

PhD in Health Program

Thesis Proposal Guidelines

Preamble

In preparing the thesis proposal document (detailed below), the student should consider guidelines set forth by the Faculty of Graduate Studies, as the thesis must meet [all requirements specified by the Faculty of Graduate Studies](#).

In accordance with those guidelines, there will be two options for the thesis: one large study or a series of related studies. The student and the supervisory committee will determine which option is more appropriate. Students may then prepare their thesis proposal document accordingly in order to ensure that components of the thesis proposal will aid them in producing their thesis.

Thesis Proposal

Students are expected to have prepared and submitted a thesis proposal by the **end of the 2nd year of the program for students in the 2 year residency program and by the end of the 3rd year for students in the 3 year residency program.**

In the case of the PhD in Health, we require a **written thesis proposal and a presentation by the student to the Supervisory Committee at a thesis proposal meeting**. Please note that the thesis proposal meeting is **not a defense**. It is intended to facilitate discussion between the committee and student – an opportunity for the student to present the work planned for their dissertation, and to obtain additional feedback prior to executing said work.

Please find below our responses to some Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: What exactly is the purpose of the Thesis Proposal?

A: There are several reasons for completing the thesis proposal:

1. The committee should know what you are proposing to do so they can evaluate it to determine the plan is sound. For example:
 - a. is/are the study design(s) appropriate to address the research question(s)?
 - b. is it placed correctly in the context of what has or has not been done in the area?
 - c. has the student adequately reviewed the literature to inform the question?
 - d. is it within the scope of expectations for a PhD?
2. The committee will provide feedback about the plan - committee members are experts in the area of study, and thus are well positioned to help with design etc. The members of the supervisory committee should have the opportunity to provide input in the development of the proposal (i.e., the PhD projects), so much of what they have already had input on should be reflected in the document - the proposal meetings should not be the first time they are seeing the proposal. The proposal meeting however provides an opportunity for discussion amongst all committee members and the student.
3. The proposal process should conclude with the committee approving the plan based on the questions above. Approval of the proposal is important, as it essentially creates a 'contract' between student and committee - if the student delivers on what is proposed, come thesis defence day there should be no arguments around scope.

Q: What sections should be included in the thesis document?

A: There will be variations based on the topic area but all thesis proposals should have:

1. **Introduction** (overview) of the proposed work
2. **Comprehensive review of the literature**
 - a. Sub-divided into headings organized in a sensible manner as per the topic.
 - b. ending with the overall objectives of the thesis work
3. **Questions** that will be addressed and associated hypotheses if applicable.
4. **Methods** section which can be written in different ways based on the topic area - some will have a general methods section that addresses common aspects of the different projects, and then the project specific methods thereafter others will have a methods section that is broken up by project.
5. While not required, formatting the proposal similarly to the thesis will help prepare the student for what is to follow. Thesis formatting guidelines are established by FGS and can be found [here](#).

Q: How long before the presentation should I send the proposal to my committee?

A: Typically **2 weeks** before the proposal meeting the committee members are provided with an electronic version of the proposal (and hardcopy if requested) so they can:

1. review it and make edits/comments
2. prepare questions/points for discussion for the proposal meeting.

Q: What are the expectations for the presentation?

A: The student provides a **15-20 min presentation** that is an overview of the proposed work. Following the presentation there are generally two rounds of questions from the committee (usually 10 min each) where they ask questions to probe the student's knowledge about the project as well as clarification of methods/procedures etc. This round of questioning need not be 'one-on-one', but rather can be more conversational in nature, involving the entire committee and student.

Q: Who coordinates and attends the presentation?

A: The **supervisor** should coordinate a time with the student and committee. Once a time is agreed upon, the Program Assistant can assist with room bookings etc. There is **no external examiner required** and anyone can attend the presentation and questions. Once the question rounds/discussion are complete, the committee and student should reach consensus on what changes are required prior to proceeding (if any), as well as edits to the proposal document. Written feedback should be provided to the student, so a committee member (s/he designated as chair) should take notes. Feedback is critical to facilitating editing of the document, and modifications to the proposed projects. After the meeting has taken place, a **Thesis Proposal Assessment Form** (attached) should be completed and submitted to the Program Assistant at phdhealth@dal.ca. The **student** is responsible for completing page 1 of the form in advance of the meeting, forwarding it to the supervisor and obtaining signatures on the final copy. The form is a fillable PDF but may be handwritten if preferable.

Q: Should someone chair the meeting?

A: The supervisory committee should select a member to act as chair for the meeting. In many instances the supervisor may be the best person to chair.

PhD in Health Program
Thesis Proposal Assessment Form

Students are expected to have prepared and submitted a thesis proposal by the end of the 2nd year of the program for students in the 2 year residency program and by the end of the 3rd year for students in the 3 year residency program.

Supervisory committees will receive and review the written proposal on an agreed upon date and the supervisor will schedule a meeting (approximately two weeks later) during which the proposal will be discussed by the committee and the student, and feedback provided.

This form is provided to facilitate that process and for record-keeping purposes. Please add additional pages as required.

Student Name: _____

Written Proposal Submitted: _____ **Date of Meeting:** _____

Dissertation Title: _____

Committee Members	Name
Supervisor(s):	_____

Members:	_____

Critical Questions:

- 1) is/are the study design(s) appropriate to address the research question(s)?
- 2) is it placed correctly in the context of what has or has not been done in the area?
- 3) has the student adequately reviewed the literature to inform the question?
- 4) is it within the scope of expectations for a PhD?

Committee Feedback:

Committee Recommendation:

The candidate...

may proceed

has not demonstrated adequate progress and requires remediation

Remediation Plan:

Has not demonstrated adequate progress despite remediation

Failure to demonstrate satisfactory progress after remediation may result in termination of program.

Next Supervisory Committee Meeting: _____

Once complete, the supervisor(s) should email this form to all the committee members, the student and phdhealth@dal.ca.