



Dissertation Knowledge Basket



PhD Program in
Indigenous Studies

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Background

Dissertations Need to Evolve

Reports University Affairs and the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies.

A *Taskforce Report on Dissertations* released by CAGS in 2018, argues that "shifts in the academy and society over the last few decades have led to a world-wide conversation on rethinking approaches to the doctoral dissertation" and challenged universities to create additional format options that would better situate doctoral research to "make meaningful change in the world."

Rationale

In their case for broadening what constitutes a dissertation, CAGS offers several factors that are global in context:

1. The nature of the world's problems are changing.
2. Modes of scholarship and knowledge production are changing.
3. Modes of innovation are changing.
4. Forms of scholarly communication are changing.
5. There is an invigorated student-centered focus in graduate education.
6. Students are motivated to make a positive difference in their research.
7. Doctoral candidates are not always well-prepared for research and other careers outside the academy.
8. Changes in the format of dissertations is



Indigenous Studies PhD

It is clear that the nature of graduate studies at many institutions is changing. Many promote multi-disciplinarity and offer training and courses in various methodologies and are more inclusive of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives.

When this program began in 1999, there was one other PhD Program in Indigenous Studies located in Arizona. Now there are a number of programs in the Americas and other locations around the world. This means increased competition for students and the need to develop more specific niches that emphasize the uniqueness of what we have to offer at Trent. It also presents an opportunity to bring IK knowledge and experience directly into the dissertation and to support dissemination of research findings in ways that will have more practical applicability in Indigenous communities and organizations.

Offering a project-based option for the dissertation creates a very unique niche for this program. No other PhD Programs in Indigenous Studies in North America offer an alternative to the monograph dissertation.

Experiential Learning, A Global Context

Many universities around the world offer experiential learning opportunities that are directly connected to dissertation or thesis work and PhD students enrolled in these institutions have a number of options with respect to possible dissertation formats. Some possible options include, a portfolio, a series of articles, graphic novel, arts-based exhibit, product or tool, website, performance, work of fiction, to name just a few. In many universities where alternative options are offered, the dissertation is a "combined work" that includes two or more components that when considered together by a committee and external examiner, fulfil the requirements in the same way a monograph option would.



**Wii-gwejtoon-gaa-mooshiginmon
kokibinaaganing gaa-kendimon**

Broken down, this phrase refers to:

- Anishinaabe-aadizowin (a way of life, culture, and knowing),
- Kinoomaagewin (The art of learning),
- Daapinomon Kendaaswin (to pick up the knowledge), and
- Mosaadimon

Gbimaadiziwing (To put this knowledge on its feet as practice and walk it in one's life) given to us by the Creator and provides an opportunity to use such gifts in the production of a creative component that reflects the overall project and

specifically the findings of a PhD research project. Please note we are also in the process of reflecting the ideas presented here in Mohawk as well. That page will be added as soon as the translation is available.

What is a Dissertation Knowledge Basket?

Within an Anishinaabeg Context:

Wii-gwejtoon-gaa-mooshiginmon kokibinaaganing gaa-kendimon reflects the idea of picking up, gathering, or adding knowledge to a basket that an individual will carry with them over their lifetime, assume responsibility for, and put on its feet as practice. This responsibility includes what is shared with others and in what context knowledge and practice it is shared.

Within Indigenous educational pedagogy, knowledge is continually gathered through practice, and thus added to one's "basket" over time. Much like Nanaboozhoo who traveled/travels the Earth and engaged/engages with the Natural World, there is an expectation of both mastery of research (broadly defined) and apprenticeship/practice in this model.

Within Anishinaabe traditions, this includes knowledge individuals have been exposed to, but more specifically, knowledge systems in which they have developed a more intimate relationship through apprenticeship and practice with an Elder or Knowledge Holder. This basket of gathered knowledges and practice can include Sacred Teachings and Ceremonies, Culture, Language, Traditional and Contemporary Practices, and other specific ways of understanding and interacting in the world around us as ethical human beings.



What is a Community of Practice?

