Chapter 11
Additional Application Materials

About Your Research

Dissertation Abstract

You may be asked to provide an abstract of your dissertation as part of the initial screening process for a faculty position. Or you may wish to provide it with your application whether or not you are specifically asked for it.

Your abstract should conform to the conventions for your field. It is usually one or two pages long. Make the abstract, and therefore your dissertation, sound interesting and important. Use the active rather than the passive construction whenever possible, and stress findings and conclusions where they exist. Rather than saying, “A possible relationship between x and y was studied,” say, for example, “Demographic data indicate that x increased as y declined.”

Briefly indicate how your research fits into a broader context to answer the implicit “Why should anyone care?” question that may be asked of any piece of research. Someone who reads your abstract should have a clear idea of what your work entailed and want to ask you more about it. Write, rewrite, and seek critiques from your advisor and others in your department until you’re satisfied that the abstract will achieve this effect.

Research Statement

Like an abstract, this short summary (usually one or two pages) may be requested as part of the application process. At other times, you may choose to include it to strengthen your application. Preparing this document is wonderful practice for interviews (see Chapter 14, “Interviewing”), because employers are keenly interested in what you plan to do in the future. It is not expected that you will have begun to do research beyond your dissertation or your current postdoctoral work, only that you will have begun to think about it coherently.

If you plan to publish your research as several articles or turn it into a
book, you may mention that fact briefly. Be sure, however, to discuss plans for research that extend beyond what you’re doing now. If your plans sound simply like extensions of your current work, or if you use phrases like “We do this,” then you risk giving the impression that you view your plans as an extension of your advisor’s research and that you have not begun to think of yourself as an independent researcher.

Give a brief context for your research interests, including how they fit into work others have done, and then discuss your plan for investigation. It is very important to communicate a sense that your research will follow logically from what you have done and be different, important, and innovative. Describing plans at an appropriate level of generality/specificity may require some rewriting and feedback from faculty members. A research plan so specific that one article could complete it is too limited, but one that includes a whole area of study, for example, “labor economics,” is too general. If you will require substantial facilities and/or external funding for your research, include that in your discussion. If you’ve identified funding organizations likely to support your research plans, indicating that this is the case will make your plan sound more credible.

If this document makes the reader want to ask you further questions, even challenge you, it has done its job admirably, because it has helped make it seem that an interview with you would be lively and interesting. Write as clearly and concisely as you can.

While of course it would be unethical for members of a hiring committee to appropriate a candidate’s detailed research plans for their own research, candidates have at least suspected this has happened to them. Find your own balance between talking about your research plans specifically enough to be credible and abstractly enough to protect your interest in your own creative ideas.

Dissertation Chapter or Other Writing Sample

In some fields a writing sample is requested as a matter of course, and you should be preparing one as you prepare your other job hunting materials. In other fields these documents are usually requested only after an initial screening, and it isn’t to your advantage to send them unsolicited. In deciding what to send, choose something that is interesting and stands on its own, even if it is part of a longer document. If you send a long chapter, you might want to enclose a note directing readers’ attention to a particular section of it, since, in reality, many committee members will skim documents. Check with your advisor and other faculty members to see what work would represent you best. Apart from a dissertation chapter, it is usually better to send published, rather than unpublished, material.

About Your Teaching

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

While the word “philosophy” is often used as part of the name for this document, it is perhaps better thought of as a brief essay that will give a hiring committee an idea of what you actually do in the classroom. You will need to make some general statements, but make sure to include examples that illustrate what you mean by them. If at all possible, describe things you have already done, or at least seen in practice, rather than give examples which are entirely hypothetical. If students responded well to an approach, say so. Avoid clichés and “hot button” words that may immediately cause the hiring committee to identify you as something you are not. However, do not hesitate to express your ideas simply and directly.

