

Guidelines for SEPP Thesis Proposal

Completion of a Thesis Proposal is one of the steps required to apply the scientist-practitioner model to earn the Thesis/Dual Track of the M.S. Degree in Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology (SEPP) from the University of Wisconsin – Green Bay. These guidelines discuss the purpose and structure of an acceptable proposal and provide some advice for its development.

What are the purposes of a thesis proposal?

The proposal serves three closely related purposes.

First, the proposal provides evidence that you are competent and prepared to undertake and complete the thesis project. In the proposal, you must demonstrate that you have chosen an appropriate and focused problem, are familiar with the scholarly literature and understand related contemporary issues, and have formulated an acceptable research procedure or methodology.

Second, the proposal assures that you are proceeding in a way acceptable to your faculty committee. An approved thesis proposal serves as a contract between you and the university as represented by your thesis committee. If you complete the work as agreed upon in the proposal and prepare the final thesis document according to accepted standards, regardless of whether your hypotheses are supported, the thesis defense and final approval of your thesis should go well. Because the course of research is often uncertain, relatively minor and reasonable changes are to be expected as the work proceeds. However, **major modifications must be agreed to in writing and approved by the thesis committee and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Graduate Studies.** Formal development, preparation, and approval of your proposal will ensure no surprises for you or the committee members at the time of your thesis defense.

Third, submission of the thesis proposal, along with the GR-2 approval form signed by the committee members, assists the Office of Graduate Studies in tracking your progress toward your degree. **Approval of the proposal by the Associate Vice Chancellor for Graduate Studies provides clearance for you to register for thesis credits.** This is an important point discussed further in the following section. The GR-2 form identifies the major professor (committee chair) and the members of the committee. A copy of the approved proposal is placed in your official file for later reference if necessary.

When should you prepare a proposal?

Before a proposal will be accepted, you must have an approved Program Plan on file with the Office of Graduate Studies and have completed at least 21 credits of graduate course work. These requirements are in place to ensure that you have developed a coherent program of study and obtained the background needed for your project. Generally, you should identify your thesis committee chair to develop an idea during your second semester of coursework. With approval from your advisor, your proposal draft can be submitted by the end of your first summer, allowing you to register for thesis credits during the fall semester of your second year and to defend your proposal by Week 7. It is never advisable to proceed too far with a project without

an approved proposal for the reasons stated in the previous section. On the other hand, failure to file a proposal may prevent you from registering for thesis credits and thereby delay graduation.

How should you start the thesis process?

February – May: Identify the thesis committee chair and develop the initial research idea (e.g., purpose and hypothesis)

May – June: Develop a proposal draft with research plan in PSYCH 700 Advanced Psychological Research Methods

June – August: Further discuss and revise the proposal draft with your thesis chair

August: After approval from the committee chair, submit the proposal draft along with the GR-2 Form to the Office of Graduate Studies

August – Week 7 of Fall Semester: Successfully defend the thesis proposal and revise for a final draft based on the committee's suggestions for final approval; research process and data collection begin afterward

Before graduation: Complete all parts of the research project, successfully defend the thesis, and submit the final thesis to the Office of Graduate Studies

It is your responsibility to initiate the process, but not to develop a fully formed project without guidance. Choosing the chair (one of the SEPP advisors) and members of your thesis committee (two in general; can be within or outside of Psychology Department) is an important step. It may seem like a daunting or intimidating venture but it should not be. Professors generally welcome inquiries about their work and availability for committee service. If you have a strong interest in a particular area, you may connect and have conversations with your potential committee soon after beginning your studies. If you are interested in having external committee members not from the UW–Green Bay Psychology Department, you should discuss with your advisor and/or committee chair before reaching out to those external professionals. Be aware that each professor can serve on a limited number of committees, and therefore, your first choice for the committee chair or committee members may not be able to accommodate your request—another good reason to begin the process early!

When a professor has agreed to chair your committee, you should work together to formulate a thesis project. Although your committee chair is supposed to provide you with guidance and support, the thesis idea has to be your own, and you will have the major responsibility for project planning and data collection. Once a general plan has been established, it is time to select the other committee members with expertise to support your work and see whether it is necessary for you to take specific courses to complete the project successfully.

