

MA THESIS PROPOSAL

Basic Guidelines

For the thesis proposal milestone, the student will pick a thesis topic (in consultation with her/his supervisor), identify the central research question, identify potential sources of data (for empirical theses), and review relevant literature. At the end of the term the student will be required to hand in a thesis proposal that includes the objectives of the thesis, a justification for the research, a substantial review of the relevant literature, and a research plan. The supervisor will assess this proposal and confirm the student's completion of the requirement by completing the *MA Thesis Proposal Report*. As part of the thesis proposal, a supervisory committee member must be named (see item 6, below). The guidelines provided below serve as a starting point for the proposal.

The format depends on the topic or type of thesis, but in most cases, one would want to include the following which are inspired by the guidelines for Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) research grant application.

Details

1. Objectives and scope

State the objectives of the thesis. The SSHRC guidelines say: "Briefly state the explicit objectives of your proposed research." When forced to do so, you should be able to state the fundamental problem of the thesis (the thesis or research question) in one to three sentences. It is good to state it very concisely at some point then elaborate. Probably need an opener that brings you to the statement of objectives or thesis/research question. It may be important to delimit the scope: what are you considering and what are you not considering? Why? What are the boundaries of the study? The delimitation of scope is particularly important in a theoretical thesis.

2. Justification or rationale for the study

Typically, there are two rationales or justifications, one more theoretical and one more practical. Given what we know already, what do we not know, and what is important to know in order to advance our knowledge or to guide our actions.

-Social relevance and practical significance (optional)

-Theoretical rationale and how this is going to contribute to existing knowledge

The SSHRC guidelines say: "Explain the importance, originality and anticipated contribution to knowledge of the proposed research."

3. Relation to existing knowledge (review of the literature)

SSHRC guidelines say, "Situate the proposed research in the context of the relevant scholarly literature." This is the largest part of the prospectus, but it should not get too large because the full literature review is to be done in the thesis. Rather than a summary of the literature, it should be an analysis of the literature around your thesis idea. That is, the review of literature should be organized in such a way as to draw existing knowledge into your analytic/theoretical framework.

This literature review may consider various alternatives, but it should end with the chosen approach(es) or framework and some tentative hypotheses. The SSHRC guides say, "Describe the theoretical approach or framework."

4. Research plans and methods

SSHRC says: "Describe the proposed research strategy/key activities, including methodological approaches and procedures for data collection and analysis, that will be used to achieve the stated objectives." Some of the following may be relevant: operational definitions of major variables; when secondary data are used (where data are obtained, some evaluative comments on the data); type of study (exploratory, descriptive, experimental, analytical); type of design (time trend, cross-sectional, longitudinal); sampling procedure (population sampled, representativeness); method of securing data (participant observer, field observation, laboratory, interview, questionnaire, published documents); reliability, validity; techniques of analysis (types of tabulations and

statistics, why).

A note regarding ethics approval—Students planning to conduct research involving human participants (e.g., survey, participant observation, interviews) need to obtain ethics approval from the University's Non-Medical Research Ethics Board. This is not a simple process and, since from start to finish the Ethics process could take up to 3 months, the student and supervisor need to plan accordingly.

Website: <http://www.uwo.ca/research/services/ethics/index.html>

5. Schedule of work to be done

Chapter outline and expected results and contributions.

6. Supervisory Committee

The Thesis Supervisory Committee consists of Supervisor or Supervisors and at least one additional member of the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS) who have membership in the student's graduate program. The expectation in our department is that the supervisory committee member will serve as a “reader,” providing advice and criticism beginning at the proposal stage and throughout the writing process, and that the supervisory committee member will read the thesis in its entirety before preliminary submission of the thesis. Where deemed necessary, it is possible to name more than one supervisory committee member.

One supervisory committee member may subsequently serve as a thesis Program Examiner. Keep in mind that examiners must be seen to be able to examine the student and the thesis at arm's-length, free of substantial conflict of interest. See section 8.5.21 of the SGPS Thesis Regulations for further details -

http://grad.uwo.ca/current_students/regulations/8.html#8326