HOW TO WRITE A DISSERTATION

MARCH 22, 2017
9:30-11:30 A.M.

Dr. Irasema Coronado and Dr. Jacen Moore
Share who you are and something special about yourself...
WHAT IS A DISSERTATION?

In general a dissertation:
- Defines the problem
- Explains the importance
- Reviews what we already know
- Describes what’s missing
- Describes method used for study
- Analyzes/discusses results
- Draws conclusions
“FRONT MATTER”

- Title & Signature Page
- Application to Graduate
- Acknowledgements
- Table of Contents
- Abstract
  - Offers an Overview of the Research, its issues and methods
• Styles may vary based on College and Department

• General format:
  • Chapter I: Introduction
  • Chapter II: Literature Review  Theory
  • Chapter III: Methodology and Results
  • Chapter IV: Summary and Discussion
PRIMARY COMPONENTS OF A DISSERTATION

- Bibliography
- Citation Style
- Appendices
- Tables and Charts
- CV

References
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOW TO BEGIN

- What is your dissertation topic?
- What are your contributions?
- What will be new or different?
- Why is it significant?
- Can you clearly explain your topic?
- Human and Animal Subjects Protection
What is a literature review?
- A description of the literature relevant to your field or topic
- Identify key researchers and arguments
- Identify key theories and hypotheses in the field or topic

See Chris Hart’s Book Doing your Masters Dissertation
THE LITERATURE REVIEW

- Perform thorough literature search
  - all available databases
- Identify and evaluate only those relevant to your topic
- Summarize work and highlight missing points

http://www.literaturereviewwritingservices.com
ISSUES REGARDING USE OF HUMAN AND ANIMAL SUBJECTS

- Benefits to subjects
- Informed consent
- Protection of participants
- Minimizing discomfort
- Privacy
- Community values
- Conservation of resources

http://www.lssu.edu/irb/
ISSUES REGARDING USE OF ANIMAL SUBJECTS

- Insure the humane care and use of animals in experimental science
- Ensuring research is conducted by personnel according to protocol
- Animal species
- Justification of using animal species
  - Alternate methods (reduce numbers, lowest level of vertebrate, possible alternate methods such as *in vitro* or computer simulations)
- Procedures
  - Pain levels
  - Minimization of pain and distress

http://www.amrc.org.uk
**ISSUES REGARDING RECOMBINANT DNA AND PATHOGENIC ORGANISMS**

- All research involving the use of recombinant DNA or pathogenic microorganisms requires the approval of the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) BEFORE you start the work.

- **Your thesis advisor** is responsible for submitting the necessary documentation for this approval.

- **You** are responsible for obtaining the necessary training and certifications required by the IBC to conduct such research.

https://www.ehs.ucla.edu/research/bio/ibc
COLLECTING DATA AND ORGANIZING A DATABASE

- Large amounts of data/information/sources
- Adjust, expand and improve the database
- Keywords, themes, categories
- Emphasize accessibility
- Advantages:
  - Become better acquainted with your research
  - Can help you see major and minor trends
  - Statistical analysis of various sub-topics
You can spend months collecting data and resources but it does not mean you are ready to write. You need to process and organize your research before the writing process can begin.
Get Organized from Day #1

Digital sources, data sets, search terms, etc.

Multiple levels of accessing your material
  - A) secondary source material by topic
  - B) research (how can you organize your material in such a way that you can locate data quickly?)
  - Suggestion: organize your research based on the argument you are making in each chapter
General outline of the dissertation
  - How many chapters?
  - What aspect of your argument is covered in each chapter?
  - Organization of chapters matters greatly!
Outline each chapter before writing
  - Primary sources? Secondary sources?
  - Literature review?
THE DISSERTATION INTRODUCTION

Introduction

- Places the project in its proper context
- Describes contributions to the field
- Discusses the sources / texts used
- Outlines chapters, major argument(s)
- You might address methodology here or discuss this chapter by chapter, per various methodologies
Dissertation Chapters

- Should advance a new argument and material
- You will still have to revisit and expand discussion of relevant works and theories that you briefly discussed in the introduction.

- Write, write, write
- Writing will save effort and time later
- Ensure each chapter has a smooth transition
CONCLUDING THE DISSERTATION

- Conclusion
  - Summarize the main arguments of each chapter
  - Contribution, implications, significance.
  - Answer the “why should academics outside your immediate specialty care about your findings?”
- Detailed and precise citations
- Excellent citations are invaluable when turning the dissertation into chapters, manuscript or book.
TIME MANAGEMENT: MAKING WRITING A PRIORITY

- Self-discipline
- Schedule writing time (ex: MWF 10 to 3pm)
- No other commitments!!!
- Do not access email or Facebook during your writing time. Treat them as a reward.
Set writing goals and take them seriously.
- Enlist the aid of your advisor.
- Commit to a conference and present a paper based on a chapter.

The pros and cons of dissertation writing groups
- Imposes another kind of writing deadline
- Time consuming and not always helpful
TIMELINES AND DEADLINES

- Possible defense dates
  - Allot time before graduation
  - Paperwork, signatures
  - Submit a draft 3-4 weeks before defense
- Communicate with committee
  - Does the timeline work for them?
- Revisions can take a long time
  - Conceptual, organizational, grammatical
- The best dissertation is a finished dissertation
SAMPLE COMPLETION TIMELINE

- CHS PhD program: RA funded full-time student
  - Spring 2011: Started PhD program
  - 1st year: Developed area of interest
  - Spring 2012: Wrote a literature review publication
  - Summer 2012: Developed research question
  - Summer 2013: Proposed (chapters 1-3)
  - Collected data Fall 2013 & Spring 2014
  - May 2014: Conference presented prelim. findings
  - August 2014: Defended dissertation
CONCLUDING ADVICE

- Read many dissertations first
- Talk with advanced students
- Develop professional habits
- Be consistent and focused
- Be positive
- Be reasonable with expectations
DISSERTATION TIPS

- Routinely meet with advisor and committee members
- Completed dissertation = Job!
- Dissertation is a publication
  - Seek out publication venues
- Do not get behind!
- Write something every day
  - Slow and steady wins the race

https://desmos-lesson-uploads.s3.amazonaws.com/activitybuilder/19539c075399938c20e94cc8baabc1a2
DISSERTATION TIPS

• Network
• Peer Review
• Elevator Speech
• How do you want for your dissertation to be cited in a literature review?
• Do not be afraid to ask questions and seek out advice from other experts

https://atmanco.com
DISSERTATION TIPS

• Finish the dissertation before it finishes you!
• As you enter job market- time to completion is a good indication of success as a scholar
• Gracefully transition to other advisor if not making progress
• Chair of your dissertation must write a positive letter of recommendation for job
DISSERTATION TIPS

• Go forth and write, write, write!