Prospectus

Following admission to candidacy, the Guidance Committee is expanded to at least four eligible members and is now called the "Dissertation Committee". The dissertation committee must include at least THREE eligible graduate faculty members from the candidate's degree program and at least ONE additional member whose primary appointment is not in the Department of Biological Sciences (BSCI); this person is designated the "outside member". Other members may also be added to the committee at this time if it is deemed useful in the guidance and direction of the student's dissertation research project; however, the majority of the dissertation committee must have faculty appointments in BSCI. Doctoral candidates are expected to write and present a Prospectus of their research project to their Dissertation Committee for approval as soon as possible and preferably by the end of the semester following the completion of the candidacy exam. At the latest, the Prospectus should be completed before the end of the third year of the Ph.D. program.

The Prospectus should be a research narrative prepared by the candidate in consultation with their dissertation advisor. The format is similar to a grant proposal following the guidelines of pre-doctoral proposals for the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health, and/or may be organized into the proposed Dissertation chapters. Regardless, it should include the following:

- A cover page (including the Project title, Candidate’s name, and a summary of the Prospectus) or Specific aims/project summary page, if applicable.
- Background/significance,
- Hypotheses/objectives to test,
- An adequate description of the proposed research (experiments or field survey) and analysis
- Expected results (preliminary data are not required).
- A proposed timeline consistent with completion within five years of program start.

A prospectus shall generally be ten pages or less, excluding the cover page and references. Following completion of the written document, the Prospectus is distributed to the committee two weeks before the meeting for the oral presentation (typically a 30-minute presentation followed by a 60-minute discussion).

The Prospectus is not intended to be evaluative. It is an opportunity to review and discuss the candidate's plans for their research project, provide feedback on the approach, and determine if the proposed work is sufficient for a dissertation and reasonable to complete within five years from when the candidate started the program. Upon completing the Prospectus, the notification of the Approved Dissertation Topic form (along with the cover page listed above) should be completed and signed by the committee. The approved Prospectus describes the research to be completed by the candidate but is modifiable in consultation with the candidate’s committee. The candidate must meet with their Dissertation Committee, at least annually, to report on the dissertation research progress.