

# Writing Your Proposal: Dietrich College Senior Honors Program Thesis Proposal Guidelines

## Topics

While most students choose a topic within their major, you may propose a project that is rooted in another discipline. You should have a firm foothold in this area, however, as faculty supervisors hold very high standards and assume, (regardless of major) that students have a sufficient background (both substantive and methodological) in the field(s) associated with the proposed project.

Your proposal will take one of two forms:

1. Creative humanities (e.g., most commonly creative writing projects) – Type I
2. Traditional humanities or social/behavioral sciences research project – Type II

See below for guidelines for each of these two proposal types.

## Proposal Content

Your proposal, regardless of type, is to be up to three pages in length, single-spaced. If anticipated expenses require a budget, this should be a fourth page. The effectiveness of your proposal will depend on your ability to explain the nature, context and scope of the project. Reviewers will look for an indication that your project will be more than just a learning experience; for example →→ that it will contribute to your field in the form of new knowledge or interpretations; or that it will have an impact in the world beyond its specific discipline.

You are required to use headings to organize your proposal, allowing readers to lift out relevant information quite readily. You are strongly encouraged to work with your faculty project advisor on your proposal and to meet with him or her at least once to review a draft prior to submitting your proposal.

## Budget

Will your project involve expenses? If so, we urge you to develop a project budget to gauge the project's feasibility and delineate the expected costs for materials, supplies or travel pertinent to your proposed thesis project. We also suggest that you investigate funding options that could be available and suitable for your project, including:

- The Small Undergraduate Research Grant ("SURG") program:  
<https://www.cmu.edu/uro/research%20grants/SURG/index.html>
- The Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship ("SURF") program:  
<https://www.cmu.edu/uro/summer%20research%20fellowships/SURF/index.html>
- The Dietrich College Honors Research Fellowship program:  
<https://www.cmu.edu/dietrich/students/undergraduate/programs/dietrich-honors-fellowship/index.html>

## Human Subjects

All research involving the use of human research subjects as participants must be reviewed and approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before the research can be initiated. To initiate a review, complete an application and submit it to the IRB for review. Call the Regulatory Compliance Administration at 412---268---1901 for answers to questions regarding the IRB or IRB review process. See [this site](#) for more details.

## Proposal Guidelines: Type I & Type II

### **Type I Proposals: Arts and Creative Humanities**

You are strongly encouraged to work with your faculty advisor on your proposal; to meet with the Undergraduate Research Office Director, Associate Director, or Assistant Director at least once prior to submitting a SURF proposal to review a draft; and to a Proposal Writing Workshop run by the URO. Please visit the [URO website](#) for workshop dates.

The SURF Art and Humanities Proposal is designed for students who will submit a research-based "making" project. It should place your project in a larger creative context, while providing specific details about your objectives, process and product, as well as the anticipated impact on your development as an artist and/or humanist. A typical problem is to offer too broad a discussion and too much personal background. The directions below are intended to help you organize your proposal and present your information in a way that balances significance and detail and meets the requirements of grant-giving agencies, including the Undergraduate Research Office (URO).

Keep in mind that the committee reading your proposal will include four members, with only one of the readers having some expertise generally in your field. You will need to make your proposal accessible to a broader audience. Your readers will be considering your proposal in light of these key criteria:

1. Well-defined, actionable research question or objective
2. Discussion of expected findings or artistic outcomes
3. Discussion of the significance/contribution of the research to the broader field
4. Comprehensive explanation of or process
5. Discussion of background, supervision, and dissemination of results

[Review the Guidelines for Type I Proposals: Arts and Creative Humanities](#)

### **Type II Proposals: Other than Arts and Creative Humanities**

You are strongly encouraged to work with your faculty advisor on your proposal; to meet with the Undergraduate Research Office Director, Associate Director, or Assistant Director at least once prior to submitting a SURF proposal to review a draft; and to a Proposal Writing Workshop run by the URO. Please visit the [URO website](#) for workshop dates.

Your proposal is your chance to tell us about your proposed research, why it is significant, and how well you are prepared to undertake such a project. All parts of your application must be submitted online. Keep in mind that the committee reading your proposal will include four members, with only one of the readers having some expertise generally in your field. You will need to make your proposal accessible to a broader audience. Your readers will be considering your proposal in light of these key criteria:

1. Well-defined, actionable research question or objective
2. Discussion of hypotheses OR other expected findings/outcomes
3. Discussion of the significance/contribution of the research to the broader field
4. Comprehensive explanation of methodology
5. Discussion of background, supervision, and dissemination of results

[Review the Guidelines for Type II Proposals: Other than Arts and Creative Humanities](#)

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Additional questions? Direct them to:

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