- A community of practice can be a physical Indigenous community or organization in which the student is a member;
- A community or organization in which the student has developed a relationship, or a working partnership with;
- Communities of practice can also include specific individual practices within artistic, environmental, educational, cultural, spiritual (or other contexts) wherein Indigenous Knowledges and ways of understanding the world provide a foundational grounding and shape the approach used by practitioners with respect to artistic, environmental, educational or other practice and scholarship.

Situating Research in Communities of Practice

Situating a Dissertation Knowledge Basket in a community or communities of practice is vital for this model to be completed successfully. A community of practice can be a physical Indigenous community or an Indigenous organization in which the student is a member, or a community or organization in which the student has developed a relationship with or a working partnership. Community of practice can also extend to specific cases where students hold a particular practice that is grounded in Indigenous communities and Indigenous contexts, which have been developed over time, supported, and guided by Elders and Knowledge Holders. This can include practices such as ricing, sugar bush, or other land-based practices not listed here.

Communities of practice can also include specific individual practices developed over time within artistic, environmental, educational, or other contexts wherein Indigenous Knowledges and ways of understanding the world provide a foundational grounding and thus shape the approach used by individual practitioners with respect to their artistic, environmental, educational or other practice. In this respect, practice communities refers to dynamic relationships that exist between a student who carries a specific practice that is being developed within an artistic, environmental, educational, or other contexts.

Students may be carriers of Indigenous practices while being a member of an artistic, educational, or environmental community of practice. In such cases, depending on the specific project, a student might need to situate their project in multiple communities of practice. Depending upon the lens used, communities of practice may well be blended and/or have permeable boundaries.

THE DISSERTATION KNOWLEDGE BASKET IS A COMBINED RESEARCH PROJECT



A dissertation knowledge basket within the Indigenous Studies PhD Program is a combined research project with three primary components that collectively demonstrate candidate mastery of a particular area through original research. Ideally, new applicants will declare this option upon submitting an application for admission to the program. New students may, however, submit a change of format form within the first year and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Approval from the supervisory committee will be required for any change. Once a dissertation proposal has been defended, a student may not switch format for their dissertation.

To meet program requirements a dissertation knowledge basket must include:

- A Creative Component (Using gifts to create something that has practical applicability)
- A Written Component (20,000-30,000 words)

The creative component, conceived of in Anishinaabemowin as Nakaazang miigwewinan gzhe-mnidoo waa-ni-zhichigeng gegoo e-zhi-gchi-piitenman gegoo, reflects the act of using gifts given by the Creator to create something that has practical applicability.

The piece created for this component can be:

- *A creative piece (graphic novel, fictional novel, film, play/performance, painting, visual arts, pottery, sculpture, etc.),
- *Product or tool (educational, environmental, etc.),
- *IK apprenticeship/practice (further development of an Indigenous practice under the apprenticeship of an Elder/Knowledge Holder),
- *Architectural design
- *Website or online/web-based platform, etc

These suggestions are not exclusive, other options are possible if determined appropriate for the student/committee/project. The nature and scope of this component should reflect the student's level of knowledge, skills and capacity to carry out the work required to complete the project. It must also consider the availability and willingness of an expert in the specific area of the project to serve on the committee. The proposed creative piece must also be appropriate in effort and scope for inclusion in a PhD knowledge basket.

A Note on Supervision:

The dissertation knowledge basket is guided to completion by a faculty committee. In addition to the supervisor (who must be a tenured faculty member from Trent) the committee must have one member who is an expert in the format area of the creative project as well as one member who is an expert in the area of the research topic or practice. If not Trent faculty, these experts can be added as Special Graduate Faculty by the PhD Program. This includes Elders and Knowledge Holders as well as experts from other practice communities or faculty from other universities who will only sit on this one committee.

Be sure to meet with your supervisor early in the second term of year one to discuss additions to your committee. Members are added to the committee by the PhD Program Graduate Committee (if Special Graduate Faculty) or by Graduate Studies in the case of Adjunct Faculty. Be aware that adjunct faculty are normally only approved if they plan to be involved in more than one committee or will be co-supervising the dissertation knowledge basket (see the full discussion of supervision later in this viewbook).

