

Department of Spanish and Portuguese  
Tulane University  
Graduate Student Handbook  
(rev. 04/2021)

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## Introduction to the Department

Graduate study in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese offers a challenging but rewarding path to a career in the scholarship and teaching of language and literary studies. Students receive the best possible training in the discipline through course work and teaching, exams and language preparation, and ultimately the doctoral dissertation. At the same time, degree candidates have ample opportunity to participate in Tulane University's rich intellectual life beyond the Department.

The M.A./Ph.D. program in Spanish and Portuguese allows each student to pursue their primary academic interests. After a broad training through course work and the M.A. exam, students may specialize in one or more of the fields of literature offered by the Department.

For Spanish, these fields are:

- Medieval and Early Modern Iberian literature,
- Modern Spanish Peninsular literature (18th century to the present),
- Colonial and 19th-century Latin American literature,
- Contemporary Latin American literature (20th century to the present).

For Portuguese, the fields are:

- Luso-Brazilian literature to 1822;
- Luso-Brazilian literature 1822–1922;
- Luso-Brazilian literature 1922–1968;
- Luso-Brazilian literature 1968–present.

(Students will earn the M.A. in the course of pursuing the Ph.D.; however, the Department does not offer a stand-alone M.A. degree program.)

The Department's Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) advises graduate students on course work and program requirements, and coordinates M.A. and Ph.D. qualifying exams. It is important that students consult with the DGS at least once per semester.

This guide provides an overview of the principal requirements, expectations, and resources related to the graduate program.

N.B. Changes may be made to the policies herein as determined by the faculty.

## The School of Liberal Arts

The graduate program is administered by Tulane's School of Liberal Arts (SLA). The SLA website (<https://liberalarts.tulane.edu/academics/graduate-studies>) includes sections with links to important deadlines, the Graduate Programs Catalog, and other key resources. Forms for continuous registration, applications for degree, approval of the dissertation prospectus, admission to candidacy, etc. can also be found there. SLA deadlines vary, and it is the responsibility of students to know deadlines and file necessary papers accordingly. Queries on such administrative matters may be directed to Ms. Ann Schumacher ([aschumac@tulane.edu](mailto:aschumac@tulane.edu)), the Director for Liberal Arts Graduate Programs.

## Gibson Online

Gibson Online (<https://gibson.tulane.edu/>) is Tulane's gateway to online services, including course listings, grade reports, registration, and bill payments. Students are responsible for registration and payment of fees each semester.

## Grades and Academic Conduct

A description of the grading system can be found in the SLA Graduate Programs Catalog. "I" or incomplete grades become "U" or unsatisfactory if required work is not completed within 30 days after the end of the semester for which the grade was reported. A course in which a grade of "C+" or less is earned will not count toward the degree and may be cause for dismissal. Also, students who earn two "B-" or "U" grades or who maintain a grade-point average (GPA) below 3.5 may be asked to withdraw from the program.

The Department strictly observes Tulane's honor code policy. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the Unified Code of Graduate Student Academic Conduct (<https://ogps.tulane.edu/sites/g/files/rdw1126/f/Unified-Code-of-GS-Academic-Conduct-06-18-13.pdf>).

## Residence and Registration Requirement

The SLA regulations call for the minimum payment of fees equivalent to the total due for three years (six semesters) in full-time residence status.

Students who have completed course work must maintain continuous residence or non-residence registration in the fall and spring semesters and should register

for Master's Research (Master's Research 9980) or Dissertation Research (Diss. Research 9990).

Under exceptional conditions, a student may be granted a leave of absence from the university by the SLA Dean. For further details on Tulane's policy and procedures on leaves, please consult the SLA Graduate Programs Catalog.

### **Program Timetable**

Tuition waivers and SLA support are provided for five years to students who maintain good standing. The Department expects students to complete the Ph.D. degree within the period of SLA funding and not to require registration in subsequent years. Students ordinarily must complete the program within seven years from the date of their first enrollment.

The Department cannot guarantee Adjunct Instructorships to students who are working on the dissertation beyond the period of SLA support; the availability of Adjunct Instructorships is a special allowance and dependent on budgetary decisions made by SLA. In years when Adjunct Instructorships can be offered, the Department will give consideration only to Ph.D. candidates who have demonstrated excellence in teaching and major progress towards completion of the dissertation. Such appointments will be for a period of no more than one academic year.

### **Course Work**

Students must satisfactorily complete a total of 14 courses (42 credits) for the M.A. degree and a total of 17 courses (51 credits) prior to the Ph.D. exam and application for Ph.D. candidacy. Students are strongly advised to take courses in all disciplinary fields, both Peninsular and Latin American, in preparation for the M.A. and Ph.D. exams.

In their first semester in the program, students must take only courses offered by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. Required courses during the course of study include: SPAN 6010 (Methods of Teaching), mandatory for all students in the spring semester of year before they begin teaching, and at least four 7000-level seminars, including SPAN 7960 (Ph.D. Preparation and Professional Development), mandatory in the fall semester preceding the PhD exam. Students are also encouraged to enroll in SPAN 6100 (Literary Theory) and SPAN 6510 (History of the Spanish Language) during the first or second year of study.

