



Guidelines to Begin Research and for Prospectus

Updated January 2026

I. Prior to Approval of the Prospectus: Design your Project but do not collect or analyze data that will be included in your thesis/dissertation.

A. **Limits on Registration before Prospectus approval by Graduate Studies:**

- In the Design phase of the project, Master's students may register for a **maximum of three (3) thesis credits** before the Prospectus is approved.
- In the Design phase of the project, Doctoral students may register for a **maximum of six (6) dissertation credits** before the Prospectus is approved.
- Students may not register for thesis/dissertation credits midway through a semester.

B. **Review Board Approvals:** Determine if you need approval by a research review board for work involving humans, non-human vertebrate animals and cephalopods, or recombinant DNA. Your mentor should help. Collection of data, and work on the project may not begin until the project has been approved by the appropriate research review board if needed (see Part II).

C. **Committee Composition:** Identify the members of your committee, with your advisor (see Part III).

D. **Plan Ahead:** Before you begin collecting or analyzing data, you need to write a prospectus that has been approved by your committee chair, committee members, the department chairperson/program director, and by the Director of Graduate Studies.

- Projects undertaken prior to appropriate review board approval and approval of the prospectus by the Director of Graduate Studies may be denied and the project deemed invalid and not allowed to be used as part of the thesis or dissertation.

II. Research Review Board Approvals

- A. If your project involves humans, animals, or recombinant DNA, you may need approval before beginning your research and before submission of the prospectus.
- B. To ensure compliance with federal, state, and university requirements for conducting research, CMU has 3 boards charged with oversight of research conducted in their respective areas. Contact the Office of Research Compliance (989-774-1152).

- Institutional Review Board (IRB) approves research with human subjects
- Institutional Animal Care & Use Committee (IACUC) approves research with non-human vertebrate animals and cephalopods
- Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) approves research with recombinant DNA

III. Committee Selection and Graduate Faculty Status

- A. All committee chairs and committee members must possess graduate faculty status. Contact Graduate Studies (989-774-3873) to check a committee member's status. Graduate Faculty Status applications are available on the [Graduate Studies website](#).
- B. Students should consult their Advisor and/or their Program Handbook for the process in selecting a committee chairperson and at least two additional committee members.
- C. The advisor may, or may not, be the committee chairperson depending on the academic discipline. The committee chair must be in the student's research discipline.
- D. In addition to the chair, at least one more committee member must be a CMU faculty member; however, this person can be from outside of the student's department.
- E. Additional committee members may be non-CMU faculty members who have been awarded Graduate Faculty status, or CMU faculty members.

IV. Writing and Submitting the Prospectus

- A. Students submit a two-part Prospectus for Graduate Studies, most often in year 1 or 2. We know your project may end up differing from this plan; you do not need to update with OGS unless new Review Board approval is needed. This short form can be considered a Prospectus Summary since programs typically require a longer prospectus.
 - o PART 1. Technical Synopsis (1.5 – 2 single-spaced pages, include the information listed; no references)
 - a. Must use *future tense* – this is what you plan to do.
 - b. Describe the specific research question or overarching hypothesis, explain why it is significant.
 - c. Include a paragraph describing the theoretical framework/rationale for the study.
 - d. What methods and/or approach will you use? Also describe the qualitative or quantitative data or type of evidence/information will be collected.
 - e. How will you analyze the data or information to address the question? Describe the limitations of your approach.
 - f. Describe the timeline for your research activities.
 - g. End with a description of expected outcomes and what will be learned.

- PART 2. Layperson Summary (one-paragraph maximum, no technical language)
- **NOTE:** the Graduate Studies Prospectus may not be the same format as your program's Prospectus or the prospectus defense, if required by your Program.

B. Submission Requirements

Prospectus Submission Requirements

- a. Approval memo/letter/email from the appropriate review board (if applicable)
- b. The prospectus form must be submitted and completed through DocuSign. A link to the form is available on the [Graduate Studies website](#). Make sure you have all items ready prior to routing the form.