**Department of Global and Sociocultural Studies**

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ISS 6306:  Writing Research Proposals

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**About the Seminar**

This seminar is a practicum in research proposal writing. The assignments will therefore emphasize writing rather than reading. However, each student will *continue reading extensively on their own research area and topic* under the guidance of their dissertation chairs and committee members. It is assumed that all doctoral students are entering the seminar with a dissertation research idea and a familiarity with the scholarly literature related to it. Our meetings will proceed as proposal writing workshops, driven by a peer-review process. That is, we will participate equally in critiquing and evaluating each other’s writing. Everyone should come prepared to write, revise multiple times, and help each other in the revision process by providing constructive feedback.

Assignments will include a modicum of required technical reading. We will use a few of the many excellent how-to guides on grant proposal and academic writing. The gold standard for social science research funding in all three of our department’s disciplines is the National Science Foundation. Therefore, the NSF’s Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement (DDRI) grant program will serve as our *model* for writing our research proposals. For your reference, the guidelines of NSF proposal preparation can be found [here Links to an external site.](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg)(as well as the discipline-specific links listed below). Once you have your research proposal drafted in the “long form” of the DDRI it can later be readily modified and adapted to other purposes, including the five-page short form you are required to submit to UGS for your dissertation proposal defense.

**Seminar Objectives**

You will become familiar with the basic conventions of research proposals in the social sciences. You will have a complete draft of a research proposal for your dissertation that can provide the foundation for both the pursuit of external funding and the dissertation proposal defense that is the GSS department’s gateway to doctoral candidacy. Completion of the seminar should be a significant step in your development as an independent scholar and social scientist. You will have the opportunity to deliver an oral presentation of your proposal and receive constructive feedback. Finally, you will become familiar with the various funding sources in your fields and their differing application requirements.

**It’s All About You**

This seminar is designed to develop your particular research project. Independent, original research is the basis of the doctoral degree in social science. Your dissertation research will define you professionally, regardless of whether your post-doctoral career trajectory is toward academia or another profession. At this point in your doctoral program you should have clear ideas of your research interests, as developed with your dissertation committee chair and members. Indeed, you should ***consult regularly with your dissertation advisor***as you develop your proposal over the course of this seminar. It is assumed that you will *continue to read deeply in your research area independently* of our classroom activities. The process of developing cutting-edge doctoral dissertation research is founded on your mastery of the current state of knowledge in your specialized area of investigation.

One of the most up-to-date sources for current knowledge is not found in published articles and books, which are the final product of a years-long process. Rather, it is the most recently funded proposals and the most recently completed doctoral dissertations that will provide an immediate snapshot of the current status and future direction of knowledge. Realize that the people reviewing your proposals for funding are the same people who have supervised these dissertations and evaluated the latest funded proposals. Similarly, your dissertation chair and committee will be familiar with the latest research in your fields. There is no shortcut to demonstrating to them that you have mastered the literature on your research topic.

There are two key sources for these. One is the Dissertation Abstracts, found on the FIU library website under Research Tools, [A-Z Databases Links to an external site.](https://library.fiu.edu/az.php?a=d&p=1). The other is NSF’s abstracts of recently funded DDRI proposals. These can be found under “browse projects funded by this program” at the NSF websites for two of our three disciplines: [Cultural Anthropology Links to an external site.](https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/cultural-anthropology-program-doctoral)and [Geography Links to an external site.](https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/human-environment-geographical-sciences-program). Sociology is no longer soliciting DDRI proposals. You should also use the NSF web links to familiarize yourselves with the procedures, protocols, and deadlines of your target discipline. It would not hurt to have a look at both of the above links and [other DDRI programs Links to an external site.](https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities?f%5B0%5D=student_educator_eligibility%3Agrad) given the fluidity and permeability of disciplinary boundaries. I recommend reviewing the most recent 3 years of Dissertation Abstracts and NSF funded DDRI proposals, which can help you hone your research problem.

**It’s All About Writing**

Writing about your research ideas will be continuous and ongoing throughout the semester. Doctoral students are expected to have above average, if not outstanding, verbal skills. The goal of the critical peer reviews as well as my evaluation and comments are not meant to fix spelling, grammar, and syntax. I will let you know when writing is not up to standard, but I will not rewrite for you. If your writing is not up to standard, it is yourresponsibility to fix it. Get tutoring help, join a writing workshop, hire an editor, or do all three.

