

SGEES PhD Research Proposal: Submission Process and Preparation Guidelines

Submission Process

To proceed from probationary to full enrolment for a PhD you are required to submit a Research Proposal **between 9 and 12 months after the start of your PhD candidature**. The proposal will succinctly describe the research you expect to carry out in your PhD study and will have a **maximum length of 15 pages**. See the below notes for format:

- 15 pages does not include, references, figures, appendices
- Refers to single spaced text
- Refers to 11 point Times New Roman font.

This is then submitted to the SGEES administration office, who will arrange for its evaluation. Upon receipt, a copy of your proposal will be given to your Graduate Coordinator, and two relevant members of staff will be asked to provide comments on the proposal. Feedback will be given to the Graduate Coordinator who will assemble all recommendations to take back to the School Research Committee for final approval. Candidates will normally receive written feedback on the proposal (including summaries of all comments received) within one month of their submission.

Possible outcomes of this submission and assessment process include:

- 1) promotion of the candidate from probationary to full enrolment in a PhD;
- 2) continued probationary enrolment of the candidate not to exceed a period of three months, with the proposal to be revised and resubmitted for re-evaluation;
- 3) a change in the candidate's enrolment from a PhD to an MSc degree programme; or
- 4) termination of the candidate's enrolment at the University.

If, under outcome 2, only minor changes are required they can be signed off by the supervisor.

The candidate is required to deliver a 30 minute seminar **prior to submission of their proposal** in a designated seminar to the school. Several PhD candidates will normally present at the seminar.

Proposal Preparation Guidelines

The following guidelines should be used to prepare your proposal:

Developing your proposal

The process includes:

- choosing and refining a topic
- formulating research objectives or questions and ideas for analysis
- outlining the key literature in the topic area
- providing a justification for the topic and its original contribution to disciplinary knowledge
- deciding on a theoretical framework, methods and design
- proposing an approach to data interpretation and/or analysis
- understanding the ethical consideration of the proposed research and applying for Human Ethics Committee approval (where appropriate)
- proposing a thesis format e.g. how many chapters and suggested chapter headings

- developing a timeline for completion of the Thesis
- developing a budget and list of resources you will need
- developing a bibliography

The candidate should seek the advice of the supervisors throughout the process.

Your proposal does not permanently set what you will do. It is a starting point and throughout your research you are likely to adjust and change your position. You will be able to trace the development of your ideas and measure the progress you have made by referring back to your proposal.

Required format of your research proposal

The proposal is a formal piece of writing and should be written in English, similar to the language of relevant research papers in your field. All statements that are not your own ideas must be referenced within the body of your proposal, and a full reference list must appear at the end of your proposal.

Title page

This includes your name, your student ID number, your student email, programme and supervisor/s, title: Proposal for Thesis, and thesis title.

Table of Contents

Abstract

Your abstract should summarise your proposal in one or two paragraphs. It will be informative enough that a busy Head of School could read it and understand what you are doing and why you are doing it. You should begin by identifying the original contribution or knowledge gap that you seek to address through your particular research questions or hypotheses. You should then discuss the research approach and methods you will use, before ending with a statement of your anticipated findings /results and their disciplinary and wider significance.

Context and Rationale for Proposed Research

This section should provide a review of the relevant literature that sets your research in context. It will include references, which will be listed at the end of your proposal. Explain why you chose your topic - what prompted your interest; how your proposed work links with previous research; ways your thesis is different or unique. Note: The proposal is a formal piece of writing. “interest” does not mean your personal interest, e.g., whether you got excited about earthquakes when you felt a big one. It means academic interest—what questions will your work address that have not previously been answered and why should other researchers care about your project?

Research Questions

Write one or two overview sentences followed by several specific questions (bullet points). Your research questions should lead naturally from the ‘background and previous work’ section and your methodology (below) should address each question in turn. These questions may be in the form of hypotheses to be tested, objectives to be realised or questions to be answered depending on the research approach you are adopting.

Theoretical framework and Method

In this section identify the theoretical framework/orientation that underpins your research and give a rationale for your approach. This should ideally connect back to your literature review in

the opening section. Demonstrate how the literature and theoretical orientation inform your chosen methodology (quantitative, qualitative, mixed method, participatory, interpretive) and how this is appropriate for answering the research questions in your previous section.

By reading widely you will be familiar with methodologies followed by previous researchers and will have explored possible research methods. You will be aware of problems others have encountered and be able to design your research and adapt methods for your research. Outline the methods you will use and problems you anticipate. These methods should include methods for analysing secondary data (data sets, literature, aerial photos etc), generating and analysing empirical data (from field experiments, interviews or surveys etc); and or analysis and interpretation of textual or performance-based information (such as photographs, maps, performances). It is important to include not only a discussion of methods that will generate or collect information, but methods that will help you analyse it.

If your research involves people, you should also include a short section on any ethical considerations that you anticipate. Also include submission of an application to the Human Ethics Committee for approval to carry out your research in your timeline later in the proposal.

Preliminary Findings or Results:

Your proposal needs to be submitted at a minimum of nine months after the start of your candidature so it is expected that you will have made some progress towards your research objectives during this time. In your proposal, describe your preliminary findings or results to date and explain why they are important, including how they may guide your continuing work (including a diagram may be useful).

Thesis Structure or Outline:

Outline the proposed structure or format of your thesis. Suggest how many chapters you will have, chapter headings and the order of presentation. A good way to do this is to include a proposed table of contents.

Timeline

Include a specific timeline for the completion of all the tasks that contribute to the intended submission of your thesis, including what you have already done. This will guide you and keep you on track. For example estimate the time needed for tasks and assign tasks for each 3-month period (use real dates). Use of a Gant Chart may be helpful for this purpose.⁴

Budget and Resources

You will have submitted a budget as part of the enrolment process. Revisit this budget and distinguish between funding that has already been sourced and further funding that might be required. Discuss where you might find additional funding (if required), and discuss the implications of not receiving more funding for the resources you require.

References

You will provide the full bibliographic information for each source used or cited in your proposal. References must be listed in alphabetical order by author. For periodicals:

- (1) all author details, (2) Date, (3) Title of article (4) Title of periodical (5) volume number and issue (6) page numbers.¹
- Author, A. A. (2008). Title of article. *Title of Periodical*, Vol number(issue), page number.

For books, each reference should include four elements:

- Author/Editor, (2) Date, (3) Title, and (4) Publication Information.
- Author, A. A. (2008). *Title of work*. Location (City): Publisher.