N.B. With the exception of courses taken for basic language instruction, students must not register for courses numbered below 6000; only 6000- and 7000-level course work counts toward the M.A. and Ph.D. degree. Students are strongly encouraged to prioritize enrollment in Graduate Seminars (7000-level courses). For a semester-by-semester guideline to course work and program deadlines, please consult Appendix A of this handbook.

### **Transfer Credit**

Students entering the M.A./Ph.D. program may apply to transfer up to 4 courses (12 credits) for previous course work in Spanish or Portuguese at the M.A. level. Students who enter the Ph.D. program with an external M.A. in Spanish or Portuguese may apply to transfer up to 7 courses (21 credits). Transfer credits may be applied for in consultation with the DGS after the completion of the first semester at Tulane. Transfer credit for 7000-level courses offered at Tulane is not allowed.

### **Language Requirements**

Reading/translation knowledge is required of two languages relevant to the student's program of study, in addition to English and the student's language of specialization. The two languages should be chosen in consultation with the DGS. This requirement may be satisfied by passing a reading/translation exam administered by the appropriate department, by completing two courses in the language below the 6000-level with a minimum final grade of "B," or by satisfactorily completing a 6000- or 7000-level course in the language. Reading/translation exams are not offered in Spanish or Portuguese.

The first language requirement must be fulfilled by the end of the fall semester that precedes the M.A. exams. The second language requirement must be fulfilled by the end of the fall semester that precedes the Ph.D. exams. Students are advised to begin language study in the fall of year one or before arrival on campus. Students are not eligible to take M.A. or Ph.D. qualifying exams unless the appropriate language requirements have been satisfied.

## M.A. Exam

The M.A. exam in Spanish examines mastery of four fields: Medieval and Early Modern Iberian, Modern Spanish Peninsular (18th century to the present), Colonial and 19th-century Latin American, and Contemporary Latin American (20th century to the present). There are also four fields for the M.A. exam in Portuguese: Luso-Brazilian literature to 1822, Luso-Brazilian literature 1822–1922, Luso-Brazilian literature 1922–1968, and Luso-Brazilian literature 1968–present. Students who plan to work on topics in both Spanish and Portuguese may choose two fields from each language.

Required reading lists for each of the fields in Spanish and Portuguese can be found on the Department's website. The M.A. closed-book exam consists of four sets of questions representing each of the four fields of Spanish and/or Portuguese that the student has selected (students answer one question for each field). The M.A. exam takes place on campus in two three-hour sessions, normally on the third Friday of March. Any consultation of outside sources (print, electronic, or handwritten) is strictly prohibited. M. A. exams will be administered electronically.

The M.A. exam is evaluated by the Department's entire faculty, who in the evaluation also review the examinee's overall development and performance in the program. The exam grades assigned are:

- 1) Pass with distinction,
- 2) Pass,
- 3) Pass with terminal M.A. degree
- 4) Fail.

N.B. Students who complete one or two fields of the exam unsatisfactorily may retake those fields within four weeks of the original exam. There are no retakes for unsatisfactory results on three or more fields.

The M.A. degree is granted after completion of 14 courses (42 credits), the fulfillment of the first language requirement, and the passing of all four fields of the M.A. exam. It is normally expected that students who pass the M.A. exam will be admitted to the Ph.D. program. If, however, overall performance has been unsatisfactory or there is serious concern about the student's ability to embark on independent research, he or she may be asked to withdraw from the program with a terminal M.A. degree.

Students who join the program with an M.A. from another institution may apply for transfer credit and take the M.A. exam in the spring semester of year one. Petitions for transfer credit and accelerated M.A. exams must be made in consultation with the DGS and be authorized by the Department faculty at the moment of acceptance of the offer of admission.

## **Ph.D. Exam**

The Ph.D. exam is based on three reading lists (one major list and two minor lists), created in close consultation with three exam-committee faculty and with their final approval. The major list and the two minor lists must each be organized into three sub-lists. The major list and each of the minor lists should be preceded by one or two paragraphs that articulate the respective critical issues and questions to be addressed. Each sub-list should consist of primary works and key secondary studies.

Students have considerable freedom when preparing the lists to develop research agendas tailored to their interests. The preparation of the lists is thus considered a fundamental step in the students' advancement in the area of the dissertation research and its complementary fields. Exam-committee faculty ordinarily serve on the dissertation committee, with the faculty advisor of the major list acting as dissertation director. Please note, however, that the dissertation director and committee must be constituted formally by invitation of the student after completion of the Ph.D. exam.

The Ph.D. exam consists of three sets of questions representing each of the three reading lists (students answer a total of four questions: two questions –one compulsory and one elective– for the major list and one elective question for each of the minor lists). The Ph.D. exam is a take-home, open-book exam that takes place in the spring semester of the academic year following conferral of the M.A (normally over the first weekend of February, from Friday morning to Monday afternoon). The exam should be completed in three separate Word documents (each representing one of the lists), using 12-point Times New Roman font, one-inch margins, and double line spacing. All sources consulted must be cited properly, and long quotes, paraphrases, and undue reliance on secondary sources avoided. Maximum length: fifteen pages per question. Exams will be administered electronically.

