

Thesis Proposal Guidelines for PhD Students

Overview

The purpose of the PhD proposal is to focus and define the student's research plans. The proposal should provide a clear, concise description of the proposed thesis research activities. The proposal should demonstrate evidence of plans to make an original contribution to knowledge (in the student's field) and communicate a research plan that is feasible and worthwhile. Qualities of strong proposals include:

- Linkage of the proposed research to relevant theory and previous research
- Demonstration of mastery of major schools of thought relevant to the field
- Explanation of the theoretical/conceptual basis of the proposed study
- Description of the methodological approach(es), in detail
- Articulation of ethical considerations.

PhD students are normally expected to defend their thesis proposal by the end of the second year of their program. Students **must** successfully defend their thesis proposal no later than the end of the 3rd year. If the student does not successfully defend the thesis proposal by the end of the 3rd year (including a second attempt, if required) the student will no longer be considered in '*good standing*' and funding package installments will normally be withheld and the Faculty of Nursing will normally recommend to SGS that the student's registration in the PhD program be terminated.

Proposal Elements

The format of the proposal will be similar to that of a **modified** tri-council grant application. Thesis proposals are normally approximately 15 pages single-spaced (or 30 pages double-spaced for ease of reading), excluding list of references, timeline/work plan attachment, and other relevant attachments (e.g. data forms, consent forms). Specific formatting requirements and length will be determined in consultation with the supervisor and committee members.

N.B. The 15-page proposal may require expansion in order to provide adequate detail related to theory/methods for the final version of the thesis in the traditional thesis model.

A proposal is likely to contain most of the elements listed below, although the supervisor and/or supervisory committee may require the inclusion or omission of sections based on the scholarly traditions/conventions of the student's particular field of study. Students must check with their supervisor and supervisory committee about the required elements and headings you should use in your proposal. Normally, the thesis proposal includes the following elements:

- **Problem and Rationale:** A clear description of the study problem including justification for the study, relevance and importance of the study, and an explanation of how addressing the research questions will advance the relevant field.
- **Background Information, Theoretical Framework, and Objectives / Hypotheses:** Background Information and Theoretical Framework typically include a concise and critical review of the theoretical and research literatures. Usually, following the literature, a theoretical model / framework is proposed that ties together study concepts and/or perspectives. A clear purpose statement and study objectives should also be included. Specific research questions should also be articulated. Some proposals may also include research hypotheses.
- **Design and Methods:** The selected study design should be specified to address the research questions. Rationale for the design should be provided, including merits and limitations. Sampling procedures are specified with justification. If appropriate, sample size should also be specified and justified. Data collection methods should be described in detail and justified. Normally conceptual definitions should be clearly described and, if appropriate, operational definitions should be specified as well as methods of measurement and psychometric properties of measures. As appropriate, how data will be managed, coded, entered, and readied for analyses should all be clearly described. If pilot testing is required, procedural details are provided.
- **Data Analysis:** The methods of analysis appropriate for the study design should be clearly described and justified, in detail.
- **Ethical Considerations:** The plan for seeking ethical approval must be clearly articulated. If appropriate, usually, draft consent forms are appended to the proposal.
- **References:** Only sources cited in the proposal text should be included. Referencing style for in text citations and the reference list must be according to an accepted style and used consistently throughout the proposal.
- **Timeline / Work Plan:** Students must attach a detailed one-page (maximum) timeline / work plan identifying plans for timely completion of each phase of the thesis, up to estimated time to complete the final oral exam.