

Research Proposal Guidelines for Applicants
Department of Sociology, Graduate Studies
(Updated: September 2012)

All applicants to graduate studies (Masters or PhD) are required to submit a research proposal with their application. The following are general guidelines for the research proposal. Masters and PhD proposals vary mainly with regard to the length and detail expected from the proposal. In each case, the proposal should outline a reasonable course of research to be carried out for the degree. A typical Masters degree is completed in two years, with one year of course work, one-half year devoted to research (fieldwork) and one-half year devoted to writing up the thesis. A typical PhD degree is completed in four years with two years of course work, one year of research (fieldwork) and one year of writing up the thesis.

The Graduate Studies Committee, which reviews applications, recognizes that applicants' research paths may shift significantly during the course of their degree. Applicants are not bound to the research proposal submitted at the time of application. At the same time, the research proposal is an important part of the application. The Committee looks to the proposal both as a statement of intent with regard to the applicants' interest in the program and as evidence of the applicants' abilities to frame their interests in terms of significant social science research.

Length

Masters Research Proposal: Up to 2,000 words (approximately 5 pages)
PhD Research Proposal: Up to 4,000 words (approximately 10 pages)

Contents

1. Title: The proposal should include a short, succinct title that describes the research. Ideally, this should be about three to eight words in length.
2. Statement of the Problem: The proposal should include a statement of the problem, question or research hypothesis to be examined by the research. Statement of the problem should include a discussion of how the applicant came to identify this as a significant issue and the context in which this problem emerged (for example, from the applicant's personal experience and background, from social science writing on the issue, or other context).
3. Review of Relevant Literature: The applicant needs to make clear how the research fits into contemporary sociology or anthropology. The review of literature should not just review general social science literature. It should specify how the research will contribute to that literature.
4. Proposed Methodology: The proposal should provide a sense of how the applicant expects to conduct research on the problem identified. This should include a discussion of specific techniques or methods to be used (e.g. surveys, interviews, participant observation, etc.) as well as practical issues such as access that the applicant has to the research site, language ability requirements, etc.
5. Expected Outcomes and/or Impact of the Research: The proposal should include a discussion of the impact of the research, both as a contribution to social science and a contribution to the people and society where the research is to take place.
6. References Cited and/or Bibliography: Relevant references should be listed in the bibliography at the end of the proposal; particularly those reviewed and referred to in the proposal. As a rule of thumb, we would expect at least five to ten items for a Masters proposal and at least ten to twenty for a PhD.