The Ph.D. exam is evaluated by the Department's entire faculty. The exam grades assigned are: 1) Pass with distinction, 2) Pass, 3) Pass with conference, and 4) Fail. Students who answer up to two questions of the exam unsatisfactorily may retake those questions within four weeks of the original exam. For unsatisfactory results on three or more questions, the student will ordinarily be asked to withdraw from the program.

Only under exceptional circumstances (ill health, incapacitating injury, family death or catastrophe) will postponement of the M.A. or Ph.D. exam be permitted. Any such contingencies must be documented by a recognized medical authority, and the DGS should be notified as soon as possible about the crisis. Changes in academic interests or field of intended research do not constitute admissible grounds for a postponement.

### **Prospectus**

The prospectus is a first statement of the dissertation project that summarizes the topic to be investigated, the rationale for the objects of analysis chosen, the reasons for its importance and scope, and the critical and methodological framework to be utilized. Close consultation with the dissertation director and dissertation committee is strongly advised during the stages of preparation and submission of the prospectus.

Students should begin to consider a dissertation topic as early as possible, and especially when preparing the major list of the Ph.D. exam. Within eight weeks after the Ph.D. exam (usually, late March), students must submit to committee members a draft of the prospectus (8-10 pages, including bibliography), followed three weeks later (usually, mid April) by an oral defense and submission of the final prospectus to committee members and the DGS. Students then have ten days to submit a shorter version of the prospectus (3 pages) together with signed copies of the Approval of the Dissertation Prospectus Form and Admission to Candidacy Form to the SLA Graduate Programs Office.

Students will not be admitted to Ph.D. candidacy (ABD status) until after all degree requirements are satisfied and the prospectus has been officially approved. For more information on the prospectus, please consult the SLA Graduate Programs Catalog.



## Dissertation

The research and writing of the dissertation project in consultation with the dissertation director and dissertation committee is the most critical stage of one's graduate career. Students are expected to complete the dissertation by the end of year five. It is important that students establish from the start with the dissertation director and committee members the timeline and procedures for the submission of chapters and the final dissertation. In addition, "work-in-progress" sessions will be scheduled regularly for students at the dissertation writing stage. Useful guidelines for dissertation writing, prepared by Professor Idelber Avelar, can be found in Appendix B of this handbook.

A public, oral defense of the dissertation takes place upon final approval of the dissertation director and committee members. The final approved dissertation must be filed with the SLA in keeping with the formatting and submission instructions detailed in the SLA Graduate Programs Catalog.

## Professional Development

The Department is committed to providing guidance on various aspects of the profession (job market, publishing, grant writing, etc.). Aspects of professional development are also a key component of the required SPAN 7960 (Special Projects).

Advanced students may also seek opportunities to present their work at national and international conferences. Funds for graduate student conference travel may be petitioned from the Graduate Studies Student Association (GSSA) of the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and J.E. Land Fund of the School of Liberal Arts. Information on both funding entities can be found at:

<https://liberalarts.tulane.edu/academics/graduate-studies/resources>

Attending conferences is a way to meet colleagues in the discipline, learn about new research topics and critical approaches, and present one's work before a larger public. At the same time, students should take care not to overextend themselves in this regard, as the main priority must be the timely completion of course work, exams, and the dissertation. The same rule applies to scholarly publishing: a professor may suggest transforming an exceptional term paper into a journal article. However, work on publications should be only a complement to advancement towards the degree and never a detour. Useful guidelines for

scholarly publishing, prepared by Professor Idelber Avelar, can be found in Appendix C of this handbook.

## **The MLA**

Graduate students are eligible for membership in the Modern Language Association (MLA) at a discounted rate and are strongly encouraged to join. Membership includes subscriptions to top journals in the discipline (*PMLA* and *Profession*), in addition to an online website that lists conference announcements, calls for papers, and recent MLA book publications on scholarship and teaching. Another MLA resource is the *MLA Job List*, a comprehensive listing of the available teaching positions in English and Foreign Languages around the country. The MLA Annual Convention, held in early January of each year, features hundreds of panels on literary scholarship and pedagogical issues, and serves as the profession's yearly job fair, where colleges and universities conduct preliminary interviews of job candidates. Students in the final year of the program who have scheduled interviews at the annual convention may petition the Department about the possibility for partial funding of travel expenses.

## **Campus Life**

The Department, the Stone Center for Latin American Studies, the Latin American Library, and other Tulane departments and programs sponsor and host guest lectures, conferences, film series, and workshops throughout the academic year. Students should make every effort to attend these events. Students may also participate in career enriching opportunities through the Graduate Studies Student Association (GSSA).

GSSA is Tulane's student government organization for graduate students and the primary assembly for communication with the university administration on all issues affecting graduate-student life. The Department's graduate students annually select a representative among them to serve as liaison with GSSA. For more information on GSSA and its resources, see <https://gssa.tulane.edu>

## Funding Opportunities

### A) Summer Funding Opportunities:

In the concentrated summer period, students undertake language study, prepare for M.A. and Ph.D. exams, and carry out dissertation research and writing. Students are strongly encouraged to apply for summer research funds each summer during their course of study. Faculty do not “take off” summers either but rather use them for research, writing, teaching, and administration. Eligible students interested in studying Portuguese or an indigenous Latin American language during the summer may apply for a Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) grant through the Stone Center for Latin American Studies. The Stone Center also provides a limited number of Summer Field Research Grants for pre-dissertation feasibility research on Latin American or Caribbean topics. Students who have ABD status (or students who will have ABD status at the time of funding) are eligible to apply to the SLA Graduate Student Summer Research and Write-Up Awards.