You can now develop the proposal with the assistance of your committee chair. When you and your committee chair agree that it is in good form, distribute a copy to each committee member and ask to schedule for a thesis proposal defense at least two weeks before your proposed defense date. After they have responded, you will confirm the date, time, and venue for the thesis proposal defense (about 1 hour total; 20-minute oral presentation followed by Q&A) to present your proposal and receive feedback from your committee. The committee members will decide whether you pass the proposal defense and discuss any suggested changes. If you pass the defense, you should make suggested changes and prepare a final draft for review by your

committee chair, and then distribute it to committee members for final approval. If you do not pass the defense, you will be asked to make major changes to your proposal and defend again. The GR-2 Form is then signed and submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies along with a copy of the proposal.

Some additional comments may also assist you with the thesis proposal preparation process: (1) always provide neatly done drafts of your proposal. Sloppily done drafts present a poor impression of your ability; (2) give your committee members adequate time to respond to drafts or requests for assistance or information. Normally, ten days to two weeks is a reasonable time for a review of a draft. Requests for guidance or help with an encountered problem are usually handled more quickly, although you may need to schedule an appointment depending on the nature of the request; and (3) avoid meetings and draft reviews around registration periods or near the end of semesters. Those are especially busy times of semesters.

What is the proper length and structure for a proposal?

There are no rigid rules governing the length of a thesis proposal; it varies across the theoretical frameworks and research methodologies. The format and structure of your proposal should be guided by the APA Publication Manual and the Thesis Style and Format Requirements (<https://www.uwgb.edu/graduate/students/thesis-project/>). The following outline presents a suggested structure of the major sections usually present in a proposal:

I. Problem Statement

This section presents a clear statement of the specific topic to be addressed and the purpose of the work to be proposed. Precisely, what is the problem to be solved, the issues to be analyzed, the questions to be answered, or the project to be completed? The general and specific objectives must be enumerated and address task domains and knowledge groups listed in the AASP CMPC Handbook. This section is critical, because it establishes the framework for the rest of the document by presenting exactly what you will do and why it is being done. Usually, this section is the shortest in the proposal and must be done carefully.

II. Literature Review

This section provides a review of the published scholarly literature pertinent to the thesis topic. Citation and documentation should be guided by the standards for the field and subfield in which you are working. This is often the longest section of the proposal that establishes the broader academic or technical context of the research. It demonstrates that you are familiar with the current body of knowledge and that you have an understanding of the wider practical implications of the topic.

III. Methodology (including Data Analysis Plan)

This section describes how you will conduct the research, including the proposed participants, procedure, materials, and data analysis. Describe ways in which the data will be collected, the analytical techniques will be used, and the conceptual models will be employed. For example, indicate the equipment needed, the survey instrument(s) to be used, participants to be recruited, the statistical techniques or packages applicable, and any facilities required. Typically, this section is shorter, about two to three pages in length. However, it must provide enough detail to demonstrate that you have a sound grasp of the methodology to be used. There may be many

different research ideas and variables of your interest, but keep in mind to not promise more than you can deliver in the time available. The best advice is, “be specific but be realistic!”

IV. References

This section includes a list of references cited in the proposal using the APA style. You are expected to include only credible sources, most of which are from peer-review journal articles.

V. Appendices

This section includes any research instrument (e.g., survey item, interview questions) and data collection protocol (e.g., intervention content, timeline) that are important to the thesis project.

Conclusion

In summary, the purposes of your thesis proposal are to demonstrate that you are prepared to carry out the work, ensure coordination between you and your committee, and assist the Office of Graduate Studies with tracking your progress toward a degree. Although your thesis proposal will not be accepted until you have a Program Plan on file and have satisfactorily completed the required minimum number of course credits, starting the process early can avoid a possible delay of your graduation.

The structure and format suggested in these guidelines may not be universal, but are applicable to most cases. You may want to check the Thesis Style and Format Requirements document (<https://www.uwgb.edu/graduate/students/thesis-project/>) to familiarize yourself with the final thesis document and the thesis defense. Minor changes to the approved proposal can be made as appropriate. Substantive changes should be must be agreed to in writing and approved by the thesis committee and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Graduate Studies. If you have concerns about the research and the thesis, ask questions. Should major difficulties arise, feel free to consult with the Chair of your program or the Associate Vice Chancellor for Graduate Studies (Cofrin Hall 835) at 920-465-2123, or email gradstu@uwgb.edu.