Guidelines for research proposal

Doctoral Program Department of Management and Marketing

As part of the application documentation for the doctoral program in the Department of Management and Marketing, we ask you to submit a research proposal of 1000 words. This helps us to understand your current level of ability in explaining and evaluating academic theory and research as well as your written communication skills. It will also assist us in to identify the relationship between your potential research topic and the scholarly disciplines covered by our Department. We do not expect you to have a fully formed research question (or hypotheses) at this stage (though you can certainly include these), nor are you committing yourself to this research topic, should you be offered a place in the doctoral program.

The research proposal should do the following:

Clearly articulate the topic of investigation

Explain what area of research you are interested in pursuing. Sometimes it helps to think of this as an 'elevator pitch' – imagine you were in an elevator and were asked by someone unfamiliar with the research discipline what you wanted to study. How would you answer them?

Explain why it is important (and interesting)

Here you need to convince a reader of the value of undertaking research on this topic. Why is this topic important? In addition, it will help if you think about why it is an interesting area for further study. Reflect on what attracted you to this topic. Who else might be interested in it? (e.g. organisations, government, researchers from a particular field etc.) What contribution or difference are you hoping to make with this research?

Review what is currently known about the topic

This is the most substantive section of the research proposal and we expect most of the 1000 words will be dedicated to this part.

When you read academic research, you will find that it almost always begins with a review of what is currently known about the topic under investigation. We do this because we are trying to build on current knowledge and because we need to 'make a case' for why our particular study is necessary and worthwhile. Before we can identify a research question (or questions) on which our study is based, we need to first identify that there is a gap in the research we are aiming to fill.

Here we want you to discuss relevant academic literature related to the topic you want to research. Who has written on this topic? What relevant articles or books have been published most recently? You may find there is a large body of academic work so try and

select those that seem most relevant to your chosen area. While we encourage you to read widely, for the purposes of the proposal, it is more valuable to engage in depth with five highly relevant papers than cover 40 superficially. Are there particular articles that appeal to you? Imagine you were at a large academic conference with many small groups of scholars having conversations about their work. What conversation would you like to join? Thinking about these questions will help to locate an appropriate academic context for your proposal.

Please follow the conventions of a common Academic referencing style. This may be either an in-text citation system (e.g. Harvard or American Psychological Association) or footnote/endnote system (e.g. Oxford commonly used in law, history and English literature). Include a list of the references you have cited in your research proposal at the end, organised in order of author surname – this reference list will not be counted as part of the 1000 words.

In terms of writing style, we expect you to write in an appropriately formal way (no 'slang', complete sentences). However it is essential that you write clearly. You do not need to use long and complex sentences or complicated expressions. The best academic writing uses simple accessible English and paragraphs based around one main idea. You will find this actually helps to explain complex ideas. It also forces you to be clear in your own mind about what you want to say.