

Dissertation Guidelines Th.D. Program



The Th.D. dissertation should be a mature piece of writing that represents significant and original research. It must demonstrate the student's ability to contribute to scholarly discourse and to bring that discourse to bear on the ministries and practices of Christian communities. At a minimum, every Th.D. dissertation should include reflection on implications of its central theme for some concrete practice(s) of Christian communities. Ideally, consideration of such practices will inform the work throughout, serving as a stimulus for the study and as one of the "texts" being probed in the investigation.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

After passing preliminary examinations, students designate a dissertation supervisor and, in consultation with the supervisor, select the other members of the committee.

- This committee need not be identical with the preliminary examination committee.
- A dissertation committee is composed of four or five members, at least three of whom must be regular-rank faculty members in the Divinity School.
- The supervisor, who serves as chair of the dissertation committee, should work in the student's primary area of concentration.
- The proposed committee roster must be submitted to the Th.D. director for approval by the Th.D. oversight committee (see "Dissertation Committee Approval Form," <http://divinity.duke.edu/for-students/academic-resources/forms>).

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

With the guidance of the dissertation supervisor, the student prepares and defends a dissertation proposal, normally **within three months of passing preliminary exams**.

This 10–12 page proposal should include:

- a tentative title for the dissertation
- a statement of the problem(s) or question(s) the dissertation will address
- a defense of the topic's significance and its feasibility
- a description of the methodology to be used and the resources required
- a working outline and summary of each chapter
- a bibliography of key primary and secondary sources

RESEARCH ON HUMAN SUBJECTS

If the proposed dissertation involves some form of research on human subjects (surveys, ethnography, etc.), it is accountable to the Institutional Review Board of the Office of Research Support at Duke University. There are several types of IRB review. Most Th.D. projects have qualified for a streamlined process. Students should consult the following website for details on the types of review and for assistance in obtaining approval for their research: <https://ors.duke.edu/research-with-human-subjects>

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL DEFENSE

In consultation with the other members of the dissertation committee, the supervisor will determine when the proposal is ready for defense.

- The student works with the Th.D. administrative assistant, Diane Decker (ddecker@div.duke.edu), to schedule the oral defense of the proposal.
- At least three members of the dissertation committee must be present at the defense to discuss the proposal with the student and vote on its approval. Other members may provide input through the dissertation supervisor.
- The dissertation supervisor will submit a report of the successful defense, along with a copy of the final proposal, to the Th.D. director (see “Dissertation Proposal Defense Report,” <http://divinity.duke.edu/for-students/academic-resources/forms>).
- If for any reason a student should significantly alter the proposal after it has been approved, the foregoing steps must be repeated for the revised proposal.

PREPARATION OF THE DISSERTATION

The final version should be between 80,000 and 100,000 words in length, including notes and bibliography. For information about format, see the “Dissertation Style Guide” (<http://divinity.duke.edu/for-students/academic-resources/forms>).

- Students develop a first draft of each chapter in consultation with their supervisor and circulate individual chapters or portions thereof to other members of the dissertation committee as appropriate. (The dissertation proposal defense may include discussion of which portions to circulate in this broader manner.)
- Taking into account the suggestions of the supervisor and other readers, the student then revises each chapter through successive drafts until a penultimate draft of the entire dissertation is ready for submission to the supervisor.
- The student must give the supervisor at least **four weeks** to review this penultimate draft. The supervisor may decide: (a) that the dissertation is ready for defense, (b) that the dissertation first requires minor revisions, or (c) that it needs more substantial revisions. If revisions are required, the student will make them and resubmit the dissertation. The same options will again be available to the supervisor.
- When the supervisor decides that the dissertation is ready for defense, the student will work with Diane Decker (ddecker@div.duke.edu), the Th.D. administrative assistant, to set the defense date. There must be at least **three weeks** between submission of the defense copy to the dissertation committee and the oral defense.
- The student submits a pdf copy of the defense draft to each member of his or her committee and to the director of the Th.D. Program. Committee members should be informed that the Th.D. administrative assistant will provide a hard copy on request.
- Students must apply to graduate through DukeHub (<https://dukehub.duke.edu>) by the deadline for the semester in which they intend to defend their dissertation. If the student does not defend the dissertation successfully in that semester, he or she must register for continuation for the ensuing semester and apply to graduate again at the proper time.

DISSERTATION DEFENSE

The oral defense of a dissertation normally lasts two hours. All committee members, including the chair, must be present in person at the defense or participate by conference call. Other faculty and students may attend with the permission of the student defending and the committee chair.

- The completed dissertation and the oral defense must be approved by the dissertation committee chair; all but one of the other members of the committee must concur.
- A report form recording the decision of the committee shall be conveyed to the Th.D. director by the chair of the committee, regardless of the outcome (see “Dissertation Defense Report,” <http://divinity.duke.edu/for-students/academic-resources/forms>).
- If the decision is positive, committee members voting to approve will sign **two copies** of both the Dissertation Title Signature Page and the Abstract Title Signature Page.
- It is the student’s responsibility to submit one copy of each signed page to the Th.D. director immediately after the defense.
- The remaining copies should be scanned and incorporated into the electronic copy of the dissertation submitted to ProQuest (see “Dissertation Submission Guidelines,” <http://divinity.duke.edu/for-students/academic-resources/forms>).

DEADLINE FOR A SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

The writing of a dissertation should ordinarily take between two and four semesters.

- If the dissertation is not submitted and accepted **within eight semesters after preliminary examinations**, the student may be dropped from candidacy.
- In exceptional circumstances, an extension of one year may be granted. The student’s petition for such an extension must be submitted to the Th.D. director for approval by the Th.D. oversight committee **before the end of the eighth semester after prelims**. This petition should be accompanied by a letter from the supervisor indicating that the dissertation can be successfully completed within the time frame of the extension.
- Students dropped from candidacy may be required to pass a second set of preliminary examinations in order to be reinstated.