

Dissertation Proposal Guidelines

Economics Ph.D. Program – University of Virginia

Dissertation proposals are typically given at 2 or 3:30 pm on Fridays during the fall or spring semester. Please consult your faculty advisors for a mutually convenient date and time. Have them sign the Proposal Permission Form below and submit it to the Graduate Secretary to reserve your time slot.

Please submit a paper copy of your proposal, signed by two faculty advisors, to the Graduate Secretary, by 2:00 p.m. one week prior to your proposal date. [In addition, please send an electronic copy (or a hyperlink to an electronic copy) via email to the department's Webmaster so that your proposal will be available on the department's Events Calendar webpage.] Your proposal must be approved by at least two faculty members from our department. This is done by having both faculty members sign the proposal before you hand it in.

Faculty advisors often ask that you see the proposal at least one week before they are expected to sign off (two weeks before the proposal date). Check with your advisors to see when they will need your proposal. In any case, you should meet regularly with your faculty advisors in the months before the proposal date.

The written proposal is limited to 15 pages, double spaced. ***To prevent stretching the limit by shrinking the typeface, all proposals must be done in 12 point type with 1" margins.*** This limit includes appendices and tables but not figures and references. You should insert tables into the text and put figures at the end, after the references. The purpose of the strict page limit is to increase the likelihood that faculty and other students will read the proposal. Also, many grant proposals (e.g., NSF) have page limits, and journal editors usually demand length reductions. You need to be able to express yourself concisely. A template for the title page of your proposal appears at the end of this document.

The main purpose of the proposal is to give a wide range of faculty the chance to evaluate what you're doing and help you to define your project. Suggestions from faculty in other subfields sometimes result in significant improvements in your work. Other times, faculty questions indicate their own misunderstanding of what you're doing, but this can help you explain things more clearly in the future.

Occasionally, the faculty may find problems with your proposal that require some reworking. While this is unfortunate, it is better to find out before you have committed too much time to proceeding in the wrong direction. Even if no detailed help comes from the proposal, that knowledge itself can be encouraging. Regardless of how the proposal turns out, remember that, since we require the proposal to be made at the beginning of the dissertation research, we realize that there will be rough spots, omissions, and errors. Realizing this, you should simply try to do the best you can in the time that you have.

You should be prepared to make a 20-minute oral presentation of your proposal and then to answer questions. The ability to make an effective oral presentation is an important skill. For example, when colleagues at other universities call us to ask about the teaching and research of our students on the job market, our reaction is likely to be heavily influenced by presentations that we have seen, such as the proposal or workshops. Twenty minutes is not long, but many research presentations at conferences are limited to 20 minutes, and explaining your work in this framework is a skill that you need to learn.

A satisfactory proposal should:

- 1) Discuss related literature, provide a complete bibliography, and indicate the importance of your research in this context.
- 2) Provide motivation, i.e., explain why your own work is interesting and worthwhile.
- 3) Indicate what issues and problems you will investigate and exactly what theoretical or econometric techniques you will use, and (for empirical dissertations) provide a careful description of the data sources.
- 4) For research based on a theoretical model, the model, or a useful special case of the model, must be completely described, so that the reader does not have to consult the literature in order to evaluate the proposed research.
- 5) Provide an outline (in paragraph form) of various parts of the thesis, indicating clearly what is finished, what is in progress, and what remains to be done.

To prepare for the oral presentation, you should:

- A) Attend the proposals of others and think about how their presentation and responses to questions could have been improved.
- B) Take drafts to your faculty advisors and ask them to point out the rough spots that are likely to generate questions and objections.
- C) Find an empty classroom and practice your presentation, while speaking out loud; otherwise, you will almost surely underestimate the time it will take to say what you intend to say. If possible, do a final trial run in front of another student.

Permission to Sign Up for a Dissertation Proposal Date Economics Ph.D. Program – University of Virginia

_____ has decided upon an acceptable research topic to pursue in his/her dissertation. As the provisional dissertation committee for this student, we have reached an agreement with this student on a research plan that, if followed, should result in an acceptable dissertation proposal by the agreed upon date.

Therefore, this student should be allowed to sign up for a dissertation proposal defense

on _____ at _____ pm.*

1. Name of Thesis Advisor (provisional) _____
(Please Print)

Signature _____

2. Name of Thesis Advisor (provisional) _____
(Please Print)

Signature _____

Once completed, this form must be submitted to the Graduate Secretary to reserve your proposal date and time.

*Please note that, until all dates prior to November 1st have at least one proposal scheduled, a second proposal should not be scheduled for those dates (except in cases where it is necessary to accommodate faculty schedules).

Title

Name

Date

Abstract. An abstract of up to 150 words should appear here.

Name of Advisor 1 space for signature

Name of Advisor 2 space for signature