

PhD in Political Science

Dissertation Options and Proposal Formats

The dissertation demonstrates a student's ability to conduct primary research, to integrate research findings into our current knowledge of the field and to contribute to policy making in domestic or international affairs. The dissertation is based principally upon research in primary sources, such as interviews, surveys, and archival study; but it also involves a careful review of relevant literature and often the policy setting of a particular topic or issue. In its final form, the dissertation must comply with the requirements of the most recent version of *A Guide to the Preparation and Submission of Theses and Dissertations*, which is prepared by the College of Social Science and Humanities. All dissertations must be approved by the dissertation committee and defended during an oral presentation.

There are two possible formats for a dissertation — traditional and dissertation-by-article. Each is described below. The traditional format is most common, particularly for students pursuing academic positions. Each student should consult with his or her advisor and dissertation committee on the student's choice of a dissertation format.

Traditional Format

The traditional dissertation format is a monograph-length project in which a student frames a research problem, executes a research design, and presents a thesis that integrates all parts of the project. Traditional dissertations vary in length, but they typically are between 200 and 400 double-spaced, typed pages. This format is particularly appropriate for a student considering an academic career or for a student who prefers to conduct research of an in-depth nature on a single topic.

Dissertation-by-Article

The dissertation-by-article format emphasizes free-standing, journal-quality articles rather than the monograph-length project of the traditional format. This format is designed particularly for students seeking careers in applied settings in which shorter, focused research projects are typical. The dissertation-by-article requires completion of the following three papers, all of which are solely-authored. The three papers must be of publishable quality, approved by the dissertation committee, and submitted for publication to suitable journals. Thus, the dissertation-by-article includes:

- **Three scholarly papers.** All three papers must present novel research questions, literature review and theoretical contributions, primary research and analysis, and conclusions. The papers may deal with a public affairs subject or engage in policy analysis as long as they are publishable in relevant scholarly journals and constitute an original contribution to knowledge.
- **Two integrative essays.** An introduction essay and a conclusion essay must provide an overview of themes, concepts, and conclusions in the papers, and connect the papers to one another. These essays form the first chapter and last chapter of the dissertation.

The Dissertation Proposal

Whether one opts to write a traditional dissertation or dissertation-by-article, a student must first prepare a dissertation proposal. The proposal represents a basic roadmap. In the course of writing the dissertation it is not unusual for students to deviate somewhat from the path set out in the proposal. What is most important in the proposal is that students convey to themselves and their committee members that they know the question they want to ask, and that they have a fairly good idea — based on the existing literature in the field — how to analyze and answer that question.

The first step in the proposal process is to identify your dissertation chair. It is essential you work closely with this person throughout the process. This person will go over the details of what they expect in a proposal based on your area of interest and other related factors. However, the following is a general outline of what (at minimum) a typical Dissertation proposal will entail:

1. **Cover page** (See next page for cover page template)
 - | Dissertation title (tentative is fine)
 - | Student's name
 - | Student's contact information
 - | Date of submission
 - | Names and contact information for the three readers
 - | Primary reader's signature and date
2. **Abstract** – *a one-page overview of the overarching question/puzzle and contribution of this research*
3. **Introduction** – *background on the research question, and why it is important, indicate contributions you hope to make to the literature, summary of the dissertation proposal*
4. **Literature Review** - *If done well, this will form the basis of a chapter in your dissertation.*
5. **Theoretical Approach & Preliminary Arguments** – *in light of the literature review, explain your own theoretical approach in more detail, re-state your question and preliminary arguments. this may also include hypotheses.*
6. **Research Design/Methodology** - *Be sure to include all the details of your methods of research and demonstrate how the methods relate to your research question(s)*
7. **References/Bibliography**
8. **Tentative Chapter Outline**
9. **Timeline for completion**

The best proposals generally are 20-25 double-spaced pages of text. The oral defense of the dissertation proposal must occur within **six months** after the student passes the comprehensive exams. The defense is scheduled upon approval of the dissertation committee and the Graduate Program Director. The proposal is presented to committee members in a public forum and must be approved by the dissertation committee and the department's graduate program director. After the defense, students *must* submit to the department's graduate program administrator a final copy of their proposal with all appropriate signatures. If a student goes past the six-month deadline, advanced permission for an extension must be obtained from the Graduate Program Director, with acknowledgement from the dissertation chair. Delaying the dissertation proposal defense too long after the six-month deadline will result in a mark of "Unsatisfactory," submitted to the Dean's office, and eventually formal academic probation.

Students will assemble a dissertation committee consisting of three members. The primary reader serves as the committee chair and becomes the key advisor for the dissertation. The primary and secondary readers must be full-time members of the Political Science Department at Northeastern University. The third reader may be a faculty member from outside the Political Science Department or outside Northeastern University. The composition of the committee must be approved by the graduate program director.

-See Next Page for Cover Page Template-

(Sample Cover Page)
THE DISSERTATION'S TITLE

A Dissertation Proposal Submitted to the Political Science
Department by
Jane Doe
1 Main Street / Apt. A Boston, MA
02115
617-373-2796
janedoe@email Month Day, Year

Dissertation Committee Members:

Primary Reader	Prof. Aaaa Bbbb	Political Science Department, Northeastern University
Secondary Reader	Prof. Cccc Dddd	Political Science Department, Northeastern University
Tertiary Reader (if known)	Prof. Eeee Ffff	Political Science Department, California State University (San Francisco, California)

Primary Reader

Date

Secondary Reader

Date

PhD Program Director

Date

Department Chair

Date