

Some Expectations for Dissertation/Proposal Writing
Prof. Colleen Capper
(updated on January 10, 2001)

1. Please allow me 2 weeks to review your work. You should call Pat and set a date to talk with me about the work you have submitted (phone or in person) 2 weeks from the time I have received something from you. Please don't wait for me to call you with feedback.
2. Be sure the work you get to me is your very best work. I require most students who have registered for 990 or 999 with me for the purpose of writing their dissertation or proposal, to meet weekly with a tutor at the campus Writing Center (www.wisc.edu/writing). Some students who need more writing support hire also editors (or a really good high school English teacher) to edit their work before submitting it to me. Allow time (and money) for this editing in your work schedule. Because of the volume of work I review each week, you will get the best feedback from me if I can focus on the substance of your work and structure, and not on the writing per se. I just don't have time to edit.
3. Keep me posted on your progress by sending me a brief e-mail. Most dissertation books suggest you stay in touch with your advisor weekly or at least regularly. I lived 5 hours from Vanderbilt when I was writing my dissertation. I made up a memo that I sent to my advisor that included what I had completed, any problems, and goals for the next 2 weeks. It really helped me to stay on task because I felt I had a responsibility and deadline with someone.
4. When you need to make an appointment with me, please call Pat Nehm to set up times to talk with me (263-6784 or nehm@education.wisc.edu). I try not to have students have to wait more than a week to talk with me. I simply keep adding office hours if my current hours get full.
5. For the coming year, I will be out of town and/or working on my own research and writing and unable to review your work, write letters of recommendation, or respond to your e-mails on the following dates. If you have scholarship or job application deadlines, please plan ahead!!!

December 15-January 23

February 16-February 26

April 9-15

Also, please note, that this summer, I will only be teaching during the 3 week summer intercession. Hence, I will be on unpaid leave from June 13-September 4, and unable to meet with you, review your work, or serve on dissertation committees during this time. PLEASE PLAN AHEAD. If you wish to get my feedback before I leave, please remember to get it to me at least 2 weeks prior to June 13.

6. Time-lines. You should plan to have your final version of your proposal/dissertation completed at least two months prior to your defense. That is, if you wish to defend in May (the latest you can is the second week of May), then you should have it done March 1. If you wish to defend in August (the first week of August is the latest you can), you should have the entire piece completed no later than June 1. If you wish to defend in December (the second week of December is the latest that you can), then you should have it completed October 1. A final version means that you and I have completed all revisions, and it is ready to go to your committee. I will not send it on to your committee, and I will not set a date for your defense until I feel it is ready.

8. Time to complete. It usually takes at least 6 months to complete a dissertation proposal if someone is working on it at least 15 hours a week or more. This assumes that you already have a topic and solid literature base. If you do not have the latter, the proposal writing could take up to 12 months. The actual dissertation usually requires 6 at least months of data collection and 6 months of analysis and writing. For some, it takes twice as long.

9. When you get your work to me, BE SURE to attach your previous version that I have marked on. This saves me an incredible amount of time. I won't be able to read your work until I have the previous version. Also, be sure the cover page of what you get to me has all your contact information (phone, e-mail, etc.).

10. If you plan to work on your dissertation/proposal and plan to meet with me (including the summer intercession) then you must register for 990 (Research/Thesis) credits.