

September 29, 2020

From: Dr. Joshua Ezra Burns, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
To: Doctoral students in the Department of Theology
Re: Reviewing dissertation draft submissions

Esteemed student,

I write with an update to my policies on reviewing dissertation draft submissions. Reviewing a draft submission to my usual exacting editorial standards typically takes me the equivalent of two or three days of uninterrupted work. With my administrative responsibilities in the college ever increasing, I no longer can find that sort of time on a dependable basis. Rather, therefore, than keep you waiting for inordinate lengths of time following your submission of drafts, I have decided to change my strategy to improve its efficiency. In what follows, I will articulate what I expect of you with respect to the preparation and submission of drafts and what you can expect of me with respect to their review. Please note that these policies are not negotiable. Note as well that they apply to all draft submissions relating to doctoral dissertations inclusive of doctoral dissertation outlines. Finally, please consider these policies in effect immediately and until which time I should notify you otherwise.

1. I have a lengthy and continually repopulating to-do list. Many of the tasks on my to-do list are time-sensitive, which means I must prioritize those tasks. I attend to other, non-time-sensitive tasks in the order I receive them. I do not consider the review of a dissertation draft submission a time-sensitive task unless the author should provide a rationale as to why it should be.
2. I will review only drafts of completed chapters. If you wish to receive my input regarding a draft submission prior to its completion, please make an appointment to consult with me. I will be happy to discuss your concerns without conducting a formal review of your work.
3. I will review each draft only once. Unless I specifically instruct you otherwise, I will not accept a revised version of a previously reviewed chapter draft until the dissertation defense.
4. I will review only one draft per submission. If you have multiple drafts for me to review, please submit one and await my feedback before submitting another.
5. My assessment of your draft will consist of a summary review indicating my general impression of your submission and areas in need of revision. My review will be accompanied by an invitation to make an appointment with me to discuss your responses to my feedback once you have reviewed it and processed its implications toward your writing process.

6. I will not edit your work. I will offer only general criticism with respect to the structure of your argument and compositional style. I expect you to respond by my criticism by editing your own work in advance of its defense. You may wish to acquaint yourself with literature on the fundamentals of academic research and writing. Useful resources for dissertations in the humanities include Wayne C. Booth et al., *The Craft of Research* (4th ed., 2016) and Claire Kehrwald Cook, *Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing* (1985). You may wish to seek assistance from a peer tutor at the university's Norman H. Ott Memorial Writing Center. You may call upon your fellow doctoral students to form a dissertation writing group in which you convene regularly to review and critique one another's work.
7. When preparing your draft submission, it is your responsibility to format your citations consistently and to an appropriate academic style. I expect you to adhere to the guidelines of *The SBL Handbook of Style for Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (2nd ed., 2014). Should I find excessive deviations from its style in your submission, I will stop reviewing it and send you an email advising you to proofread your citations and resubmit your work.
8. At the end of each fall and spring academic term, I must give registered students whose dissertations I am directing a grade of satisfactory (SNC) or unsatisfactory (UNC). If you have submitted a chapter draft since the prior fall or spring grading deadline, I will give you a grade of SNC. If you have not submitted a chapter draft since the prior fall or spring grading deadline, I will email you inquiring as to your recent progress. If, in that event, you can demonstrate significant progress since the prior fall or spring grading deadline, I will give you a grade of SNC. If not, I will give you grade of UNC, which may result in your placement on academic probation.

If you intend to begin or to continue producing your dissertation under my directorship, I urge you to attend to these policies. Please know that my objective is to make you accountable for the quality of your work where I cannot provide that service. I can tolerate occasional errors, digressions, and lapses in coherence. But habitual carelessness denotes an author's lack of discipline and disrespect for the reader. Do not be that author. If you expect me to meet your needs, I expect you to meet mine. Let us therefore work together to ensure a mutually satisfactory outcome.

Thank you for your cooperation,



Joshua