N.B. Projects involving human subjects (such as oral histories) require Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval. For further details on Tulane’s IRB policy, please consult: <https://research.tulane.edu/hrpo/policies>

### B) Final-Year Dissertation Writing Fellowship:

Graduate students in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese receive five years of SLA support in the form of Fellowship (year one) or the combined Fellowship/Teaching Assistantship (years two to five). During the penultimate year of the PhD program, students may apply to receive their final year of support in the form of a full SLA Dissertation Writing Fellowship in lieu of the combined Fellowship/Teaching Assistantship. Students who receive the Dissertation Writing Fellowship are expected to remain in residence at Tulane and be prepared to complete the dissertation during the period of the grant.

To be eligible to apply, students must be PhD candidates in good standing in their penultimate year of the program, demonstrate significant progress on the dissertation by the time of application, and show evidence of application for at least one external dissertation writing grant. Applications should be submitted by February 1 to the Department Chair, who will then forward endorsed applications to the SLA Dean’s Office for final evaluation and approval. The complete application will include:

- 1) A one-page letter of application to the Department Chair
- 2) Two-page proposal and one-page timeline for completion and defense
- 3) One chapter of the dissertation approved by director or two chapters for students who take their MA exam in year one.
- 4) Letter of support from dissertation director
- 5) Evidence of current application for external fellowship

If a student receives a full external dissertation award, they may, as necessary, petition the Department and SLA to reserve the unused final year of SLA funding for the academic year immediately following the period of the external grant. In such cases, the additional year of funding is not guaranteed but will be considered on a case-by-case basis contingent on the student's demonstration of progress to degree. Students who in exceptional circumstances are granted two years of external doctoral funding may not petition for the reinstatement of the final year of SLA funding.

Students who are awarded partial external funding may petition to have the award supplemented by SLA. Combining an external award with SLA funding is an arrangement that requires the approval of the funding agency and SLA. Students in good standing who do not apply or meet the requirements for the Dissertation Writing Fellowship will instead receive final-year funding in the form of Fellowship/Teaching Assistantship.

#### C) Dissertation Completion Fellowship

ABD students who are within a year of completing their dissertation and have exhausted all regular departmental funding can be nominated for an SLA Dissertation Completion Fellowship by a faculty member. This is a 6-month or 9-month stipend with no teaching responsibilities that requires students to submit a completed dissertation within one year of commencement of the award. Recipients may not have another form of employment at Tulane and agree not to hold a teaching appointment at another institution during the term of the fellowship. Students must not be beyond their 7<sup>th</sup> year in the program. This is a competitive opportunity, by nomination only. A call for nominations will be distributed by SLA early in the spring semester.

## Teaching

Beginning in year two, students serve as Teaching Assistants in 1000- and 2000-level Spanish or Portuguese language classes; on occasion, depending on staffing needs, Ph.D. candidates have the opportunity teach a 3000-level course. As the backbone of the Department's instruction program, students are expected to invest considerably in their teaching, without, however, sacrificing their progress to degree.

The required SPAN 6010 (Methods of Teaching), taken in the spring of the year before the student starts teaching, provides an introduction to the Tulane teaching program and guidance in pedagogical theory and in teaching practice at the 1000- and 2000-levels and beyond. First-time Teaching Assistants must attend the New TA Orientation held in August by the Office of the Provost. In addition, mandatory teaching orientations will be scheduled by the Department before the start of each school year, and instructors are urged to attend the Department-sponsored teaching workshops that take place at regular intervals.

N.B. It is imperative that Teaching Assistants adhere to the syllabuses prepared by the course coordinators. Students must not leave campus at the end of semesters until the conclusion of the exam period and the submission of final grades; these responsibilities may not be delegated to others. Please feel free to direct any questions or concerns about the teaching program to the Language Program Director or the Department Chair.

APPENDIX A  
GRADUATE STUDY TIMELINE  
(rev. 04/2021)

I. M.A./Ph.D. Students

YEAR ONE

*fall semester*

- Arrive early (8 days before classes begin) for Orientation/Meeting with DGS
- Take 4 courses
- If necessary, take language course

*spring semester*

- Take 4 courses (including SPAN 6010)
- If necessary, take language course
- Meet with DGS to discuss progress and summer plans
- If applicable, apply for summer research funding

*summer*

- Study for M.A. exam

YEAR TWO

*fall semester*

- Arrive early for teaching orientation (required of TAs)
- Take 3 courses
- Teach 1 course
- Demonstrate fulfillment of first language requirement

*spring semester*

- Take 3 courses
- Teach 1 course
- Take M.A. exam in March
- Discuss with relevant faculty intentions for the Ph.D. program (areas of specialization)
- Meet with DGS to discuss progress and summer plans
- If applicable, apply for summer research funding
- File Application for M.A. Degree (check the SLA website for deadline)

*summer*

- Preliminary dissertation research
- Work on Ph.D. lists
- Study for second language requirement

