

GUIDELINES FOR PROSPECTUS AND DISSERTATION

Prospectus Guidelines

Before the end of the spring semester of the third year, the Graduate School requires each student to submit a Dissertation Prospectus, a written summary of the planned nature and scope of the dissertation research, together with a provisional title for the dissertation. It is strongly recommended that students begin working with their advisors on this process early in the third year to ensure that the prospectus and Dissertation Advisory Committee (DAC) are approved by the end of the academic year (May).

Students first submit to the EPH Doctoral Committee the names of their proposed Dissertation Advisory Committee members. The DAC consists of at least three members including the chairperson. Two members are expected to be EPH Graduate School faculty, and one member may be from another department but is expected to have a Graduate School appointment. EPH encourages participation of faculty members from other departments. An additional committee member may be selected from outside the University if he/she is a recognized authority in the area of the dissertation. A *curriculum vitae* must be provided in support of this additional member. The students should also submit a brief (one page) proposal/description of the research plan and rationale for committee members. The proposed DAC members must sign this one page proposal/description stating that they have agreed to serve on the Committee. Once the EPH Doctoral Committee approves the student's DAC, the student should meet regularly with his/her Committee to develop the prospectus.

Ideally students should submit the names of their proposed Committee members during the fall semester of the third year and then submit the prospectus during the spring semester of the third year. Students must have both the Committee Members and prospectus approved by the end of the third year (May).

The purpose of the prospectus is to formalize an understanding between the student, the advisors, and the EPH Doctoral Committee regarding the scholarship of a proposed dissertation project and to certify their collective willingness to collaborate in seeing the dissertation project to a successful completion. The prospectus should:

- Provide a detailed description of a research plan, including title, topic, background, significance, study questions, analytic plan, and methods;
- Establish a consensus between the student, the advisors, and the EPH Doctoral Committee that the research plan meets the requisite standards of originality, scope, significance and virtuosity;
- Certify that the student is, in the eyes of the advisors and the EPH Doctoral Committee, qualified to see the proposed research plan to successful completion;
- Formalize the advisors' willingness to work with the student to see the proposed research plan to successful completion.

Viewed in this light, the prospectus serves as the mechanism by which the student and his/her advisors agree to embark on a process of guided discovery – not a contractual obligation to deliver particular deliverables on particular dates.

This document should be written in clear, plain English with minimal jargon, abbreviations, or colloquialisms. The prospectus should be a maximum of 20 pages (double-spaced) not including diagrams, figures, tables and references and should adhere to the format outlined below. If a student has a publication as a result of the research they are performing or has some progress to report, an appendix or a link to a publication can be included.

1. Title of Proposed Thesis (can be a working title)
2. Abstract (1 page): Follow the first paragraph with a statement of the thesis problem, a brief exposition of the research.
3. Specific Aims: A concise statement of the general problem under study and the explicit goals of the project.
4. Background and Significance: This section should place the research project in context and describe the proposed research in a manner intelligible to a non-specialist. This should include a brief, but critical, evaluation of the relevant literature and a description of how the student's research project will advance knowledge in the field.
5. Proposed Research Plan: Outline the research project envisioned at this time and indicate the plan to attain the overall goals of the project. Acknowledge pitfalls and limitations of the research, and if possible suggest alternative strategies.
6. References: Should be included at the end [not counted in the page limit].

The format of the thesis proposal (Prospectus) handed to the DAC for discussion and approval should conform to the requirements described above.

The prospectus submitted to the EPH Doctoral Committee should be the version of the proposal approved by the student's DAC after the initial meeting. The prospectus must be submitted to the EPH Doctoral Committee together with the Submission of Dissertation Prospectus form, indicating that it has been approved by the DAC.

The EPH Doctoral Committee will review the prospectus and may require additional changes to either the prospectus or the DAC. Once the EPH Doctoral Committee has approved the prospectus, it will be submitted to the Graduate School Registrar.

Regular face-to-face meetings of the DAC will be invaluable and are expected throughout the student's research toward the thesis.

Because the prospectus is required fairly early in the dissertation research, the content of a thesis may change over time, and the student should not feel bound by what is submitted. However, major changes to the direction of research described in the prospectus should be discussed with the DAC and approved by the EPH Doctoral Committee.

Admission to Candidacy

After all pre-dissertation requirements are successfully completed (course requirements, Honors requirement, Qualifying Examination, Dissertation Prospectus), the student will be admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree. These requirements are typically met in three years. Customarily, students who have not been admitted to candidacy will not be permitted to register for the fourth year. Exceptions must be approved in advance by the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate School Associate Dean. In the semester following admission to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree, the student will automatically receive the M.Phil. degree.

The Thesis/Dissertation

The Ph.D. thesis in EPH should be of publishable quality and represent a substantial contribution to knowledge in a publishable form. The Graduate School policy in regards to the dissertation is:

The dissertation should demonstrate the student's mastery of relevant resources and methods and should make an original contribution to knowledge in the field. The originality of a dissertation may consist of the discovery of significant new information or principles of organization, the achievement of a new synthesis, the development of new methods or theories, or the application of established methods to new materials.

Normally, it is expected that a dissertation will have a single topic, however broadly defined, and that all parts of the dissertation will be interrelated. This does not mean that sections of the dissertation cannot constitute essentially discrete units. Dissertations in the physical and biological sciences, for example, often present the results of several independent but related experiments. Given the diverse nature of the fields in which dissertations are written and the wide variety of topics that are explored, it is impossible to designate an ideal length for the dissertation. Clearly, however, a long dissertation is not necessarily a better one. The value of a dissertation ultimately depends on the quality of its thought and the clarity of its exposition. In consultation with their faculty advisors and the Director of Graduate Studies, students should give serious thought to the scale of proposed dissertation topics. There should be a reasonable expectation that the project can be completed in two to three years.

The thesis may be presented as a single monograph as a major publication or as (typically) a minimum of three first-authored scientific papers. One or more of the papers should be published, accepted for publication or be in submission. The collected paper option does not imply that any combination of papers would be acceptable. For example, three papers related to background material (review papers), or three papers that reported associations of three unrelated exposures, or three papers of the same exposure but reporting different outcomes would not be acceptable. Rather it is expected that the papers represent a cohesive, coherent and integrated body of work. For example, one paper might be a systematic review of the topic, another might develop a new methodological approach and the third might apply those new methods to an area of current public health interest. In the collected paper option, the final thesis should include introductory and discussion chapters to summarize and integrate the published papers.

The student's DAC will determine whether the standards for a PhD thesis have been met and the thesis is ready for submission to the readers. There will be a minimum of three readers, one of whom is from EPH, two with Graduate School appointments, and one who is typically an authority in the dissertation research from outside the University.