Stages of the PhD: Guidelines for Students and Supervisors

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April 28 2016

Approval by Steering Committee, May 6 2016

The following narrative describes the various stages of the PhD program, their purposes, their relation to each other, and their recommended timing. It is meant to elaborate on the requirements listed in the Calendar, and to guide supervisors and students as they move through the program.

The timing outlined here is not prescribed; personal circumstances or academic specificities may require adjustments. In particular, part-time students will need to adjust this trajectory. However, the intention is that the "cohort experience" of the PhD class continue through Year 2 with some degree of shared timing for going through the Qualifying Exam and Thesis/Project Proposal stages. A shared pace will enable mutual support, and also increase the time available for students to do their dissertations and projects. Having such a timetable clearly delineated should also help supervisors, whatever the norms are in their home disciplines and departments, to support students in meeting the expectations and general practice of Cultural Studies. Students have been and will be expected to submit a progress report in September of each year of the program, and this timetable provides a reference point for that report.

The intention is to strike a balance between flexibility for the many varieties of work that take place in Cultural Studies, and clarity of expectations across the program. Supervisors and students are advised to speak with the Program Director if they have questions about latitude in interpreting these guidelines.

Cultural Studies is an emphatically interdisciplinary area of inquiry that intersects the humanities, science studies, the social sciences and the arts. Drawing on a range of practices, we investigate values, beliefs and belongings, cultural processes and cultural objects, economic and social relations, institutions and identities. Cultural Studies therefore draws on a range of methods and critical theories and strives to do so self-reflexively. In this way we break down conventional divisions not only among academic disciplines but also between academia and activism, and between theoretical analysis and cultural production. Accordingly, it is expected that students take an interdisciplinary approach throughout the program: that is, in coursework, in the Qualifying Exam, in the Thesis/Project Proposal, and in the Thesis/Project.

YEAR ONE

In the **fall and winter term of Year 1, students take 4 courses plus CUST802.** This eight month period constitutes a foundation for the work that follows, introducing students to new frameworks, faculty, and to each other. It is advised that students consult with their supervisor as they select courses.

In the **early summer of Year 1, students revisit the PhD thesis or project they proposed upon application, consider whether their initial supervisor is still the best choice, and in consultation with their supervisor invite two other CS-affiliated faculty members to serve on their committee.**[1] (This committee, barring necessary changes, will be in place for the duration of the program.) Although students will have written versions of their PhD plans for admission to the program and for funding applications, at this point they have a chance to decide if this is how they do in fact wish to proceed. Once the general project is in view, students consult with their supervisor to identify skills, knowledges, or experiences they need in order to do the kind of work they want to do. **For the remainder of the summer the focus should be on building an annotated bibliography of relevant works and materials** they have already read or viewed (it can include artworks, exhibitions, and so on, as appropriate), and those they plan to engage. This can be thought of as a "literature review" stage to prepare the student to ground their thesis/project proposal in the relevant communities of theory and practice. For guidance on annotated bibliographies, students may consult guidelines available from the Queen's Writing Centre (http://sass.queensu.ca/writingcentre/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2013/06/Annotated-Bibliography.pdf); the expectation for this purpose is that the annotation on each work should be about 200-300 words in length.

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[1] In a situation where a community advisor, and adjunct instructor, or a non-CS-faculty member is desired for the committee, the student should consult with the Director.

YEAR TWO

In or by early September of Year 2 (and after all coursework is completed), students submit a 1000-word Proposal for the Qualifying Exam, along with a bibliography of relevant materials read/engaged (annotated) and materials identified to be read/engaged. In essence, the shape of the proposal should be something like this: "Because I wish to do X for my thesis/project, I need to do (or have been doing) Y reading and want to do Z critique or analysis for my qualifying exam." "Z" is the content or topic the student proposes will be the most necessary exercise to "qualify" them to write a strong thesis/project proposal and proceed to write/do it. Sometimes this may be learning a new area of theory or methodology; other times it may be diving deeper into frameworks or perspectives already somewhat familiar. It might be learning about new material, bodies of art, or fields of activity; or it might be focusing or casting wider from material already familiar. The exam may well engage with some areas of the Thesis/Project in detail rather than addressing the big picture. In some cases, the qualifying exam may integrate artistic work. The goal of the Qualifying Exam is for the student to feel ready, and to be deemed ready by his/her committee, to write the Thesis/Project Proposal and to proceed to do the thesis/project; that is to say, the Qualifying Exam is not a rough draft of the Thesis/Project Proposal, but rather groundwork for it.

The committee meets with the student in late summer or early fall to discuss the Qualifying Exam Proposal and make suggestions for preparation during the time remaining before the exam. (The principle is to leave at least two months between this meeting and the exam itself.) Together the committee and student discuss the theory, methods, and content that the student will need to master for the thesis or project, check areas needing attention, and suggest scholarship and other work the student should read or engage with for the exam. In the case of a Research-Creation project, they decide on whether an artistic production component will be part of the exam. Also at this time, all parties **agree on dates for the exam** to be written.

At least ten working days before the agreed-upon start time for the examination, **the student submits to the committee via email the final version of an annotated bibliography of at least 30 items** (some of which will likely be new since the first draft, reflecting priorities agreed upon at the meeting about the Exam Proposal), **and two or three suggested questions** they are prepared to answer for the examination.

