

Guidelines for the Ph.D. Dissertation Proposal in Political Science

The School of Graduate Studies requires all Ph.D. students to get approval for a dissertation proposal by the end of their third year (fourth year for direct-entry). The department asks that you aim to submit it by the end of year two or early in year three, in order to give you enough time to complete your degree inside five years.

Although the proposal may seem daunting at first, you should keep in mind that it is not the end product of your research, but simply the first step on the journey toward the completion of your dissertation project. No one expects you to know the results of your research; rather, the proposal is your signal to your committee that you have a clear idea of what you want to investigate and a plan of how to proceed.

We strongly recommend that you aim to have a supervisor in place early in the proposal writing process. Your supervisor will clarify her/his expectations for the proposal, but in general a proposal should contain the following components:

- The research question your dissertation will address.
- How that question is situated in the relevant literature. (In most cases, an extensive literature review is NOT required. Rather, situating your question involves a discussion of how it contributes to or builds on existing literature or responds to puzzles left unexplained or unexplored. There is no need to identify and read everything that has already been written on the topic.)
- The research design. (You should discuss how the research will proceed and why the approach you are taking is appropriate to address the question you want to address. This will vary quite a bit depending on your topic, subfield, and approach. As appropriate, you should address issues such as your theoretical framework, text selection, and approach for textual interpretation, case selection, hypotheses, and research methodology.)
- A preliminary chapter breakdown.
- A preliminary timetable for the completion of the research.

The entire proposal should be about 25 pages.

Beyond these general guidelines, you should consult your prospective advisor to discuss any further expectations concerning the proposal and the initial stages of embarking upon your research. For example, you should clarify what level of detail is expected and whether to include a bibliography beyond the works cited in the proposal. Especially in political theory, many students find it helpful to construct an extensive bibliography of the relevant literature as a roadmap. This bibliography can be attached to the end of the proposal and need not be already read.

Once you actually embark on your dissertation research, it is very common to modify your project. The proposal does not need to be re-approved if this happens, unless the change is significant enough to result in change in composition of the thesis committee (and even then only if deemed necessary by the supervisor and the Graduate Director). The proposal is simply to get you started. The dissertation is where those modifications will appear.

If your research involves working with human subjects (e.g. interviews), you will need to apply for ethical review through the University of Toronto's Office of Research Services. This process must be completed before your thesis proposal is finally approved.

Pipeline Resistance in North America: Keystone XL and the Northern Gateway

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1 Research question

1.1 Place in the literature(s)

2 Method

Theoretical framework, text selection, and approach for textual interpretation, case selection, hypotheses, and research methodology

2.1 Theoretical framework

2.2 Interviews

2.2.1 Data protection

2.3 Text selection

2.4 Approach for textual interpretation

2.5 Case selection

This project involves the study of two social movements that have arisen in response to proposed pipelines. TransCanada's proposed Keystone XL pipeline would run from Hardisty, Alberta to the Gulf of Mexico in Texas. The Enbridge Northern Gateway would run from Bruderheim, Alberta to Kitimat, British Columbia, where diluted bitumen would be transported by

tanker through the Hecate Strait. Both pipelines are multi-jurisdictional, and Keystone XL is international, which has had a substantial effect on the process of considering approval in the United States.

This project also involves special consideration of two types of participants in these social movements: aboriginals and members of faith communities.

2.6 Hypotheses

3 Chapter breakdown

4 Research timetable

- September 2015 — Submit draft proposal to committee
- Begin ethical review
- December 2015 — Finalize proposal and receive approval
- Complete ethical review
- Complete preliminary list of interview subjects

5 Bibliography

6 Potentially relevant material by category

These are works not yet examined, but which may have been identified as references in other works, recommended by committee texts, or otherwise deemed relevant to this PhD project.

“First Nations, with our constitutionally protected aboriginal and treaty rights, are Canadians’ last best hope to protect the lands, waters, plants, and animals from complete destruction – which doesn’t just benefit our children, but the children of all Canadians.”

— Pamela Palmater¹

“The determination of indigenous peoples in this country and elsewhere to protect Mother Earth is indomitable and I have no doubt that in the end they will prevail.”

— Dimitri Lascaris²

This PhD research project will examine the politics of climate change in Canada and the United States, focusing on the civil society movements that have arisen in response to proposed oil pipelines originating in the bituminous sands of Alberta. Both longstanding and new (climate-focused) environmental non-governmental organizations have been a prominent part of this movement, along with faith groups and aboriginal organizations. This project will examine the origins of the movement, the objectives and strategic decisions that have been developed so far, and the relationships between the elements that comprise opposition to pipelines overall. In particular, this project will focus on the relationships between environmental groups and aboriginal groups: identifying places where their objectives and strategies overlap, as well as where they differ. It will also seek to gain perspective on the effectiveness of the movement in achieving political outcomes by studying the policy-making individuals and bodies that have been the target of each campaign.

