

## **TSD Qualitative Dissertation Proposal Guidelines** (20-30 pages, excluding References and Appendices)

The following elements are necessary for all (except dissertations that use a theoretical method) dissertation proposals and final dissertation presentations in the Transformative Studies Doctoral Program. Page lengths below are for the proposal only. For page length for the actual dissertation, consult with your chair. You may find that your particular inquiry is best described with a different ordering of these elements, yet all of these elements, in some logical order, are required for a complete and acceptable proposal. This outline will be used for both the dissertation proposal and the final dissertation presentation. Thus, work done on this outline will serve you throughout the dissertation process.

- I. **TITLE PAGE (1 page):** title of inquiry, your name, your address, phone number, email, date of submission. Include this page in all submissions, even if only one chapter is submitted
- II. **ABSTRACT (3 paragraphs)**  
In three paragraphs not to exceed one page, describe in paragraph one: the subject of the inquiry, the inquiry question, and the co-researchers; in paragraph two: the paradigm within which the inquiry falls, the method to be used, and the logic that connects the inquiry to the selected method; and in the third paragraph, the significance of the study and how the results of the inquiry will be useful to specific audiences. Abstracts are published. Be succinct. Cite keywords.
- III. **TABLE OF CONTENTS (1 page)**  
Use complete outline format specified by APA. Include page numbers.
- IV. **INTRODUCTION TO THE INQUIRY (4-6 pages)**
  - A. **Inquiry Question and Subquestions:** What are the guiding inquiry question and subquestions? What is the nature of the inquiry? Why is it important? What has led to the need for this study?
  - B. **Statement of the Problem Addressed: Purpose and Significance of the Study** What is the rationale for the inquiry? What is the problem addressed? What is to be learned? For which audiences is this inquiry beneficial?
  - C. **Personal Relationship to the Topic:** Explain your interest in the topic and your personal relationship to the inquiry. How did you come to be interested in the topic? Are you a member of the group being studied?
  - D. **Definitions:** Define all concepts and variables in the study, **FOR THIS INQUIRY**, that are germane to the inquiry question and method.
  - E. **Researcher's Assumptions:** The lens through which you approach the inquiry. List assumptions as to context, inquiry question, and method.
- V. **LITERATURE REVIEW (10-14 pages)**  
Plan to review all pertinent findings touching on the inquiry question and the method to be used. Start with a strategy as to how all of the areas are interconnected and pertinent to the inquiry. Several disciplines and a methodology should be involved in this section.

Include a preliminary literature review on the various subfields of literature that are most relevant to your inquiry question, often about 3-5 subfields. Focus on the seminal works in those subfields. Discuss if, why, and how your dissertation is transdisciplinary, why your work is not limited to the purview of one discipline, and what specific aspects of the issue lead you to draw on other disciplines that need to be reviewed here. What is the Dominant Disciplinary Discourse of your issue? In other words, in what discipline has most of the work on your topic been done? What are the limitations of this disciplinary approach? What are its underlying assumptions?

When you discuss the transdisciplinary nature of your literature review, do not “lead” with the disciplines you will be drawing on, as in “For my dissertation I will draw on psychology, sociology, anthropology, quantum physics, molecular biology, evolutionary theory, and cosmology.” Lead with the *issue*, and indicate why this cannot be satisfactorily addressed using only one discipline. Explain how and why, using specific examples, you need to address issues that cannot be covered by one or more disciplines. In other words, what specific aspects of the issue will require drawing on other disciplines? Be as specific as possible, e.g., “in order to explain George W. Bush’s sudden embrace of Kinky Friedman’s music, I will draw on the psychology of conversion experiences, in particular the work of James Goren and Ullman...” “I will draw on the sociology of work and specifically sociologist Howard Becker to illustrate how a professional creative *performance* cannot be understood solely from a psychological perspective but requires an understanding of the network of interactions that make the performance possible, from ticket collectors to stage hands, producers, etc.” You will want to identify the topics you want to explore, and then point to specific approaches in other disciplines that address that topic or can be used to address it.

In the first paragraph, include the one sentence thesis or inquiry question. In a few sentences, give a roadmap of the literature review, explaining what material you cover and why, how it relates to your thesis. Introduce and summarize each section of the literature review so that a narrative is created and the reader understands the scholarship on your topic to date. Write the review in a way that prepares the way for your original contribution.

