

Appendix D

Psychology Student Academic Affairs
764-2580

GUIDELINES FOR DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS AND MEETING ON THE PROSPECTUS

A dissertation prospectus should contain: (1) an abstract of the specific aims of the investigation; (2) the background and significance of the proposed research, including the conceptual framework; (3) the research design and methods of procedure, including measurement techniques to be used, if applicable; (4) analysis strategies to be followed; (5) a tentative timetable. (Norms in each area will determine the length and further qualifications to these sections; areas should provide written guidelines for these norms and have available models of proposals for students to see).

A satisfactory committee meeting based on the prospectus is required and should have all committee members present in order to discuss additional information about the plans needed, agreed upon changes in the design or procedure, agreed upon responsibilities for advising the student about any particular aspect of the dissertation, agreed upon methods and timing for distributing chapters for comments. The committee may request another committee meeting before considering their meeting satisfactory, or it can put in the hands of the chair or any other committee member the discretion of overseeing that desired changes in the prospectus and its procedures have been made.

The form indicating the student has met the above requirements is attached. Once endorsed by the Area Chair, it will be sent over to the Student Academic Affairs Chair by the Area Chair at least one semester before the thesis oral defense is held.

Once the dissertation committee meets and approves of the prospectus (with any modifications requested), the student can feel that the agreed upon document represents a statement of both the necessary and sufficient elements of an acceptable dissertation. Although minor changes can be approved by the chair in consultation with the candidate, committee members should refrain from making major changes that greatly expand the scope of the project. If a member of the committee or the candidate feels that major changes are needed, particularly when procedures and findings have not followed their expected course, that person would be responsible for scheduling a meeting of the entire committee to approve such changes.

Once the dissertation prospectus approval form is validated by the dissertation committee, and endorsed by the Area Chair, the graduate chair can then send the Nomination of Dissertation Committee Form to Rackham for graduate school approval.

PSYCHOLOGY STUDENT ACADEMIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS

Please see the Requirement, Policies and Procedures Manual for regulations concerning the appointment of the dissertation committee. This form must be on file in the Psychology Student Academic Affairs Office in order to apply for a Rackham One-Term Dissertation Fellowship. This form must be returned to the Psychology Student Academic Affairs Office, 1343 East Hall 1043. A Rackham Dissertation Committee form will then be prepared, signed by the Student Academic Affairs Chair and forwarded to Rackham several weeks before the Format Check and Final Orals are scheduled.

Student's Name _____ ID# _____

Home Address _____
_____ Phone # _____

Date of Prospectus Meeting _____

Having met at a dissertation prospectus meeting, the undersigned committee members approve of the dissertation prospectus (any modifications required are noted below).

	Signature	Name (Please print)	Rank	Department
Chair	_____	_____	_____	_____
Co/Chair	_____	_____	_____	_____
Cognate Member	_____	_____	_____	_____
Other Member(s)	_____	_____	_____	_____

Modifications needed: (use back of form if necessary)

I corroborate that the required modifications to the prospectus have been made.

Thesis Chair's Signature Date

Endorsement by Area Chair

Area Chair's Signature Date

To: Clinical Psychology Graduate Students
From: The Clinical Area
Re: Some Advice About Starting Your Dissertation

The clinical area has been discussing what seems to be the biggest gap in progress through the program, the one between (a) finishing the 619 and becoming a candidate and (b) having a formal prospectus meeting with the dissertation committee and beginning the dissertation research. Although we would not expect the transition from the one to the other to be instantaneous, we are concerned when this takes years.

One possibility is that the eventual requirement of an extensive literature review and detailed methodology is overly daunting, at least insofar as many students approach this requirement. At some point, of course, the introduction and methods for the dissertation need to be written in great detail. But if a student is acting on the premise that these need to be complete before there is extensive contact, or indeed any contact, with a dissertation chair or dissertation committee, this is counter-productive and may explain the delays we sometimes see in formally beginning a dissertation.

Here is some advice about a different way to go about things:

1. Once you have a *general* idea about what you would like to investigate for your dissertation, secure a dissertation chair and if possible other members of your dissertation committee. Some potential committee members may want to know more about your plans before choosing to join your committee, but this should not be a barrier to initial discussions.
2. Meet with your chair and potential committee members as a whole in a preliminary session. Here you can receive advice about productive directions to pursue in your literature review and your choice of interesting questions and appropriate empirical strategies.
3. We think that you could have this meeting sometime within the year that follows becoming a candidate. If you are stuck on choosing a general topic, consider asking for suggestions from faculty members of topics worth pursuing. This is a very reasonable thing to do even if you have some specific ideas.
4. Only now is it time to read and write and think in earnest, but do not disappear for months or years to craft a paper in isolation from faculty input. Your immediate goal should be to write a literal prospectus (dictionary definition: a preliminary written statement or forecast) that you can circulate among your potential committee members and that is terse enough to result in quick feedback.
5. Go through as many iterations as needed until you, your chair, and your potential committee members believe that the committee can be finalized and a formal prospectus meeting held to approve your plan, with whatever further revisions come out of that meeting. Nowhere in any of this advice is a page limit assumed or specified. Rather, your committee can advise you about a reasonable length given your topic. Some proposals will be short, some long: Whatever it takes for the dissertation committee to understand your plans and to render a judgment that the result will be deemed a dissertation.
6. Then have the meeting and complete the paperwork from the Psychology Student Academic Affairs Office that signifies that your committee has been formed and that your prospectus meeting has been held. You will then be eligible for fellowships and research support from the Psychology Student Academic Affairs Office and other sources.