**CSS 506 -- Fall 2008**

**Research Proposal Project**

**Purpose:**

To provide each of you the opportunity to:

* Demonstrate your understanding and ability to develop a scientific research project
* Demonstrate your ability to formulate a researchable question and develop a proposal to address it;
* Practice selecting and linking together an appropriate research paradigm, research design or methodology, theory or model, boundary setting parameters (e.g., participant selection, sampling), data capturing techniques (e.g., observation, unobtrusive measures, structured interviews), data analysis procedures, quality of data procedures, and the reporting style for a given set of research questions and corresponding research objectives and/or research hypotheses as appropriate;
* Demonstrate how theory is used in scientific research;
* Explain how previous knowledge and literature is used in justifying, designing, and/or interpreting research;
* Demonstrate your ability to use scientific inquiry and research methods terminology correctly; and
* Demonstrate your understanding of ethical considerations involved in gaining entry or access to pools of subjects.

**Key Definitions and Explanations:**

All methodology and methods-related terminologies used in your proposal should be consistent with those described in the texts used in class, or justified on the basis of other defensible and recognized sources. It is acceptable to use terminologies that I do not commonly use. However, you need to keep in mind that you are developing a proposal for a larger audience which might not include people who are familiar with research terminology, it is crucial to provide citations.

In addition, since your audience may come from different backgrounds. You need to define any technical terms, constructs, or concepts that you may use in your proposal. These definitions may come from an existing theory or previous research or you may give your own definition. However the circumstance you need to state the source and citation (if applicable).

Please use citations throughout your proposal and follow the APA Style Manual.

**Requirements:**

The objective of this assignment is to develop a scientific research proposal. I understand that many of you do not have a thesis research oriented topic but rather an application-based project. However, this is a class about fundamental of research methodology and methods, I have to be able to evaluate your learning outcome through your understanding of research methodologies and your ability to apply them in a specific research problem. Thus, for those who are going to do a project, you would have three possible choices. First choice is to think whether you can look at your project from different angle and ask yourself how you can tackle it as a research problem. The second choice is to develop a component of your project that require primary data collection and develop it into a research proposal. The third choice is to make up a research topic that is not related to your project and start over from the beginning. I am available to help each of you to develop or to narrow down to a researchable problem. I accept appointments during office hours as well as evening and weekend appointments if you need extra help.

Even though you do not have to use any particular outline, your proposal needs to address at least all of the topics listed below. This is regardless of its qualitative or quantitative orientation. In some situations you may need to modify the vocabulary used, but in general all topics can be addressed. If you feel there is a topic that absolutely does not fit your approach come talk with me and negotiate how to deal with the situation.