Usually, it is helpful to organize the literature review thematically, which is to say according to important aspects or themes of the inquiry question. Occasionally, e.g. for a historical piece, it may be most appropriate to organize it chronologically. This must not be a linear, simplistic, A said X and B said Y exposition; rather, the exposition must be synthetic and questioning.

Given the short space, this review should focus mostly on the most seminal works in the fields most relevant to your inquiry, and how different perspectives have been used to frame your issue. It should focus on details regarding seminal terms, definitions, ideas, theories and debates surrounding your specific inquiry question. Put the principles, ideas and debates in which your question is contextualized in your own words. Limit your use of direct quotes to a minimum. Let the narrative guide the flow; do not put titles of publications in texts, only in citations. All parts of the paper should link very clearly to your thesis, so for instance,

demonstrate relationships among topic headings. Use your own voice in mapping out the literature.

Focus on the literature you are reviewing, synthesizing and framing it with respect to your inquiry, so as to pave the way toward your own contribution. Articulate your strategy for the literature review, and how it will go beyond the disciplinary limitations of the DDD. Situate yourself in the literature, and give the reader an insight into your process. In other words, trace your encounter with various bodies of discourse, how you came to see limitations, what the various perspectives and approaches to your topic are, illustrating their underlying assumptions, and where you see gaps, unresolved issues, contradictions, areas that have not been explored sufficiently or at all, and areas where integration is needed between diverse bodies of discourse.

Usually, the dissertation includes one chapter devoted to the literature review. However, if it is suitable for your topic and your chair concurs, you might spread the review of literature over various chapters.

## VI. METHOD (4-8 pages)

### A. Research Strategy/ Method

Describe in detail the paradigm underlying the inquiry, particularly the epistemology, ontology, axiology of the paradigm; the method(s) you find appropriate for the inquiry; the rationale for choosing this method; and how this method is consistent with your assumptions stated above.

### B. Procedures

Describe in detail ALL of the procedures you will use:

- Criteria for, and mode of selection of co-researchers; methods of informing co-researchers (with appended documents);
- Data gathering procedures including interview procedures (include protocols in appendix). Include every step you will make in carrying out the inquiry, described in chronological order.

### C. Data analysis

Describe how will you work with the data and methods in drawing conclusions. Discuss the mode(s) of analysis that you foresee using to make sense of the data that you gather (e.g., different types of phenomenological approaches prescribe particular steps in analysis; the same is true in grounded theory, narrative and action research).

### D. Delimitations and Limitations

- Delimitations: the boundaries within which you will conduct the inquiry (e.g., time, number of co-researchers, nature of data, collection methods).
- Limitations: given its delimitations, what might the inquiry not accomplish (e.g., do you expect the findings to be generalizable? To which groups or population?)

### E. Validity procedures

### F. Ethical considerations (see HRRC document). Append Informed Consent Form

### G. Modes of presentation (relevant for ABR)

## VII. FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION (1-2 pages)

- A. Findings and Outcomes – This section should have several sub-sections, describing discrete parts of the inquiry, findings in each case, and relating each set of findings to theory and method. (This section is not for the proposal, just for the dissertation.)
- B. Discussion and Implications – Within a broader context, suggest how you foresee the eventual findings to contribute to disciplinary or transdisciplinary discourse, or current understanding of larger processes such as social change. What do you foresee the implications of the study to be? Will it make a particular contribution in term of practices (cultural, psychological, methodological, artistic)? Why is this inquiry significant?
- C. Conclusion

## VIII. REFERENCES

A list of all the works (books, articles, edited books, scholarly essays, etc.) quoted in the dissertation proposal, using the APA citation system. The References should be in one, alphabetically ordered list. These works should consist mostly or entirely in scholarly works – via peer reviewed journals and academic publishers. For some topics, you may use some trade books.

For some topics, committee chairs will recommend an additional short list of generic references used for topic development, but not cited in the proposal. CIIS holds that popular journals such as Psychology Today and Wikipedia entries are not accepted as scholarly sources. Appropriate official and scholarly websites are accepted.

## IX. APPENDICES

- A. Committee Membership, including short biographical statement for each member. (1 page)
- B. Timeline for completion of entire inquiry.
- C. Documents to be distributed (e.g., permissions, informed consent, contractual agreements)
- D. Other supplementary documents (e.g., Questionnaire instruments)