



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).

The DAC consists of at least three members, including the thesis advisor, who must have a Graduate School appointment and will chair the committee. Two members are expected to be YSPH faculty but participation of faculty members from other departments is encouraged. 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 supporting *curriculum vitae* must be provided. The student should also submit a one-page specific aims (for the research plan) and a rationale for each committee member. The proposed DAC members must sign the one-page specific aims stating that they have agreed to serve on the committee (the signatures can be on a separate page). The Graduate Studies Executive Committee (GSEC) prefers that students submit this one-page specific aims document for approval prior to developing the prospectus. Once the GSEC 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 GSEC regarding the scholarship of a proposed dissertation project. The prospectus should:

- Provide a detailed description of the research plan as outlined below, including title, topic, background, significance, study questions, analytic plan, and methods;
- Establish a consensus between the student, the DAC, and the GSEC 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 twenty pages (double-spaced). All tables, graphs, figures, diagrams, and charts must be included within the twenty-page limit. References are not part of the page limit. Be succinct and remember that there is no requirement to use all twenty pages. A prospectus found not to comply with these requirements will be returned without review.

The following format should be used (similar to NIH guidelines):

1. Title of Proposed Dissertation (can be a working title).
2. Specific Aims (one-page): A self-contained description of the project, which should be informative to other persons working in the same or related fields. State concisely the goals of the proposed research and summarize the expected outcome(s), including the impact that the results of the proposed research will exert on the research field(s) involved.
3. Research Strategy: Use the following subsections:

(a) 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 proposed research project will advance scientific knowledge and/or technical capability in one or more broad fields.

(b) Innovation

Explain how the application challenges and seeks to shift current research paradigm(s). Describe any novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation or interventions to be developed or used, and any advantage(s) over existing methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.

(c) Approach

Outline the research project envisioned at this time and sketch out the plan to attain the overall goals of the project. Describe the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses to be used. Include preliminary data, if available. Acknowledge pitfalls and limitations of the research, and if possible suggest alternative strategies.

4. References: Should be included at the end [not counted in the page limit].

The prospectus submitted to the Graduate Studies Executive Committee must be the version approved by the student's DAC and must be submitted together with the Submission of Dissertation Prospectus form.

The Graduate Studies Executive Committee will review the prospectus and may request changes to either the prospectus or the DAC. Once the Graduate Studies Executive Committee has approved the prospectus, it will be submitted to the Graduate School Registrar.

Weekly meetings with the chair of the DAC are recommended. Regular face-to-face meetings of the full DAC are 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 chair.

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 Graduate Studies Executive Committee.

Admission to Candidacy

After all pre-dissertation requirements are successfully completed (course requirements, two Honors grade, 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 Public Health should be of publishable quality and represent a substantial contribution to advance knowledge in a field of scholarship. 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 and meta-analysis 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 must include introductory and discussion chapters to introduce, summarize and integrate the published papers.

The DAC reviews the progress of the dissertation research and decides when the dissertation is ready to be submitted to the readers. 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 at YSPH, the second reader can be from YSPH or another Yale department. Both readers must hold a Graduate School appointment and should include at least one senior faculty member. A third reader must be selected from outside the University. All readers must be recognized authorities in the area of the dissertation. The outside reader must submit a *curriculum vitae* for review by the Graduate Studies Executive Committee. The outside reader must be an individual who has not co-authored a publication(s) with members of the student's Dissertation Advisory Committee and/or the student within the preceding three years. However, this restriction does not apply to mega-multi-authored publications. Members of the Dissertation Advisory Committee are not eligible to serve as readers. After the completed readers' reports are received by the Graduate School, they are reviewed by the DGS and the Graduate Studies Executive Committee prior to making a School of Public Health 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.

All Ph.D. dissertations in Public Health must be presented in a public seminar. This presentation is scheduled after the submission of the dissertation to the readers and preferably prior to the receipt and consideration of the readers' reports. At least one member each of the DAC and the GSEC is expected to attend the presentation. It is expected to be presented during the academic term in which the dissertation was submitted and must be widely advertised within YSPH.