

Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts

Dissertation Preparation

SYLLABUS

Course Description:

Dissertation Preparation I takes place in the fall semesters each year. Dissertation Preparation II is in the Spring. PhD candidates enroll in Dissertation Preparation I at the start of their dissertation project, after passing the Qualifying Exams, and for each following fall semester until the completion of the dissertation. There is no structured dissertation period during the summer.

All PhD candidates and their directors should refer to the **Dissertation Handbook** available in the Canvas homepage, which lists specific guidelines for dissertation, grading scale, and expectations. The Dissertation Handbook is also available in our website, <https://www.idsva.edu/policies-procedures>.

This syllabus is not meant to substitute the Dissertation Handbook; it is meant to give some indications on how to effectively structure the semester in order to complete at least an average of 15K-18K words, or the equivalent of a chapter (approx. 40-50 pp double spaced). Although more detailed expectations will be set by each Dissertation director and their advisees, meeting this average number of words is advisable in order to graduate within two-three years after receiving Permission to Proceed to the dissertation. The dissertation should comprise a minimum/maximum total word count of 80K-100K words¹.

Note: summers are not counted toward formal semester instruction, but it is expected that the candidate produces an equivalent number of new pages in order to stay on track, following indications given by the Dissertation Director ahead of the summer period.

Learning Objectives:

The main goal of the Dissertation Preparation course is to guide the process of writing the dissertation, and to help the PhD candidate produce a document that fulfills the following criteria:

- 1) To form a *distinct contribution* to the knowledge of the subject and afford evidence of originality by the discovery of new facts and/or by the exercise of independent critical power, interpretation, and argumentation;
- 2) To give a critical assessment of the relevant literature, and in so doing,
- 3) To demonstrate a deep and synoptic understanding of the field of study, objectivity, and the capacity for judgment in complex situations and autonomous work in that field.

¹ Note: in exceptional circumstances the word count can be lower than 80K words, for a minimum of 60K words. This arrangement needs to be discussed with the Dissertation Director, and approved by the Director of the School.

Course Requirements:

The PhD candidate is expected to produce a consistent number of new pages each semester, in order to graduate within two or three years at the most, and to receive a “Satisfactory” grade at the end of each working semester. We recommend completion of an average of 15K-18K words (approx. 50 pp), or the equivalent of a chapter draft.

Note: This amount of pages is our recommendation, but not mandatory.

As a matter of fact, a Satisfactory grade is not necessarily connected with the number of pages produced each semester. Depending on the phase of the dissertation, the number of pages produced can vary (for example, during the first semester it may be lower, when more research may be needed). The dissertation advisor gives a satisfactory grade considering the quantity and quality of the writing, as well the research process of their student(s).

The IDSVA Writing Guide must be used, especially at the early stages when drafting the outline and working on the thesis statement, to ensure that a proper argument-driven chapter and dissertation is developed throughout the process. Please make sure you use the latest version (revised September 2019).

The MLA manual of style must be used. Students should buy the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, through which they can gain access to the online version as well. A succinct version of the MLA style is available online at:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

(Unfortunately at the time of writing MLA does not offer institutional access to its handbook).

Papers must be written in Times New Roman or serif font, point 12, double-spaced, leaving a 1” margin on top and bottom, and 1” on right and left sides. *No other fonts or formats will be accepted*. Make sure all your documents (including drafts) are editable: files should have a word .doc or .docx extension – no .pdf will be accepted until the final submission is due. Please consult the Dissertation Handbook for specific guidelines on the final formatting of the dissertation.

Note: in this course, please send your drafts directly to your Dissertation director – no use of Canvas is necessary for the purpose of submitting drafts (Dissertation directors do not have access to Canvas).

Assessment:

Grading Scale for Dissertation Preparation

Grade point	Letter grade	
0	S	Satisfactory
0	U	Unsatisfactory
	W	Withdrawn

Please check the Dissertation Handbook for important details about grading and credits.

Schedules:

The following is a possible work schedule template for the entire dissertation period:

Semester 1 (Fall)	15K-18K words	1001 Dissertation Prep I
Semester 2 (Spring)	15K-18K words	1002 Dissertation Prep II
Summer break	15K-18K words (or more)	Work on your own
Semester 3 (Fall)	15K-18K words	1001 Dissertation Prep I
Semester 4 (Spring)	15K-18K words	1002 Dissertation Prep II
Summer break	Work on revisions	Work on your own & arrange time for your Director to read and give final approval
Semester 5 (Fall)	Dissertation Defense*	Defenses are held in videoconference (Zoom)
Semester 6 (Spring) - optional	Dissertation Defense*	Defenses are held in videoconference (Zoom)
3 rd week of April	Walk at Commencement (optional)	New York City – attendance is not mandatory

*Note: as of 2023-24, it is also possible to schedule a dissertation defense in the early spring and walk at Commencement in late April. In this case, semester 5 can be used to finish the dissertation (candidates will enroll in Dissertation Prep I).

The above plan will result in a 75K-90K word range, which together with the endnotes will easily fall in the 80K-100K word range expected by the PhD dissertation.

A more detailed schedule for the semester may be structured as follows:

Week 1		First meeting
Week 2		
Week 3	5K-6K words	
Week 4		Second meeting
Week 5		
Week 6	<i>Fall break</i> 5K-6K words	
Week 7		Third meeting
Week 8		
Week 9	5K-6K words	
Week 10		Fourth meeting
Week 11	15K-18K + words	
	Evaluation & grading	(add meetings as needed)

Meeting Protocols:

When IDSVA PhD candidates start working on their dissertation in their fourth year of studies, they need to keep regular meetings with their Directors of Dissertations, conducted either via

telephone or videoconference. To make sure this communication is effective, we have established the following guidelines for maintaining long-distance contact:

1) Student Meetings with the Director of Dissertation

Typically, PhD candidates are assigned a Director of Dissertation at the beginning of the fall semester of their fourth year (or in the spring semester, if they use the fall semester to revise their written exams). To ensure that communication is open and effective, the candidate and his or her Director should meet via telephone or videoconference approximately every three weeks, with contact by e-mail in between as needed. Typically, such meetings last approximately thirty minutes, or longer as needed. The Director and the candidate establish a meeting schedule at the beginning of each semester, coordinated with the deadlines for drafts established by each individual Director, and based on the student dissertation outline.

2) Student and Faculty Meetings with the Chair of Dissertation Committees

The Chair of Dissertation Committees will periodically check on the candidates' progress, to make sure that the research project is proceeding apace and that candidates and advisors are working together effectively. The Chair of Dissertation Committees reports to the Director of the School.

During these meetings (which are individually arranged) candidates and directors may bring up problems or concerns that require the Chair's attention. These meetings are two-fold in nature: the Director of Dissertation confirming adequate progress (or alerting the Chair to problems), and the candidate confirming that he/she is appropriately engaged and challenged. Typically, these meetings last approximately fifteen minutes or less, and occur twice a semester, at the discretion of the Chair.

In the event that a problem does arise between a candidate and his or her Director, it is the responsibility of the Chair to report the issue to the Director of the School, and it is up to the Director of the School to help moderate disagreements.

Note: The Chair does not serve as an additional faculty advisor for dissertations. *Responsibility for supervision of the research and writing of the dissertation lies solely with the dissertation Director.* It is therefore inappropriate for students and the Chair of Dissertation Committees to discuss the content of the research project.