

# The Philosophy PhD Dissertation Prospectus

## Timeline

The Baylor Philosophy Department expects an initial defense of the prospectus in the seventh semester of full-time non-summer enrollment, i.e., normally in the first semester of the fourth year. By the end of the next semester, the prospectus should be successfully defended. Students should normally start serious work on the prospectus in the second semester of their third year. There normally should be a student-organized prospectus-writing group for students at this stage of their career.

Students should get the prospectus to their committees reasonably ahead of the defense. A month is reasonable lead time. Less than two weeks is unreasonable.

## Expectations of the document

A prospectus is a maximum of 15 double-spaced pages, plus a bibliography.

Different dissertation directors will have different expectations. Check with your dissertation director for his or her specific expectations. The following notes are only heuristic guidelines.

The primary function of a prospectus is to provide convincing evidence to the committee of the truth of two propositions:

- That the topic is appropriate for a dissertation—not too trivial, too boring, too vast, or done already.
- That you are ready to work on this dissertation, including (but not only):
  - you have a sufficient knowledge of what relevant literature there is and have read a not insignificant portion of it
  - you have a sufficiently clear picture of what the problems in the area are
  - you show promise of making a sufficient original contribution, e.g., because you already have a sufficient number of original ideas on the topic, though perhaps in inchoate form.

A prospectus normally contains a general discussion of the problem or problems and of the planned approach, a discussion of how the planned approach relates to the literature, together with more or less worked-out outlines of chapters.

The dissertation should not be thought of as one's *magnum opus*. It is, rather, a work that provides one with a "license to do professional philosophy". *A fortiori*, the dissertation prospectus is not a *magnum opus*. It is, rather, a work that provides the committee with evidence that you're ready to work on gaining your license to do professional philosophy.

There is no obligation that the dissertation match the prospectus, though significant departures should be cleared with one's dissertation director, and if one wishes to work on a completely new topic, the committee as a whole should be consulted (and may need to be reconstituted).

## Some model prospectuses

These prospectuses will give you an idea of what a solid prospectus can look like. Again, remember that your dissertation director may have specific requirements. Note that some of the older prospectuses may exceed our present maximum length.

- Mike Cantrell, ["Kierkegaard and Modern Moral Philosophy: Conceptual Unintelligibility, Moral Obligations and Divine Commands"](#)
- Daniel Johnson, ["Explanation in Metaphysics"](#)
- Kraig Martin, ["Justified Closure of Inquiry"](#)
- Chris Schrock, ["A Reidian Response to the Problem of Secondary Qualities"](#)