

Devising a research project is challenging and time-consuming. The steps required and articulated below will likely take between three and 12 months. They are designed to help streamline the process for you and your committee and, crucially, ensure that you are set for a successful oral defense of your prospectus. A cautionary note: the writing of a two- and five-page version of your proposal are often the most challenging and time-consuming steps in this process. Importantly, all the work that goes into the prospectus stage will make the research and writing stages that follow that much more straightforward!

This document is designed to make clear my expectations and to push you think systematically as you start work on a prospectus. This is a general guide, and you and I may decide to deviate from it. Generally speaking, there are six steps that will lead to a successful oral defense.

### **Step 1. Write a “Two-Pager”**

This document must be two single-spaced pages (references excluded). It must concisely and clearly outline your early thoughts. It should answer the following questions:

- What is the topic of your proposed research?
- What is the interest, empirical puzzle, and/or question you seek to understand or answer?
- What do existing accounts in relevant literature(s) have to say about this topic?
- Why do these existing accounts fail to address your interest sufficiently well?
- What is your proposed answer?
- How will you develop and defend that proposed answer? (i.e., What theoretical or conceptual tools will you develop or draw on and what methods and data do you propose to utilize to answer your question?)

### **Step 2. Write a revised “Two-Pager”**

After receiving feedback and approval from me, you will be asked to revise the two-pager and share it with prospective community members. You must meet with the committee members (in person or virtually), share your two-pager, and solicit feedback before devoting more time to expanding the proposal. This is the time to build your committee, commit to your project, and start thinking about the project in more detail.

### **Step 3. Write a “Five-Pager” and Tentative Timeline**

After you have received feedback from me and the rest of your newly established committee on the two-pager, you will expand your proposal into a five-page (single-spaced) outline of your proposed research (excluding references and timeline) and devise a tentative timeline. The five-pager should address the following topics (which can serve as headings in the document):

1. Introduction (0.5 pages): sell the project as interesting and important.
2. Question, Interest, and/or Puzzle (0.5-1 page): explain what you want to answer, understand, or explain and why.
3. Existing and Alternative Explanations (1-1.5 pages): tell us what we know about this topic and why we need to know more.
4. Answer in Brief (1-1.5 pages): tell us about your answer and how you’ll approach your topic in theoretical and conceptual terms.
5. Methods and Case Selection (1 page): articulate and defend your approach to your topic by explaining how and why you have selected your case(s) and what methods of inquiry and data needed and why.
6. Prospective Empirical Findings (0.5-1 page): conclude by telling us a bit about what you think you’ll see in your case and your data and why.

In addition, at this stage you will be asked to provide a tentative timeline of the research process. Consider when and how long it will take to complete the following: proposal steps 4-6 below, IRB approval or waiver (as required), preliminary data collection, engagement with literatures, any fieldwork, and writing. If you are

travelling for interviews or other fieldwork, it is important to think now about where, when, and how it will be financed.

### **Step 4. Draft Prospectus**

After you have received feedback and approval from me and the rest of your committee on the five-pager and your timeline, you will expand the proposal into a draft prospectus. This should be no more than 40 *double-spaced* pages (excluding references). The draft should provide a variant of the following (as discussed with me):

1. Introduction (1-2 pages)
2. Puzzle(s) and Question(s) (3-5 pages)
3. Existing and Alternative Accounts (5-10 pages)
4. Proposed Argument (5-15 pages)
  - a. Theory and Foundational Literature(s)
  - b. Answer in Brief
  - c. Hunches or Hypotheses and Observable Implications
  - d. Operationalization of Key Concepts
5. Methodology and Case Selection (3-6 pages)
6. Proposed Chapter Breakdown (1 page)
7. Proposed Research Timeline (1 page)
8. Conclusion and Proposed Added Value (1-2 pages)

### **Step 5. Prospectus**

After you have received feedback and approval from me and your committee on your draft, you will be asked to revise and produce a final version of the prospectus that will be defended orally. That final prospectus must not exceed 45 double spaced pages (excluding references).

### **Step 6. Oral Defense**

You will sit a two-hour oral defense with your committee. The defense will require you to succinctly and clearly present the project. You present for roughly 15-20 minutes and be asked to visual aids (e.g., slides quickly exploring sections 1-8 of the Draft Prospectus). During the defense, you will be asked to do the following: discuss your puzzle or question and case(s) in some detail; defend the novelty and/or suitability of your proposed theoretical approach and research design; explain the logistical details of the research process (including fieldwork, data collection, data analysis or interpretation, ethical concerns around research, and your proposed timeline), and; speak about the contributions or added value of your investigation vis-à-vis existing literature.