

If You Want Me to Serve as a Thesis Sponsor or Co-Sponsor . . .

I am willing, even eager, to serve as a sponsor (or co-sponsor) of PhD theses. Since I expect to take an active role in advising on theses that I sponsor and this requires a substantial commitment of my time, I require that those students who want me to be a sponsor request that I do so through a formal process. This may seem unnecessarily bureaucratic. But I think there are some real advantages. First is that it helps to prevent misunderstandings about whether or not there is an agreement to sponsor the dissertation. Second, the process that it sets out is exactly what you should be doing to develop an exciting thesis in any case. Look on this as structure that is intended to help you identify and develop a great thesis, not just as hoops to be jumped through.

Step One: Read

The first step is for you to read the documents “[Thesis Research: Where do I start?](#)” and “[Seminar or Paper Presentation Ideas](#).” These outline what I consider to be some of the more important practical and conceptual issues that you need to address in identifying a thesis topic. I expect you to know these thoroughly and to incorporate them into all aspects of your dissertation research.

Step Two: Research, Think, Talk

Use the ideas in “[Thesis Research: Where do I start?](#)” to identify topics that might be developed into a thesis. Do stop by to run ideas by me to see if it sounds plausible before you spend vast quantities of time on a topic. I will try to give you some indication of how promising I consider a topic. At this stage, though, it is often difficult to tell whether a topic will work or not for a thesis.

Step Three: Write, Talk

Look in particular at the “[Seminar or Paper Presentation Ideas](#)” document and use this as an outline for a short written and oral presentation to me on your work. Your presentation should identify what question your research asks and answers. It should tell me why it is important. It should tell me what is new in what you are doing and do so by making specific reference to the frontier work in the area. It should tell me how my view of the world will be changed as a result of your research.

Step Four: Prospectus or Paper and Formal Presentation

By this stage, you should be well along on your dissertation research. You should have very good answers to the questions noted above. I now want you to write up a dissertation prospectus of at least ten pages that describes in greater detail your plans for the dissertation. In lieu of a prospectus, you can submit a draft of a paper that you expect to be a chapter of your dissertation. I expect that you will use the prospectus or the paper draft as the basis for a presentation in either the morning Brown Bag workshop or the regular international and development seminar.

Step Five: Request Formal Written Approval of the Prospectus or Paper as the Basis for Sponsorship

When you believe that you have satisfied the requirements set out above, you can ask me to send you a formal written note approving the prospectus or paper as the basis for sponsorship of the thesis. If I agree with your assessment, then I will do so.