

## **Advancement to Candidacy Proposal Format**

PhD Students should propose a focused research question and describe the research plan. The plan should be explicit - do not assume the reader understands your thoughts without a good written explanation. Please use 11 pt Arial font, double-spaced, and 0.5" margins. The suggested format is as follows below. Alternative formats may be used if approved by the Primary Advisor.

### **Abstract**

1/2 page - Describe the problem being addressed (WHAT), its significance (WHY) and your overall approach to achieve your goals (HOW).

### **Specific Aims**

1 page - Describe your hypothesis and the specific goals and approaches you will take to achieve the goals. This section should delineate (usually as numbered statements) what SPECIFIC goals your proposed study will address. The reader should be able to get a clear sense of what you want to do by reading your "Specific Aims". This section is often described as the most important section in a research proposal. It is also useful here to tell the reader WHY the study is important to do.

### **Background, Significance, Innovation and Preliminary Results**

4 - 6 pages - Provide sufficient background, in a clear, concise manner, so that the reader will not have to go off to the library to read the original papers. Try to envision someone reading the proposal who is not familiar with the subject. Tell the reader what has been accomplished, what has not, and point out what is novel and technically and/or conceptually innovative. In doing so, set up the context for what needs to be accomplished in your particular area of interest. Provide supporting evidence (your own preliminary data, if available) that led to the hypotheses and convincing information that suggests the approach is logical and likely to succeed. The preliminary data figures and figure legends must be integrated into the text. The figure legends can be of smaller font than the text of the proposal (10 pt). A PhD dissertation should add new knowledge to the scientific domain. Make sure you articulate what new knowledge will be contributed by your project.

## Research Plan

10-20 pages - Describe the research plan to achieve each one of the specific aims. Clearly explain the "rationale" behind the activities. Usually this section is written to follow, temporally, the individual Specific Aims. Be sure that the study design and analytic approach proposed will unambiguously address the goals outlined in the Specific Aims. In cases where innovative technologies will be used, describe the plan in sufficient detail so that the reader can evaluate it. Identify potential limitations of your study approach and propose alternate strategies to help overcome these limitations. It is very important to present hypotheses of anticipated results and how they will be interpreted. Include a theoretical or conceptual framework that informs your hypotheses and study design. Include a study timeline showing what study tasks will be accomplished each month or semester. An appropriate rule of thumb is that all the proposed aims should be independent of each other, such that the success of one aim does not rely on the outcome of another.

## References

Cite key references for the background and research plan. Include the entire author list of each citation, full titles of papers, year of publication, journal, volume and inclusive pagination. Original research articles are generally preferred over review papers and textbooks. Use a standard journal style for your field (please note in proposal what style you are using).

If you are proposing to use the article format, then you should also include (in addition to the above):

- Copies of any completed articles (published or not),
- Outline of articles in progress,
- List of proposed journals, and
- Timeline for completion of the work.

In summary, the proposal should be of sufficient length and detail for the Dissertation Committee to be able to assess the plans for the dissertation and comment on its importance to the field and feasibility.

Note: dissertation proposals often necessitate a submission to the Institutional Review Board. Documentation of submission and approval is a recommended inclusion within the proposal.