**Seminar Conduct**

There will be three types of materials for reading: 1) proposal-writing guides in various formats and media; 2) examples of successful (i.e., funded) social science dissertation proposals, mostly DDRIs; and 3) the written products of seminar participants. We will alternate seminar meetings between reading about how to write proposal components and writing our proposal components. In other words, there will be reading weeks and writing weeks. Both types of weeks will require participants’ critical, constructive contributions to discussion. At the end of the seminar, we will peer review the final, complete research proposals and the associated oral presentations.

During reading weeks, we will read and discuss the writing guides and the proposal examples. All participants are required to read each proposal example and come prepared to analyze and critically discuss the particular component for that week (e.g., methods, theoretical framework). In addition, I will assign two participants to the role of lead discussant. During writing weeks, participants will produce the assigned proposal component and come prepared to discuss and critically evaluate their peers’ written products. All participants will have their written work peer reviewed during the seminar sessions in writing weeks. I will assign two participants to the role of lead discussant for each individual component submission. It is expected that each component will be continuously revised in response to reviews as the semester progresses.

**Seminar Requirements**

This is a graduate writing seminar, which means: 1) that the writing requirements are extensive and often challenging; and 2) that learning will be a collective process as we share our individual insights and constructively critique each other’s writing. In sum, we will write and rewrite a lot and learn from each other through written and oral exchanges. Here is how the course grade is portioned out.

Participation                                           25%

Periodic writing assignments                30%

Final proposal                                         35%

Oral presentation                                   10%

The details of each requirement follow.

**Participation**

Participation constitutes a significant part of the seminar grade. We will be operating as a workshop, with everyone involved in critiquing each other’s work in a collective effort to improve each proposal. Everyone is required to complete the reading assignments prior to the meetings and to participate in the discussions. I will also assign individuals to take the lead in discussions each week. One excused absence is allowed. More than one absence will negatively affect the participation score.

Peer reviews of the proposal components are included as part of the participation portion of the seminar grade. For each component, participants will provide written and oral critiques of each other's writing. Written critiques will generally be no more than a brief paragraph or two and must be uploaded to the Canvas website **no later than 11:59 p.m. the day before the seminar meeting**. The critiques should give attention to form and style as necessary but focus primarily on substantive issues. Oral or written peer comments on the results of the exercises are also invited, but not required. The Golden Rule should govern the critiques. That is, provide your peers with the kind of feedback you would find helpful to your own work. Neither empty praise nor harsh, dismissive commentary are helpful. I will also provide written comments to each of you individually.

**Periodic Writing Assignments**

There are two types of writing tasks. One will be the “Try This Now” exercises in the textbook by Mullaney and Rea, which will not be scored but are included as part of the participation grade. The second will be the various proposal components, which are scored as periodic writing assignments. Participants must upload these two assignments through the seminar’s Canvas site **no later than 11:59 pm on the Friday before the meeting**in which they will be discussed. After receiving critical feedback, all participants will redraft the proposal component in preparation to moving on to the next. Thus in the second writing week you will submit the revised component one and the first draft of component two. In the third writing week, revised components one and two and the first draft of three, and so on will be combined until we have complete proposal drafts.

**Final Proposal**

This will be a complete proposal written in (modified) NSF format as detailed in the guidelines prepared for the seminar. We will adhere to NSF’s main guidelines, including page limits, in evaluating the proposals. The final proposal must be uploaded to the Canvas website **by 5:00 p.m. April 22.**

**Oral Presentation**

Most professional career paths—but especially academia—demand that one be able to communicate and defend one’s ideas and research orally to an audience of peers. One’s oral presentation of the dissertation proposal is a milestone event in one’s professionalization. During the last two weeks of the seminar all participants will deliver 10-15 minute oral presentations of their research proposals and answer questions about them.

**Policy on Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is theft, cheating, and pointless since our goals are to learn and make original contributions to the advancement of social science. The disciplinary action that will be taken in the case of plagiarism is explained in the section on “Academic Misconduct” in the FIU *Student Handbook*. If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, check out the websites: “[How to Recognize Plagiarism Links to an external site.](https://plagiarism.iu.edu/)” (Indiana University) “[Avoiding Plagiarism Links to an external site.](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding_plagiarism/index.html)” (Purdue University).