## YEAR THREE

### *fall semester*

- Arrive early for teaching orientation (required of TAs)
- Notify DGS of Ph.D. exam committee by September 5
- Take equivalent of 3 courses (1 seminar + SPAN or PORT 6000\* + SPAN 7960)
- Teach 1 course
- Demonstrate fulfillment of second language requirement
- Submit Ph.D. lists by December 5

### *spring semester*

- Take Ph.D. exam first weekend of February
- Teach 1 course
- Draft of prospectus due to committee members by March 25
- Prospectus defense by April 15
- Submit short version of prospectus to SLA by April 25
- If applicable, apply for summer funding

### *summer*

- Work on dissertation

## YEAR FOUR

### *fall semester*

- Arrive early for teaching orientation (required of TAs)
- Work on dissertation
- Apply for external dissertation fellowship
- Teach 1 course

### *spring semester*

- Have one chapter of dissertation written and approved by director by January 15
- Apply for SLA Dissertation Writing Fellowship (deadline: Feb 1)
- Teach 1 course
- If applicable, apply for summer funding

### *summer*

- Work on dissertation

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\* Independent study registered with the faculty member supervising the main list for Ph.D. exams.

## YEAR FIVE

### *fall semester*

- Arrive early for teaching orientation (required of TAs)
- Have two to three chapters of dissertation written by the end of the semester
- If applicable, teach 1 course
- Participate in "work-in-progress" session and "mock interviews"
- Conduct job search

### *spring semester*

- If applicable, teach 1 course
- Finish and defend dissertation
- File Application for Ph.D. Degree (check SLA website for deadline)

## II. M.A./Ph.D. students who take the M.A. exam in year one

### *previous summer*

- Study for M.A. exam

## YEAR ONE

### *fall semester*

- Arrive early (8 days before classes begin) for Orientation/Meeting with DGS
- Take 4 courses (including SPAN 6010)
- If necessary, take language course
- Meet with DGS to transfer credits
- Demonstrate fulfillment of first language requirement

### *spring semester*

- Take 3 or 4 courses (depending on number of credits transferred – up to 21)
- Take M.A. exam in March
- Discuss with relevant faculty intentions for the Ph.D. program (areas of specialization)
- Meet with DGS to discuss progress and summer plans
- If applicable, apply for summer research funding
- File Application for M.A. Degree (check the SLA website for deadline)

### *summer*

- Preliminary dissertation research
- Work on Ph.D. lists
- Study for second language requirement



## YEAR TWO

### *fall semester*

- Arrive early for teaching orientation (required of TAs)
- Notify DGS of exam committee by September 5
- Take equivalent of 3 courses  
(1 Seminar + SPAN or PORT 6000<sup>†</sup> + SPAN 7960)
- Teach 1 course
- Demonstrate fulfillment of second language requirement
- Submit Ph.D. lists by December 5

### *spring semester*

- Take Ph.D. exam first weekend of February
- Teach 1 course
- Draft of dissertation prospectus due to committee members by March 25
- Prospectus defense by April 15
- Submit short version of prospectus to SLA by April 25
- If applicable, apply for summer funding

### *summer*

- Work on dissertation

## YEAR THREE

### *fall semester*

- Arrive early for teaching orientation (required of TAs)
- Work on dissertation
- Teach 1 course

### *spring semester*

- Have one chapter of dissertation written by the end of the semester
- Teach 1 course
- If applicable, apply for summer funding

### *summer*

- Work on dissertation

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<sup>†</sup> Independent study registered with the faculty member supervising the main list for Ph.D. exams.

## YEAR FOUR

### *fall semester*

- Arrive early for teaching orientation (required of TAs)
- Work on Dissertation
- Apply for external dissertation fellowship
- Teach 1 course

### *spring semester*

- Have two chapters of dissertation written and approved by director by January 15
- Apply for SLA Dissertation Writing Fellowship (deadline: Feb 1)
- Teach 1 course
- If applicable, apply for summer funding

### *summer*

- Work on dissertation

## YEAR FIVE

### *fall semester*

- Arrive early for teaching orientation (required of TAs)
- Have three or four chapters of dissertation written by the end of the semester
- If applicable, teach 1 course
- Conduct job search

### *spring semester*

- If applicable, teach 1 course
- Finish and defend dissertation
- File Application for Ph.D. Degree (check SLA website for deadline)

**APPENDIX B:  
SAMPLE GUIDELINES FOR DISSERTATION WRITING  
BY PROFESSOR IDELBER AVELAR**

**Guidelines for dissertation writing**

This is a set of guidelines, requirements, and suggestions that will make your life easier as you get ready to start writing your dissertation. Some of them are fairly standard. Others are personal pieces of advice that have worked well for me over the years. Keep this list with you and make sure to consult with me if any item is unclear to you.

**I – Choosing your topic and writing the prospectus**

**1.** The choice of a dissertation topic is your inalienable right. Faculty cannot force you to write about something. I will, however, raise objections to your topic if it appears to be: 1) broader than appropriate for a dissertation or for your training; 2) incoherent; 3) grounded on false premises or posing false problems; 4) outside my or your disciplinary scope. Regarding 4), our limits are fairly flexible for a department of Spanish and Portuguese. You are free, for example, to include film or popular music as objects of your dissertation. But only if you are willing to become conversant with the methods and concepts of film studies or popular music studies, so as to be able to make an original contribution to the interpretation of an object in those fields.

