

Guide to Negotiating the Scope of the Special Fields Paper

When originally conceived, the Special Fields Paper was designed to allow a student to develop and demonstrate expertise in a subfield *different* from the subfield of the dissertation, so that students would be prepared to teach more broadly and could go on the job market in two different areas. While this remains a worthy goal and an important starting point in considering the Special Fields Paper, in practice, students often do not have a clear idea of the field of the dissertation this early in their graduate career. Consequently, the question of whether the Special Fields Paper should be focused on the area of the dissertation, or an area other than the dissertation, is decided through discussion between the student and the Special Field Paper advisors. This discussion should take place in the spring quarter of the student's second year (and certainly no later than the beginning of fall quarter of third year), ideally with both committee members present.

In conducting this discussion, we encourage students and advisors to consider the following points:

- 1) The main benefit to focusing the Special Field Paper on an area different from the dissertation is that this allows the student to develop and demonstrate broader expertise. However, such expertise can be demonstrated in other ways: for example, if the Second Year Paper was on a different topic than the planned dissertation, or if the dissertation itself will require developing expertise in two subfields.
- 2) Some faculty use the Special Fields Paper as an opportunity for a student to develop expertise in more central or more marketable subfields of the discipline, which may be especially relevant if the student is exploring a dissertation topic that is less central to the discipline as currently constituted.
- 3) Some faculty use the Special Fields Paper as a chance for the student to develop another publication. Sociology Compass, for example, publishes focused literature reviews and can be an outlet for Special Fields Papers.
- 4) If the topic of the dissertation is uncertain and the student is consequently unable to identify a separate area for the Special Fields Paper, the best approach may be to identify a broad area of interest and use the Special Fields Paper as an opportunity for the student to conduct background reading with the goal of emerging with a dissertation topic.

Whatever approach a student takes, we strongly recommend that the student send an email to both advisors after the meeting summarizing what was discussed and what approach the student will take to the SFP.