

**The Thesis Proposal**  
**Department of Anthropology**  
**Idaho State University**

**9/11/2019**

The purpose of a thesis proposal is to outline your proposed Master's level research project for evaluation by your primary advisor and your thesis committee. The proposal will present your advisor and committee with the relevant information to evaluate the study that you are proposing, identify potential problems, and help you to strengthen you the project before you begin collecting data.

The length and structure of your thesis proposal should be determined in collaboration with your advisor. An average thesis proposal will be 5-10 pages with additional pages for supplementary items, such as a budget, budget justification, and timeline. The recommended contents for the proposal are listed below. Exceptions and additions to this list can be made with the approval of your academic advisor.

**Cover Page/Front Matter:**

- your name
- name of your primary academic advisor
- names/academic positions of your thesis committee members
- working thesis title
- summary (abstract without results – up to 250 words)

**Introduction:**

- summary of each section of the thesis
- statement of the problem/issue that you plan to address in your thesis
- research question(s)
- primary research objectives

**Background:**

- literature review – summary of key references and their relevance to your project
- intellectual merit – potential to advance knowledge within the field and more broadly within academia: why will this study be important within the discipline?
- broader impacts – potential to benefit society and contributions to desired societal outcomes
- project goals / research objectives

**Materials and Methods:**

- research questions – what questions /hypothesis do you plan to address in your thesis?
- materials – What is the source material from which you will collect your data? (e.g., skeletons from 18<sup>th</sup>-century Denmark, undergrad college students from the Anthropology department, high-resolution CT scans)

- samples—are your materials a sample from a larger population, collection, or database? If so, what population do your samples supposedly represent?
- data collection methods & data types: How do you plan to collect your data? What specifically is being collected? (e.g., ordinal scores for non-metric traits of the skull, size (continuous) and shape (nominal) variables from animal bones, X-ray fluorescence profiles from obsidian flakes, words usage from participant interviews)
- analysis methods: How do you plan to analyze your data?
- relationship between methods and questions: How do the methods selected work with the samples and data you have collected to address your research question(s)?

### **Assessment of Potential Problems:**

Essentially no project runs exactly as planned. Common issues include failure to obtain funding, scheduling conflicts with collections or research participants, and the failure of new methods or techniques to produce the intended data.

Your proposal should identify at least two realistic potential problems you may encounter with your thesis. If these occur, how do you plan to modify your proposed project to ensure that you will be finished in time? Take this part of your thesis seriously because students often get stuck when things do not go according to plan. Your advisor and members of your committee will also be able to provide guidance as to possible issues that you may encounter.

### **Additional Information:**

- references
- budget and budget justification
- timeline
- current student CV

The content of the text portion does not necessarily have to be presented in the order of the bulleted list as long as it is contained within the document. Additional headings can, and often should, be used to structure and clarify the text. For the thesis proposal only, hand drawn figures and figures from peer-reviewed publications may be used with proper citations if they are accompanied by a description of how you plan to design the final figures. Figures from published sources may not be used in the final thesis without express permission from the copyright holder.

## **ISU Human Subjects Committee**

If your study involves human subjects, you will likely need to prepare a Human Subjects Research protocol for review and approval by ISU's Human Subject Committee (HSC). The protocol details all the components of your research and demonstrates how you intend to protect your research participants. You need final approval from the HSC *before* collecting your data. When considering whether your study is subject to HSC review, you must consider federal regulations that define **research** and **human subject**. **Research** is defined as “a *systematic investigation*, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to *develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge*.” *Systematic investigation* can include surveys, interviews, focus groups, and analysis of existing data, for example. Contributing to *generalizable knowledge* means that studies are

drawing general conclusions and research findings from the study participants about a larger population. In other words, your research is generalizing findings beyond the individuals in the study. **Human subject** is defined as a “living individual about whom an investigator is conducting research.” This can involve the collection of personal information, biospecimens, communication, and other types of data gathering. There are methods and approaches that are common in anthropological research but are not generalizable and therefore do not require Human Subjects Committee review, such as oral histories and biographical research. When in doubt, consult with your adviser or any member of the Human Subjects Committee.

The HSC protocol is an online form submitted through a system called Cayuse IRB found on the HSC website. Students should consult with their advisers and review the Human Subjects manual when preparing their protocols: <https://www.isu.edu/media/libraries/research/Human-Subjects-Manual-03-2015.pdf>. All investigators must complete CITI Training, which is an online Human Subjects training and found on the HSC website. Your academic adviser will need to approve your protocol before submission.

For more information contact our HSC representative, Dr. Katherine Reedy [reedkath@isu.edu](mailto:reedkath@isu.edu).

## **Thesis Proposal Defense**

The thesis proposal defense is a chance for you to verbally present your proposed plan to your advisor, your committee, and your peers. It is your chance to demonstrate that you have the knowledge and understanding to begin formally working on your proposed project. Although you will have already developed the written version of your thesis proposal, oral presentation of your work is a separate useful and incredibly important step in your professional development.

During this process, remember that all studies can benefit from review and that you are here how to learn how to conduct research. A critique of your proposal is not a judgment of you personally (although it can definitely feel like that!). The defense is to defend your choices, but is also a time to accept constructive feedback from your committee. As a professional you will need to learn to accept recommendations that can strengthen your work while also learning to maintain your voice and own the decisions that you feel are appropriate.

Ideally, the thesis proposal defense will take place in the Fall semester of your second year in graduate school. You should schedule this with your major advisor and your committee members.

The thesis proposal should be a formal presentation of 15-20 minutes and:

- include the sections listed above in this document
- include the presence of your advisor, your second faculty member from the Anthropology Department and your GFR if they are contributing to the development of your thesis
- should be announced via an email to the faculty of the Department of Anthropology 1-2 weeks before the defense
- should be advertised via the student listserve and flyers if you would like to include the public at your defense. Defenses do not need to be public, you decide this with your advisor