Sustainability Thesis Pre-Proposal Form

Student Information

After completing at least six courses, degree candidates in the Sustainability Program 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 and 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 delineates the methodology to be implemented during thesis research. 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.

The research advisor and the course instructor will help you identify a possible thesis director for your research. Please refer to the ALM Guide to Thesis Research for useful background information, noting special guidance for master’s theses in scientific disciplines.

Prior to enrolling in ENVR E-200, you are required to have your thesis research topic approved by your research advisor, Mark Leighton (leighton@fas.harvard.edu). Towards this end, you must submit this form and the research pre-proposal described below by July 15 for fall, December 1 for spring, and May 1 for summer.

Thesis Pre-Proposal

Create a WORD document (5-7 double spaced pages) that addresses the following issues, numbered in sequence:

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, nonetheless propose research goals and questions it will address.

3. Provide a background section for your research topic of 2-3 pages 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.

Note that you may initially be unable to address all these topics very well, which should encourage you to initiate discussion with your research advisor. The lead time is to help develop your pre-proposal so revised submissions might be required before you can finalize registration.

**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 this term, you will not be Registered (RE) until your grades are available after the close of the current term.