

DUKE UNIVERSITY
Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy

The Master's Project (MP) Prospectus

Before the end of the fall semester (usually by November 30), students intending to complete their MP's and graduate in May write and formally present to their Master's Project Committee a 7-10 page, double-spaced Prospectus. The Prospectus describes the client's problem and related policy question, provides background necessary to understand the problem, and explains how the student intends to proceed to develop a recommended course of action. Two-year MPP's enrolled in PubPol 307 in the fall term receive guidelines and feedback from their section instructor and their peers on the Prospectus process. Joint-degree students planning to complete their MP's and the program during the current academic year do not enroll in PubPol 307; however, they are encouraged to audit the course or attend as many 307 section meetings as their schedules allow.

There is a range of acceptable formats for the Prospectus; however, a strong Prospectus includes the following components:

- **Policy/Research Question:** The Prospectus should include a clear, well-defined, and concise question. Policy questions can be prescriptive: "What should X do about Y?"; "How should X best accomplish Y?" or empirical: "Why do North Carolina schools suspend low-income students at a higher rate than more affluent students?" The question should be stated in a single sentence in the introduction.
- **Background:** This section provides the larger political, economic, social, historical, and policy context for the problem and related policy question. The background should answer the question "What is the problem?" and include a literature review of relevant books, scholarly articles, web materials from government agencies, interest groups, think tanks, etc. A list of references cited for this section should appear at the end of the Prospectus.
- **Policy Options:** This section identifies plausible policy options to address the problem/answer the policy question. One effective way to present this section is to lay out categories of recommendation options and describe potential viable strategies within each category. For example, if the question is: How can we eradicate polio in Nigeria?, the possible recommendations can be categorized into economic options (such as putting more resources into existing efforts), cultural options (such as conducting campaigns to dispel taboos about vaccination), administrative options (such as developing a decentralized field organization to distribute the vaccine), etc.
- **Data and Methods:** This section describes the research strategy and specifies how the student plans to answer the policy question. It should demonstrate that the project is feasible and should address potential problems the student may encounter in the research process and how the student plans to respond to these problems. A good research strategy must be feasible (taking into account the data available and the student's level of skill) and answer the policy question.

The student should meet regularly with the MP Advisor to discuss the Prospectus and receive feedback on drafts. Samples of exemplary Prospectuses from prior years are available in the MPP Program Coordinator's Office, 172 Rubenstein Hall, for student review.

The Prospectus Defense

Once the student has completed the final draft of the Prospectus and has received approval from the MP Advisor to make the presentation, the student consults members of the MP Committee and schedules a time and location to hold the Prospectus Defense. Students can either sign up to use one of the Sanford or Rubenstein Hall graduate student study/bubble rooms (up to two weeks in advance) or contact Sandra Peters, Institute Building Manager, at srpeters@duke.edu to reserve a different space. Most Prospectus Defenses last no longer than one hour. All members of the MP Committee should be present. Please consult the MP Advisor about expectations for the defense presentation.

Students should distribute copies of the completed Prospectus to the MP Committee members at least one week prior to the Prospectus Defense to give the student time to address any red-flag issues Committee Members may notice. The student brings a copy of the Prospectus Approval Form (available in the Student Handbook, on this website or on the class' Blackboard site). After making the presentation, the committee members will come to a consensus on whether or not to sign-off on the Prospectus. The MP Advisor notifies the student of the decision and returns the signed Prospectus Approval Form to him/her. The student then brings the signed form to the MPP Program Office for recordkeeping purposes.