



Sustainability Thesis Pre-Proposal Form (ENVR 496)

After completing at least six courses, degree candidates in the thesis track are eligible to register for ENVR 496 Crafting the Thesis Proposal in Sustainability. The major objective of the course is to produce a thesis proposal, which i) defines the research scope, 1-2 main research questions, and 1-2 hypotheses 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, research may focus on comprehensive analysis of a policy or practice, or involve modeling such as life cycle or cost-benefit analysis. Even in these cases, hypotheses should be formulated that delineate major predictions of the analysis. 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 496 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 preapproved well in advance of registration for ENVR 496. 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 496 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 six questions in a separate Word document that you attach in your email to your Research Advisor. Title this "ENVR-496_your name_date" with your specific information. In your email, please include your full name, prior education, and current employment. 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 significance of your proposed research, and what are a few broad objectives or goals it addresses?
3. What is the main research hypothesis and specific research questions you expect to examine?
4. 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.
5. Outline a research methodology you expect to employ, including the sources of data and methods of analysis.
6. 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.