

## Dissertation Canvas

### Exercise 1: Describing your thesis topic.

The purpose of this exercise is to help you sharpen how you describe your thesis topic --  
-to yourself and others.

Please consider these questions iteratively.

1. **WHAT** is your thesis about?
  - a. A thesis topic can be described along three dimensions: Phenomenon, Theory, Methods. Can you describe your topic in these terms?
  - b. Can you state the few (2 or 3) research questions you hope to answer about this topic? A thesis will typically have multiple research questions. Please articulate these as simply as possible, with minimal jargon.
2. **WHO** is the academic audience for your research?
  - a. Who would read your research? Name names!! Think of senior scholars in your field. Why would they care?
  - b. What do your audience members currently think are the answers to your research questions? (Maybe no answers currently exist). Why would they find your approach convincing?
3. **HOW** do you intend to answer the research questions?
  - a. What data/methods will you use? For instance, if you are testing a theoretical argument, do you need to make a causal claim? If so, how close can you get to the randomized experiment as the gold standard for causal inference? If developing a theory inductively, what access to data do you have? What methods will you use to extract insights from the data? If theorizing formally, what sort of model platform will you use?
  - b. Do you have the skills/ mentorship you need? What classes are you taking? What skills have you acquired? Who will be on your committee? Who can you count on as mentors outside your committee?
  - c. Are there synergies across your research questions? Can you use the same methodology/tools/data across them? If not, why not? (It is ok to not have synergies, but you should have a reason for this).

**You can jot down your answers and revise as many times as you feel is necessary. Hopefully, this process will also help you select more promising topics for your thesis and discard less promising ones. Remember, you will have to “live with” your thesis topic for a long time (by some estimates, a decade). Take your time to decide!**

## **Exercise 2: Broadening the impact of your work.**

**The purpose of this exercise is to help you think about a broader audience beyond academia.**

Imagine you have an opportunity to pitch your dissertation topic to a (hypothetical) well-endowed funding agency. This agency can fully and generously fund your thesis expenses and is willing to fund risky projects if you can convince them that your research furthers the broad objectives of the agency.

There are three kinds of agencies to consider:

- a) A funding agency within the U.N., whose goal is broadly defined as making the world a better place than it is now
- b) A foundation supported by leading Fortune 500 corporations, that is interested in advancing best practices in management
- c) A policy think-tank funded by a national government that is interested in improving the quality of policies

To develop your pitch, you might consider the Heilmeier Catechism developed in DARPA (<https://www.darpa.mil/work-with-us/heilmeier-catechism>).

**You should select ONE of these three as the target for your pitch- but it is highly recommended that you pick the target that you are currently LEAST familiar with. For instance, if you are comfortable thinking about how to pitch your work to the corporate foundation, perhaps you might think about the think tank or the UN agency as your target.**