

The ALM Social Science Proposal and Thesis Process

- Attend the thesis orientation meeting *at least* eighteen months before you plan to finish
 - There is an orientation meeting at the beginning of each term.
 - e.g., February 2015 orientation for May 2016 graduation
 - This is necessary to allow you enough time to complete both the proposal and thesis processes while keeping anxiety levels to a minimum.
- Reread *A Guide to the ALM Thesis*, 7th ed. (available in hard copy in the ALM office and on-line at <http://www.extension.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/file/ext_almg1.pdf>, check the ALM Social Science website <<http://hudce7.harvard.edu/~ostrowski/alm>> for materials and sample proposals.
- Discuss your topic or possible topics with the relevant Research Advisor (RA)
 - Government, History, and assorted other concentrators contact Don Ostrowski (e-mail address is: don@wjh.harvard.edu; phone: 617-495-4547).
 - International Relations concentrators contact Doug Bond (e-mail address is: dougbond@fas.harvard.edu; phone: 781-929-0006).
- Submit drafts of your thesis proposal to your RA (e-mail attachment preferred).
 - The proposal process takes on average three (3) months, but can take up to a year or more –depends upon various variables: how well prepared you are, life intervening, etc.).
- Do not be discouraged by your RA's asking for proposal revisions. Our goal is to get your project accepted by a Harvard professor as soon as possible. But there are only a limited number of possible Thesis Directors (TD) for any topic.
 - If we were to send a proposal out prematurely and a professor were to reject it as faulty or vague, then that would effectively eliminate that professor from further consideration even if you subsequently improve the proposal. It would also reflect badly on the ALM program if we were to get a reputation for sending out half-baked proposals.
 - While we do approve your proposal as such, this does not guarantee that we will be able to find a TD for your topic; only a Harvard professor can ensure that by agreeing to direct the thesis.
 - we merely attempt to facilitate the process by getting the proposal in as good a shape as possible before sending it to a potential TD.
 - This means that if the proposal is turned down by a Harvard professor with suggestions for how to improve the project, we will ask you to revise the proposal further.
 - The act of our sending a proposal to a possible TD is not a guarantee that no further revisions will be necessary. Nor am I able to guarantee that a TD will be found for every topic.
 - If no TD can be found for your topic, then you may have to find a new topic (but, don't worry, our not being able to find a TD is an extremely rare occurrence).
- Only a Research Advisor may make the formal request to a possible TD.
 - You are free to discuss your topic with anyone at any time, but you should not ask anyone to be your TD until we have made the initial contact.
 - The TD can accept by informing your RA or you or the ALM Office of his or her willingness to direct your thesis.
- Once someone has agreed to be your TD, then you should get that person's signature on the Approved-Proposal Form, which your RA will send you.
- You should sign the Approved-Proposal Form, obtain your TD's signature at the first meeting with your TD, and immediately return the form to your RA or to the ALM Office.

- Be prepared to pay your tuition for the thesis course within two weeks of receiving approval from the ALM Office and the Dean of University Extension.
 - All this should be done before you have any further meetings with your TD.
- The TD is now in charge of the direction of your thesis.
- Your RA recedes from the picture and intervenes only at your request or that of your TD.
 - Whatever direction the research goes from this point on is up to you and your thesis director.
 - Remember that you are now a representative of the Extension School to someone who has not only agreed to direct your thesis but may in the future agree to direct the thesis of another ALM candidate who follows you (unless your TD has a bad experience directing your topic). Be courteous and conscientious.
- It is possible to do the thesis (and proposal) *in absentia*. The program was designed, however, for people in the area, who would have relatively easy access to the TD.
 - If you have to do your topic from afar, then the burden of maintaining contact with your RA and with your TD is totally on you.
 - In other words, since candidates have completed their theses from Costa Rica, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, and other countries around the globe, you do not have at your disposal the excuse that you could not contact your RA or TD. It is up to you to maintain contact with them.
- When you have completed your thesis and have handed it to your TD for a final grade (no more changes expected), then send your RA a copy of that version.
 - September 15 for November graduation; January 15 for March graduation; April 1 for May graduation (Note:: if the completed unbound copy is not in by those respective dates, you will have to put off graduation until the next time)
- Now begins the format review process.
 - We mark the thesis according to where stylistic corrections should be made. Make those corrections carefully.
 - This, too, is a process that may require several drafts.
 - Our checking of corrections is intended only to make sure they are made correctly. Often enough, corrections are inadvertently made incorrectly or just not registered by the computer as the result of human error (e.g., pushing the “delete” button rather than the “save” button).
 - Only when your RA gives final approval and tells you to get the thesis bound (and not before) should you get the thesis to be bound.
 - You should make no changes after your RA gives final format approval.
 - If you do make any changes, get your RA’s approval for those changes *before* you upload your thesis to the ETD website.
- Upload a digital copy of the thesis to the Electronic Thesis Database (ETD) by the scheduled date.
 - October 15 for November graduation; February 15 for March graduation; April 15 for May graduation
 - The thesis is then bound by the Extension School and placed in Grossman Library (Sever Hall) for five years. It then is archived in Pusey Archives.
 - Within a few months, your name and the title of your thesis will show up on HOLLIS.
 - Your thesis will also be available for access through Proquest.
- Attend graduation ceremonies in May.