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 five papers, all of which are singly authored. The first four must be of publishable quality, approved by the dissertation committee, and submitted for publication to suitable journals. Thus, the dissertation-by-article includes:

- Four research/policy analysis papers, including at least one which deals explicitly with theoretical issues. One paper among the four can be a “government report” prepared on a public affairs subject.
- One integrative essay that provides an overview of themes, concepts, and conclusions in the papers, and connecting the papers to one another. This essay forms the first section of the dissertation and is typically 30-40 pages in length.

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 who will most likely be 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**
3. **Introduction**
4. **Statement of the Problem/Issue**
5. **Background/Literature Review** - If done well, this will form the basis of a chapter in your dissertation.
6. **Research Question(s)/Hypotheses**
7. **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)
8. **Contributions/Limitations** - Need a brief statement of what contributions you hope to make to the literature; might also want to mention some known limitations or expected challenges
9. **References/Bibliography**
10. **Tentative Chapter Outline/Timeline**

The best proposals generally are 20-25 double-spaced pages of text. Students must submit to the department’s graduate program director a final copy of their proposal signed and dated by their primary and secondary readers. The proposal is due six months after the student reaches Doctoral candidacy. 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.

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-
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Reader</td>
<td>Prof. Aaaa Bbb</td>
<td>Political Science Department, Northeastern University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Reader</td>
<td>Prof. Cccc Dddd</td>
<td>Political Science Department, Northeastern University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary Reader (if known)</td>
<td>Prof. Eeee Ffff</td>
<td>Political Science Department, California State University (San Francisco, California)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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__________________________
Primary Reader

__________________________
Secondary Reader

__________________________
PhD Program Director

__________________________
Department Chair

Date

Date

Date

Date