**2.** A prospectus lays out a path of research, most often by assessing the state of the bibliography on a certain question and then focusing upon one or more “gaps” in that scholarly conversation. It states what your objects will be, briefly describes them, and anticipates the content of each chapter. It is the plan that organizes the set of questions that will guide you. *It is not a paper or the “summary” of a paper.* It is a genre with its own specificities. Consult with me for a sample prospectus if you'd like. This is a genre that you will need to master if you intend to write book proposals in the future.

**3.** If I raise objections to your theme, I will talk with you and help you define it, but always with the understanding that you have the last word on what your topic will be. When you defend the proposal, you do not need to have the confirmation of your hypotheses or ready-made answers, but you must be able to formulate a coherent set of questions that you intend to pursue. It is fine to say “I don't have the answer to this yet,” but it is not fine to be totally confused about what your guiding questions are.

**4.** A prospectus does not “bind” you: you can later change your plans as you write the chapters. However, when you defend it, you must demonstrate that it is a coherent and feasible research project. If you change it later, it must, of course, continue to be coherent and feasible.

**5.** A prospectus is usually 8-to-10 pages long, followed by a 2-to-4-page bibliography. For feedback on drafts of your proposal, allow **one week**.

**II – Writing your chapters**

**1.** A **dissertation** is a 180-to-300-page exposition of an original study of objects that either have not been analyzed separately or together before, or have been approached

in ways fundamentally different from the one you are proposing. It will be your responsibility to delimit the scope of your work. You will be expected to describe the current state of a sub-field, formulate and defend your hypotheses about your corpus, and draw conclusions.

**2. A dissertation chapter** is usually a 45-70-page exhaustive study of one or more objects. In order to write your first dissertation chapter you will need to have: a) a clear map of the bibliography with which you will be conversing; b) a description of your object(s); c) an interpretive hypothesis.

**3.** Most, if not all good novelists are readers of novels. This should be obvious, but the obvious often begs to be stated these days: you cannot write a good dissertation if you have never read one. Make sure you read dissertations in your field by running searches with key words related to your topic. A searchable dissertation database is available at <http://proquest.umi.com>. You can access it directly from Tulane. If you are accessing it from off-campus, you'll need to log in with your user name and password at the top of <http://library.tulane.edu>.

**Suggestions:** 1) Legrás, Horacio. "El criollismo y la creación de la interpelación democrático popular en Argentina" (Duke, 1999); 2) Avelar, Idelber. "The Experience of Defeat: Mourning and Memory in Post-dictatorship Fiction from Argentina, Chile, and Brazil" (Duke, 1996). 3) Ramos, Julio. "Contradicciones de la modernidad literaria en América Latina: Martí y la crónica modernista" (Princeton, 1986). 4) Goldman, Dara. "Lost and Found: Insularity and the Construction of Subjectivity in Hispanic Caribbean literature." (Emory, 2000).

**4.** If I am your main advisor, I expect you to turn each chapter in to me and wait for feedback before you turn it in to the rest of the committee, unless we have made a different arrangement with another faculty member. If a colleague and I are reading your work at the same time, the three of us must know that in advance, so that duplication of faculty work does not take place.

**5.** You are welcome to consult with me personally or by email however many times you want, upon whatever questions you have throughout the process of writing. But I will only read complete drafts of chapters. Before you turn each chapter in to me you must:

a) run a thorough spell check; watch out for cacophony, incongruous use of verb tenses, vague attributions, repetitions of words, phrases or ideas, excessive use of passive voice, undocumented, long or irrelevant quotes, dangling clauses and the like. Revise it at least once in hard copy. You cannot expect someone to read and edit your work if you have not done it exhaustively yourself first.

b) follow MLA or Chicago Style guidelines; use endnotes to each chapter; reserve them for ancillary, tangential reflection on the topic or further discussion of relevant bibliography, not to document quotes. In order to document citations, use parenthetical notation within the text.

**Examples:** MLA: (Sarlo 127) or (Sarlo, *Escenas* 127). Chicago: (Sarlo 1994: 127) or (Sarlo 1994b: 127). Omit author's name if authorship is clearly stated in the text that precedes the parenthesis.

c) make sure your chapter has a properly documented set of premises, a logical progression, and a coherent thesis. While defending your hypothesis, make sure you consider it from different angles, anticipate possible counter-arguments, and locate your interlocutors in the relation to your claims. Refrain from being overdogmatic or making excessively broad claims. **Do not ever hide counter-evidence or ignore existing counter-arguments.** In the vicinity of Howard Tilton Library and in the age of Google Scholar, JSTOR, Project Muse, World Cat, MLA Bibliography, and the UMI Dissertation Database, it is unacceptable that you ignore something published on your object. If you are writing on Roberto Bolaño, you have to make your best effort to find everything ever written on him, extract the best contributions of that material, and set them to dialogue with your own hypotheses. That is the bare minimum.

d) allow **two weeks** for feedback on specific chapters and **three weeks** for final feedback on completed manuscript. In busy times, it can be a bit more. It is usually less. While I have your chapter, do not make changes to it, or you will make me work twice on the same thing. You are responsible for keeping my turnaround time in mind for the planning of your calendar. That is, if by November 1 you intend to have a letter of recommendation to the MLA stating that you have two chapters approved, I must have your second chapter in hand by October 15 if you are positive that it will be approved with minor changes. I must have it way earlier if you think you will have to revise and rewrite it.

