Guidelines for the

RESEARCH EXPLORATION MEETING

and

DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS EVALUATION MEETING

PhD Program in Government, Harvard University

After completing Generals at the end of the second year, the next challenge is to develop a compelling and feasible dissertation project. To aid in that effort, each student will engage sets of faculty advisors through a two-stage process of research exploration and prospectus evaluation, marked by two meetings: the Research Exploration Meeting, to be held by no later than the end of the first semester of the third year, followed in due course by the Thesis Prospectus Evaluation Meeting, to be convened by no later than October 1 of the fourth year. The student will take the initiative in convening both meetings.

Research Exploration Meeting

The purpose of this meeting is to explore one or more potential areas of dissertation research, and consider how best the student can go about further defining an important and feasible dissertation project. Three or four faculty members should be involved, and the Director of Graduate Studies can help the student identify appropriate participants, if these are not readily apparent. Asking faculty to participate in the Research Exploration Meeting does not commit the student to working with any or all of those faculty members at the prospectus stage, or on the dissertation.

At least three weeks in advance of the scheduled Research Exploration Meeting, the student should submit to the faculty participants an approximately ten page statement outlining one or more potential research questions for the dissertation, or setting forth alternative possible areas of dissertation research if the definition of possibilities remains at an early stage.

The Research Exploration Meeting is not an examination or an evaluation. The meeting and preparations for it are geared to each student’s needs and intended to allow advisors to give appropriate feedback in a timely and helpful way. A dated form signed by the student and by all the faculty advisors present should be handed in to the Graduate Program Office to document the occurrence of the Research Exploration Meeting. For the student to remain in good standing, the meeting must occur before the end of the first semester of the third year.
Dissertation Prospectus Evaluation Meeting

Following the Research Exploration Meeting, the student will continue to hone an appropriate research plan and identify an appropriate Dissertation Advisor and Prospectus Committee. The faculty advisors at this stage may include some who participated in the research exploration process or they may, if appropriate, be new people. At least two Government Department faculty members serve on the Prospectus Committee, including one tenured faculty member who serves as the chair (Dissertation Advisor); one or more additional faculty members from inside or beyond the Department also become members. Ordinarily, at least one member of the Prospectus Committee will be a nontenured faculty member.

Following ongoing discussions with advisors, the student will finalize a Dissertation Prospectus, setting forth the dissertation research question, situating the project in appropriate literatures, outlining hypothesis or lines of interpretation, and setting forth a plan for research and a schedule for completing phases of investigation and writing. The Prospectus must be submitted to members of the Prospectus Committee at least three weeks in advance of the meeting to evaluate the prospectus.

The formal Dissertation Prospectus Evaluation Meeting will be convened no later than October 1 of the fourth year. This meeting may result in formal approval of the Prospectus, or it may lead to suggestions for final revisions during a follow-up period of up to one month. **For the student to remain in good standing, the prospectus must be approved by November 15 of the fourth year.** When all steps are completed, a Dissertation Prospectus approval form must be signed by the Dissertation Advisor and all faculty members of the committee and submitted to the Graduate Program Office. From then on, the student will keep in touch with Dissertation Committee members through the completion of the thesis.

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*Ordinarily, the Prospectus Committee continues to serve as the student’s Dissertation Committee. When appropriate, the student may make changes to the composition of the Dissertation Committee. At least two FAS faculty members, including at least one tenured member of the Government Department, serve on the Dissertation Committee; one or more additional faculty members from inside or beyond FAS also become members. The chair of the Dissertation Committee must be a tenured member of the Government Department faculty.*
DOCUMENTATION OF RESEARCH EXPLORATION MEETING

This attests that the student submitted a statement exploring research possibilities for the PhD dissertation and met with faculty advisors to discuss his or her ideas.

Name of Government PhD Student:

Date of the Research Exploration Meeting:

Faculty Advisors Participating in the Meeting (print name and provide signature):

1.

2.

3.

4 (if applicable).

RETURN to:
the Graduate Program Office, Department of Government, CGIS Knafel 151.
DIssertation Prospectus Approval Form

Student:                                  Date:

Title of Prospectus:

Evaluation:

☐ Prospectus is approved substantially in its present form.

☐ Prospectus requires revisions.

☐ Second conference will be held by ______________.

☐ Revisions will be approved by members individually.

☐ Prospectus is unacceptable.

☐ Recommend candidate seek new topic.

☐ Recommend a new prospectus to be reviewed by a new committee.

Comments:

Examiners:

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