Creative Component

Important Guidelines

- It should not be an imitation of another's work
- It can be a response to ongoing issues, concerns and interests
- It is rooted in a specific knowledge and cultural context
- It manifests historical, cultural issues, concerns and interests
- It contributes to human experience and hence knowledge.



Specific Criteria

The project undertaken for this component must demonstrate a fully conceptualized and stylistically developed work of quality expected at a PhD Level. To qualify as a component of a dissertation basket it must:

- Be presented in the candidate's chosen medium—such as creative writing, performance, exhibition, website, tool or product, Indigenous practice (including ceremonial practice and knowledge where appropriate), etc.
- Where a performance, exhibition or Indigenous practice are concerned, it must be demonstrated/presented/performed in a fashion that is accessible to the communities of practice, supervision, and the examination committee.
- Represent no more than 70% and no less than 50% of the total work submitted for examination.
- Provide evidence of the skills required to produce a coherent and semi-professional piece of work.
- Produce a project component that is in dynamic relation to the theoretical and scholarly ideas explicitly discussed in the written component.
- Be in keeping with the Vision Statement of the program and thus make original and ethical contributions to Indigenous communities/organizations.

Evaluation Criteria

Credibility: Is the project grounded in a community of practice and scholarship in the field?

Resonance: Does it have aesthetic merit, generalisability, and transferability?

Contribution: Does it make a significant contribution to knowledge and practice in the field and communities of practice?

Meaningful Coherence: Is it effective? Does what it set out to do. Does it tell an engaging and comprehensible story in which the meaning is clear?

Written Component

Important Guidelines

- Exhibits excellence in advanced thinking that supports, contextualizes and/or amplifies the creative component
- Demonstrates comprehensive understanding of previous work within the field
- Demonstrates a thorough understanding of the conceptual, theoretical and cultural context (s) in which the overall project is situated.



Specific Criteria

It must be organized and grounded in the candidate's positionality, cultural context (s), and relationship to the topic of exploration. It should consider and place the project within relevant literature or sources and the community of practice.

The document should demonstrate that the candidate has advanced their knowledge and skills related to a specific practice that is situated within an Indigenous community or organization. If applicable, the document should also address specific practices that are developed in relationship to other practice communities such as artistic, environmental, educational, etc.

Positionality

Who are you in relation to the topic and practice?

What is your practice? Where did you learn it? Who were your teachers?

Discuss your project and how you did it. Who was the community of practice in which the project was situated?

What are the philosophical/theoretical frameworks in which your practice is embedded?

What did you learn/unlearn as part of this process? Explore your insights, epiphanies and how you see your practice. How have you extended your practice, and how will this benefit your community (ies) of practice? Discuss how the project expands your knowledge basket and how you will apply it (walk it) in your life.

Reflection in action: How does the overall project contribute to human experience?



Emphasis on Evaluation

- The written component must demonstrate:
- Quality of thinking and writing
- Quality of the document's coherence with the actual research that was conducted as well as situating the creative component in the field and communities of practice
- Quality of follow through with Indigenous communities, and other communities of practice

Supervision



Supervision for a dissertation knowledge basket requires different expertise than what is normally needed for a monograph dissertation. In addition to the supervisor and committee members who oversee specific research and writing processes, an expert is needed to provide guidance for the creative component that will be added to the dissertation knowledge basket. Depending on the project and creative component, this may be more than one person. Students should begin to work with their supervisor early in year one to set up their supervisory committee to ensure that the experts needed to provide guidance for all aspects of the project have been identified and a request made to add such experts to their committee as *Special Graduate Faculty* by the start of year two (September).

IK Practice Related Projects

Students who hold a specific Indigenous practice may choose to develop that practice further as their project component through a specific apprenticeship with an Elder (s) or Knowledge Holder (s). Please note that this apprenticeship is expected to go beyond what a student learned in the IK course or the Biimaadiziwin/Atonhetseri:io course. Such apprenticeships will be organized and overseen by the Director of Studies for the PhD Program. Experts who provide IK related guidance for IK related apprenticeships must be added to the supervisory committee as Special Graduate faculty by the start of year two (September).