#### ***IV – Reminders***

**1. Circumscribe your objects and your claims carefully.** Very few dissertations innovate methodologically, and you certainly are not expected to invent a new way of reading things. Your claim to originality may be the use of widely known methods and techniques to objects that had not been studied according to them yet. There is nothing wrong with that: this is, in itself, a considerable research exercise. But if that is the case, state it explicitly as you present your argument. In other dissertations, the original contribution may be the unearthing of previously unknown objects of study. If this is your case, make sure you think carefully about what you can and cannot claim for your objects. If you study a historical period in literature, make sure you delimit it coherently. If you are making claims about, say, “the Argentine detective narrative,” be sure to have all possible counter-examples in mind before you make the claim. In a dissertation, words such as “first,” “largest,” “always,” “never before,” etc. should only be used when you are absolutely sure of what you are doing.

**2. Maintain contact with your advisor.** Ideally, if you are working with me, you should be in touch bi-weekly, at least. I strongly recommend that you write the bulk of your dissertation while in town, but I understand that there are circumstances in life that may decide otherwise. If that turns out to be the case, it is your responsibility to keep me abreast of how your work is going. Do not burn bridges by disappearing for a year and reconnecting with a request for a letter of recommendation – and certainly do not do that to your advisor while writing a dissertation.

**3. Do not fail to document your quotes.** Failure to do it will lead to incomplete presentation of your argument, at best, or a flat-out case of plagiarism, at worst. You may be borrowing from someone even if you don't have a literal citation in quotation marks. You can be, for example, borrowing an idea. In that case, make the parenthetical

notation or expand upon it in a note. When deciding to include a quote, make sure you get the full information on the source in a separate file.

**4. Do not use quotes as “fillers”.** In a dissertation in literary studies, you have to demonstrate that you are conversant with a body of work, but you do not need to quote extensively from it, except in a few cases. When summarizing a novel, for example, you may privilege paraphrase, insert a few sentences that you find emblematic, and reserve quotes only for passages that you intend to analyze in detail. When dialoguing with scholarly work, summarize the most important idea in it, the argument at its best; document the idea properly; expand upon it in a note if you wish; keep quotes in your own text to what is absolutely essential. By all means feel free to cite when necessary. But remember that the quotes should serve the unfolding of your argument, not obstruct it.

**5. Allow for ample time and provide materials when requesting a letter.** If I am your advisor, I am not doing you any favors by writing a recommendation letter. It's my job. By the same token, you must do your side, which is to request it with an advance notice of **three weeks**, ideally more if your writing your letter involves reading proposals and other materials. If you are planning to apply for a fellowship in October, for example, you may want to give me a “heads up” a couple of months earlier, even if you do not have all materials yet. Do not ever think you're “bothering” me by sending an email reporting on your progress. It saves me time later. In a recommendation letter, I can certainly emphasize your positives, but I cannot hide counter-evidence to a claim I am making about your work. If you have disappeared for a year without reporting on your progress, well, I must report that, even if I have reason to believe that it will not happen again. When requesting a letter, send a short email with **title** of dissertation, **deadline** for letter, updated **cv**, and **description** of other attached materials. If you have an **abstract** of the dissertation (or the book project, as the case may be), send that along as well.

#### ***IV – Preparing your defense***

“My committee has approved all my chapters” is a few steps away from “my dissertation is ready for defense”. Allow **one month** at least for those steps to take place, depending on the conversation you had with me upon approval of each chapter. In that pre-defense period, you will have to 1) write your conclusion; 2) check to see if all your quotes are documented; 3) organize your works cited list; 4) format your dissertation according to Graduate School guidelines; 5) check if title still adequately describes what you did. 6) make sure all members of your committee have received the manuscript in timely fashion for a last round of editing.

Idelber Avelar  
Professor

Appendix C  
Some recommendations regarding academic publishing

Idelber Avelar  
Dept. of Spanish and Portuguese

**Premise**

The expectations for graduate students have risen dramatically in recent years, and publishing figures prominently among them. It is important both to understand that change and not to overestimate it. In the fields of Spanish and Portuguese, at least, the rise in expectations does not mean that you are condemned for life if you don't publish as a graduate student (that may be true in some situations for other fields, such as English). It is important, however, to familiarize yourself with the steps, procedures, and standards of the academic publishing world, both to prepare your future and, in my personal opinion, to extract more juice, more thought, and more fun from your writing.

