

# **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, i.e. 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 advisor on this process early in the third year. Ideally students should submit the names of Dissertation Advisory Committee (DAC) members during the fall term of the third year and then submit the prospectus during the spring term of the third year. Students must have both the committee members and the prospectus approved by the end of the third year (May).

Students first submit to the EPH Doctoral Committee the names of their proposed DAC members. The DAC consists of at least three members, including the thesis advisor, who will chair the committee. Two members are expected to be EPH faculty with a Graduate School appointment, 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 each committee member. The proposed DAC members must sign the 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 works with his/her Committee to develop the prospectus.

The purpose of the prospectus is to formalize an understanding between the student, the DAC, and the EPH Doctoral Committee regarding the scholarship of a proposed dissertation project. The prospectus should:

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

The prospectus should be written in clear, plain English with minimal jargon, abbreviations, or colloquialisms and is limited to a *maximum* of 20 pages (double-spaced). All tables, graphs, figures, diagrams, and charts must be included within the 20-page limit. References are not part of the page limit. Be succinct and remember that there is no requirement to use all 20 pages. A prospectus found not to comply with these requirements will be returned without review.

The format of the prospectus handed to the DAC for discussion and approval should use the following format:

1. Title of Proposed Thesis (can be a working title).
2. Abstract (1 page): It should be a self-contained description of the project and should contain a statement of objectives and methods to be employed. It should be informative to other persons working in the same or related fields.
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 sketch out the plan to attain the overall goals of the project. Include preliminary data, if available. 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 prospectus submitted to the EPH Doctoral Committee should be the version approved by the student's DAC. The prospectus must be submitted to the EPH Doctoral Committee together with the Submission of Dissertation Prospectus form.

The EPH Doctoral Committee will review the prospectus and may request 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. The DAC is expected to meet as a group at least twice each year, and more frequently if necessary. Since dissertation progress reports are due at the close of the spring term, it is advised that one of the meetings be scheduled in March or April. In doing so, the thesis advisor, student and DGS will have current information on the student's progress for use in completing the Dissertation Progress Report on line. The student schedules the meetings of the DAC. The chairperson of the DAC, i.e. the thesis advisor, produces a summary report outlining progress and plans for the coming year. The document is to be distributed to the other committee members for comments. The student and the DGS are to receive a copy of the document from the DAC chairperson.

Because the prospectus is required fairly early in the dissertation research, the content of a thesis may change over time, and thus, 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, overall High Pass average, qualifying examinations, 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 DGS and the Graduate School Associate Dean. In the semester following admission to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree, the student will automatically receive the MPhil. Degree.

### **The Thesis/Dissertation**

The Ph.D. thesis in EPH should be of publishable quality and represent a substantial contribution to advance knowledge in a field. 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 dissertation 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 outcome 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. Students should submit the entire dissertation to the DAC at least 4 weeks prior to the submission deadline (October 1<sup>st</sup> for December graduation and March 15<sup>th</sup> for May graduation). This allows ample time for the DAC to review the dissertation and either approve it for submission or recommend revisions prior to submission. It is imperative that all members of the DAC approve the dissertation prior to submission therefore it is the student's responsibility to ensure the committee has enough time to review it. Students should plan to have a committee meeting approximately 2 -3 months prior to the submission deadline to inform the committee of their expected timeline and receive input from the committee regarding the feasibility of meeting this deadline.

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. The selection of Yale faculty readers should include at least one senior faculty member. All readers must be recognized authorities in the area of the dissertation. The outside reader must submit *curriculum vitae* for review by the EPH Doctoral Committee. Members of the Dissertation Advisory Committee are not eligible to serve as readers. The Graduate School sends a copy of the dissertation and a reader's report form to each reader.

When the completed readers' reports are received by the Graduate School and the department, they are reviewed by the DGS and the EPH Doctoral Committee prior to making a departmental recommendation to the Graduate School that the degree be awarded. The DAC may be asked to comment on the readers' reports before recommendations are made to the Graduate School.