In addition to satisfying the University of Toronto’s requirements for a PhD thesis, this research has an intended audience that includes academics, policy-makers, and activists.

¹Palmater, “We are We Idle No More?”, p. 40.

²Lascaris, *University of Toronto Divestment Lecture*.

7 Research question

This project will seek to understand why the movement opposing pipelines has come together, and what implications it may have for climate and energy policy in North America. In particular, it will compare the civil society movement against pipelines with relevant past movements, and will examine the relationships between the different major groups within the coalition.

For environmental groups, the principal rationale on stopping pipelines is to reduce the total quantity of Canada's bitumen sands which end up being extracted, sold, and burned. Other environmental concerns have also borne upon public discussion of both pipelines, including the danger of spills, and impacts on habitat and species. The basic argument that not all of the Earth's fossil fuels can be used without causing dangerous climate change has not yet become a serious part of the federal political conversation in Canada or the United States. No major Canadian political party supports the phase-out of activity in the oil sands, and American policy is similarly structured around continuing and expanded fossil fuel production. If avoiding dangerous climate change requires major policy changes, the objectives currently held by environmental groups will need to become politically mainstream.

The mechanism through which that could take place — and, in particular, the influence of the anti-pipelines movement — is of interest in both practical and theoretical terms. Practically, the energy decisions made in North America will influence how much total climate change occurs, including insofar as they will affect decisions made elsewhere. Theoretically, such a transition is interesting in terms of the process through which a robust *status quo* that strongly favours some individuals can be overcome. Parallels which may have some relevance for understanding this process include the women's and gay rights movements, the civil rights movement, and the abolition of slavery.

Many of those opposed to the development of major new fossil fuel projects have identified the legal rights of aboriginal groups in Canada and the United States as a promising mechanism for resistance. This connection has also been recognized by aboriginal groups and authors. For instance, in their account of the Idle No More movement, the Kino-nda-niimi Collective identifies — as one of three main objectives of the movement — “The repeal of significant sections of the Canadian federal government's omnibus legislation (Bills C-38 and C-45) and specifically parts relating to the exploitation of

the environment, water, and First Nations territories”.³ The recent Supreme Court of Canada Tsilhqot’in decision adds to the importance of aboriginal rights in responding to environmental issues.

While many aboriginal groups and much of the writing of aboriginal individuals highlights environmentalism and respect toward nature as long-standing values, there are also conflicts that have arisen with environmentalists. In some cases, these conflicts are essentially pragmatic: as when members of a community wish to benefit financially from resource extraction which others see as damaging. Sometimes, disagreement is more philosophical, or based on the view that the environmental movement wishes to take advantage of the rights of aboriginals to achieve outcomes that may not be in their interests. By seeking direct comment on these issues from a wide variety of individuals associated with aboriginal groups, a richer understanding of patterns of conflict and cooperation between environmentalists and aboriginals may be obtained.

Similarly, the involvement of faith groups in the anti-pipelines movement is of interest for several reasons. It will help to illuminate how coalitions in which different factions vary in their presuppositions, objectives, and favoured tactics function. It also increases the scope for historical comparison with major past social movements, which have also included major participation from faith groups.

8 Methodology

The principal sources of data for this project will be documentary sources and interviews.

The former will include the published statements of environmental, faith, and aboriginal groups — as well as publications from governments and pipeline corporations. This material will be examined to identify areas of agreement and disagreement in terms of objectives, large-scale strategies, and tactical decisions. Generally-speaking, these materials should be accessible from Toronto, though there may be cases where accessing archives elsewhere would be worthwhile. This applies particularly to documents from the federal governments of Canada and the United States, and potentially to provincial government documents.

³The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement*, p. 22.

Interviews will be conducted both remotely and in person. Developing a schedule of who is to be interviewed will occur first with reference to published materials, and additionally by branching out to interview people recommended by earlier subjects. Ultimately, the project will include travel to areas where opposition to the TransCanada Keystone XL pipeline has been active, between Alberta and the Gulf of Mexico, and where opposition to the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline has been active in British Columbia, possibly including the Unist’ot’en camp. Prominent members of both movements will be contacted and hopefully interviewed from Toronto before the travel part of the research, and are expected to serve as an important mechanism for identifying who to interview during those trips.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed and used as a supplement to the documentary sources for analysis.

9 Sources:

References

- Lascaris, Dimitri. *University of Toronto Divestment Lecture*. 2014. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWHPvQ16j9w>.
- Palmater, Pamela. “We are We Idle No More?” In: *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement*. Ed. by The Kino-nda-niimi Collective. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2014.
- The Kino-nda-niimi Collective. *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2014.