

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

Graduate School

Statement on Thesis/Dissertation Proposals

Revised 8/2000

I. Introduction

A thesis proposal states a problem to be investigated and describes how the research will be performed and reported. Approval signifies that it meets the standards of the University of Rhode Island for the degree desired. Therefore, the preparation and writing of the thesis proposal are of utmost importance. Although the student is expected to seek guidance in the choice of topic and the method of solving the problem involved, responsibility for the proposal lies with the student who will, as far as possible, work independently and demonstrate the ability to plan and outline an acceptable research project. Adherence to the guidelines given below should assure the student that all information necessary for the satisfactory evaluation of the plans for master's or doctoral research will be included in the proposal.

II. Format

Thesis proposals are to be typed double-spaced and submitted with a cover sheet (attached). Sufficient copies of the proposal must be provided to permit distribution to the Graduate School, Institutional Review Board or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee if required (see Sec. III), department, major professor, thesis or doctoral committee, and the student. While no length is stipulated for proposals, it is expected that the student will present the required information as concisely and clearly as possible and that, under ordinary circumstances, proposals will not exceed five or six pages. The ability to describe concisely a research problem and methodology is one of the skills that the thesis process is designed to develop.

III. Submission

Thesis proposals should be submitted before substantial research has been completed. Typically, it should be submitted before or during the first semester in which the student registers for research credits. In all cases, however, in order to be eligible to graduate in a particular semester, the proposal must be submitted by the deadlines specified in the Graduate School's Annual Calendar.

All copies of the thesis proposal must be signed by the members of the student's thesis or doctoral committee, who thereby approve the proposal for forwarding by the student's major professor via the department chairperson and/or program director to the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies, Research and Outreach. The Vice Provost is charged with responsibility for review and approval or rejection of all proposals. Proposals that do not meet the standard of the Graduate School will be returned to the student for revision and resubmission. Approved proposals are returned to the department for distribution, with one copy retained in the student's file at the Graduate School

Research Involving Human Subjects, including the use of questionnaires to collect data, must also be approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) as meeting University and Federal guidelines. In such cases, the box provided on the *Thesis/Dissertation Proposal Approval Sheet* should be checked. An *IRB Policies, Procedure and Forms* packet is available in hard copy at the **Research Office, 70 Lower College Road** on the Compliance Office web site at:

<http://www.uri.edu/research/tro/irbmain.htm>. A condensed version of IRB policies and procedures is found in Appendix D of the *Graduate Student Manual*. The principal investigator and/or department chairperson shall make a preliminary determination of how the research involved will be reviewed (Exempt, Expedited, or Full Board Review.)

After all committee and departmental signatures have been obtained, one (1) copy of the complete thesis or dissertation proposal with the signed approval sheet attached should be submitted to the Director of Compliance at the Research Office along with the appropriate number of copies of the proposal abstract (see IRB packet for details.)

The proposal abstract should contain the following information:

- Completed IRB Proposal Abstract Cover Sheet from IRB packet
- Summary of Research Project including:
 - Subjects to be involved (describe fully, including how they will be recruited)
 - Nature of the subjects' participation;
- A statement concerning the diversity of the subjects or a reason for exemptions (see IRB packet for details);
- A signed Assurance Form from IRB packet
- Informed Consent (include all elements contained in sample Informed Consent Form in IRB packet).

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Copies of any research tool to be utilized.

The IRB meets on the third (3rd) Thursday of each month. Materials must be submitted to the Director of Compliance at the Research Office two (2) weeks in advance of the desired review date.

Following the IRB review the student will receive an *Action Report* stating the status of the research proposal, either “Approval Pending” or “Approved.”

“**Approval Pending**” requires submission of additional information before approval is granted. The additional information is reviewed by the IRB Chairperson and, if satisfactory, an *Approved Action Report* is issued. “**Approved**” indicates that the student may proceed with the research project. Approved projects are assigned a monitoring date on the *Action Report* (see Monitoring section of IRB packet). All investigators will receive a monitoring form in advance of that date. It must be completed and returned to the Research Office ten days before the designated date.

When the student receives the *Action Report* stating that the IRB has approved the research proposal, the **student may pick up the *Thesis/Dissertation Proposal Approval Sheet*, at the Research Office.** It is the student's responsibility to submit the approved *Thesis/Dissertation Proposal Approval Sheet* (one with original signatures and four copies) attached to five (5) copies of the approved research proposal to the Graduate School for the Vice-Provost's signature. The original copy, with the approval sheet signed by the Director of Compliance and the Vice-Provost, will be placed on file at the Graduate School. The other four copies will be returned to student's department for distribution.

Research Involving Vertebrate Animals must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). A letter of explanation and Protocol Review Abstract Form with the required format (hard copy and/or disk) is available at the Research Office, 70 Lower College Road or on the web at: <http://www.uri.edu/research/tro/irbmain.htm>. A condensed version of IACUC policies and procedures is found in Appendix E of the Graduate Student Manual. The student's research proposal must be submitted to the Director of Compliance at the Research Office for the IACUC review. In addition, the Public Health Service and the U. S. Department of Agriculture require an annual report of the status of each continuing project funded by the agency with respect to animal use protocols and the use of live animals in research and teaching. These reports must be submitted to the Director of Compliance for review by the IACUC.