The committee then crafts a question or questions for the exam, which they send to the student on the date mutually agreed upon. The general expectation is that the student will write 5000 to 7000 words, not including footnotes.[2] If the examination includes artistic work, the committee will adjust the length of the written examination accordingly; that is, the production component is not to be considered over and above the written component. **The student will have ten working days to complete the exam** (though accommodations can be made in advance for a longer period if work or other responsibilities intervene). The student will distribute their answer to all committee members. Within ten working days of the deadline for the exam answer, each examiner fills out Form 2: PhD Qualifying Exam Evaluation Form for Committee Members including comments on the exam, and returns it to the supervisor. The supervisor

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[2] The current graduate calendar says 3500-5000 words, so this figure represents an increase that cannot be put in place until calendar changes are officially proposed, not before fall 2016. In the meantime, 5000 words will be considered the rule of thumb as it complies with both past and future practice.

determines the decision based on a majority of the three evaluations, notifies the student, and forwards all copies of Form 2 to the student. If the exam is deemed a "pass," the supervisor fills out and submits [Form 3: PhD Qualifying Examination Approval](#) to the program assistant. If the student receives a "Revisions required," they have 10 working days to complete the revisions and resubmit, and the same process is followed as above. If the student fails the exam, the student will have one chance to re-write it within the next six months, with the same process followed as above.

Following the Qualifying Exam (that is, **by January of Year 2 if possible), the student turns their attention to the thesis/project proposal.** The format of this document may vary, and is determined in consultation with the supervisor and/or committee, but the general expectation is for a document of 30-40 pages (accompanied by a bibliography which need not be annotated) that makes clear the theoretical, methodological, and substantive elements and structure of the dissertation/project. Students are required to show the relation of the research to the program's objectives, available faculty expertise, and to the relevant academic literature. All proposals will include a timeline. Projects that require expenditures will include a budget. Well before the proposal defense, students who require or may require ethics clearance do the initial CORE training online and consult with their supervisor and possibly the Unit REB about the appropriate timing for full GREB application.

Research Creation and Community-Based Research ("Project Option") Proposals: In consultation with the supervisory committee, a Research-Creation dissertation proposal may integrate artistic production (see the Guidelines for Research-Creation for more information). If it does, the ratio between production and the written component will be discussed and determined by the committee and the length of the written component will be adjusted accordingly: the production component is not to be considered over and above the written component. All "project option" students will describe how they will document their work, and how they conceive the relationship between the project and the written component. Students whose work will involve community collaborators must show that they have identified and communicated with appropriate participants, and they must justify their choice of participants given the theoretical, political, methodological, and practical contexts of their thesis or project.

Before the end of Year 2, as the thesis or project proposal is approaching completion, the Supervisor schedules the proposal defense and finds a Chair for it (normally the CS Director; this person conducts the meeting but does not play a role in the evaluation of the proposal). **Ten working days prior to the scheduled defense, the student distributes the proposal to all committee members.** The defense focuses on the relevant theoretical, methodological and substantive areas germane to the student's program. The committee assesses the student's understanding of the discipline, the viability, scope and coherence of the proposal, and the preparedness of the candidate to undertake the proposed thesis or project, and offers suggestions for refinements or changes as appropriate. Also at the defense, committee members will assess the timeline and (if applicable) budget, and will each committee member will clarify what they understand their consultative role to be going forward. Some discussion of plans for the student to share their work in progress (at conferences, exhibitions, etc.) would also be appropriate at this time. If the proposal is deemed insufficient, the student will have one opportunity to re-write the proposal and defend the revision within the next six months.

YEARS THREE AND FOUR

In Years 3 and 4, it is expected that students will be in regular touch with supervisor(s). Students should ask supervisor(s) how often they wish to meet or see work, but a general rule-of-thumb might be that students write a short email report once a month to their supervisor(s). Students in Years 3 and 4 should actively seek out opportunities to present work at conferences and in exhibition, especially if they have not done so before. **A complete penultimate draft of the work should be completed by March of Year 4**. This timing allows for the supervisor(s) and committee to read/examine the entire work and for the student to revise accordingly, for the required external and "internal external" examiners to be recruited, for the 5 week period between submission and defense, for summer holiday schedules, and for completion within four years. Students are advised that the CS program cannot guarantee any funding beyond Year 4, and that they are required to pay tuition as long as they continue in the program.

Recommended PhD Timeline: A Summary

	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE	YEAR FOUR
Fall	•2 courses + 802 •apply for external funding	•submit proposal + prelim bibliography for Q Exam •meet with committee to discuss and set date •prepare further •apply for external funding if needed •submit annotated bibliography, questions •write Q Exam	•begin T/P research, production •apply for external funding if needed	•continue T/P research, production •apply for conferences, publication & exhibition opportunities, jobs
Winter	•2 courses + 802	•begin preparing Thesis or Project Proposal, with budget and timeline •do or prepare for GREB if applicable	•continue T/P research, production •apply for conferences, other ways to share your work	•complete thesis or project draft •select external examiner
Summer	•review goals for PhD •confirm committee •read for Q Exam	•complete GREB if applicable •defend T/P Proposal (may be in September)	•continue T/P research, production	•schedule defense •defend your thesis or project •submit all materials for archiving
Throughout	•stay in touch with your committee •pursue funding opportunities as available •attend pertinent events at Queen's •consult and share work with fellow students •reach out to potential colleagues, audiences, and supporters via conferences, community events, etc.			