Recommendations:

1. Develop the habit of visiting the library periodically to look at the latest issues of the journals that interest you most. If you still don't have a list of periodicals that you like particularly – because you haven't read enough of them – then you start by looking at a wider array of journals. Eventually you will narrow it down to fewer, and slowly compose a map of your potential interlocutors in the field. That will also eventually indicate to you where you can, should, and would like to publish.
2. Become an MLA member as soon as possible. That will not only give you early membership in the association to which you will have to be affiliated in order to look for a job. It will provide you with the yearly edition of the MLA Manual, a subscription to PMLA (where you will see scholarly articles, an array of forums and debates, and extensive advertising from conferences and university presses), a subscription to Profession (where position papers on the state of the field are published and discussed), the MLA Newsletter, and several other promotions. The annual membership for a graduate student costs \$20.
3. Discuss your work with others, read your colleagues' work, and take positions in the debates in the field. Make sure you understand the history of these debates, the fact that they are probably older and larger than the scope of your particular work, and narrow down your writing to questions that you can argue thoroughly and knowledgeably. Be ready to compose parallels and contrasts between the several positions that precede you in the debate.
4. Make sure you understand the genres in academic publishing (position paper, conference paper, research article, dissertation or book chapter, the essay, etc.), not necessarily to respect them as sacred word, of course, but to be able to engage them competently and possibly subvert them as well.
5. As you compose your map of the journals in the field, you should begin to experience that the notion of "publishable" paper varies, fluctuates, and is defined differently from journal to journal. Besides quality, there are objective differences between approaches, styles, genres, that offer a quite wide array of possibilities, especially in certain fields. A rejection letter from a journal is not necessarily a bad experience, and is bound to be a positive one if there's indication that your work was read carefully.
6. Be ready both to accept criticism as well as politely to point out that you stand by what you originally wrote. Make sure you understand there's a dialectic going on between the two possibilities, and that this dialectic provides you with some room to operate, argue, and change your text. Learning how to write is, quite simply, learning how to rewrite. It is important to hold as a premise – until there's indication to the contrary – that your work is being read in good faith. Resubmitting work all the time is part of what you will have to do. That will often be enriching, and sometimes a bit mechanical and uninteresting. But it will need to be done.

7. In our field you can build your career writing in Spanish or English (if you also write in Portuguese this is true in a different way). I am of the opinion that you should start by publishing in the language you're most comfortable with, regardless of what you had to do to fulfill your doctoral requirements. You can always widen your linguistic horizons later.
8. As time pressures build, try to cultivate the ability to convert a piece from one genre into another (an unpublished research article into a conference paper, for example). This will save you time, and will help you handle less things at any given moment of your development. As you do this, you get a hold on the differences between genres – e.g. the fact that the dry and reflexive prose of a research article would probably bore a conference audience to death, if simply read aloud to them *sin más*. Understand the differences between oral presentations and written scholarship, the differences between the readership of various journals, etc.
9. Understand that just as you expect the journal referees to devote time to reading your piece carefully, it is your responsibility to do the best you can in advance. There are strong demands on their/our time, and if someone has to correct your spelling, your bibliographical notation, and the format of your quotes I bet they/we will be less inclined to be generous with your work. Take care of all of that in advance.
10. Understand you will often have to reread yourself more times than you'd like to. Writing takes work and time, and is more than "expressing what you think" on the page. "What you think" has probably been thought before, at least in some other form, and it's your responsibility to come to terms with the anteriority of that other thinking. Thinking is thinking the already thought (Heidegger).

### **Guide to Academic Periodicals**

(heavily concentrated on the fields of Latin American literature and culture, plus some journals in literature and critical theory in general)

#### **Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies**

##### **Brazil/Brasil**

boundary 2

Buletin Hispanique (Bordeaux, France)

Bulletin of Hispanic Studies (Liverpool and Glasgow)

Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies

Canadian Review of Comparative Literature

Casa de las Américas (Cuba)

##### **Chasqui**

##### **College Literature**

##### **Comparative Literature Studies**

##### **Confluencia: Revista hispánica de cultura y literatura**

Cuadernos Americanos (Mexico)

Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos (Madrid, Spain)

diacritics

Dispositio/N

Dissens: Revista Internacional de Pensamiento Latinoamericano (Stocklestr, 22-A, 72070 Tübingen, Germany)

Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y del Caribe (Tel Aviv)

##### **European review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies**

##### **Hispania**

##### **Hispanic Journal**

##### **Hispanic Review**

Hispanófila

Iberoromania (Tubingen, Germany)

Indiana Journal of Hispanic Literatures



**Inter-American Review of Bibliography**  
**Journal of Hispanic Philology**  
Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies (Carfax, UK)  
Journal of Interdisciplinary Literary Studies  
Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies (Carfax, UK)  
**La Torre**  
**Latin American Literary Review**  
Latin American Perspectives  
Literature and Aesthetics: The Journal of the Sydney Society of Literature and Aesthetics (Australia)  
Lugar Comum (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)  
Luso-Brazilian Review  
**Modern Fiction Studies**  
Modern Language Notes  
**Modern Language Quarterly**  
New Literary History  
Novos Estudos CEBRAP (São Paulo, Brazil)  
Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica (Mexico)  
**PMLA**  
Poetics Today  
**Profession**  
Punto de Vista (Argentina)  
qui parle  
Radical Philosophy (UK)  
Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos  
Revista Chilena de Literatura (Santiago, Chile)  
Revista de Crítica Cultural (Santiago, Chile)  
Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana  
**Revista de Estudios Hispánicos**  
Revista Hispánica Moderna  
Revista Iberoamericana  
**Romance Notes**  
**Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature**  
Style  
**SubStance**  
Symposium  
**Textual Practice**  
The Comparatist: Journal of the Southern Comp. Lit. Assoc.  
the minnesota review  
The Modern Language Review (London, UK)