The student's major professor and/or department chairperson is responsible for submitting the necessary materials under these procedures when the principal investigator is a student.

The committee's review process will include:

- Consideration of the animal models to be used (number and kind)

- Rationale for use of animals in the project
- Husbandry and health care of the animals
- Research protocols (especially animal experimental procedures)
- Pain relief during experimentation
- Special animal needs
- Potential biohazards. Prior approval from the Biohazard Committee is required before submission to IACUC.

The project director and the instructor have the responsibility to be knowledgeable about federal, state, local and University regulations governing the use of animals. A copy of these regulations is available at the Research Office Library

The IACUC meets on the fourth (4th) Monday of each month to review all protocols submitted. Materials must be submitted to the Director of Compliance at the Research Office two (2) weeks in advance of the desired review date. All incomplete proposals will be returned to the principal investigator, instructor, or major professor with recommendations regarding compliance with Federal and University policies and procedures. The materials submitted must include:

- One (1) copy of the approved thesis or dissertation proposal
- Twelve (12) copies of the *Protocol Review Abstract Form*

Following IACUC review the student will receive an *Action Report* stating the status of the research proposal, either “Approval Pending” or “Approved.”

“**Approval Pending**” requires submission of additional information before approval is granted. The additional information is reviewed by the Chairperson of IACUC and, if satisfactory, an Approved *Action Report* is issued. “**Approved**” indicates that the student may proceed with the research.

When the student receives the *Action Report* stating that the IRB has approved the research proposal, the **student may pick up the Thesis/Dissertation Proposal Approval Sheet, at the Research Office.** It is the student's responsibility to submit the approved Thesis/Dissertation Proposal Approval Sheet (one with original

signatures and four copies) attached to five (5) copies of the approved research proposal to the Graduate School for the Dean's signature. The original copy, with the approval sheet signed by the Director of Compliance and the Dean, will be placed on file at the Graduate School. The other four copies will be returned to student's department for distribution.

Questions concerning submission of research proposals should be directed to the Research Office (401) 874-4328.

IV. Contents

Thesis Proposals shall contain the following sections, presented in the order shown:

A. Title of the Study

This is the title as the student conceives it at the time the proposal is submitted. It should be no more than 100 characters in length. As the research develops, various rephrasings of the title may prove better suited to the work. In such cases, the most satisfactory one will be used for the thesis, the final formal report of the investigation. Please note that at that time a title abstract of 40 characters or less must be submitted.

B. Statement of the Problem

Limit the statement, if possible, to two or three sentences, and note in precise language exactly what is to be investigated. To amplify the statement, it is usually desirable to list:

- The scope or limitations of the problem;
- Either one or more hypotheses the research seeks to test or the objectives expected will be attained as a result of the study.

Major assumptions that underlie both the study as a whole and the methodology to be followed should be indicated.

C. Justification for and Significance of the Study

This section of the proposal includes:

- A brief statement of the reasons for the selection of the problem;

- The relation of the principal literature to the proposal;
- An explanation of the study's importance to the advancement of knowledge and its significance to the student.

The problem selected should be substantial enough to constitute a good example of a report of a scholarly investigation. Completion of a project or several unrelated projects does not satisfy this requirement. At the Ph.D. level the work should constitute a significant increase in the pool of knowledge.

D. Methodology or Procedures

This section describes the activities necessary to achieve the objectives. Methods should flow naturally from the problems and objectives, should include:

- A research design
- General characteristics of the study population
- Location or setting in which the study will take place, calendar events in carrying out the study
- Sampling design and procedures
- Data collection schedule
- Brief description of instruments and tools for collecting data (validity, reliability, and pre-testing of the data collecting instruments)
- Definition of the most important terms and concepts
- Data processing procedures and procedures of data analysis as appropriate

E. Resources Required

The last part of the thesis proposal is a statement of the resources needed for the successful completion of the study and an indication of their accessibility to the student proposing to use them. Books, letters, manuscripts, raw data, technical reports, laboratory equipment, and existing and proposed measuring devices, as well as other facilities, are all possible aids to and resources for research and should be included as they pertain to the solution of the problem under investigation.

F. Literature Cited in the Proposal

The most persistent difficulty with thesis proposals is lack of evidence that a search of the literature took place in framing the problem to be studied. The absence of evidence that the scholarly literature in the field has been consulted might be due to one or more of the following reasons:

1. That it was omitted because the student was not aware that it was required;
2. That the student was unfamiliar with the library as a resource in developing the research proposal.
3. That, having searched the literature of the field, the student found that the problem was unique, and therefore, could not be documented. If so, it is important to note where the literature stops and the proposed research starts, itself an intriguing scholarly problem.
4. That the thesis problem has been provided "ready-made" as a spin-off from a larger study, so that no literature search appeared to be needed. One might question the wisdom of thus isolating the student from the scholarly literature, however valid and important the research topic.

G. Revised Proposals

If, as the research proceeds, a significant change in subject or methodology becomes necessary, a revised proposal should be submitted. Sometimes an abbreviated format can be used for such changes. The student or major professor should contact the Graduate School for assistance in such cases.