After completing the required comprehensive and field examinations, a Ph.D. student in the NEJS-Sociology Ph.D. Program will select two co-chairs, one from each department, to direct the dissertation, as well as two other readers, one from each department. Each of the co-chairs will be identified as such on the dissertation title page. For internal purposes, the candidate will choose one of the co-chairs to function as the “primary” chair. The dissertation defense will also require a fifth reader who may be a faculty member from outside of Brandeis. For details about appointing the outside reader and defending the dissertation, please consult the Sociology Department's Graduate Student Handbook.

The dissertation prospectus, which will be 20-25 pages in length, will be presented to the dissertation prospectus committee for approval and/or suggested revisions. The dissertation prospectus elaborates a student’s dissertation topic and explains the research the student plans to undertake. It should clearly state the research question, situate this question in a review of relevant literature, and describe the methods that will be used to answer the question. The prospectus should also provide a tentative timeline for completing the project. If the proposed research involves data collection with human subjects, the student must also seek approval from the Brandeis Committee for Protection of Human Subjects (BCPHS) by the date of the scheduled defense.

A prospectus defense will be held in the Sociology Department and will be attended by the two committee members from Sociology and the two committee members from NEJS. The defense is open to the public and must be announced at least two weeks in advance within the Sociology department, by which point the student must deposit two copies of the prospectus in the Department office. The proposal defense meeting typically begins with the student giving a short (10 minute) presentation on his or her work before answering questions from the faculty. After the defense, the Dissertation Prospectus Committee meets in private to decide on one of three grades: No Pass, Conditional Pass (meaning that specified further work is needed), or Pass. This grade will be noted on the Dissertation Prospectus form (available on the shared Latte site), which must be signed by all Committee members and deposited with the Sociology Department's Graduate Administrator.

After this defense in the Sociology Department, the student will make a copy of the full proposal available to the administrator of the NEJS department and write a two-page synopsis to be presented before the NEJS faculty at a scheduled department meeting. The presentation is open to the public and involves a ten minute oral description of the project followed by a question and answer period with the NEJS faculty. The NEJS faculty must approve the project for the student to move forward with the dissertation.