

The Prospectus—Guidelines for Students

Department of Economics, SUNY-Binghamton

What does the department expect of a prospectus presentation, and how can you increase the likelihood that your prospectus will be accepted?

1. The purpose of a prospectus is to convince the faculty that you have chosen a viable project of PhD-level quality that you can accomplish in the proposed time. The appropriate time to present your prospectus is at the end of the fall semester of your 4th year—that is, before you have completed too much of your dissertation. If you are working on a three-paper dissertation, then you should plan to present

- (1) one project that is well under way (not necessarily completed)
- (2) a reasonably well developed idea for the second project
- (3) a vague idea for the third project.

If you are working on a “one-big idea dissertation,” then you need to present a sufficiently detailed outline of your entire dissertation to make your case that your project is more than just a single paper and that you will be able to complete it within a reasonable time.

A prospectus presentation is different from a dissertation defense or a seminar. It is appropriate to devote most of your presentation time to the description of what you plan to do and how you plan to be doing it. It is not necessary to dazzle your audience with great results—keep those for your defense and for the job market.

2. Your prospectus presentation must answer the following four questions:

1. What is the main research question (or questions, if you write three papers) that the dissertation will address?

2. Why is the research question important?

Place the research question within the existing literature and the broader policy context.

- Explain why this is an interesting question that merits more research.
- Explain what hole in our knowledge of the topic you are planning to fill.

3. How do you plan to answer the research question?

Explain what models, data, and techniques you plan to use.

(a) Models:

- What model or set of models guides your approach?
- Why are these models the most appropriate ones for this question?

If you are constructing your own model, make sure that you answer the following questions:

- What do you want your model to show? What implications are you aiming at?
- What are the key assumptions in the model? Be honest. Highlight, do not hide, goofy assumptions.
- How does your model differ from existing models?
- What are the basic equations of the model? Write them out.

For dissertations with an empirical component:

(b) Data:

- What data will you use to answer the question, or test your new model?
- Why are they the most appropriate data to answer the question?
- Know the properties of your data—for example, what exactly they measure, how they were collected, whether they describe the whole population or only a subset.

(c) Techniques:

- What econometric techniques will you be using?
- Why are these the most appropriate techniques?

4. What are the expected or preliminary results?

Present either some preliminary results, that is, a subset of the results that will appear in your dissertation, or an example of the KIND of results that you expect to obtain.

3. The general structure of a 40-minute prospectus presentation:

<u>First slide:</u> Answer the 4 questions in one sentence each	Rest of the presentation: Answer the 4 questions in more detail				<u>Last slide:</u> Briefly summarize the other two projects of your dissertation
	<u>Motivation</u> What do you plan to do, and why?	<u>What is new?</u> Explain what others have not done yet	<u>How do you plan to do it?</u> Describe your main contributions	<u>Results</u> Present expected or preliminary results	
<i>1 minute</i>	<i>5 minutes</i>	<i>4 minutes</i>	<i>21 minutes</i>	<i>5 minutes</i>	<i>4 minutes</i>

This leaves 5 minutes for questions and answers at the end of your presentation. Expect to be interrupted with questions/comments/objections during your presentation as well! (However, because the Economics Department schedules two prospectus presentations for a 90-minute department seminar, your presentation will not exceed 40–45 minutes, including interruptions.)

Adjust the above structure to fit your dissertation. For example, if you apply somebody else’s economic and econometric models to a new dataset, then you should plan to spend more time on presenting the details of your data set and your preliminary results than on the other person’s models.

Make sure that your presentation is well rehearsed. Eliminate all typos from your slides, and give your presentation to your friends or in front of a mirror before presenting it publicly!

4. Failing a prospectus:

You will fail the prospectus if you

- do not adequately address the four questions listed above, and/or
- are unable to convey the ideas of your dissertation without the help of your committee

5. Miscellaneous:

- (1) You can present your prospectus only
 - after you have presented your pre-prospectus in the PhD Seminar, ECON 693/694.
 - if your dissertation advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies agree that you are ready to present your prospectus.
- (2) The prospectus presentation is part of the Economics Department seminar series. The last two slots in the fall semester and the first and last slot in the spring semester are reserved for prospectus presentations (two presentations per seminar). You should
 - first discuss with your dissertation advisor whether you are ready to present your prospectus
 - contact the faculty member in charge of the seminar schedule well in advance to schedule your presentation! (“Well in advance” means “before the seminar schedule is built”—which usually happens towards the end of the previous semester!)
- (3) Make sure that ALL members of your committee have read a written dissertation proposal and have signed off on it. There is a standard form on which these signatures should be placed, which is sent to you upon successful completion of your last comprehensive exam. If a committee member has made comments or suggestions about your topic in the past, respond to those comments and suggestions.

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