

# Graduate Thesis and Research Committee

## FAQS

### Meetings for 2009/2010

The Graduate Thesis and Research Committee normally meets on the first Tuesday of every month from October to June, except January & April when the meetings will occur on a later Tuesday. Proposals for lecture-recitals, D.M.A. documents, master's theses, and Ph.D. dissertations are due in the office of the committee chair (Dr. Cahn) by the proposal deadline no later than 4:00 P.M. The committee will begin collecting proposals for the following month's meeting one day after the current meeting's proposal deadline.

Fall Quarter		Winter Quarter		Spring Quarter	
<i>Proposal deadline</i>	<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Proposal deadline</i>	<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Proposal deadline</i>	<i>Meeting</i>
Sept 29.....	Oct 6	Jan 5.....	Jan 12	Apr 1*.....	Apr 13
Oct 27.....	Nov 3	Jan 26.....	Feb 2	Apr 27.....	May 4
Nov 24.....	Dec 5	Feb 23.....	Mar 2	May 25.....	June 1

\*April 1, Thursday proposal deadline. All other proposal deadlines are Tuesdays.

### The proposal must observe these requirements

1. You must provide six paper copies and an electronic copy of the proposal to the committee chair ([cahnsj@uc.edu](mailto:cahnsj@uc.edu)), .doc or .docx formats only. Staple paper copies, upper left-hand corner & number pages, upper right-hand corner. For the electronic copy, all elements of the proposal – title page, proposal narrative, bibliography, etc. – should be incorporated into a single document.
2. The cover page must include
  - a. the title of the research project (use Title Case, not ALL CAPS),
  - b. the degree, major and degree requirement for which the proposal is being submitted: A (Lecture-Recital/Thesis/Document/Dissertation) Proposal Submitted to the CCM Graduate Thesis and Research Committee in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of (degree) in (major)
  - c. division and previously earned degrees (school and date)
  - d. the author's name, residential address and email address
  - e. the printed name and signature of the advisor *and two readers*, except proposals for lecture-recitals, which require only the signature of the advisor.
3. The minimum interval between the first submission of lecture-recital proposals and the date of presentation is ten weeks. This is to permit students whose proposal has been returned for revision to resubmit it at the next month's meeting without having to reschedule the lecture-recital. Students proposing a lecture-recital for the fall must submit the proposal no later than the June meeting, since the ten-week interval following submission to the October meeting would necessarily defer the date of presentation to December at the earliest.

## Informal Advice from the Committee\*\*

1. *What is a proposal?* A proposal is a concise multi-part document that puts forward your ideas for a research project, makes the case for its importance and individuality, and demonstrates your command of the subject and source materials. Before submitting your proposal, you are encouraged to share it with other students and professors for their comments. This outline is intended to help you organize your proposal:

- I. Statement of Purpose: What is the research project about?

A proposal states what the project (lecture, document or dissertation) is about, what question or idea is motivating the project and what the project's purpose is. It should explain what you are trying to produce with your research project (a history, a critique, an analysis, an edition, a transcription, a database, a theory, a composition, a performance, etc.), for what audience it is intended and what you are trying to achieve. You should use this section to introduce your readers to the main concepts, sources and problems taken up in the proposal. This may also be the place to describe how the research will be presented: what will the chapters contain? Or, how will the lecture be organized?

The Statement of Purpose is followed by sections of explanation and justification under the headings: background, literature review and methodology. Order these in a way that makes the most sense for your proposal. Where preliminary findings are available, these should be described. To this should be appended an outline, bibliography and an abstract of the proposal. Proposals for lecture-recitals should also contain timing estimates.

- II. Background: Place the subject – define the context.

The background places the subject matter in a meaningful context that defines the topic. A background entails sketching out such things as historical events or periods, compositional or performance issues, theoretical or intellectual disputes or some combination. Depending on the topic, projects on the same work would require different backgrounds (e.g. *Beethoven's Fifth Symphony* and... *E.T.A. Hoffmann's Review or Its Sketches* or *Other Problems in Tonal Rhythm*). Generally, the exhaustive biography of a composer or the remote history of a musical practice (e.g. the history of the baroque trio sonata for a research project on the Bartók Piano Sonata) does not provide meaningful background. Only as much background as is necessary to make sense of the proposal should be included.

This section will help the committee assess your understanding of the topic and establish its substance in light of the background.

- III. Literature Review: Place your research in context: how will it contribute to the discourse?

The literature review provides an exposition of the discourse on a particular topic. What has been written, where is there agreement, where is there dispute? Moreover, how has the existing literature shaped your topic and how will your research project contribute to the discourse. See more on the literature below. The literature review should demonstrate familiarity with, if not command of the bibliography cited.

---

\*\*All of the advice in this document is the interpretation of the Graduate Thesis and Research Committee based on their reading of the CCM Graduate Student Handbook. Those wishing to look behind the advice for the official wording should consult the Handbook itself.

This section will help the committee assess the thoroughness of your research and the kind of contribution your project will make to the literature.

