

The purposes of the prospectus are (1) to establish the program of research that the student proposes to follow; and (2) to indicate the significance of the planned research and its relationship to the existing body of knowledge in political science and related areas of inquiry.

Writing a detailed prospectus, especially in terms of the two purposes listed above, also aids the student's committee in bringing their judgment to bear in advising the student about the appropriateness and adequacy of his/her anticipated research program.

The specific format of the prospectus and its contents should be worked out with the student's committee. Moreover, the prospectus should be viewed as a **proposal** for research that may be significantly altered in light of ongoing discussions with the student's committee members and the actual initiation of the research itself. It is not a final product, but a document that represents a student's "best shot" effort to address the following issues related to the thesis/dissertation project:

1. **The purpose or objective of the planned dissertation:** What is the puzzle or problem or hypothesis(es) that the research addresses? How will the existing knowledge base be different as a result of the thesis/dissertation? What are the limits or boundaries of the proposed thesis/dissertation? [Make clear that the proposed project is both feasible and focused]
2. **Significance of the proposed research:** What important theoretical 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 the proposed research? Is there consensus or disagreement? The bibliographic 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 question/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 correct.
5. **Outline of the chapters (for dissertations):** The outline should be more than simply chapter headings. It should reveal the student's approach as well as the boundaries and parameters of the work.
6. **A student should regard the prospectus as presenting a research design for the thesis/dissertation.** Bear in mind that the prospectus should be regarded as a working document subject to alteration on the advice of committee members rather than as a hurdle to be surmounted.