For ideas, try to look at statements written by others in your department as well as those written by applicants to your department, if those are available to you. Look at the Web pages of hiring institutions and read their statements of philosophy, missions, and goals to help you get a sense of some of the dimensions which are frequently addressed when people talk about teaching.

Teaching Portfolio

Sometimes, particularly after making a “first cut,” candidates are asked for additional materials about teaching, such as a syllabus for a course you have taught or a proposal for a course you would like to teach. Some candidates compile “teaching portfolios,” which can include syllabi and other materials developed for courses, comments from students, and self-evaluations of one’s teaching. While these can be nice enhancements, they are rarely required and should not be submitted unsolicited at the first stage of application.

However, Web-based versions (discussed in more detail in Chapter 12) should always be mentioned on your vita or in your cover letter. Compared to paper copy, they are much less burdensome for hiring committees.

If you haven’t yet begun to compile materials for a teaching portfolio you might begin to do so, as this can be a helpful step in writing your teaching philosophy. It is also a good idea to get into the habit of keeping a record of work you do in the classroom, because teaching portfolios are sometimes required as part of a tenure file.

Evidence of Successful Teaching

Some job ads ask for “evidence of successful teaching.” While such a requirement is obviously open-ended, it’s a good idea to include some-
thing that involves external evaluation of your teaching. You might, for instance, present a faculty member with all your teaching evaluations, if your institution uses them, and ask that person to summarize them into a shorter letter. The author of the letter can interpret whatever numerical system is generally used by your institution. For example, if instructors of a required chemistry course on average receive scores of only 3 on a scale of 5, the person writing the letter can explain that your score of 3.7 is truly impressive. Sometimes candidates themselves put together an information sheet that might include this information as well as quotations from student evaluations. In addition to having a faculty member discuss your teaching, you could also selectively ask a few students to write on your behalf. If you’ve received teaching awards, you or someone writing about your teaching can put those into context as well.

Video of Your Teaching

As institutions try to control their hiring costs, they increasingly want to know more and more about candidates before paying to bring them to campus. On some occasions, institutions that care very much about the quality of teaching are asking candidates not only to write about their teaching philosophy but also to send a recording of their classroom teaching. Generally, this will be requested after the initial pool of applicants has been narrowed down to a smaller number. While there is no guarantee that you will be asked for a video, if you are concentrating your search on institutions oriented to teaching you should probably go ahead and prepare one so that you can have it ready immediately if it’s requested.

You are more likely to be asked for a short recording than for one of a full-length class. If you want to emphasize the breadth of your teaching abilities, you might choose to compile a recording from shorter classroom segments. If you don’t care to prepare it in advance of your applications, be prepared to produce one on short notice, if necessary. If you are currently teaching a course, you could easily produce a video quickly simply by arranging for part of one of your regular class sessions to be filmed. If you are not currently teaching, you might want to find someone who would let you use part of his or her class time for this purpose.

Other Things That Might Be Required

If you are in a visual field, such as fine arts or architecture, a portfolio or slides of your work will always be required, as may be an “artist’s statement.” Their preparation is beyond the scope of this discussion, but take them very seriously. Check with your professional association. For example, the College Art Association, www.collegeart.org, gives excellent advice on
Sample Research Statement, Humanities

Anita Scholar

Statement of Research

In my research, I am drawn time and again to examine processes of identity-formation. Of particular interest to me is the ever fraught relationship between personal desire and socio-cultural influence in the determination of self-definition. I am also fascinated by the seemingly paradoxical nature of self-definition as a phenomenon that is, at turns, intrinsically rigid and unexpectedly flexible. I am interested in the relationship between art and society, in the roles that education, and particularly social class, play in determining who we believe we are—and, often more importantly, who we are not. The uses of these self-definitions are also a critical point of inquiry: what are the personal, socio-cultural, and political ramifications of the ways in which we choose—or are led—to define ourselves? These questions always seem to inform the thematic specificity of my investigations. Literature and film are prime vehicles for the study of self-expression and the representation of selfhood, for they take these as their very subjects. I have outlined below two research projects that I hope to carry out upon completing my dissertation. The first is to produce a manuscript for publication based on my thesis; the second is to engage in a book-length study of the literary fictionalization of theoretical discourse.