Artistic Practice Related Projects

Students holding a specific artistic practice may choose to disseminate their research findings through that practice with respect to the creative component. This could be painting, sculpture, dance performance, novel, play, graphic novel, etc. It is also possible for students who carry IK, to produce a combined creative component that is grounded in IK and also in artistic practice. It will important to request the appointment of an expert on artistic practice to the committee by the start of year two.

Other Projects

Students who would like to develop an educational or environmental tool or disseminate their research findings through the creation of web-portal or other format not listed here may do so if the proposed creative component is of sufficient scope and quality to meet program requirements for inclusion in a PhD dissertation knowledge basket.

Ethics and Ethical Protocols

Regardless of the format used for the creative component, all students are required to work within the vision and mandate of the program as well as any existing ethics processes and protocols in the specific Indigenous community or organization in which they are working. Individual students who arrange an IK practice or artistic related apprenticeship with an Elder or Knowledge Holder will also be bound to the scope and parameters agreed upon by the student and the Elder or Knowledge Holder. Students will also be required to follow any protocols and practices established by the Elder or Knowledge Holder as part of that specific apprenticeship.

Apprenticeship/Training Fees

Students are responsible for any fees required to undertake an apprenticeship or training. Students are permitted to seek out and apply for relevant grants or scholarships or other related funding programs available that might cover apprenticeship and training fees. Apprenticeships should be completed by the end of year three to ensure there is enough time to produce the creative component and complete the program by the end of year four.

Dissertation Knowledge Basket

Creative & Written Components

The dissertation knowledge basket will be examined collectively by the examining committee as an integrated and interrelated whole constituting the dissertation for this option within the PhD Program in Indigenous Studies.

Two external examiners, appointed by Graduate Studies will review the knowledge basket, one with expertise in the format area of the Creative Component and one with expertise in the research area of the candidate. External Examiners will review both components and provide a report to the program determining if the candidate is ready to move forward to the defence stage.



Submission Process

Creative Component

Where the Creative Component is comprised of writing (whatever genre) it should be included in the same document with the written component. For non-written formats that require an exhibition, performance, or other type of demonstration, the PhD Program will set a date to view the creative component upon receipt of a completion form by the candidate. The creative component will be viewed by the examining committee, including the external examiners. The external examiner will submit a report to the program within four weeks.

Written Component

The written component must be submitted within one term after the completion of the Creative Component. The supervisory committee will review the written component and then when satisfied that it is ready for defence, will submit it to the program for distribution to the external examiners. The external examiner will submit a report to the program within four weeks.



Round Table

Upon receipt of the external examiner reports, a round table will be scheduled wherein candidates will meet with the examining committee and external examiners to discuss their dissertation knowledge basket in its entirety. After making a presentation, the candidate will respond to questions by the examining committee. The round table is open to the public.

Proposal Guidelines

Proposal Format

- Written (word format)
- Length: under 40 pages (double-spaced)

Proposal Outline

- Introduction
- Source/literature review
- Methodology/methods
- Format for creative component
- Chapter outline for written component
- Budget and timetable

Proposal Fundamentals

- WHO are you?
- WHAT is your practice?
- WHAT is your research?
- WHAT is your plan to complete the research?
- WHAT format are you using for the creative component?
- WHY is this format significant ?

TIPS

- Supervision
- Write Concisely
- Write Coherently
- Establish Boundaries in your research
- Focus on Major Issues
- Prove Compelling Answers
- Highlight Key Scholars/practitioners

Literature/Source Review

- Indicate the strengths and weakness of scholarship
- Demonstrate that you understand how scholars connect their specific research to larger issues, questions, or practices within the field
- Make connections between the work of other scholars and practitioners
- Assess the usefulness of each source as well as embedded assumptions

Methodology/Methods

- Demonstrate that you know the difference between methodology and methods and how they are applied in research
- Methods: the tools or techniques used to gather sources of information
 - Interviews, observations, experiments, data collection, archival research, procedures
- Methodology: refers to the theory that underpins your methods