IV. Methodology: How will you conduct your investigation?

Here are few examples, in no particular order, of what might count as methodology:

- *Comparison*: a critical examination of manuscripts and published editions to *establish the text* of composition.
- *Analysis*: using particular analytical tools in a theoretical framework for the analysis of one or more compositions.
- *Synthesis*: drawing together ideas from diverse areas (analysis and performance, science and pedagogy, history and aesthetics, criticism and social geography) to broaden a perspective on a musical work or practice.
- *Case study*: taking a single subject and evaluating the subject's performance in a single task vis-à-vis the spectrum of the subject's abilities. This is apt for the study of a teaching method or an artist's way of working.
- *Experimental study*: testing the efficacy of a pedagogical technique: does this technique really work?
- *Compilation*: assembling information or lists of works with commentary on some aspect of them. This is apt for performance guides and combinable with any of the methodologies suggested above.
- *Interdisciplinary methods*: adapting the concepts and procedures used in one discipline for some aspect of musical study.

Many more examples could be offered. The point is that you need to justify this crucial step: on what basis is the raw material accumulated in your research notes turned into a critically considered piece of writing as a lecture or document. What will you need to do to make your case persuasive?

This section will help the committee assess the coherence of the research project and the attainability of the research objective.

V. Preliminary Findings (*optional*): What has your research produced so far?

The proposal is not a draft or short version of your lecture or document. Preliminary findings that may occur in your lecture or document can be presented in a succinct form as further justification of the fruitfulness of the research project.

VI. Outline: How will the research be organized and presented?

For lecture-recitals, the logic of the presentation and the timings are primary considerations. In all its aspects, the lecture-recital should flow with minimal time lost to stage set-up or other delays.

VII. Bibliography: What sources inform and define the research project?

The bibliography should contain authoritative primary and secondary sources that ground the research project, that demonstrate the project's standing as graduate-level research

and that define the issues taken up in the research project. Often bibliographies are larded with citations of highly general, outdated or elementary works; this is unnecessary. A Select Bibliography is preferable.

VIII. Abstract: In 175 words or less: what is the project about and why is it important?

Here are two sample abstracts:

...[T]his article explores the interconnected histories of disability and music as they are manifested in three theoretical approaches to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Western art music (the musical Formenlehre and the tonal theories of Schoenberg and Schenker) and in three works by Beethoven and Schubert. Around the turn of the nineteenth century in Western Europe, disability began to be understood not as something natural and permanent but rather as a deviation from a normative standard, and thus subject to possible remediation. In the same time and place, art music also underwent a significant shift..., one that involved an increasing interest in rhetorically marked deviations from diatonic and formal normativity, and the possibility of their narrative recuperation. The article describes ways in which language about music and music itself may be understood both to represent and construct disability. More generally, it suggests that disability should take its place alongside nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation as a significant category for cultural analysis, including the analysis of music.<sup>1</sup>

[This study] focuses on the first generation of recordings of Chopin's works, principally waltzes and mazurkas, made in the first three decades of the 20th c. The relationship between the recordings and the musical text is explored; the recordings document a performance tradition that does not always reflect the music as written. Also considered is what conception of the ontological status of music underlies the relationship. It is suggested that recordings should be primary objects of musicological study.<sup>2</sup>

2. *What is the difference between a document and a thesis?* The Minutes of Academic Council (May 21, 2004) state: "In the DMA requirements, each reference to the word 'thesis' should be replaced with the word 'document.'" Thus, for purposes of satisfying the degree requirement, there is no difference between a document and a thesis. Nevertheless, some documents "may resemble a thesis in the more narrowly defined sense of persuasively arguing a central point through analysis of primary and secondary sources" (CCM Graduate Student Handbook). A thesis in this narrower sense will contain a thesis statement expressing

the author's perspective on the material and is usually formulated as a problem to be addressed, a controversy to be resolved, or an assertion to be demonstrated. . . . Some topics may not lend themselves to . . . specific theses at the early stages of research, but the proposal should [still] indicate some of the questions that the author intends to pursue. (CCM Graduate Student Handbook, App. F).

In other words, a thesis should contain a thesis statement with propositional content typically beginning, "I demonstrate," "I claim," or "I assert," which the author supports with evidence and argument. In the proposal, of course, only a *working thesis* is expected, since the final thesis of the thesis may not be known at that early stage.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph N. Straus, "Normalizing the Abnormal: Disability in Music and Music Theory," *JAMS* 59 (2006): 113-184.

<sup>2</sup> Leo Treitler, "Early Recorded Performances of Chopin Waltzes and Mazurkas: The Relation to the Text," *JALS* 51 (2002): 55-75.

A document, on the other hand, “may be of a more descriptive nature” (CCM Graduate Student Handbook). Document proposals, therefore, are not required to state a working thesis, but only a clear plan to carry out a descriptive project of the kind exemplified by, but not limited to, a conductor’s/performer’s guide, a survey of repertoire, a pedagogical discussion, and an expansion of the lecture-recital. Nevertheless, the document proposal must propose more than simply to be useful and interesting to the reader, since that is merely to restate what is already taken for granted. The **statement of purpose** must indicate *how* the document will be useful and interesting (e.g., by pointing out features that are not self-evident or by observing relationships or inferring generalities that have not been observed or inferred before).

