

## **Description of Dissertation Prospectus**

### **Department of Economics**

The purpose of a prospectus is to formalize an understanding with faculty advisers that the student's dissertation project is interesting and feasible and that the student has a clear idea about how to go about doing it. The prospectus should be done in consultation with two dissertation advisers, and both advisers must sign it for the prospectus to be approved. It is natural that dissertation research leads to changes in original plans, but as long as the general topic remains the same and faculty advisers approve, the prospectus need not be revised. If the project is dramatically changed, the student should amend the original prospectus and have the new one be approved by the advisers and Director of Graduate Studies.

Students are encouraged to start thinking about possible dissertation topics early in their studies, perhaps trying out preliminary ideas in a term paper or in their econometrics paper. They should certainly have begun regular discussion with potential faculty advisers in the fall term of their third year and are encouraged to submit incomplete or preliminary versions of proposed research well before formal deadlines.

A signed prospectus must be submitted before a student can advance to candidacy, and a student cannot register (and receive financial aid) for the fourth year of study without first having advanced to candidacy. Beginning with the 2011/12 academic year, students must submit an approved prospectus no later than May 10<sup>th</sup>. The prospectus should not be done over the summer.

The prospectus need only be a few double spaced pages long and should not exceed eight pages. It should not be nearly as developed as a draft chapter or paper. Advisers differ on what they expect to find in it, but it normally contains the following elements:

1. a proposed dissertation title;
2. a statement of the problem addressed or the question to be answered;
3. a description of why the topic is interesting;
4. a brief critical review of the relevant literature and of what the student hopes to contribute to it;
5. a description of the methods, theoretical or econometric, to be used and, if empirical, of the data sources; and
6. a tentative outline of the contents of the dissertation, including tentative chapter titles, if possible.

The fifth element is central to the prospectus, because it is here that the student demonstrates understanding, the capacity to carry out the project, and that it is feasible.