

ANTHROPOLOGY MASTER'S THESIS RESEARCH PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS

February 2025

Preamble: This document provides instructions on how to fill out the Anthropology Master's Thesis Research Proposal Form and advice on how to craft an effective Master's thesis research proposal. By including the elements outlined below, and presenting them thoughtfully, you will demonstrate that you have considered the scope and depth of your research and are prepared to carry it out effectively. You should work closely with your supervisor(s) to craft this document. Questions can be addressed to the Graduate Program Assistant or Graduate Chair.

The first table requires you enter your full name, Western ID number, the name of your supervisor(s), and as well two dates. The first date should be the day that you submit the preliminary version of your Thesis Research Proposal that will be read by all other faculty members in your stream (i.e. the Sociocultural & Linguistic Anthropology stream or the Biological Anthropology & Archaeology stream). This document must be submitted to the Graduate Chair and Graduate Program Assistant who will distribute it to the relevant faculty. Note, your supervisor(s) MUST explicitly express to you that they consider the document ready to proceed to this stage. The second date is the day you submit the final version of the Thesis Research Proposal containing revisions that stemmed from the panel discussion with faculty, as guided by your supervisor(s). Again, your supervisor(s) MUST explicitly express that they consider the document done and ready to be put on file.

Thesis Research Proposal Advice & Recommendations

Title. A good Master's thesis proposal title should be clear, concise, and informative, effectively capturing the essence of your research while sparking interest. A title should give readers a clear idea of the focus and scope of your research and reflect the main themes of your study. Keep it short while providing enough detail to convey your research focus. If applicable, indicate the methodology. While academic terms are often necessary, avoid excessive jargon. Be mindful of abbreviations that could confuse readers. Using active language or posing a research question can help foster reader interest. You are welcome to use this title in other documents (i.e. for Research Ethics Board documents) and for your thesis.

MA Thesis Research Proposal: A good Master's Thesis Research Proposal includes several key components that demonstrate the nature, feasibility, and significance of the proposed research. We encourage students to use subheadings such as Research Objectives/Questions/Aims, Background, Materials/Ethnographic Context, Methods, Theory, and Significance, *as appropriate*. If your research does not require one or more of these subheadings, then you don't need to use it/them. With the exception of the last subheading (*Significance / Contribution to the Field*), you can include the others in whatever order you deem best. Discuss this with your supervisor if you are unsure. Essential elements that contribute to a strong research proposal are:

- 1. Research Objectives, Questions or Aims.** The research problem should be clear, well-defined, and narrow enough to allow for in-depth analysis within the scope of a Master's thesis. It should address an important gap in existing research or provide a new perspective on an established topic.

2. Background/Literature Review: Provide an overview of the topic demonstrating an understanding of some of the existing research and potentially useful theoretical frameworks. No one expects you will have completed all of the literature review that is required for a thesis, but try and include the most important (i.e., foundational, widely-cited, highly-ranked/esteemed, groundbreaking) books, book chapters, and journal articles on the subject in the research proposal. Note, you should not just summarize previous research but also critically evaluate it, noting strengths and weaknesses as appropriate within the word limit. Make it clear where and how your research could fit into existing knowledge and scholarship. This may involve identifying the gap(s) your research will address or new perspective(s) it will bring.

3. Materials or Ethnographic Context. Describe what or who you will be examining. If this is archaeological or bioarchaeological, you may need to specify the sites(s) and/or material(s), and when and where they existed or were produced (the spatiotemporal context or 'who, what, when'). If you are working with a modern population, this is where you should describe its ethnographic context, including relevant political, economic and historical factors.

4. Methods. Explain how you will conduct the research and justify your choice of method(s). Specify the types of data you will collect and how you will collect the data. If you will recruit human participants, describe any connections you have to relevant communities and the status of any permissions you will need to obtain. Finally, outline how you plan to analyse the data you collect and any tools or techniques you will use.

5. Theory. Your research may require you outline the main theories, concepts, and/or frameworks that will guide it. If you have not already presented this information in the Background section, it can be presented in its own section. Briefly introduce the key theory(ies)/framework(s) and explain why/how it is applicable to the research questions/objectives. If relevant, justify why the theory/framework you are using is preferable to others.

6. Significance / Contribution to the Field: Clearly explain how your research will advance understanding in your field and what new insights it will (hopefully) provide. If relevant, explain the real-world implications of your findings, such as how they might influence policy, practice, and/or future research.

It is important the writing in the Thesis Research Proposal is clear. By the time it is being read by faculty in your stream all sentences should be easy to read and there should be no typographical errors. Use academic language. Note, it is fine to write in first-person (i.e. "I will/have..."). The proposal should be well-organized with a logical flow.

The proposal should be a **minimum of 1500 words and a maximum of 2500 words**. Indicate the exact word count of your proposal at the bottom of the text box. You are welcome to use tables and figures within the thesis research proposal. These do NOT count against the word count, and nor do their titles/headings. If you use tables or figures, be sure to number them sequentially in their order of occurrence and refer to them in the text, as this tells the reader when you want them to consult the table or figure. You can do this by writing "Figure/Table x shows/outlines the..." or by inserting parentheses at the end of a sentence that contain reference to the item (i.e. (Fig. x) or (Table x)). All

tables and figures must have a title/heading that explains what is shown. Typically, table titles go at the top of the table while figure titles go at the bottom of the figure.

Timeline

Present a realistic timeline outlining the key stages of your research and when you expect to complete them (e.g., literature review, data collection, analysis, writing). This will help to demonstrate that your proposed research is feasible within the time frame and with the resources you have (e.g., access to data, equipment, participants, and duration of data collection/analyses, etc.). If relevant, outline any resources (e.g., software, equipment, samples, participants) that still need to be secured and how and when you plan to obtain these. You may provide the timeline in written form, via a table, or a figure. There is no word limit to this section.

Ethics

Answer the questions in the text box. If you and your supervisor have determined that you do NOT require approval from a Research Ethics Board for your research, then simply say “No” and you can be done with the section. If you do require ethics approval, indicate which board will be reviewing the application (the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board or the Non-Medical Research Ethics Board), the application ID number, the date of the initial submission, and the date when you receive approval. If you do not have approval yet, this can be added to the document once obtained. In such cases, answer this question with “pending”. There is no word limit to this section.

Note, there is a final OPTIONAL question for anyone, whether or not they are undergoing formal ethics review, to provide information about ethics and ethical considerations relevant to their project that they would like faculty to keep in mind when reading their proposal.

References Cited

Provide bibliographic information for all references cited in the preceding sections. Any in-text referencing style and references/works cited style format is fine as long as you use it consistently, meaning all references should be in the exact same style. There is no word limit to this section.