

Pre-approval of Research Plans by D-GESS Sections

At ETH Zurich, research plans are approved by the doctoral committee of the respective department (art. 13(4) Ordinance on Doctoral Studies). At D-GESS, this official approval is preceded by an approval by the respective department section (Behavior, Governance, Knowledge, or Law & Economics). In all four sections, this internal pre-approval follows the same principles:

1. Written research plans are distributed to all professors who are members of the respective section. They are asked to provide input on the written version of the draft proposal.
2. A research plan is approved by the section if at least the majority of the respective professors approve the proposal.
3. Once a research plan has been approved by the section, it can be forwarded to the doctoral committee for official approval (via the doctoral administration at D-GESS)

In addition to these general principles, the individual sections have adopted the following rules:

Behavior

Prior to submitting the research plan, PhD students are expected to give a presentation in the Behavioral Colloquium to receive a first round of feedback from the behavior professors. This feedback is expected to be taken into account for writing the proposal. Later, the PhD supervisor sends the proposal and CV to all members of the behavior section. The supervisor suggests two (or more) members of the group to provide a thorough review and constructive feedback within about two to three weeks. All other members of the group are expected to familiarize themselves with the proposal and provide further comments, taking the outcome of the more detailed reviews into account. Any member of the group can choose to also provide a detailed review.

If the reviewers or other members of the group raise concerns, they report them to the PhD supervisor. Typically, the candidate then writes a revision and resubmits. The reviewers and the group check then whether the concerns have been addressed. Alternatively or in addition, individual professors who raised concerns can also have a direct meeting with the supervisor and the candidate to interactively resolve open issues.

If after one or two rounds of revisions no consensus can be reached, the PhD supervisor and the representative of the behavior section in the doctoral committee consult with the head of department about how to resolve the lack of consensus in the best interest of both the candidate and the assurance of quality of science in the department.

Given the heterogeneity of disciplines represented in the behavior section, we aim for constructive feedback that serves as quality assurance rather than assessing whether the proposed research is fully aligned with the state of the art in its home discipline. We trust that the supervisor is the best judge of that aspect. Emphasis is put on making sure that the work has testable hypotheses based on relevant scientific literature/discourse, independent of whether data is collected in human experimentation or derived from simulations or big data sources.

A more detailed description is published [here](#).

Governance

The approval of research plans in the Governance section depends on the type of PhD student:

- For PhD students in political science and public policy, candidates have to attend the PhD colloquium of the Center for International and Comparative Studies (CIS), which is organized by the Department of Political Science (IPZ) at University of Zurich as a formal module within the department's PhD program amounting to 4 ECTS credits with 40 contact hours and 80 hours private study. The PhD colloquium requires that the candidates attend a two semester-long series of sessions, where they and their peers present their research plans. A recommendation is made by a committee, which is constituted by the candidate's PhD supervisor and two other professors, with at least one being from CIS. This committee can recommend approval, approval with revisions, or reject the proposal, in which case it would have to be presented again in the CIS Colloquium.
- For PhD students who are part of the Institute of Science Technology and Policy (ISTP), candidates have to attend the research proposal presentations of all PhDs within their respective research group (urbanization, mobility, or mineral resources) and present and discuss their own research proposal. A recommendation is made whether to approve the research plan by the supervisor and two other faculty members of ISTP.
- PhD students in Development economics have to write a research plan (up to 20 pages without bibliography and Appendices) which contains an exposé of the candidate's dissertation, including the central research questions, methods & data, ethical concerns and a time table. Moreover, PhD students have to present and discuss their research proposal – before submitting it for approval - either in the ETH wide research colloquium “Research for Development” (taking place each spring semester, 1 credit point) or the ETH economics research colloquium for PhD students (without credits). A recommendation is made by the supervisor and two additional professors of either ETH-DGESS, ETH-MTEC or of the economics faculty of University of Zürich. The selection of reviewers depends on the topic of the PhD students.

Based on the aforementioned recommendations, the professors of the Governance Section make a collective decision whether to forward the research plan to the Doctorate Committee for final approval.

Knowledge

The PhD's supervisor sends the research plans via email to all professors of the section, asking for their prompt feedback.

Everyone reads the research plan and comments when competences / interests are overlapping as well as when the necessity arises from the research plan itself by email to all professors of the section.

The responsible supervisor or the candidate responds to these comments and suggestions. In most cases, the suggestions are useful for the implementation; the research plan has to undergo revision if there are fundamental doubts regarding the feasibility. (One can assume that the thesis supervisor is capable of assessing the feasibility, though, and that it is an exception that colleagues from other disciplines must re-assess the project by providing substantial arguments.)

Law and Economics

PhD students at the Law & Economics Section do a presentation on their research plan to the entire group in one of the weekly brownbag lunch meetings, soliciting feedback from professors, postdocs and other PhD students. Thereafter, the process follows the general principles outlined above.