

**Department of Sociology
Faculty of the Humanities**

Masters / Doctorate degree

Research proposal

What is a research proposal?

A research proposal reports the wishes of the people / an organization who submits it and describes how they intend to accomplish these wishes. The project proposal is a coherent statement of project objectives, activities, resources and outputs. It is a detailed and logical document, and it is the basis for negotiations, contracts and actual execution. Finally, it is the basis for monitoring and evaluation.

A research proposal should follow the inherent logic of a project. Each one begins with a situation that one wants to change. The current situation should be described, pointing out the problems. At the same time, the desired situation at the end of the research period should be given: these are the research objectives. The next step is to select activities through which the given situation will change into the desired situation, including the identification of necessary human, material, and financial resources.

The different outputs should be described in relation to the objectives. Finally, it is of the outmost importance to identify possible constraints, to consider the sustainability of research activities and results, and to give a clear picture of the way in which the research will be managed.

STEP BY STEP

If you wish to follow the research programme of either the Master's or Doctoral degrees, you should take the following steps:

STEP 1:

Spend time deciding about your topic that you wish to research. You may have already had exposure to the area that you would like to investigate, build on previous research you may have done etc. You may also perhaps not know what you hope to research. Once you have a good indication of what area of research you would like to involve yourself in, you can begin the process.

STEP 2:

Apply in writing on the application form provided at the Department (and on the departmental website) to the Chair of the Research Committee at the Department of Sociology:

Prof A Pelser

Department of Sociology
P.O. Box 339 (41)
University of the Free State
Bloemfontein 9300
Tel: (051) 401-2563
Fax: (051) 401-3518
Email: pelserraj@ufs.ac.za

indicating which potential research area you are interested in. (Please explain your proposed research in a paragraph or two.) Your application will include information about your academic record and your CV. Once you have been notified by the Chair of the Research Committee that you can commence your application procedure for the degree, you can write up and submit your draft proposal.

STEP 3:

Once you have submitted your draft proposal you will be informed of the date and time of your draft proposal evaluation and will be required to attend this evaluation in person in order to discuss and hear comments/suggestions that need consideration.

Should your first attempt draft proposal not meet the requirements of the Department, you will be allowed to submit a second draft proposal. Only **two** draft proposals per candidate will be considered. Should your **second** draft proposal be rejected, you will be advised not to continue with your application.

If your draft proposal is approved by the Research Committee you may then proceed with the formal application procedure.

STEP 4:

Now you can start to write your formal research proposal.

STEP 5:

Your research proposal is the exercise by which your admission to the degree would be determined. In this respect, you need to see the submission of your research proposal as being the selection procedure required for admission to this course. Should your research proposal not be accepted by the Departmental Research Committee, you will not be allowed to register for the Master's or Doctoral degree.

You will only be allowed to register for the Master's or Doctoral degree research programme once your research proposal has been approved by the Departmental Research Committee and you have a letter of acceptance to the programme from the Chair of the Committee.

STEP 6:

Once the Departmental Research Committee approves your research proposal, you can either approach a member of staff to be your supervisor/promoter or you could ask to be assigned to someone.

The Committee will not take responsibility for students registering for the programme if they have not been through this process and do not have written confirmation of their acceptance into the programme by the Chair of the Committee.

ASSIGNING A SUPERVISOR / PROMOTER

Students are assigned to supervisors or promoters based on a combination of the following factors:

- The availability and competence of an expert member of staff working in a specific research focus area within the department. The preference for a specific staff member as supervisor / promoter may also be expressed by the student, and is considered against factors such as the supervisor's / promoter's expertise, field of research specialization, and existing work-load.
- Master's and Doctoral students may also request an assistant or co-supervisor / co-promoter to be appointed. The co-supervisor/ co-promoter is often involved in the guidance with regards to specific aspects of your study. Even if a co-supervisor / promoter are appointed, your main supervisor / promoter remains the person responsible for you.
Please note that the final decision taken with regards to the assignment of the supervisor or promoter is made by the Head of the Department in conjunction with the Departmental Research Committee.

FEEDBACK AND PROGRESS

Students are entitled to regular and comprehensive feedback from their supervisors / promoters.

