

TSD Theoretical Dissertation Proposal Guidelines
(20-30 pages, excluding References and Appendices)

The following elements are necessary for a theoretical dissertation proposal and final theoretical dissertation presentation 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)**
Give 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 (less than one page)**
In three paragraphs not to exceed one page, describe in paragraph one: the thesis statement or inquiry question, and main argument or general subject of the inquiry; in paragraph two: the theoretical perspective and frameworks within which the work will be contextualized; and in the third paragraph, the scope of the study, and how the results of the inquiry will be useful to specific audiences. Abstracts are published. Be succinct. Specify keywords.

- III. **TABLE OF CONTENTS (1 page)**
Use complete outline format specified by APA. Include page numbers.

- IV. **THESIS STATEMENT / INQUIRY QUESTION (1-3 pages)**
State the thesis the dissertation will develop and what the work will attempt to accomplish. Depending on the nature of the dissertation, this could be stated as a thesis statement or as a hypothesis that you will explore and assess throughout the dissertation. The general inquiry is also often framed as the main research objective of the dissertation or as an inquiry question (a single explanatory question; not a yes/no question).

In either case, you should start with one sentence – a singular statement or a singular question. Then explain and embellish upon the sentence in one to three pages. This should indicate how your dissertation may build upon and/or challenge themes and interpretations proposed by other scholars.

- V. **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE(S) & METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH(ES) (2-4 pages)**
A theoretical dissertation should provide evidence of your independent critical judgments and creative approaches to the existing theoretical literature. This section of the proposal addresses your theoretical standpoint or perspective; the methodological approach(es)

you will adopt, and the type of theoretical outcome(s) that you will pursue in the dissertation. Ideally this section discusses the complex interplay between all three.

Discuss if and why you are using a transdisciplinary approach by highlighting the limitations of present disciplinary perspectives, the Dominant Disciplinary Discourse, and the issues that you assert need to be explored in order to address adequately your topic. Describe the particular standpoints or perspectives that you intend to apply to existing knowledge. In other words, what is the position from which you are undertaking your reading of the various bodies of literature? What theoretical perspective are you planning to use in order to undertake your critical reading of the literature(s) (e.g. ecofeminist, Jungian, transpersonal, Buddhist, integral pluralist, etc.)? Furthermore, can this be seen as a methodology of reading and analysis? Thinking broadly about methodological issues in relation to theoretical positions, name and discuss any specific methodological approach(es) (e.g., critical theory, historical analysis, comparative hermeneutic, feminist hermeneutic, postcolonial theory, etc.) that you intend to use. Considering that these approaches are often non-monolithic and with competing perspectives, how do you situate your own methodological orientation within the current debates?

It is also essential to consider what the main outcome(s) of the dissertation will be. For instance will the main theoretical outcome entail: a) deconstruction or critical analysis (this could be done from a number of different perspectives); b) creative revision and the postulation a new theoretical framework (*a* and *b* are often combined); c) comparative analysis (if so, name the primary comparative elements); d) integrative analysis (describe the integrative outcome(s) sought); e) historical analysis (history of concept or idea), or f) another type of outcome, such as a new model, a curriculum, etc.?

Describe in some detail the type of outcome you will be seeking in the dissertation. Will you use a particular orienting metaphor or concept (e.g., participatory; emancipatory)? Do you intend for the format of the dissertation to mirror its content in any way? Will the dissertation draw from your own autobiography? Provide relevant justification for each of these questions, if applicable. Finally, make sure to adequately address any relevant methodological questions specific to your dissertation topic.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE (1-3 pages)

Clarify the original contribution of the dissertation to the existing scholarship. Who is your audience? What significance do you see this work having to one or more issues and disciplines? This section could be divided into subsections: a) academic significance; b) social significance; c) personal significance (optional); and d) spiritual significance (optional).

VII. LITERATURE REVIEW (10-14 pages)

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.

VIII. CHAPTERS BREAKDOWN & SUMMARY (3-5 pages)

This section should convey both the overall structure for the theoretical dissertation as well as summarize the content of the individual chapters. Each chapter should deal with a substantially different area while carrying your arguments forward.

Describe in some details what each chapter of the dissertation will discuss including what literature will be used and how. The summary of each chapter and their organization should give a clear indication of the unfolding of the thesis statement throughout the dissertation. Describe how the dissertation will conclude and the expected final outcome.

IX. SCOPE AND CRITICAL ASSESSMENT (1-2 pages)

Describe the delimitations or outer limits of the inquiry and state what the dissertation will not cover that might be expected. Outline how you will critically assess relevance to the project. Briefly state some of the main objections that may be made to your thesis statement and how you will attempt to address these.

X. REFERENCES

A list of all the works (books, articles, edited books, scholarly essays, etc.) quoted in the dissertation proposal, using the APA citation system. 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. This should include the majority of the most significant works/materials that will be used in your research.

The References Cited should be in one, alphabetically ordered list. 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.

XI. APPENDICES

- A. Committee Members – For each of your committee members, kindly list their names, a short one-paragraph bio about their work, and their basic institutional and contact information – title, university, email, and snail mail.

- B. Timeline – Provide a basic timeline of your research, including how long you anticipate working on all the major aspects, e.g. approximate timeframes and dates for your exam preparation, exam, research, research analysis, writing, submission of chapter drafts, etc.
- C. Other supplementary documents