**Required Books and Other Readings**

1. Proposal examples and various essays, articles, pamphlets, etc. (all available under "Files" in the Canvas portal for this course).
2. Mullaney, T and Rea, C. 2022. *Where Research Begins: Choosing a Research Project that Matters to You (and the World)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
3. Schimel, Joshua. 2012. *Writing Science: How to Write Papers that Get Cited and Proposal that Get Funded*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
4. Punch, Keith F. 2016. *Developing Effective Research Proposals*(3rdedition). Sage.

NOTE: PLEASE DO NOT USE EARLIER EDITIONS OF PUNCH. ALSO, IF YOU CHOOSE TO USE A DIGITAL COPY, IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE SURE THE PAGE NUMBERS MATCH THE PRINTED VERSION WE’RE USING.

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1:  January 10**

Discussion Topics: Orientation, introductions, and defining your problem

Readings:

* Mullaney and Rea: Introduction and Chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-66)

**Week 2: January 17**

Discussion Topics: Proposal writing overview: style, content, and audience

Readings:

* Punch: Chapters 1 and 2
* Schimel: 1-25; 145-157
* *Overview Readings*folder contents in Canvas, including “Watts, The holy grail,” “Orwell on writing,” “SSRC Art writing Proposals,” “Style,” “Penn State Writing Proposals.”
* NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide: Part I – Grant Proposal Guide

Written Product:

* Exercise: “Try This Now: Write Here, Right Now” in Mullaney and Rea, pp. 14-15.

**Week 3: January 24**

Discussion Topic: Research Problem Statement

Readings:

* Mullaney and Rea: Chapter 4
* Schimel: 26-66
* Appropriate sections in the proposal examples.

**Week 4: January 31**

Written Products:

* Exercise: “Try This Now: Before and After” in Mullaney and Rea, pp. 133-138.
* Proposal Component: Problem Statement

**Week 5:  February 7**

Discussion Topic: Research Questions (and Hypotheses)

Readings:

* Punch: Chapter 4
* Appropriate sections in the proposal examples.
* *Nuts and Bolts*folder in Canvas, “Question”
* Review Mullaney and Rae: Chapters 1 and 2.

**Week 6: February 14**

Written Products:

* Exercises:
  + “Try This Now: Go Small or Go Home” in Mullaney and Rea, pp. 36-40.
  + “Try This Now: Identify the Problem That Connects Your Questions” in Mullaney and Rea, pp. 64-65.
* Proposal Component: Research Questions

**Week 7: February 21**

Discussion Topic: Theoretical framework

Readings:

* Mullaney and Rae: Chapter 5
* Punch: Chapter 5
* Appropriate sections in the proposal examples.
* *Nuts and Bolts*folder in Canvas, “Theory” and “Concepts and Terms”

**Week 8: February 28**

SPRING BREAK

**Week 9: March 7**

Written Products:

* Exercise: “Try This Now: Start Your Own ‘What’s Your Problem?’ Bookstore” in Mullaney and Rea, pp. 159-164.
* Proposal Component: Theoretical framework

**Week 10: March 14**

Discussion Topic: Background/context/location/history

Readings:

* *Nuts and Bolts*folder in Canvas, “Background and history”
* Appropriate sections in the proposal examples.

**Week 11:  March 21**

Written Product:

* Proposal Component: Background/context/location/history

**Week 12: March 28**

Discussion Topic: Design and Methods

Readings:

* Mullaney and Rea: Chapter 3
* Punch: Chapter 6
* Appropriate sections in the proposal examples.
* *Nuts and Bolts*folder in Canvas, “Design” and “Timeline”

**Week 13: April 4**

Written Products:

* Exercise: “Try This Now: Envision Your Primary Resources” in Mullaney and Rea, pp. 78-82.
* Proposal Component: Design and Methods

**Week 14: April 11**

Discussion Topics: Budgets and Putting it all Together

Readings:

* Mullaney and Rea: Chapter 6
* Punch: Chapters 7 and 8, Schimel: 158-179.
* Appropriate sections in the proposal examples.
* *Nuts and Bolts*folder in Canvas, “Budgeting”
* NSF proposal guidelines

Oral Presentations, Part 1

**Week 15: April 18**

Written Product:

* Proposal Component: Budget Justification

Oral Presentations, Part 2

**Finals Week: April 25**

Oral Presentations, Part 3 (if needed)