

## **Department of Anthropology**

### **Master of Arts Thesis Proposal Guidelines**

A thesis proposal indicates that the student is ready to work at a professional level. This level of professionalism should be reflected in the scope and breadth of the thesis proposal. Moreover, the proposal is the kind of document that most anthropologists are required to write throughout their professional careers. The proposal should be clearly written with a focus on a problem that can be readily identified. It should serve as a contract between the student and his/her thesis committee, as well as a framework to guide investigation and preparation of the final thesis product. The proposal typically has the following constituent components (although alternative subheadings may be used):

#### **1. Introduction: Statement of Problem**

This section should be relatively short but, more importantly, to the point. It indicates that you have gone beyond a casual interest in a topic and are now prepared to ask (and answer) a focused question related to that topic. While you cannot answer your questions before you conduct the study, neither can you answer a question before you state it clearly and concisely.

#### **2. Literature Review**

In this section of the proposal, the student should contextualize the research that is proposed. Present a brief history of the problem. How have others approached the topic (in theory and in practice)? Do you find previous work satisfactory? Why or why not? Whose work will you build upon? How will your perspective contribute toward an overall understanding of the problem?

#### **3. Methodology**

The section on methodology tells the reader how you will go about collecting and analyzing your data. First, indicate what kinds of information are appropriate for the study and how you will gain access to the information. Do you have access to all of the resources that the project requires (e.g., analytical skills, linguistic ability, etc.)? What types of analyses will you conduct? Will they be primarily quantitative or qualitative in nature?

#### 4. **Schedule**

Indicate when you plan to carry out the various phases of your work. Specify when you expect to complete the research, analysis, writing, and revision stages of the project. Indicate if you have adequate sources of funding, permission and access to information, travel plans, and necessary visas. You are also reminded that *you may need to obtain approval for your research from the human subjects review committee.*

#### 5. **Summary and Conclusions**

Summarize the significance of the research project and indicate what your expectations are in the research. For example, if you are evaluating a hypothesis, do you think that the data you collect will refute it? Finally, conclude with a brief outline or table of contents that shows how you will present the information in the actual thesis.

A thesis proposal should demonstrate a student's ability to think about a problem clearly and identify sources of information of immediate relevance. It is not meant to showcase every theory or concept you encountered in your courses, seminars, and previous experiences. Be selective about what you present in the document, always trying to be concise and to the point. A measure of your professionalism is the way in which you have mastered the relevant literature from a range of literatures in the discipline. Demonstrate such a mastery in the proposal. Finally, keep in close touch with your advisor and members of your guidance committee. Show them drafts of your proposal; also, feel free to circulate drafts among your graduate colleagues.

You're on your way now! GOOD LUCK!