



## DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY – GUIDE TO WRITING YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL

All Higher Degree Research (HDR) students are required to submit a research proposal with their application to study at Western Sydney University. The following guidelines have been prepared to assist you in the development of your statement of intent. Please read them carefully before submitting your application.

### What is a research proposal?

A research proposal is an outline of your proposed research project that is designed to:

- Define a research question and your approach to answering it
- Highlight originality and/or significance
- Explain how it adds to, develops, or challenges existing literature
- Persuade the University of the importance of this work and why you are the right person to undertake it.

Your research proposal may vary in length but it is expected that it will be 1-2 pages.

### What is the purpose of the research proposal?

A research proposal is used by potential supervisors to assess the quality and originality of your ideas, skills and the overall feasibility of your research project. They are also used to assess your expertise in the area you are choosing to research, your knowledge of existing literature in the field, and how your project will enhance it. This provides you with the opportunity to capture the attention of readers and convince them of the importance of your research.

It is essential that you identify a prospective supervisor and contact them to discuss your proposal to ensure that it is of mutual interest and also to gain their input into the design, scope and feasibility of your research project. All PhD applications must provide two academic referees as part of their application.

### Will I be able to change my research proposal?

Yes, all good proposals will evolve as your research progresses. In fact, it is normal for candidates to refine their proposal in response to literature reviews, further consideration of research approaches and comments received from your supervisory panel.

## **How do I set out my research proposal?**

The following elements are essential in a successful research proposal, each item below must be addressed:

### **1. The research theme/question**

This can change but be sure to include key words that will relate your proposal to relevant potential supervisors, funding schemes etc. The title should be around 20 words.

### **2. Name of the academic(s) with whom you have discussed the project**

You may have a particular person or School/Institute in mind. When you first make contact to discuss your topic of interest, be prepared to talk about your understanding of the literature and the proposed line of enquiry. It is up to you to make the first move in outlining the topic and the academic advisor may help you to refine it.

### **3. Overview of current research – where is the gap?**

Justify your project from a review of literature on the topic: discuss the most important texts, demonstrate your understanding of the research issues, identify any gaps that your research is intended to address. It is also a good idea to make links between your research and the existing research strengths of the academic/s you have listed in your application. If you need further information about academic staff, please visit the University website.

### **4. Methodology**

You do not need to go into specifics here, but you do need to demonstrate that you have given some thought about how you will undertake your research. Anticipate the methods you will use to achieve the project aims and show that your research project is feasible in the time period (3 years for a PhD, 2 years for a Master of Research). How do you anticipate achieving your project aims? What is your rationale for using this approach? How will you collect and analyse the data?

### **5. Resource Requirements**

Will you need specialist equipment? Do you anticipate any field work expenses? Will travel be required? If so, where to, how long and at what stage of your project?

### **6. Draft timeline**

Provide a monthly/quarterly outline of how you will complete the research within the timeframe. A full-time PhD usually takes 3 years. Part time qualifications can be expected to take twice as long.

### **7. Expectations of research results**

What do expect to know, prove, demonstrate, analyse, test, investigate or examine at the conclusion of your research?

## Possible pitfalls

Although you may meet the minimum entrance criteria, it is possible you may not be accepted as a PhD Candidate as a result of weaknesses in your research proposal. To avoid this, please keep the following points in mind:

- Ensure your research idea, question or problem is stated clearly and persuasively. Make sure you are addressing a demonstrable gap in the existing literature.
- Research the School/Research Institute/Discipline of the academic staff you intend to have as supervisors. Make sure the academic staff are interested in your topic and available to supervise you. Also ensure the staff you have identified have been provided with a copy of your research proposal for comment/input.
- Ensure the research proposal demonstrates a clear understanding of research methods and approaches and that they are appropriate to your research question.
- Ensure that the scope of your research project is reasonable. There are limits to the size and complexity that can be completed and written up in 3 years. Research proposals are assessed for their intellectual ambition and significance, as well as the likelihood of completion within the timeframe.
- Demonstrate your passion for the topic! The staff assessing your proposal may not be experts in your field so make sure you engage the readers with your passion of the subject!