Completing Your Thesis: Workshop II

Preparing for your Proposal: Focusing on the Next Step
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Workshop Outline

1. Brief introductions (name, program, stage in thesis development)
2. What is a thesis proposal (brief overview)
3. Overview of Structure (with examples)
4. Advice
5. Q&A/Discussion
What is a proposal?

**Purpose:** to justify and plan for your research project; demonstrate that your project has a purpose and contributes to/advances an existing body of research; demonstrate that you have expertise on a topic and familiarity with the literature

The proposal should be a work in progress that will be shared with your adviser (or full committee) and revised.

A proposal is a sort of introduction to your own thesis and it should be concise. As a concise document, it should help you think through how to bridge your research with the final product (the thesis itself).

The proposal may contain some the following elements:

- Title
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Research Question(s)
- Rationale/Purpose
- Review of Literature
- Methodology
- Significance
- Overview of Chapters
- Timeline for Completion
Is there a general structure?

Thesis proposals will vary from department to department!

Some departments may have clear criteria of what *should* or *may* go into the thesis proposal but others may have a loose structure or no structural guideline whatsoever.

- In the latter case, what are the discipline standards? How are journal articles in your field structured? How are other theses in your department structured? **Find a model!**
- Have you asked your advisor or another figure in your department what *should be in the proposal*? Or *what your proposal should look like*?
Examples of Proposal Templates (Highly Structured)

CSUF M.A. in Teaching Sciences

- Proposed title page (according to Graduate Studies Thesis Manual)
- Abstract -- 150 words
- Chapter 1 -- Introduction
- Chapter 2 -- Review of the Literature
- Chapter 3 -- Research Methodology
- Chapter 4 -- Results
- Chapter 5 -- Interpretation of Results
- References
- Appended Material

The M.A. in Teaching Sciences requires a highly structured proposal in which each proposed chapter includes an overview of the proposed content with a particular emphasis on the “review of literature” (aka “lit review”) and the “research methodology.” For example, the M.A. in Teaching Sciences website specifically calls for the following sections in the “Chapter 3” proposal:

- Variables, hypotheses, research design, sample, treatment, evaluation instruments, data collection, data analysis, limitations of the research, expected results, anticipated outcomes
Examples of Proposal Templates (Slightly Less Structured)

CSUF M.A. in Sociology

- Abstract (120 words or less)
- Introduction
- Literature Review and Theoretical Framing
- Data and Methods (Quantitative) or Methods (Qualitative)
- Results or Data Presentation
- Discussion
- Conclusion
- Literature Cited/References
- Appendices

This example may seem just as detailed, if not more detailed than the M.A. in Teaching Science, but there is a lot of room to maneuver in the proposal itself--you are not bound by a specific chapter structure.
GUIDELINES for the PROSPECTUS (PROPOSAL)

The MA in Anthropology Prospectus (proposal) is about 5-10 pages long and must incorporate the following information:

1. An abstract that briefly summarizes the project [100-200 words]
2. Statement of the objective(s): Statement of the problem, hypothesis to be tested, research questions, or proposed ethnographic study
3. Review of the relevant literature
4. Theoretical framework for the proposed study
5. Methodology or procedures for gathering information and completing the objectives of the study
6. Expected completion date [e.g., Expected completion date: May 2017]
7. Reference list for any sources included in the prospectus; other reference materials that may potentially be used can also be included
8. Optional: Your thesis/project adviser may require other items, such as a budget or an IRB approval, or any other information that is relevant to your particular study proposal
Title and Abstract

For the proposal your title is merely a “working title” -- you are not bound by anything at this stage

Your title should clearly tell your audience about your topic and the type of study you are conducting without being too vague. Examples? (does anyone have a working title?)

The abstract is a brief overview (typically between 100-250 words) that pulls the reader in and offers some basic details about your study. It should summarize primary points of your research (e.g. research question, methods, implications, etc.).
Introduction/Statement of the Problem

The introduction should “position” the reader -- provide any necessary background information and give the reader a sense of the overall import of your topic.

The introduction should also provide an overview of what is in your study without giving away too much from forthcoming sections (i.e. lit review).

If asked for a specific “statement of the problem” you should ask yourself what problem needs to be solved and how your research does this...
Review of Literature

This is one of the **most important** portions of your proposal -- it demonstrates that you have looked at the existing literature relevant to your work and hold the ability to dialogue with this work.

The literature review tells your reader that you are ready to jump into a conversation about topic X.
Methodology

What is your overall methodological approach?

What are your specific methodological approaches -- how are you collecting data?

How do you intent to analyze your results and how does your method enable your analysis?

This is also a time to mention any limitations inherent in your methodology...
Remaining Sections

Additional sections of the thesis proposal are highly specific to your program.

- Your program may ask you for a “significance” section -- what is the usefulness or significance of your research?
- Overview of chapters -- your program (and adviser) may ask for a brief overview of each chapter that you intend to draft
- Does your program require a timeline for completion? What about a budget (if you have received funding for your research)?
- Bibliography -- should be in the standard format for your discipline
Advice & Questions/Discussion

Does anyone have any advice to share?

Any questions?
Next Steps

Workshop #3: Wednesday, February 20, 2:30-3:30 (PLS-360)

Tips and Skills for Defending Your Thesis

- Review presentation skills and obtain tips for speaking in front of a defense

If you are already in the writing process consider joining the Graduate Student Thesis Support Group (Tuesdays, 7:00-9:00pm in PLS-360)