. Students who do not submit chapters to all committee members as the dissertation progresses may find themselves in the awkward position of delivering a full dissertation to a committee member who may find significant problems in it. This can cause a major delay in finishing the dissertation. If chapters are submitted to members as they are completed, each committee member can judge the flow of the dissertation and do early corrections of direction, rather than possibly having the dissertation go off course from the point of view of that member (please remember that, even though the Chair of your committee has general responsibility over the dissertation, this does not preempt nor override the independent judgments and critiques of other committee members).

When all the committee members believe that the dissertation is completed, except for minor changes, a defense date is arranged in order to allow input from the Institute community and potentially the larger academic community.

Before the defense date is scheduled, however, the student must submit the full dissertation draft for technical review (consult with CIIS librarian and/or Director of Graduate Studies for requirements). This is to ensure that a uniform academic style standard has been followed in the dissertation and that the dissertation meets the technical regulations for the CIIS Library and for University Microfilms International. Proof of technical review must be shown to the Chair of the dissertation committee before a defense can be scheduled. **Due to the variable amounts of time needed for the technical review, students must submit the final draft of their dissertation (pre-technical review) by the end of the semester before the one in which they intend to present their defense.**

A defense must be scheduled at least three weeks in advance to ensure that the event can be properly promoted. Deadlines are available in the Academic Calendar.

To schedule a defense, the student must confirm a day and time (with at least one alternate day and time) with their committee members, and then complete the Request for Oral Defense Announcement and Room Reservation form, available at the Registrar's office or in MyCIIS (go to MyCIIS > Registrar > Registrar's Office Forms and look under the Thesis and Dissertation Forms headline). The student is responsible for obtaining the signature of their Committee Chair before submitting it to the ACS Program Coordinator, along with the requested day and time, plus alternate(s). The Program Coordinator will then schedule the room with a finalized date, and submit the form to the Assistant Registrar. The Program Coordinator sends out an announcement of the defense, and the student is encouraged to do their own promotion, as well.

The student must bring the Thesis/Dissertation Approval form to their defense, in anticipation of the form being signed by all committee members. At the defense the committee may sign off on the dissertation, or they may demur until the Chair has ensured that necessary remaining changes have been made. In certain cases, due to a variety of reasons, a committee may decide that the student needs to do more to finish the work and it might take some time even after a defense for a student to complete the dissertation to the satisfaction of all.

Students are responsible for obtaining all signatures before submission to the ACS department for final approval. A final hard copy of the dissertation (ideally post technical review), along with all necessary

forms and signatures for approval, must be submitted together to the ACS Program Coordinator for final review. Any missing forms or signatures will mean the entire packet will be rejected, so please be sure to check the requirements carefully. Once the ACS concentration director has approved the dissertation, the Thesis/Dissertation Approval form will be forwarded to the Center for Writing and Scholarship.

Students must also submit a final copy of the dissertation, after technical review is complete, to the Center for Writing and Scholarship for final approval. Once the dissertation has been approved by all departments, the student may publish their dissertation by uploading to UMI for final publication.

Note that procedures and regulations may change from time to time. Please see regulations published in the Academic Catalog and the Academics and Registrar sections of MyCIIS for the most up-to-date rules and procedures, and verify with those offices.

During the dissertation process, beginning with the proposal, it is understood that a student must remain registered each semester. Leaves of absence, which allow a student to not register in a given semester, are only granted for legitimate emergencies. Four years are allowed, including leaves of absence, to complete the dissertation from the time of proposal approval.

The dates by which defenses must be held in order for a student to graduate in a given semester are set by the Institute. These deadlines are usually early in the semester, and can be found by referencing the Academic Calendar. A student should have all her or his dissertation drafting finished well before the beginning of the semester in which she or he wishes to graduate. A dissertation should be completely refined and reviewed in detail by each committee member, including the outside committee member, well before the beginning of the semester during which the student has an expectation to graduate. A student should not expect that faculty will disregard or waive the straight timelines and deadlines set by the Institute.

Candidates may use either Chicago or MLA citation styles in their dissertations, but must use CIIS guidelines in employing these styles. Note that **CIIS requirements may differ from the standard Chicago or MLA style guidelines. Candidates must adhere to these formatting guidelines and may not use alternative or blended styles.** Please refer to the style guides available via the Center for Writing and Scholarship. These guidelines and other useful information can be found in MyCIIS > Academics > Center for Writing and Scholarship > CWS Documents. It may also be useful to download recently approved CIIS dissertations using your chosen citation style for models on the appropriate use of these styles. Understanding these citation styles in their CIIS dissertation usage can potentially save you considerable time and money in the technical review process.