3. *Is the literature review required?* Yes. The CCM Graduate Student Handbook states that the bibliography should list “pertinent sources already examined and other sources that appear to be relevant.” Further, “some of the material from the bibliography must already have been perused.” One of the purposes of the bibliography is to demonstrate that the amount of existing source material, whether primary or secondary or both, is sufficient to make the proposed research possible. Authors must also show that they have some preliminary notion of what the listed items contain so that they can verify to the committee that there is something new or fresh to be done—that they are not proposing to do over again what someone has done already. That means reviewing summarily the available bibliography and giving a preliminary evaluation of its usefulness for the proposed research instead of merely listing unexamined items.

In identifying such material, a quick review of the online versions of *RILM Abstracts*, *The Music Index*, *Dissertation Abstracts*, and the bibliographies in *The New Grove* and *MGG* will often be sufficient, though not always. It depends on the subject. For example, you would never want to neglect the *Garland Composer Resource Manuals*, if one is available for your composer, nor would you ever want to neglect that composer’s thematic catalogue or modern collected edition. Collected editions, especially those published since the mid-20th century, are a mine of information, for they contain not only critical scores, but historical commentary and critical notes that are often more thorough and more up-to-date than in any other source.

4. *What does research mean?* The CCM Graduate Student Handbook states:

According to generally accepted standards, the document is intended to show the candidate’s ability to perform satisfactory graduate-level research and to report the results in scholarly prose.

It further states:

While MM theses and DMA documents do not need to demonstrate completely original research (they may rely primarily on secondary sources, for example), they must present the material from a fresh perspective and represent the author’s own arguments and perspective. They may not simply summarize or recast already existing research.

The first quotation from the Handbook refers to research and reporting. When a researcher has an idea, he or she must first investigate the potential sources of information in order to learn what others have already discovered about the subject and give them appropriate credit. Along the way, the researcher may also learn what aspects of the subject need to be refreshed or argued anew.

The second quotation refers to originality. Except in Ph.D. dissertations, absolute originality is not required; D.M.A. documents and master’s theses may simply have a fresh perspective. In any case it is important to realize that originality, whether of discovery or perspective, usually rests on a foundation of existing knowledge. You must relate your views and findings to those that are already available in the published literature in order to build on the foundation laid by others and to integrate your work into that of the field. The external signs of such integrative research are citations in the form of footnotes in the finished document. (In the proposal, on the other hand, it is possible to allude to published research informally in the running text; the use of footnotes is valuable, but discretionary.)

5. *What is the most important thing to keep in mind when proposing musical analysis?* The CCM Graduate Student Handbook, Appendix F, states: “If a theoretical discussion is proposed, the author should indicate what analytical method will be used (e.g., Schenkerian, set theory), and what elements of the music will be considered.” The committee will consider no proposal that proposes to do musical analysis without indicating and justifying the method of analysis to be employed.
6. *What is the most important thing to keep in mind when proposing a combined lecture-recital and thesis proposal?* The CCM Graduate Student Handbook mentions the possibility of expanding a lecture-recital into a D.M.A. document, stating further:

In this case, one proposal could serve for both the lecture recital and the document, clearly delineating what each would include. The document should be more detailed and discuss substantially more material than the lecture.

Such proposals will be approved only if the content of the document is significantly more detailed and contains substantially more material than the lecture. Proposals that present the same content in two different media will not be approved. The document must take advantage of the difference of medium to elaborate and support ideas that are presented in the lecture-recital in a more abbreviated and general way. Students proposing a document on the same general subject as an earlier lecture-recital should clearly state how the document will differ from, or complement, the earlier exercise in a special section of the proposal, under its own heading.

7. *When must lectures, documents and dissertations be distributed to the evaluating committee?* According to the Graduate Student Handbook, **lecture recitals** must be submitted “at least **two weeks prior** to the date of the lecture-recital. Students must supply to the divisional office/s of evaluating committee “three fully documented copies of the entire lecture-recital document.” For **documents or dissertations**, “the student must submit a separate copy of the document in final draft form to each member of the committee no later than **the first Monday of the quarter preceding the one in which he/she intends to graduate**. This copy must be certified in writing by the advisor as being basically acceptable.” Consult the CCM Graduate Handbook and your advisor for further details. For dissertations, consult your advisor in all matters related to the review of dissertation chapters and the final draft.
8. *Who is ultimately responsible for submitting the proposal by the deadline?* The student who is the author of the proposal is ultimately responsible for on-time submission. Students who reside at a distance from CCM must plan accordingly to allow time for gathering signatures, photocopying and delivery of the printed copies. Do not let things go to the last minute and plan with a specific deadline in mind. Submissions can always be accepted early; late submissions cannot be considered.