I. Affect and the Critique of Market Culture

My most immediate postdoctoral research project will be to revise my dissertation for publication. Entitled "Affect and the Critique of Market Culture in Latin American Literature and Film," my thesis explores the work of five novelists and filmmakers from Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, and Mexico in an attempt to synthesize a model of globalized subjectivity. Given the claims of representativeness to the broader Latin American perspective. My aim has been to present a deeper and more comprehensive consideration of the region's literature and film. Ultimately, I would like to arrive at a topical presentation of my study rather than orienting it around emblematic texts. In order to accomplish this, I will need to research other literary genres (e.g., short story, poetry) and include further analyses of representative novels and cinematic works.

I would likewise seek to expand my base knowledge of recent cultural production in the United States, especially literary, in order to craft a final manuscript that can rightfully claim to be more comparative in its approach and analyses. Developing and incorporating a more nuanced understanding of U.S. culture would enhance the project not only as a means of identifying with the cultural pressures exerted on the South by its evidently influential neighbor to the North, but also as a means of developing a model of convergent and divergent cultural tendencies across the two regions. To what extent do they participate in the same globalized market culture and to what extent do they play distinct roles with distinct perspectives? I have attempted to give these vital questions preliminary answers, but believe they warrant further research of U.S. cultural production.

Finally, I would like to develop a clear distinction between the cultures of modernity/postmodernity and globalization in order to periodize my project's claims regarding the models of subjectivity prevalent in the latter. There are generally two schools of thought with respect to the filtration of globalization with modernist capitalism: the first characterizes post-Industrial Revolution capitalism as an on-going tradition (Jameson); the second argues that globalization constitutes a dramatic and qualitatively distinct turn in capitalist practice and culture (Beck, Lash). My view is that there is truth in both perspectives and that they are not necessarily contrary. For the purposes of strengthening the foundation of my own project, then, I need to develop a working model of pre-globalized subjectivity that is at once differentiated from its globalized counterpart and reflective of an underlying continuity between the two. To this end, I will explore theoretical approaches to the capitalist culture of the modern and postmodern periods and produce a sufficiently representative survey of their cultural production in the United States and Latin America.

II. The Fictionalization of Theory

A second book-length project that interests me is the phenomenon of the fictionalization of theory in Latin American literature—that is, the self-conscious structuring of fictitious texts around the scaffolding of theoretical discourse (I here define "theory" broadly as post-linguistic turn philosophy: structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, and Foucault).

These writers, principally novelists, construct their texts on the strength of a conceptual foundation informed by an amalgam of postructuralist—primarily French—theory. Sarwat, as an emigré in Paris, was involved with the Tel Quel group and attended Jacques Lacan's famous weekly seminars. Valenzuela and Eltit incorporate into their texts feminist perspectives on psychoanalysis (Lucie Irigaray, Hélène Cixous) and poststructuralist ideas about canonicity and power (Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault).

These novelists write against or under dictatorships that adopt a repressive or outright anti-intellectual stance toward literary and humanistic thought (Batista, Castro, Videla, Pinochet). In the face of such repression and censorship, it would make sense that authors might reach for highly developed, yet codified, mechanisms of opposition to these regimes. Poststructuralist theoretical discourse is precisely such an instrument: in general terms, as a subset of philosophy, it occupies a privileged position in the humanistic disciplines; in specific terms, as a particular body of thought, it theorizes the cultural dynamics of power, control, and subjectivity that are apropos of these authors' resistance to the socio-political circumstances of dictatorship. This study would interrogate the conditions that give rise to this phenomenon and the changes it signals both in the role of the contemporary Latin American intellectual and in the nature of the long-standing cosmopolitan intellectual relationship between Europe and Latin America.