

PhD Proposal Guidelines

These guidelines apply to the final draft of the PhD Proposal that is to be approved by the Advisory Committee. Note that each student and dissertation are individual – the details of each proposal may be adapted by the supervisor and Advisory Committee to suit the needs of the individual student.

Purpose

The dissertation proposal serves as the plan for the dissertation research project, and as a means to ensure that the planned research is appropriate for a dissertation.

The basic purposes of all research proposals¹ are to **convince** the reader that:

- a) The research project has clear objectives
- b) The research project is worth doing (it is significant / important in some sense and will make an original contribution to knowledge/understanding in the field)
- c) There is a well thought through plan for achieving the research objectives in the available timeframe.
- d) However, the substantial portion of the proposal should be dedicated to demonstrating that the proposed methods are suitable, well-developed, and feasible

Note that it is not enough simply to describe previous works, your project, and your methods.

Timing

The dissertation proposal should be presented after the successful completion of the comprehensive examination (GLIS 701), This should normally be in the fourth or fifth term of the program (Fall or Winter of PhD 3).

Process

This formal dissertation proposal is the final step in the development of the dissertation research plan. Ideally, this should not be the first time committee members see what the student is planning. The process is more effective and efficient if the supervisor and committee are involved and consulted prior to this proposal.

- As soon as possible following the comprehensive exam, the student, supervisor and committee should discuss the process and timeline for the development and approval of the proposal (this can happen at the end of the oral exam component, after the results have been shared with the student)
- Discussion with the supervisor and committee about the overall research goals, research questions, and methodological approach
 - a short (1-2) page point-form summary document may be helpful to specify the overall goals and methods being considered
 - the committee should provide feedback on the goals and methods, and determine the next steps

¹ Source: D.R. Rowland. <http://uq.edu.au/student-services/pdf/learning/research-proposal-sample-v2.pdf>

- If applicable, an application for ethics certificate must be approved in accordance with the McGill Research Ethics Board. Some people find it helpful to write the ethics application in parallel with the proposal, as there are some overlapping elements.

Format

The proposal may take a variety of formats, as determined in consultation with the supervisor and committee. Note that the weight of the proposal needs to be on the methods (section B); the section should be as long as necessary to include all the relevant details. Use appendices as needed for things such as draft data collection instruments (survey, interview guide, etc.).

Regardless, it should explicitly address the following:

A. Introductory sections (1500-3000 words)

- Problem statement/description of the problem area
- Significance/relevance of the research (the “so what” question)
- Purpose/goal of the research
- Research questions/objectives
- Summary of background literature (should include a succinct synthesis of reading course literature)
- Theoretical/conceptual framework

B. Methods (as long as necessary)

- Proposed methods (provide as much detail as possible)
- Population/sample
- Recruitment procedure
- Data collection (instrument(s) and methods)
- Data analysis strategy and methods
- Timeline/schedule – from acceptance of proposal to thesis submission and defence
- Brief discussion of risks (i.e., the unexpected happening), and contingency plans to adjust

• Additional considerations for multi-phase or multi-study proposals

If the proposed work will involve multiple phases or individual studies, it may not be possible to provide full details of the methods for each phase/study. The proposal should include:

- Clear exposition of the different phases and an explanation/justification for how the phases/studies fit together to form a coherent body of research
- Full details for the first phase/study (as per the items listed above)
- As much detail as possible for subsequent phases/studies, and how the detailed methods will be determined
- The role of the committee in the ongoing development of the research methods, including what approval is required (e.g., supervisor only, supervisor and committee) for subsequent phases/studies

C. Dissemination (250-500 words)

- Format of the dissertation (monograph vs. article-based)
- Plan for publication/dissemination of the research
- Anticipated contributions of the research and practice

D. Appendices (as long as necessary)

- May include
 - Data collection instruments (e.g., survey, interview guide)
 - Ethics application

PhD Proposal Completion Award

Students who successfully complete the PhD Proposal by the end of the sixth term in the program will receive the comprehensive exam completion award of \$500.

Updated: Dec. 2021