Appendix 4

Guidance for Writing a CSCR Doctoral Dissertation or Master’s Thesis

In general, a doctoral dissertation or master’s thesis should make a contribution to knowledge in a field. A master’s thesis differs from a doctoral dissertation in its scope, depth and rigor. One way to think about this difference is that a master’s thesis leads to a typical research publication, while a dissertation would incorporate several publications or become a book. A master’s thesis is typically a report on a research study conceptualized, designed and conducted by a student. In contrast, a doctoral dissertation reports an in-depth study that makes a unique or new contribution to the student’s field or subfield of study. Therefore, doctoral dissertations must demonstrate a greater depth of knowledge of a field than a master’s thesis. When faculty evaluate your dissertation or thesis they have the following questions in mind (Mullins & Kiley, 2002, p. 377):

1. How would the faculty member have tackled the problem set out in the abstract and the title?
2. What questions would they like answers to?
3. Do the conclusions follow on from the introduction?
4. How well does the candidate explain what he/she is doing?
5. Is the bibliography up to date and sufficiently substantial?
6. Are the results worthwhile?
7. How much work has actually been done?
8. What is the intellectual depth and rigor of the thesis?
9. Is this actually “research” - is there an argument?

Additionally, CSCR faculty may be asking themselves these questions:

10. To what extent has the student engaged others (e.g. community members) in the planning and conduct of the research?
11. Have they adequately attended to power and privilege in their research?
12. In what ways does the research promote social justice?
13. To what extent does the research address an issue or problem that is of central importance to a community or group of people?

It is a student’s responsibility to adequately respond to these questions and clearly articulate their thoughts and ideas when writing a dissertation/thesis. We have provided a list of resources and checklist that may be helpful to you as you plan your research and write your dissertation. We encourage you to consult them and be sure to frequently check-in (e.g. every two weeks) with your advisor during this stage of your doctoral studies.

Resources

