

## Dissertation Prospectus Defense Guidelines for the Economics Department<sup>1</sup>

- The purpose of the 4th year dissertation prospectus defense is to demonstrate to your committee that you are well on your way to being able to complete a satisfactory dissertation by the end of your 6th year, and to go on the economics job market (academic or non-academic) in the Fall of your 6th year.
  - Currently, the prospectus defense is usually done in the Spring of the 4th year. You can consider doing it in the Fall of your 4th year if you are ready. One reason is that your prospectus must be approved before you can take your GSAS dissertation fellowship; being on that fellowship would, for example, allow you to engage in field work in your 4th year Spring. Another, non-exclusive, reason is that you may want to graduate in 5 years, for instance if you would prefer a non-academic job.
  - Typically, your prospectus committee will consist of 3 faculty members; one must be your main (co-)advisor, and at least two must be Economics department faculty. For BusEc Track students, your main (co-)advisor must be from the CBS Economics division.
  - Consult with your main advisor as early as possible in your 4th year about what they / the committee expects for a successful defense, both in terms of substance and format.
  - Usually, a prospectus defense occurs during a colloquium time slot—so it lasts 60 minutes—but it is closed: i.e., only the candidate and the committee are present. You present a summary of your completed and planned research, using slides.
  - A rule of thumb for a successful defense is that you exhibit:
    - (i) one research paper that, with some revisions, could be a chapter of your dissertation (this could be your 2nd or 3rd year paper);
    - (ii) good progress on another paper/chapter; and
    - (iii) plausible ideas for a third paper/chapter.
- Often, either (ii) or (iii) will turn into your job market paper. Naturally, the specifics here vary by field and individual students' research topics/methods, so consult with your advisor.
- You should provide your committee with written materials—again, consult with them about their expectations (do they want to see your 4th year research summary? paper(s)? slides?)—at least one week before the defense.
  - It is possible to re-do a defense that your committee deems unsatisfactory. However, per [GSAS policy](#), you must pass a defense by May 31 of your 4th year. So, the earlier in the semester you schedule your defense, the better.
  - Logistics: Inform the Economics Graduate Program Manager when your prospectus defense is scheduled. Complete the top half of the [prospectus report](#), submit it to the committee for signatures following the defense, and then return it to the Economics Graduate Program Manager. Prospectus defenses are expected to take place in person. GSAS approval is required for the remote participation of any committee members.

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<sup>1</sup> Last modified 10/29/25 by SSG