

The dissertation 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 progress and direction of the research itself. The Orals exam should be viewed as an opportunity for intellectual exchange and not as a formal, final “hurdle” in the sense that a student either passes or fails. There are no conditional passes. Students should consult with their advisors on specific content. Issues that are often addressed in a dissertation prospectus include (but are not limited to):

(1) **The purpose or objective of the planned dissertation research.** What is the 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 in the time available.

(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 Orals is a time for gaining help from the dissertation committee, perhaps for the first time, as a whole. Focus the committee member's attention on problems that need further consideration.

(6) **Outline of the chapters.** Be specific about the student's individual contribution if chapters have co-authors.