1. Clear and concise introduction that identifies the research problem, provides some background information about the problem, and establishes a clear picture of what you intend to accomplish through research.
2. Presentation of the overall purpose of your study (see Creswell, p. 90) and the research questions you plan to address. Besides an introduction to the problem or topic you have selected you might include; key definitions, corollary research objectives and/or research hypotheses, and the key concepts/constructs and/or variables you are proposing to describe or measure.
3. Justify why the research you have described is important to conduct and explain how it will add to or refine knowledge and/or theory. In other words, what is its significance? What are the practical and theoretical contributions of your research? How does it further scientific and/or practical inquiry? It also is often useful to discuss the audience for the research.
4. Explain the role of theory in your research. What theories, if any, have been used to study your topic in the past? What are the strengths and limitations of these theories in light of your specific research question? Demonstrate how you are proposing to test theory, apply theory, generate theory, combine theory or use theory in some other fashion (e.g. as an interpretative tool)? Depending upon how you propose to use theory, it may be useful to clearly articulate key constructs and or propositions you are borrowing or are building on. Consider including a graphic theoretical model displaying relationships among constructs as a way to more clearly and concisely present its role in your study. If appropriate, synthesize how the theory has evolved and where your work fits in terms of its continued evolution. Theories in this case are not limited to well-established theories but developing frameworks, models can also be applied if they are most applicable for your research problems.
5. Briefly explain your research paradigm (e.g. issues of ontology, epistemology and knowledge, desirable level of researcher intervention). Justify why you are using them in this particular situation. Don’t forget to mention the approach you’re taking (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods).
6. Be sure to address how you will ensure scientific quality. For quantitative approaches make sure you address items such as internal and external validity as well as other threats to validity. For alternative inquiry paradigms make sure you use their accepted alternative approaches to address scientific quality such as trustworthiness and authenticity. If your work involves testing theories, be sure to describe how your theories are testable.
7. Set your boundaries, determine the sampling approach (quantitative or qualitative strategies) and justify the setting/case/population you will study. Present an explanation of why you selected your unit(s) of analysis and be sure to adequately describe your sampling element, informant, case or other focus (setting, activity, etc.). Be sure to address issues of context, generalizability to a population and/or transferability to another case. Also, in some situations it may be necessary to discuss how you will gain entry.
8. Explain your instrumentation or how you will be measuring (qualitative or quantitative) attributes, justify your levels of measurement, and address relevant issues in moving from abstract levels of conceptualization to measurement levels or the reverse. Are your measurements aimed to develop a model or theory inductively, test theory or to describe some construct, case or situation? When appropriate, address measurement issues like validity and/or confirmability, reliability and/or dependability, as well as other relevant sources of error. When appropriate address the issue of researcher as instrument and insider/outsider issues as well as any ethical issues that might be involved in the generation of data.
9. If you propose to use a measurement instrument such as a questionnaire, a full draft of the instrument is not required, but preferred. An outline of survey content areas would be an acceptable alternative. It would be nice to see examples of key response scales and/or questions, especially if what you are proposing is “a new measurement instrument.” Likewise if you are proposing to use in-depth interviews or focus groups it would be useful to see the kinds or line of questions you are thinking about using to guide your acquisition of data. In all cases questions to be used in your approach to measurement should be linked to specific research questions or hypotheses to allow us to clearly see how you are operationalizing and measuring (includes describing) phenomenon of interest to you and your study. The more detail you can provide the better job we can do evaluating your proposal. Please use literature to justify the logic behind your instrumentation.
10. Select/develop and write up step-by-step procedures that you will utilize to collect/capture/generate your data. Will you be collecting primary or secondary data? How will you get from your raw data to the format you analyze (transcribing, encoding, formatting, etc.)? What will your database look like and will you use some particular computer software to store, manage and/or manipulate your data?
11. Develop and justify your data analysis techniques. These may be qualitative or quantitative. Address what type of statistical tests, content analyses, or counterpart qualitative analyses (coding, category construction, theme identification, etc.) you are likely to use and why. If writing is a part of your analysis process, be sure to explain how. Please use literature to justify your approach. If you are still developing your statistical or contextual analysis skills you should at least explain what you want to do in your analysis and why, as opposed to detailing specific analyses techniques or tests.
12. Develop a research action plan (timeline) that includes time estimates and scheduling of necessary tasks, personnel and financial resource needs. It should include what you need to conduct your research. The level of detail needs to allow the evaluator to assess the likelihood that you can complete the project on time and within budget.
13. Briefly describe the products that will result from your research, what will their format be, and how will you plan to disseminate them. What are the implications of these products in terms of knowledge production (new ideas or constructs, modification of theory, empirical generalizations, etc.)? Foreshadow the impacts you hope to be able to make after doing the study.
14. Ethical issues associated with the research are identified and addressed. For example, the need to include a human subjects form, justification of covert methods, openness of field notes, anonymity, confidentiality, invasion of privacy, participants’ right to be informed, informed consent, etc. Discuss any anticipated ethical issues and the steps you will take to address and minimize them.
15. References cited. Do not forget to use citations throughout your proposal and that a separate literature review section within the proposal is not required. All necessary literature should be integrated into the sections of the proposal that is most appropriate (e.g., a citation on survey research methods should occur in the methods section of your proposal).
16. Have you come up with a cleaver way to address your research topic? Have you pushed the research design/methodology potential to the limit? Have you tried to capitalize on sequentially, concurrently or integratively using qualitative and quantitative approaches of doing research?

