

**DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS**  
**Guidelines for Political Science Graduate Students**  
**(November 2008)**

Students should begin meeting with prospective dissertation committee members no later than one month after passing their Candidacy Examination to explore potential dissertation topics. **Students are strongly encouraged to form a dissertation committee quickly, and to consult frequently** with their committee members about a proposed research topic and preparation of their dissertation prospectus. Students should be pro-active in soliciting advice from faculty on an ongoing basis.

**Dissertation Committee:** When students have settled on a dissertation topic and on the composition of their Dissertation Committee, this information should be recorded on the appropriate form (*Dissertation Committee and Proposed Subject for PhD* form) and placed on file with the Graduate Studies Coordinator. The Dissertation Committee consists of at least three faculty members whose professional skills and interests can contribute to the student's intended dissertation topic. The Dissertation Committee is composed of the advisor who must be a category P Graduate Faculty member and at least two other Graduate Faculty members who must be either category M or P (one of whom must be a member of the Political Science faculty). Under exceptional and compelling circumstances, a category M faculty member may request to the Chair of the Department that he/she be designated a category P status in order to serve as Chair of a Dissertation Committee. Approval of such a request is at the discretion of both the Chair of the Department and the proposed category M faculty member. Additional Graduate Faculty also may serve on the Dissertation Committee. The advisor serves as Chair of the Dissertation Committee. Selection of an appropriate committee should be discussed by the student and his or her advisor and is subject to the rules of the Graduate Studies Committee.

With the approval of the Graduate School, faculty from other universities or persons with special academic or technical expertise may be appointed to the Dissertation Committee. External members are in addition to the required three, current Ohio State Graduate Faculty members.

**Time Frame:** The dissertation prospectus should be presented at a colloquium with all members of the Dissertation Committee **by the end of Spring quarter of the third year, or soon thereafter**. When the Committee concludes that the prospectus is satisfactory, the *Dissertation Colloquium Report* form should be placed on file with the Graduate Studies Coordinator.

Barring exceptional circumstances, failure to secure approval of the prospectus in a timely fashion will be regarded as unsatisfactory progress toward degree and will be taken into consideration when funding decisions are made by the Financial Aid Committee. Failure to have a prospectus approved by April 15<sup>th</sup> of the 4<sup>th</sup> year will result in at least a temporary denial of Departmental funding.

**The purpose of the prospectus** is (1) to establish the program of research that the candidate proposes to follow in the preparation of the dissertation, (2) to indicate the significance of the planned dissertation research and its relationship to the existing body of knowledge in political science and related areas of inquiry and (3) to provide the

information on points (1) and (2) above in a clear and sufficiently detailed written form so that the candidate's dissertation committee can bring their judgment to bear in advising the student about the appropriateness and adequacy of his/her anticipated doctoral research program.

**The specific format of the prospectus, as well as its contents and length, should be worked out with the committee, and in particular the committee Chair.** The prospectus is not a final product but a working document that may be significantly altered in light of ongoing discussions with the dissertation committee members and the actual initiation of the research itself. The dissertation colloquium should be viewed as an opportunity for intellectual exchange and not as a formal “hurdle” in the sense that a student either passes or fails.

Issues that are often addressed in a dissertation prospectus include:

- (1) **The purpose or objective of the planned dissertation.** What is the puzzle or problem or hypothesis(es) that the research addresses? How will the existing knowledge base be different as a result of the dissertation? What are the limits or boundaries of the proposed dissertation? (Make clear that the proposal is feasible and focused.)
- (2) **Significance of the proposed research:** What important theoretical and/or empirical issue does the research address? In other words, why does it matter that this research be undertaken?
- (3) **The present state of knowledge related to the topic.** What do we already know (or think we know) in the area of proposed research? Is there consensus or disagreement? The bibliographical review included in the prospectus **should not** be an extensive literature review that lists references in a general domain but rather one that discusses the specific contribution or shortcomings contained in particular items **relevant** to the proposed research.
- (4) **The research strategy to be employed.** How will the problem be investigated? Where appropriate, what analytical methods, types of evidence, data collection strategies, and sources will be employed? Show how key concepts will be defined and, if appropriate, measured. Discuss what type(s) of evidence will support your hypotheses and what evidence could demonstrate that they are incorrect?
- (5) **Enumeration of the specific and as yet unresolved problems the candidate perceives.** The colloquium is a time for gaining help from the dissertation committee as a whole. It may be the first time that the student meets with the committee as a whole. Focus their attention on problems that need further consideration.
- (6) **Outline of the chapters..**

These guidelines, and the forms referenced above, are available at

[http://www.berkeley.edu/~grads/](#)