DISSERTATION

Dissertation Committee
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. The
advisor and student together should decide, as soon as possible, who the second and third
readers of the dissertation will be. The advisor and second reader are normally members of
the department, and the third reader may be as well. In cases when the dissertation topic begs
a third reader from another department or university, it is the advisor’s responsibility to make
the initial contact and to obtain his or her participation.

It is important that students establish from the start, with the advisor and committee
members, the timeline and procedures for the submission of chapters and the final
dissertation. There are different ways that a committee may decide to review chapters. For
example, the advisor may be the first person to read individual chapters and request revisions
before they are passed on to the second reader, who in turn may request further revisions. It
is also possible that a committee may decide that the advisor and second reader
simultaneously read and critique chapters as they are produced. Alternatively, the second
reader may prefer not to be involved at each stage of the process, but should have the
dissertation well in advance of the defense, so that there is enough time to incorporate
his/her suggestions before the final draft of the dissertation is presented to the department.
The third reader generally reviews a complete draft of the dissertation. It is preferable, if not
always feasible, that the third reader’s suggestions be incorporated into the thesis before the
defense.

Format and Guidelines
Dissertations should adhere to the highest standards of professionalism in form and content.
An acceptable dissertation is well written, organized and thoroughly demonstrates the
candidate’s expertise in his or her area of research.

Dissertations should have a minimum of 200 double spaced pages, in the equivalent of Times
Roman, 12 point font, 1-inch top, right and bottom margins, 1.5-inch left margin, not including
bibliography. They should follow MLA style unless there are compelling reasons to adopt
another standard format such as Chicago. In any case, consistency of format is essential.

The date of the defense will be determined only when the members of the committee (advisor
and second reader) deem it ready for presentation to the rest of the faculty. The dissertation
defense date will be chosen in consultation with the advisor, DGS, and Department Manager.

Once a date has been set, the student will be expected to submit an electronic and two hard
copies with at least two (2) weeks of advance of the defense date. The candidate will also send
an electronic copy as a PDF file to the Department Manager. The candidate should provide an
abstract in English as well if the dissertation is in Spanish, or in Spanish, if it is in English.

It is the student’s responsibility to obtain the Graduate School Guidelines for the preparation
of the dissertation: https://www.brown.edu/academics/gradschool/dissertation-guidelines
**Dissertation Defense**
The defense consists of an oral presentation by the candidate, based on notes, of approximately 15 minutes, followed by questions and comments from faculty members. The defense should complement, rather than reiterate, the project. In it, the student can discuss the evolution of the dissertation, problems encountered and how they were handled, the significant contributions of the project and plans for future expansion. Committee members lead off with questions and discussion, which is then opened to other faculty in attendance. The third reader may participate by video conference, be present at the defense or send written comments and questions for the defense.

Largely for the benefit of the candidate, defenses in the Department of Hispanic Studies are not public events. Attendance is limited to committee members and faculty members. However, with the approval of the advisor, the candidate can invite up to three individuals to attend the defense (but not the deliberations).

Faculty in attendance to the defense may vote in favor or against the approval of a dissertation. Should there be three nays among faculty in attendance the dissertation will not be approved. Normally, dissertations that get to the dissertation defense stage do not present such risks because the manuscript has been previously reviewed by the candidate’s advisor and second reader, who have ensured that serious problems were addressed in the final draft to be presented to the department.

**Please note:**
The department has learned from previous experience that students on the job market who are not half way through their dissertations by the middle of the semester in which they submit their applications may not have enough time to finish their dissertations by the end of the academic year. Students should keep in mind that the job search process is extremely time-consuming. Regardless of whether a student gets a job or not, each dissertation will be held to the same high standards described above.