

Cultural Studies Program  
**General Guidelines for Dissertation Proposals**

**I. Summary and Statement of the Research Problem, Argument, or Inquiry**

A *concise* description of

- A. the question to be examined in the dissertation research,
- B. its relevance, including its relevance to the general field of cultural studies, related disciplinary fields, and any other logical audiences, and
- C. what promises to be new, original, or innovative about the proposed research and dissertation

(discussion in this section should be *brief* and should be written in non-specialist language)

**II. Background of the Problem, Argument, or Inquiry**

A substantial discussion of

- A. relevant scholarly literature on question, including ancillary and adjacent issues
- B. relevant theoretical claims and perspectives
- C. social and/or scholarly significance of question posed

(discussion in this section should draw on scholarship from the relevant disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and identifiably cultural studies traditions)

**III. Treatment of the Problem, Argument, or Inquiry**

A substantial, detailed, and disciplined discussion of

- A. evidence to be considered (social, archival, textual, media, questionnaire survey, etc.)
- B. methods to be employed (ethnographic, historiographic, textual, interpretive, quantitative)
- C. theoretical perspectives to be engaged, interrogated, examined, or tested

(discussion in this section should describe the materials, methods, and theory to be employed while justifying their relevance to the problem, argument, or question posed; discussion should entertain the strengths and limitations of other ideas and approaches, and should also include a reflexive anticipation of possible limits to the forms of knowledge that might be generated using the proposed means)

**IV. Schedule of Proposed Research and Write-Up**

**V. Exploration of Possible Outcomes**

(concise discussion of possible findings, including the significance, implications, and possible impacts of various possible findings)

## VI. Bibliography

## VII. Appendices (where relevant):

- A. Instruments (survey questionnaires, interview questions, etc.)
- B. Human Subjects Protection Protocol and Ethical Considerations
- C. Chapter Outline

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**NOTE:** These guidelines refer from the outset (I) to a plurality of possible framings for the research project: “Problem” (sometimes read as a social science term), “Argument” (sometimes read as a term from the humanities), or “Inquiry” (a term that straddles the humanities and social sciences). Other possible terms here might include: anomaly, contradiction, hypothesis, premise, puzzle, thesis . . . . The wording also suggests a number of possible relationships between theory and method under IIC: in its application, theory may be “engaged, interrogated, examined, or questioned.”

The use of these terms is intended to keep framing as neutral as possible with regard to approach and disciplinary method, framing the dissertation research as *research* in the strictest sense of the term: “studious inquiry,” “diligent, protracted, and systematic investigation.” This framing presupposes only a) that dissertation proposals are proposals to do scholarly research, and b) that the process of scholarly research submits theory, method, and evidence to critical examination, such that the inquiry is open to unexpected findings.