After completing the General Exam milestone, students can begin preparation of the Dissertation Proposal and register for MAS.950: Preparation for PhD Thesis. The proposal committee must be approved by MASCeCOM and the proposal must be presented at a public proposal critique by the end of year 3 of the doctoral program, allowing for one year before the dissertation defense.

To begin the proposal process:

1. The student will submit to MAS staff (via email) an abstract (one page maximum) and proposed committee members (with short bios of any non-MAS committee members)
2. The student will also be expected to let their advisor and committee members know that we need their confirmation of approval via email.

MASCeCOM will review and approve the abstract and committee members. Students will receive approval via email confirmation from MAS staff.

After receiving committee/abstract approval, the student may go on to write the full proposal (using the guidelines listed below) for sharing with their committee. The completed proposal must be submitted to the MAS staff via email.

We would expect that the student will also remind their advisor and committee members to send (via email to the MAS staff) confirmation of approval and any notes/comments. This new requirement means that MASCeCOM is no longer reading/approving the proposal document. Approval is dependent upon the student’s committee and verified by the MAS staff.

**Dissertation Proposal Guidelines**

The Dissertation Proposal should present a plausible argument for a specific approach to a well-defined problem, with the intention of making an original and significant contribution to knowledge in the field.

The proposal should include:

- Title page
- Abstract: A short overview of the key goals, questions, and expected contributions.
• Goals or Problem Statement: What general problem are you addressing (often illustrated by a scenario)? Why is this a significant problem? What are your motivations? What makes this an especially appropriate problem for an MAS/Media Lab Dissertation?
• Research Questions: What specific questions are you addressing?
• Background: The intellectual framework and historical context for the Dissertation, including related research (with literature references). This section might be derived from the written component of your General Exam.
• Research Plan: How will you carry out your research? What methodologies will you use? How will you evaluate the results?
• Expected Results and Contributions: What results do you expect? What is new in the proposed research? Keep in mind that a PhD is, by definition, an "original and significant contribution to the field". What will you produce besides the document (physical artifacts, software, demos, videos, etc.)?
• Timeline: A set of milestones to serve as checks on reasonable progress. Obviously subject to change in the face of the fortunes of research life! Don't forget there must be one year between the proposal critique and the dissertation defense.
• Resources Required: What equipment or other resources will be needed?

Once the MAS staff receives the completed proposal (with committee approval), the student will be allowed to schedule their proposal critique. MAS staff can book the room and make the announcement. Please allow at least 2-3 weeks from final proposal submission to the date of the critique.

The student will present at a public critique (see below). Afterwards, committee members will provide written feedback to the advisor and student (via email). If necessary, the student may need to edit or rewrite parts of the proposal. MAS and MASCOM will defer to the advisor’s decision on this issue, based on the content of the committee comments.

**Proposal Critique Guidelines**
The Proposal Critique will consist of:

- a 30-40 minute public presentation (open to all members of the Media Lab community)
- a 15 minute Q & A session with the general audience
- a 30 minute private session with the full dissertation committee

To complete the proposal and critique process, the advisor must confirm to MAS when the committee has given final approval for the proposal. MAS will then confirm acceptance of proposal with advisor and student. A grade for MAS.950 will be given at end of current semester and the student can go forward to register for MAS.THG until completion of program. There must be at least one year between the critique and the thesis defense.