More Proposal Guidelines

Methodology Tips

- Consider connections between the source review & methodology section
- Discuss what you sought to accomplish before describing how you did it
- Discuss whether quantitative or qualitative methods are used
- Include enough description of methods so other researchers could replicate the study
- Discuss the limitations of your approach and the methodology/methods used
- Compare and contrast your use of methods/methodology with those used by other scholars

Format Option Selection

The dissertation knowledge basket requires that you complete two components:

- Creative Component
- Written Component

Your proposal must fully detail your plan for each component:

Creative Component

Your proposal should describe the creative component and the significance of expressing the topic and research findings in the chosen format:

- What is the nature of the format?
- How will it reflect your findings of the research you will do?
- Will further training be required to produce the creative component in this format?
- If further training is required, how will it impact your budget and timeline?
- Timetable for completion

Written Component

Your proposal should provide a breakdown of chapters, keeping in mind that the actual written component of the dissertation knowledge basket is expected to address the following questions:

- Who are you in relation to the the topic and practice?
- What is your practice & where did you learn it? Who were your teachers?
- What is the project (the overall project and the creative component)
- How did you do it?
- What did you learn?
- How does the overall project contribute to human experience?

Note: It is vital that proposals clearly articulate the interface between the creative component and the written component. There is an expectation that the dissertation knowledge basket will be scholarly, creative, coherent, and rigorous. This expectation should be reflected in the project design that you outline in the proposal.

What Qualifies as a PhD Creative Component?

Regardless of the format, the creative component must be a substantial, coherent, and resolved body of work that demonstrates comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the field, expressed through creative exploration and practice. Previously created work can inform the research and process, but the creative component must be a new exploration and must be completed after a proposal defence and ethics processes have been completed. The following definitions are not exhaustive but provide clear expectations as far as the scope and quality needed for a creative component to qualify for inclusion in a PhD Knowledge Basket:



IK Practice: a substantial apprenticeship wherein a student works to develop an Indigenous practice under the direction of an Elder or Knowledge Holder.

Demonstration of the Indigenous practice must be executed to a semi-professional standard as defined by the Elder (s) or Knowledge Holder (s) and the supervisory committee.



Architecture: a substantial body of creative project work to be presented in digital or printable format, or as an artefact or a design project executed to a semi-professional standard as defined by the supervisory committee.



Communication: a substantial body of creative work equivalent to a program or a series of programs suitable for broadcast television, radio or multimedia presentation and executed to a semi-professional standard as defined by the supervisory committee.



Creative Writing: a substantial body of creative prose (fiction or non-fiction) equivalent to a substantial novel, or the equivalent in other forms: one substantial collection of poems; one substantial specimen of dramatic writing or a collection of short plays; graphic novel, or other form of writing that can be regarded as equivalent to established genres and executed to a semi-professional standard as defined by the supervisory committee.



Design/Illustration: a substantial body of artwork to be presented in digital or printable format, or as an artefact or a design project and executed to a semi-professional standard as defined by the supervisory committee.



Fine Art: a substantial body of art work produced within the context of a contemporary visual art practice, to include but not be limited to work produced through drawing, painting, composing, photography, designing, producing, performing, writing or curating and executed to a semi-professional standard as defined by the supervisory committee.



Music, composers: a substantial body of compositions, recordings, presentations or performances and executed to a semi-professional standard as defined by the supervisory committee.



Music, performers: a substantial body of live or recorded performances that are executed to a semi-professional standard as defined by the supervisory committee.



Performance: a substantial body of work in the form of performance; a play, dance performance, land-based performance, media time-based work or video multimedia work executed to a semi-professional standard as defined by the supervisory committee.



Educational Tool: a substantial body of work in the form of an educational tool for use in urban, rural or Indigenous community contexts and executed to a semi-professional standard as defined by the supervisory committee.



Environmental Tool: a substantial body of work in the form of an environmental tool for use in Indigenous communities and homelands and executed to a semi-professional standard as defined by the supervisory committee.