**Evaluation:**

*Context*

This exercise is worth 20% of your CSS 506 grade or 100 points. It is *the* opportunity for you to demonstrate the knowledge you have gained throughout this class and in others you are or have taken. Some of the things you are being requested to do for this exercise you have done earlier in class as elements of other exercises/projects and hopefully should be able to build and improve upon those earlier efforts.

*Some Additional Evaluation Insights*

Some of you are ahead or behind others in the process of taking courses (statistics, advanced theory courses, etc.) and developing your research (maybe you came with a funded project) and thus will be able to address some sections in more detail than others. If there is a section that you know is incomplete and needs additional work (such as theories or details of a questionnaire), tell me what kinds of things remain to be addressed. Although this is not as preferred as actually completing the section, it will allow you to at least demonstrate your understanding and I will consider that in my evaluation.

No literature review is required to be presented in the proposal, but literature should be used throughout the proposal. It is hard to imagine a section or sub-section of your proposal that would not include the citing of some literature.

*Format:*

Present one double-spaced, printed copy to me for grading. Please use 1 inch margins and 11 or 12-point font, nothing smaller. Integrate all of your graphics and tables into the text. The double spaced copy will provide me with space to write comments on your proposal. APA style of citation will be strictly enforced. In addition to the paper copy please send me an electronic copy via e-mail (lenale@uidaho.edu). With this copy also send a note saying that it can be placed in the black notebook and duplicated by other students for learning purposes.

*Final Note:*

There is no “best” outline for a proposal but they would be varied according to your research objectives and approach. There are good general outline in Creswell’s book. Sandra Pinel will provide you with general components, procedures, and tips for proposal writing. There are also various examples of former CSS graduate students proposal in room 19A. Those could be a good place to start. Keep in mind that there is no “bible” style in this class, use your creativity and knowledge to develop an outline that work best for your research problem.

I believe the best way to tackle this assignment is to work on it throughout the coming weeks. If you do this I can give you feedback at several points along the way. I also believe that it is a project you should feel free to talk over with your major professor, members of your graduate committee, and fellow graduate students (old and new). Of course, do not hesitate to use the statistical consulting and writing labs on campus. I am happy to work with you along the way and can also refer you to other faculties if you need other type of help. However, you have to make your own decisions. I may suggest couple of alternatives but will try my best not to make the choice for you.

**Deadlines:**

The online deadline that I would enforce is the final proposal deadline. Other due dates only applied if you want to have feedbacks from me. They have been established to help move you along to completion rather than waiting until the last minute to begin formulating your proposal. They also offer me an opportunity to read your work, offer insights, feedbacks and ideas that may be helpful, and provide suggestions for necessary improvements before you final version is due at the end of the semester. However, if you are making good progress with your major professor or by yourself and confident that you will be able to develop a good proposal without my inputs the only important deadline is the final due date. Any proposal submitted after the deadline will be deducted 5 points for each day over due.

The first 1/2 of your proposal document is due to me on **November 21 by 5pm**. This should include your Introduction & Background, Purpose statement and revised research questions, Research Approach, Research objectives and hypotheses as appropriate, Design/Methodology, and Data Collection/Generation Methods. These will be returned to you immediately following Thanksgiving Break. Any feedback you do receive should be used to refine your ideas for the second 1/2 of your document.

The second 1/2 of your proposal document is due on **Friday, December 5**. This should include your Data analysis and processing, Study limitations, Ethical considerations, study timeline or research action plan, Product results and Budget. I will provide you feedback by Monday, December 7. This project is 20% of your grade and by breaking up the document into a succession of due dates, you have the opportunity to improve your work and integrate any ideas or feedback that is provided to you. This process will undoubtedly make writing your final product much easier for you and the final product the best that it can be.

**Multiple Due Dates**

* Friday, November 21: 1st ½ of proposal due (details highlighted in Deadlines section)
* Friday, December 5: 2nd ½ due
* Wednesday, December 17: Final Proposal Document due by 5 pm