

Professor Heather Haveman: Dissertation Proposal Outline (Very Rough Draft)

Introduction

- 1) What are you going to study? What is your dependent variable?
 - a) You may often want to defend not just your dependent variable, but also your research site (industry, occupation, country, region), especially if the explanation you are developing for your dependent variable is specific to that chunk of the social world (or is specific to that and very similar chunks).

- 2) Why is your dependent variable important/interesting – theoretically (to scholars in which subfield(s) of sociology) and substantively (who besides you cares about this)? What do we know about it? What do we NOT know about it – what are you going to add to our knowledge?

- 3) What is your approach to explaining your dependent variable – what kind of argument (“big theory” – e.g., Weberian, institutionalist, demographic, relational, symbolic interactionist) will you use and why is this appropriate? If you combine 2 or 3 approaches (e.g., Weberian=macro theory, symbolic interactionism=micro theory), that’s fine – you just need to explain how/why they cohere when applied to this dependent variable.
 - a) What are you expecting/predicting – what are your (general) hypotheses?

- 4) How are you going to gather data to test the hypotheses/predictions you derive from theory?
 - a) What research site?
 - b) What data-gathering method (lab/field experiment, interview/original survey, secure secondary data, secure archival data, direct observation)
 - c) How will you analyze these data?

- 5) What are your contributions to sociological theory and/or to our empirical understanding of your dependent variable? Who will learn something from reading your work? What will they learn?

Theory

- 1) Do NOT review the literature! This is supposed to be the section of the dissertation where you build an argument about your dependent variable. In order to do so, you have to have reviewed the extant literature(s) you are drawing on and hoping to contribute to, but you do not want to include that complete review – your summary of the literature – here. Instead, you want to USE the literature to develop predictions/hypotheses about your dependent variable. So write your literature review off-line – but consult with your advisors on it, to make sure it’s complete and factually correct.

- 2) Divide your summary of your literature-based argument into sections; each section should cover a single causal process or a set of related processes.
- 3) It often helps to sketch a causal diagram consisting of boxes (concepts/variables) and arrows (causal links) that show direct (main) effects, moderator (interaction) effects, and mediator effects. Don't be surprised if you revise this diagram several times as your argument develops/coheres.

Research Site (may precede theory if the theory applies specifically to that site)

- 1) What are you studying/where are you conducting research – what country, subnational region, industry, sphere of social life, demographic/occupational subgroup?
- 2) Why is this site important/ interesting/representative/classic/on the edge in some way that is particularly useful? (Again, this means you have to tell us why anyone besides you would care about what happens in this research site.)

Research Design

- 1) Sampling plan. What is the universe/complete set of social phenomena to which your theory applies? What sample will you draw from this universe? Why is this a good way to draw a sample?
 - a) What is your unit of analysis – individual, dyad, group/family, location/community, organization, region, country, world?
- 2) Data sources/collection procedures/measures. Where are you getting data from – an existing database, an existing institution from which you are drawing data, original data collection from individuals, groups, institutions...?
 - a) If you are interviewing/surveying people, what questions are you going to ask? Provide a complete interview schedule or survey instrument as an appendix and discuss it. If you are gathering data from archives, provide samples of the archival materials in an appendix and discuss them.
 - b) How will you select data and code variables/measure constructs/operationalize constructs? How will you reduce the raw data into analyzable chunks, and how will you reduce problems with missing data or problematic data? (Some of this may fit better into the methods of analysis section below.)
- 3) Methods of analysis. How will you analyze the data you gather? The analytical method you use depends on the form of data you gather, which in turn depends on the phenomenon you are studying. For templates/examples to follow, look at articles on the same topic or methods chapters in books on the same topic.
 - a) Whatever method(s) you use, take use through the analysis you will conduct step by step.

- b) If you are not sure about all of the analyses you plan, because you're not sure exactly what data/how much data you can gather, then tell us as much as you can about what you would do assuming the most likely outcome from your data-gathering efforts.

Outline of Remainder of Dissertation

List chapters and provide a 1- or 2-paragraph summary of what each will contain and justify each one – explain why you need each one, how each one adds to a coherent project.

Timeline for Completion

Tell us what you're going to do, step by step – week by week if possible, month by month if not. Break the dissertation down into small subtasks and tell us how long each should take. Explain why you'll do the tasks in the order you've planned. As with all projects, you have to leave plenty of room for unanticipated setbacks – reluctant sources, computer problems, travel problems, etc.

References

Provide complete references in ASA or Chicago Manual style.

For the ASA Style Guide, see <http://www.buffalostate.edu/library/docs/asa.pdf>.

For the Chicago Manual of Style online, see <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>; pay particular attention to the section titled Documentation I: Basic Patterns.