This feedback is usually given in a pre-arranged and mutually scheduled research supervision feedback-session, and should involve both verbal feedback as well as written feedback on essential and specific theoretical (conceptual) and methodological (operational) issues in need of change, reformulation and refinement. The maximum period of time that is allowed for supervisors / promoters to provide feedback once they have received written work is **two weeks** for every new completed chapter or for every fully completed publishable article. Supervisors and promoters have the prerogative to realistically extend on this "feedback period" if the student agrees therewith in writing. Supervisors and promoters who are on leave need to negotiate and contractually schedule with their students a mutually agreed upon and fair "feedback period" and feedback procedure that will be followed by both parties involved during the period of leave.

MEETING AND CONTACT SESSIONS

It would be important to meet with your supervisor/promoter "regularly" (as agreed on by both of you) so as to maintain continuity of process and to keep you on schedule.

This applies to both local students and students from out of town. The idea then is to see your promoter as often as the two of you need to in order to achieve the goal of handing in a good quality product in the proposed time frame.

Time frames and deadlines should be put together by you and your supervisor/promoter as soon as possible. However, such a schedule has no meaning unless it is kept. It should also be determined beforehand by you and your supervisor/promoter what precisely will be done during such contact sessions

Please note that attached to this information brochure / manual there are two contracts that need to be finalized and undersigned by the student and the supervisor / promoter (See “*Supervision contract*” and a “*Plagiarism contract*” that needs to be undersigned by the student).

IMPORTANT: A paper trail of all decisions should be kept at all times.

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS SHORTCOMINGS AND PROBLEMS WITH PROGRESS:

ENHANCING THROUGHPUT RATES

Students whom experience problems with progress related to shortcomings in the relationship between the supervisor/ promoter and themselves, are encouraged to proactively discuss their concerns with their supervisor / promoter. In the case thereof that no reasonable resolution can be attained, the student is invited to discuss the matter further with the Head of Department.

In the case of students not making progress due to skills-related deficiencies such as shortcomings in their formulation and language use, they are encouraged to make an appointment with a professional at URAS/ ERAS to assist them with this matter.

APPENDICES

A. RESEARCH SUPERVISION CONTRACT

**Contract between (name of supervisor/ promoter) and
..... (student).**

The student undertakes to:

1. Compile and submit to the Departmental Research Committee a research proposal.
2. Schedule and attend regular research supervision sessions with the supervisor / promoter on at least a monthly basis. (These appointments need to be scheduled in a mutually agreed upon fashion between supervisor / promoter and student. In the case of the student living outside of Bloemfontein, regular e-mail or telephonic contact with the supervisor / promoter needs to be maintained).
3. Adhere to the procedure that all work that is submitted to the supervisor / promoter will be of an acceptable standard of English or Afrikaans. It will be language edited and technically styled in an acceptable manner.
4. Take serious cognizance of the consequences of plagiarism and refrain thereof.
5. Submit work, chapter by chapter or article by article, and accompany this submission with a relevant reference list. Where there is a co-supervisor / co-promoter, two copies need to be submitted to the main supervisor / main promoter.
6. Establish and adhere to the dates for the submission of the final manuscript(s). As the study nears its completion the supervisor / promoter needs to be provided with a final draft concept document at

- least 2 months prior to the final submission date provided by the Registrar of student academia.
7. Provide a declaration that the work or research is the original work of the student.
 8. Provide a declaration that the work or manuscript has been language edited by a professional person in the field of editing.

The supervisor / promoter undertakes to:

1. Establish and maintain a working relationship with the student in which the supervisor / promoter plays the role of manager, tutor and mentor, and the candidate or student takes the responsibility for carrying out the research task .
2. Provide proper feedback in respect of written sections of the work submitted within a mutually agreed upon time.
3. Inform the candidate about the procedures that may affect the course of the research project.
4. Where appropriate, accord to the candidate an equal say in all decisions in respect of the research report.
5. In the case of a dispute submit a report to the Head of Department on the nature and causes of the dispute.

Signature of student:

Date:

Signature of supervisor / promoter:

Date:

B. PLAGIARISM CONTRACT

I (full names and surname of student) hereby acknowledge that I am aware of the Department of Sociology interim description and guidelines in respect of plagiarism. I understand what plagiarism involves, and I herewith declare that all written / documented work and material that I submit to my research supervisor / promoter, the Departmental Research Committee, and eventually to the external examiner, is my own work and that where applicable and required, reference has been made to other authors, and sources of ideas. I accept that if I am found guilty of plagiarism I shall avail myself for any disciplinary hearing and steps to be undertaken by the Department of Sociology. I also hereby understand that I may not hold my supervisor / promoter or the Department of Sociology liable in any manner of way if I have been found guilty of this misconduct.

Signature:

Date: