

## Sociocultural Dissertation Proposal Guidelines

The dissertation proposal is usually written at the beginning of the third year in Phase II after the field statements are completed (although it is certainly possible to start work on the proposal earlier). Students are strongly urged to take ASM 579 Proposal Writing, which previous students have found very useful. After the dissertation proposal is completed and approved by the student's Ph.D. supervisory committee, the student schedules an oral defense of the proposal, which constitutes the oral portion of the doctoral examination necessary for advancement to Ph.D. candidacy.

The student's dissertation topic should be determined in consultation with his/her advisor and Ph.D. committee. The proposal should be about 10 pages (usually single-spaced, excluding bibliography). There is no definitive format for the proposal, although following the guidelines for NSF, NEH (National Endowment of the Humanities), NIH (National Institutes of Health), Wenner-Gren, Social Science Research Council, or Fulbright is a good idea, especially if you plan to submit grant proposals to these agencies.

In general, dissertation (and grant) proposals should contain the following sections:

- 1) A *project summary/overview* that introduces your general research topic, provides background and historical information, explains why your topic is important, and briefly discusses your main research objectives, methods, and contribution. This section should be more than a summary of the next four sections of your proposal.
- 2) *The main objectives, issues, or questions* that your dissertation project will address. Instead of writing a long narrative, it helps to identify three or so main issues/questions that will guide your research and then to elaborate upon each of them. You could also list and discuss sub-issues or sub-questions under the main issues/questions. Make sure you don't include too many issues/questions (keep the proposal focused).
- 3) A *background literature review* of previous research relevant to your dissertation topic. In addition to assessing previous work, this section should identify problems, gaps, and limitations in the past literature and indicate how your topic/perspective will make a significant contribution to the literature. You should not review relevant literature simply to review the literature. Instead, the review must be directly connected to your own dissertation topic and its main issues.
- 4) A discussion of your *research methodology* that can include:
  - A description of the research methodologies you plan to employ (including whether certain methods are more appropriate for specific sites/research problems/populations, etc.)
  - A description of and reasons why you have selected your particular field site(s) (or population(s) you plan to study)
  - Why you have chosen to do multi-site or comparative field work (if that is the case)
  - How you plan to conduct research at these various sites (including access to informants, sample selection, size, and representativeness, the types of data you plan to collect, research timeline, etc.)
  - Possible problems/issues/difficulties you may encounter in the field and how you plan to deal with them
  - Your personal qualifications (past experience, skills, language, ethnic background, etc.) to undertake this research, including relevant past research (although this can be mentioned elsewhere)
  - How you plan to organize and analyze the various types of data you will collect
- 5) *The general significance and impact* of your proposed research. This can include its intellectual significance/contribution to anthropology (as long as you don't repeat what you already said in section 3), its broader social/practical impact, its comparative/wider geographical significance, its relationship to broader social processes (e.g., globalization), or the importance of studying the issue at this time.

Sections 2 and 4 should be the focus of your proposal (really long lit. reviews are not necessary). Grant proposals (and by extension, dissertation proposals) should be written in a manner accessible to a general academic audience. Therefore, it is a good idea to avoid highly technical jargon or narrow in-house theoretical debates or issues that would interest only specialists in your subfield.

Before you conduct fieldwork involving human subjects, you must obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see <http://researchintegrity.asu.edu/irb/>).