Dissertation Writing

1.51 Applying for Dissertation Research Grants: In the autumn of their third year, students are encouraged to begin applying for outside grants to support the dissertation as possible, particularly those grants that do not require ABD status. In the autumn of their fourth year and beyond, students are expected to apply for as many as possible. Many grants do require ABD status at the time of application, and many have autumn deadlines. Students are therefore advised that reaching ABD status before the start of the fourth year is highly desirable because it qualifies them to apply for more grants during the cycle that starts in the autumn of their fourth year.

Grant applications take a lot of time to prepare and they fall at a very busy time of year for the faculty. Thus, you’ll want to plan well in advance. It is especially important that you keep in close touch with your advisor, so that he or she knows your plans, and you have the benefit of his or her advice. Work carefully with your advisor on your project description, by far the most important part of any grant application. Strongly consider writing a brief note to your advisor outlining the grants for which you plan to apply.

1.52 Departmental Fellowship Nominations: For some dissertation grants, departmental nomination is required. Lists of these fellowships may be obtained from the Department Coordinator. The principal ones are:

- Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA), National Gallery, Washington: A variety of grants, each with particular requirements.
- Samuel H. Kress Fellowships: Some are based at foreign institutions and some are travel fellowships.
- Dedalus Foundation: Dissertation grants available for work on modern art and modernism.

To be considered for nomination for most of these grants, you need to have advanced to ABD status by the time you apply for nomination. You should submit your application to the Department Coordinator in autumn quarter according to the announced deadlines (usually early/mid-October). Your advisor must approve your project description before you can submit an application for the faculty committee’s consideration, so be sure to have him or her sign the appropriate approval form (available in the Department office) and include it with the materials you submit. Departmental decisions are usually made in early November.

1.53 Department Grant Opportunities: Endowments within the department support graduate student research travel, summer language study, and, when possible, dissertation completion. The amount available varies from year to year, depending on the applications we receive. Preference is given to students who apply for outside funding, including other sources of funding at the University, but are not successful. In general, the Department’s priorities are ranked as follows:

- The support of primary dissertation research travel for students who have not succeeded in securing outside grants, or who are not adequately supported by the grants they obtained.
- The support of pre-dissertation research trips of two to six weeks that are essential to preparing a dissertation prospectus and/or external grant proposal. Except in very rare cases, students are limited to one. Students may apply for top-up funding if their travel needs exceed their summer stipend amount. Students should also apply for external funding whenever possible.
- Funds for summer language study: Student tuition waivers and stipends are normally sufficient to cover summer language courses at the University of Chicago. If there is significant academic or programmatic reason, students may also apply for funding for language courses at other institutions, preferably in other North American cities. In such cases students with stipends are expected to apply these toward their living expenses. Students should apply for external funding whenever possible. Courses must be taken for letter grades and a copy of the transcript submitted to the Department Assistant at the end of the summer.
- After these needs have been met, funds may be available to support partial or complete write-up grants for advanced students who are unsuccessful in winning University or external grants. Students are eligible for departmental write-up funding only if they have applied for University-wide and/or Divisional write-up grants. Please note that these have special eligibility requirements and that advance planning is therefore essential. In most cases, students need to have a completed and approved dissertation chapter and may not apply beyond their seventh year.
- After these needs have been met, and on rare occasions, funds may be available to support small trips for dissertation writers who need to do a final round of follow-up research.
- We do not, alas, have sufficient funds to support such purposes as research trips before the pre-dissertation trip, secondary source research in US libraries for dissertations or early stages of dissertation writing, or conference travel. If you are uncertain as to what constitutes an appropriate request, check with your advisor and/or the Director of Graduate Studies.

Note that the Department does take into account a student’s fellowship income for the year in question and how much travel money it has given to a student in previous years, and it expects and appreciates frugality in the calculation of living expenses. An announcement describing the funds and their purposes and the application form are circulated late winter quarter. Applications are due in April; the faculty reviews them and the Director of Graduate Studies notifies students of the results in mid- or late May.

Checks are available around the start of summer quarter. Outstanding work for incompletes, including any from spring quarter, must be submitted to the Department Coordinator and the instructor(s) before a check will be released. Exceptions are courses that require a summer fieldwork component (courses in classical archaeology) and courses taken in other departments for which the instructor gives all students a later due date. In these cases, the Department Coordinator will need an email from the instructor stating the due date for the class. Students who receive awards for primary dissertation research must be ABD by the time the award is to be given, or the money will be withheld until this status is obtained. If the student has not moved to ABD status by the end of the academic year for which he or she applied, the award will be rescinded. As always, if you have questions, you should feel welcome to consult the Director of Graduate Studies.

1.54 Writing the Dissertation: Different topics, students, and advisors require different strategies for the submission of part, or all, of the dissertation for approval; you should therefore consult often with your committee and devise a plan and a schedule for your work. It is typical that the first chapter takes the longest time to write, and it is generally advisable to make sure that your entire committee weighs in on it before you proceed further. This way you will know that you are on the right track with each faculty member. Be sure also to consult, early in your research, the University-wide formatting requirements for finished dissertations (available on the Dissertation Office’s website), especially those regarding photographs.
1.55 Help for Dissertation Writers, including Workshops: Working on a dissertation is often a long and lonely experience. To alleviate the pressures of this situation, which can cause normally productive students to fall into the doldrums, the University sponsors graduate workshops, one of the primary purposes of which is to provide a supportive intellectual environment for the dissertation writer. Graduate students often present chapters of their dissertations here for constructive criticism. You are strongly encouraged to begin participating in one or more of these workshops even before you start the dissertation. Through the process you will become acquainted with the forms of PhD proposals and chapters. The University also sponsors dissertation-writing support groups. For information on these, ask the Department Coordinator or the Office of the Dean of Students.

1.56 Dissertation Completion Fellowships: Also referred to as “dissertation year fellowships” (DYFs) or “write-ups,” these special fellowships for writing the dissertation are usually designed to support students in their final year. Indeed, evaluation of applicants for such grants usually includes some careful assessment of whether the student can truly finish his or her dissertation within a year. Most often, you will be asked to submit a letter of application, an abstract, and a completed chapter of the dissertation.

Most University and/or Divisional dissertation completion fellowships require Departmental nomination. Students should submit letters of application, abstracts, and completed chapters to the Department Coordinator by the posted deadline, which usually falls in the middle of February. Departmental nominations are usually made by early March.

Divisional and departmental dissertation completion fellowships are subject to University terms and conditions. Most notably, fellowship recipients who do not graduate by the end of spring quarter following the year they held the fellowship are ineligible for further internal University funding from any source. This includes out-of-pocket tuition aid normally awarded in the quarters in which students teach. The full list of terms, conditions, and eligibility requirements is available on the Division’s website.

Look for other grants. The AAUP and other agencies offer dissertation completion fellowships for which no nomination is required.

1.57 Time Limitations on the PhD Program: The University requires students to complete all requirements for the PhD degree within twelve years of beginning the program (nine years for students who matriculated in autumn 2016 and after). This means that you must plan on defending your dissertation, filing the fully formatted copy at the dissertation office, and graduating no later than the summer quarter following your twelfth (or ninth) year. This is a firm University deadline to which the Department cannot grant exceptions. Students who do not meet this deadline will be administratively withdrawn from the program.