

Graduate Student Proposal Presentation

1. Background

Starting with the class admitted Spring 2005, the Geography Department requires all MA students to present a proposal of their research for culminating experience to faculty and peers. The philosophy behind this requirement is to provide students with useful feedback in the critical developmental stage of the research experience. No grade is given, just advice and questions to help guide the student through the next step of their MA research. Students will present a 20 minute synopsis of their research ideas to faculty and fellow graduate students focusing particularly on linking the research to a broader theoretical framework and presenting a methodology design to achieve the specifically stated objectives. This will be followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments.

2. When you will present your research proposal

Proposal presentations take place at the end of each semester and should contain the group of students who have recently filed the Proposal for Culminating Experience (either that or the last semester)

3. Proposal preparation

Preparation of proposal presentations should be conducted with the guidance of advisors although some guidance on content structure and presentation tips are provided below.

3.1. Use the following breakdown as a guide to both content and structure of a research proposal, although different studies (topics and methods) tend to employ different variants of this.

1. Introduction and background
 - a. Introduction to the nature of the study
 - b. Theoretical framework and literature review
 - c. Specific research objectives of the proposed study. This may be stated as question(s) or hypothesis(es).
 - d. Rationale for research (why is it important?)
2. Methods and materials
 - a. Description of study area (pertinent to research objectives)
 - b. Detailed description of methods proposed to resolve research objectives
 - i. Sampling design (when, where, frequency etc.)
 - ii. Instruments used
 - iii. Method(s) of analysis
 - iv. Sources for error
3. Projected results
 - a. What kind of information will your methodological design acquire?
 - b. How will you use this information to reach your research objectives?
 - c. How will the proposed research contribute to knowledge in the field of study?

3.2. General Suggestions for a good proposal (from various sources)

- Make no more than three points in any presentation. People cannot process a lot of information. Make your three points and give supporting evidence.
- Tell us what you tell us, tell us, and then tell us what you told us
- Do not read. Remember that if you do not read your presentation you will be able to include less information

- Practice your talk and time yourself
- Use props – overheads, maps, slides. They will move you along. Make sure that your props are readable from a distance. Limit handouts – people will read them and not listen to you.
- Have a note pad with you and note down suggestions and comments (whether or not you think they are relevant). This will give the impression that you care about what people say.
- While defending your point of view, be open to other interpretations, particularly at an early stage of your research. If after you have put up a good defense of you position you still find yourself in an attack situation, try to diffuse it by saying that you would like to discuss the matter further after the talk or by noting the point and moving on to the next question.
- Begin by stating the basic research problem and then your specific research question or objectives.
- Anticipate the so what question by saying in a sentence or two why this research is important – not just that we will learn something but why we want to learn it. Are you engaging in a theoretical debate? Attempting to help with policy evaluation? Contributing a new case that will shed light on a little known process?
- Limit the background information in favor of what you will actually do.
- Tell us exactly what **you** will do and relate it to your questions. How will you answer the question(s) posed? Be careful about where you place emphasis. We do not need a lot of background information – just enough to understand the overall design. If regional context is important – say why in a few words. If your work is methodologically driven – emphasize that.
- Summarize by bringing us back to the research problem. This could also be a place to answer the so what question. See where it fits best.