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 may 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 (“S.U.R.G.”) program (http://www.cmu.edu/uro/SURG/index.html)
- The Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (“S.U.R.F.”) program (http://www.cmu.edu/uro/SURF/index.html)
- The Dietrich College Honors Research Fellowship program:
- http://www.cmu.edu/dietrich/undergraduate/dhfp/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 -- http://www.cmu.edu/provost/spon-res/compliance/human-subject-research-protocol
Proposal Guidelines: Type I & Type II

Type I Proposals: Arts and Creative Humanities

A creative humanities proposal 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. Please include the headings in the proposal exactly as they appear below. The proposal should be no longer than three pages.

Part I. Abstract

The Abstract is a brief but specific statement of the project’s objectives, methods, and impact of your work as an artist and/or humanist. The abstract should be written for a general audience to introduce your topic and to offer readers of all educational backgrounds a glimpse of your intended work. Please address what you hope to accomplish, what means and resources you intend to use, and why the project important to you, your field, and to the larger world.

Part II. Project Narrative

The project narrative is a detailed discussion of your proposed project, including the objectives, the methods you plan to use, and how your project relates and contributes to the particular creative field(s).

Here is what you should include in your proposal:

1. A detailed description of the creative work you intend to undertake:
   a. What makes it original?
   b. Why is it important that you undertake this project?
   c. Objective or goal: What do you want to achieve?
   d. Conceptual approach: How are you approaching the project?
   e. Issues: What concern, problem, or need will the work address?
   f. Approach: What medium and genre will you be using and why are they appropriate for this work?
   g. Vision: What is your vision for the final project?

2. A discussion of how the proposed work fits into and advances the field’s current creative context and conversation:
   a. What are the sources of inspiration for this project?
   b. How does it build on or differ from past or current work by others in the field or in related fields?
   c. In what specific ways will this work advance the current creative context and conversation?
   d. Furnish an annotated bibliography that reflects your awareness of the field’s current creative work, as well as work in related fields.

Part III. Process

Describe the process involved with the project.

1. How do you plan to accomplish the project?
2. With what faculty member(s) will you work? How often will you meet? How do you know the faculty member(s)?
3. Provide a detailed timeline, including:
   a. Pre-production research
   b. Production schedule itemizing tasks and allocating time
   c. Post-production, if applicable
Part IV. Biography

Describe your personal and educational background as they bear on this project:

1. What formal and informal training have you had in areas relevant to this project?
2. What other relevant experiences have prepared you for this project?
3. How does your past work inform this project?

Part V. Outcomes

Outline the outcomes of your project:

1. What form will the final product take (e.g., a poetry chapbook; a full-length novel; etc.)?
2. Benefit to the artist and humanist: How will this project/product enhance your interests and skills, directions and opportunities for further work?
3. Exhibition/Presentation (if applicable): In addition to Meeting of the Minds (the annual campus-wide research symposium, at which all Dietrich College senior honors students are required to present), how, where and when do you plan to present your work? If no additional exhibition beyond Meeting of the Minds is planned, how will you disseminate the knowledge gained and artistic content produced from the project?

Part VI. Supporting Materials

You may include supporting materials if these would serve to clarify the proposal. These could include prior art or creative work; links to CD/DVD documentation; sketches of proposed work; preliminary research; archive information, etc.

Type II Proposals: any not in art or creative humanities

The effectiveness of your proposal will depend on your ability to explain the nature, context and scope of the project. Your proposal should include the following information and should include these exact headings:

Part I. Abstract

The Abstract is a brief but specific statement of the project’s objectives, methods, and impact of your work as an artist and/or humanist. The abstract should be written for a general audience to introduce your topic and to offer readers of all educational backgrounds a glimpse of your intended work. Please address what you hope to accomplish, what means and resources you intend to use, and why the project important to you, your field, and to the larger world.

Part II. Research Question and Significance

This is a key section that helps provide important background for your project. You should discuss the broader contextual framework:

• What has been done before in the field?
• (If applicable) What has been done in the particular lab you may be working in to set the stage for this project?
• What is new about what you are proposing?
• How will it advance the field?
• Furnish an annotated bibliography that reflects your knowledge of the field related to your topic, and the significance to the field of your topic.

In terms of the audience you are writing for: You should frame the question that you want to explore in your research for a broader audience and discuss why this is an interesting and important question.

Part III. Project Design and Feasibility

This is an important, larger section and should include much of the substance of your proposed project. It is appropriate to use your discipline-specific language to provide detail about how the project will unfold.

• How will you go about exploring your research question?
• What will be your methods?
• Are these methods in keeping with traditional approaches in this research area or is this new, uncharted territory that requires an experimental methodology?
• What is your expected timetable for carrying out this research? Break down the specifics of what your projects steps are going to look like.

Part IV. Background

This is a shorter section to explain what courses and/or work/research experiences have prepared you to undertake this project. Please include how you know the faculty advisor.

Part V. Feedback and Evaluation

This is a shorter section. Who will provide feedback on and evaluate your project and according to what schedule and what criteria? How often will you meet with your faculty project advisor?

Part VI. Dissemination of Knowledge

How will you share the results of your project? What form will your final report take? You should include the Meeting of the Minds Undergraduate research Symposium (at which all Dietrich College senior honors students are required to make a presentation about their projects) but if there are other venues to share your work -- e.g., a departmental poster session or a discipline-specific conference -- please mention these options here.

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Additional questions? Direct them to:

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