### **General Guidelines on the Academic Process**

The Asian and Comparative Studies Program will make every effort to make certain that requirements for academic work will be clearly stated and promulgated regularly. However, it is always in the student's best interest to consult with her/his advisor regularly (at least once per semester), as well as ask them for advice regarding problems or things that are unclear. If an advisor is unsure, then the ACS Concentration Director should be asked, and students may also consult with the ACS Program Coordinator. At every stage of the PhD journey it is advisable for the student to be proactive in pursuit of answers and advice.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Human Research Review Committee**

Any research involving human subjects must be submitted for approval to the Institute's Human Research Review Committee (HRRC) along with application for approval. (Applications for approval are available outside the Registrar's Office or online at [www.ciis.edu/students/hrrc.html](http://www.ciis.edu/students/hrrc.html).)

The HRRC is charged with the responsibility and authority to review, approve, disapprove or require changes in research activities involving human participants. This review is done to ensure that the research conforms to the principles of ethical research articulated by the various professional organizations, including the APA and American Anthropological Association and by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Students may not begin any of their research involving human participants, including piloting and fieldwork, until the entire research proposal has been fully approved by the Human Research Review Committee. Please note that the committee may take up to 6-8 weeks for an initial review, and many applications are rejected on the first round of submission. The process of revision and re-submission may take weeks or months, so please allow time for this, and consult with your advisor and the ACS Program Coordinator if you are having any trouble with the process.

If your research project includes human participants, a copy of the HRRC letter of approval must be included with your dissertation proposal in order to receive final approval.

## APPENDIX B

### The Literature Review for the Dissertation Proposal

Next to the précis statement or the thesis statement for the dissertation proposal, the literature review is the most important aspect of the dissertation proposal. This is the place where the topic for the dissertation is academically framed and the “research space” that the dissertation will uniquely hold is carved out. It is most important to understand that the literature review is not a book review which details books read in dissertation research to date! The literature review is a critical survey of previous literature on the topic of the dissertation with the goal of establishing the place of the dissertation topic by demonstrating a gap in existing academic literature. The literature review for the dissertation proposal should include the following:

- 1) A survey of books whose subject matter is substantially in the area to be covered by the proposed dissertation. These books must be critically reviewed to show that they either cover the subject matter for the proposed dissertation in a way that is quite different from that of the proposed dissertation or that the approach used in them is flawed (or both). The survey of books must include published reviews of the books in question unless such reviews are completely unavailable. Clearly the depth of the write-up in the literature review on different sources will vary in regard to their value and relevance to the proposed dissertation project. Books that are deeply flawed, but cover the topic at hand, can be dismissed in a simple sentence. Books that are academically respectable and have considerable material that crosses into the subject matter in the dissertation must be closely reviewed. If a student should find that there are just too many books to review on the topic, it is likely that the proposed dissertation topic has been already well covered in the literature and the topic probably needs to be narrowed or changed.
- 2) A critical survey of dissertations that have been written on the topic heretofore.
- 3) A review of articles found in major journal sources (including online journals). Obviously, this is the area where it is likely that every source will not be tracked down just for the proposal. But for establishing the boundaries for the topic it is important to survey approximately 15 to 25 major journals in the subject area. Articles found in these journals related to the proposed research topic should be reviewed in the literature review in terms of their relevance and importance for the topic. Again, if one finds that there is a plethora of articles on the chosen research topic in journals, it is likely that the topic is too broad.

This list of points to cover is phrased as though the proposed dissertation topic is very focused and covers a single field. If the proposed topic is interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary, then the literature review needs to delve into the various prongs of the project in an in-depth way. If the proposed project, for instance, were to be on the history and philosophical development of tradition X, the historical sources **and** the philosophy sources would need to be reviewed.

Let the librarians at the Institute (or elsewhere) guide you in doing this research. A tremendous amount of the searching can now be done online; however, other elements cannot and a student may have to delve into journals going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (quite common in Asian studies) that are only found in paper form.

Let your dissertation committee chair and the program itself also be of aid to you if you start to feel lost in this process. The Center for Writing and Scholarship is also an excellent resource, and can help you understand the literature review and how to approach it for the purposes of a dissertation proposal and dissertation.

Though the process of the literature review might seem tedious and a little beside the point at times, you should be clear that a good literature review nearly always leads to a good dissertation. It provides crucial direction to the research work that is repaid many times over, as it closes the door on false starts in the dissertation process very early and leads one away from topics that are not clearly thought through.