Sustainability Thesis Pre-Proposal Form (ENVR 200)

After completing at least six courses, degree candidates in the thesis track are eligible to register for ENVR E-200, Crafting the Thesis Proposal. The major objective of the course is to produce a thesis proposal, which i) defines the research scope, research questions, and a hypothesis to be tested, ii) organizes and critically evaluates the background literature that leads to the formulation of original research questions and hypotheses, and iii) states the research methods.

In some cases the research will not be hypothesis driven, rather it might encompass a comprehensive analysis of a regulation, practice, or policy. In other cases, a research thesis might involve modeling, survey analysis or life cycle assessment of a product or material. However, in all cases a research-based thesis must contain original work carefully done and well presented to be worthy of an advanced degree from Harvard.

Prior to enrolling in ENVR 200, you are required to have your topic approved by your designated Research Advisor Dr. Mark Leighton (leighton@fas.harvard.edu) or Dr. Rick Wetzler (wetzler@dcemail.harvard.edu). It is important to plan this process accordingly, and have your thesis pre-approved well in advance of registration for ENVR 200. Multiple discussions and revisions are needed and approval is not guaranteed for all projects. We recommend that you begin this process the semester before your ENVR 200 registration and not to make travel arrangements until the topic is approved.

The final write-up for this course is a complete or nearly complete thesis proposal.

To begin the process, answer the following five questions in your email to your research advisor. Please include your full name, prior education, and current employment in your email. Please put “Thesis Preapproval” in the subject line:

1. What is the working title of your thesis research (be as specific as possible)?
2. What is the main research hypothesis and specific research questions you expect to examine? If your thesis research is not hypothesis driven, propose research goals and questions it will address.
3. Provide a background section for your research topic that summarizes the current status of knowledge about your subject in the form of a literature review. You should include the rationale for your proposed research. List at least 5-10 references at the end.
4. Outline a research methodology you expect to employ, including the sources of data and methods of analysis.
5. Describe how your courses (including ones you might take in the future) prepared you for this research topic and methods.

Please note: When you register for this course, you will receive a registration status of Waiting for Placement (WP). The program office must review your academic record to ensure you meet the published prerequisites. Once your proposal is approved and all other prerequisites have been satisfied, you will receive a registered (RE) status. If you are enrolled in courses in the prior term, you will not be registered (RE) until your grades are available.