**SICS Research Proposal Guidelines**

A research proposal is akin to an itinerary for a trip. It explains where you are going and how you intend to get there so that faculty can advise you on the best way forward. There is a Catch-22 character to research proposals because students cannot be expected to answer all the questions about their research before it has properly begun. Proposals are necessarily, as their name implies, suggestive rather than definitive. Still, they serve a significant purpose. They ensure that students think through their projects carefully and they give academic supervisors an opportunity to identify and advise on potential problems. The proposal, then, serves a significant function in guarding against misguided research initiatives that could result in months of wasted effort.

A proposal defines the question to be explored, contextualizes it, and explains how it will be studied. It should contain the following elements:

1. Significance Statement

Introduce your topic and explain why it is interesting and important.

2. Research Question

Identify the specific problem that will be the focus of your study. Frame it as a question that you will answer.

3. Literature Review

This section sets the scholarly context for your research. It is where you situate your topic within relevant scholarship to show how your project will advance knowledge in the field. A literature review does not require you to describe in detail every scholarly work relevant to your topic. Nor is it an annotated bibliography. Rather, it should read like a prospectus for what scholarship you plan to engage with and why. It should focus on the main issues and debates in the field and point to where existing scholarship is lacking, thereby setting the stage for how you propose to go beyond what has already been written.

You will not have read carefully all of the relevant literature by this point in your research, but you should have an idea of what the relevant works are and how they relate to your subject. To identify the streams of scholarly literature relevant to your topic, search for relevant books, articles and theses in library catalogues, databases, online, and by asking faculty working in the area for advice.

If it's relevant, discuss theory. Theories are generalizations about how things work that raise significant issues and open avenues of inquiry into subjects. You may construct a theoretical framework for your study or choose instead to draw on theory on an ad hoc basis. Or you may choose not to use theory at all.

4. Methodology

This is the critical "how to" section of your proposal. It specifies:

    a) Research Methods:
        i. How you will go about researching this subject.
        ii. Availability of sources.[1]
        iii. Biases and limitations of sources.
        iv. How you will read each type of source critically to compensate for its biases and limitations.
        v. How your sources relate to one another, i.e. how the strengths and weaknesses of one type of source offset or exacerbate those of others.
        vi. The biases and limitations of the body of evidence generated by the combination of these sources.

    b) Theoretical Approach: The theory you intend to use (if any; flows naturally out of the literature review section), and how it affects your approach to your research. If you are not adopting a particular theoretical framework, it is worth reflecting on assumptions implicit in the way you are approaching your topic. Ask yourself about the conceptual foundations of your work and be explicit about its underlying premises.

    c) Methodological Rationale: Why the approach outlined in a) and b) above is the best available means of generating the evidence required to answer your research question.

    d) Scope: Specify what you are and are not going to investigate. Explain how your project can be completed within the time available to you in the program. Describe how long it will take you to complete each research task and why. Explicate provisos, caveats, etc.

5. Bibliography

List the primary and secondary sources you intend to use for your research. Conventions for formatting references to sources vary across disciplines. Choose a recognized style and apply it consistently and correctly.

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[1] Research Involving Human Subjects: If your project involves work with human subjects (interviews, for instance) it must be reviewed and accepted by the university's ethics committee as part of the proposal approval process. Since this process can take a while it should be started as early as possible. Research involving human subjects should not proceed until you have this approval.