Delta State University
SSC 470/570: Methods of Social Research
Fall Semester 2005

Group Project:
Preparing a Research Proposal

For the semester project, you will pair up with another student in the class to prepare a research proposal. The guidelines below should help you prepare your proposal.

In a research proposal, you are telling someone else about a research project that you intend to undertake. For example, you may prepare a proposal to submit to a funding agency in order to finance a research project, or you may submit a proposal to an oversight committee charged with evaluating research projects. In preparing a proposal, your job is to design a research project – in other words you want to explain how you intend to carry out this research – and then you want to communicate this design to others using a standardized, systematic format.

Note that this is NOT a research paper. You are not required to do any data collection or original research. You will look through journals in the library or on-line to find results of previous research, however, in order to prepare your literature review.

Your proposal should be 12 pages, and should include the following elements:

(1) An *executive summary*: This is a one-page (maximum) summary of your proposed research project. It is similar in purpose to an abstract in a journal article, but a little longer. You want to identify the question that your project will address, specify the context in which you will address this question, and describe how will you study this topic – i.e. what methods will you use? You also want to state who will benefit from this research project – that is, what are the practical purposes for doing this research? Be concise, and just give the most important information in the executive summary. It may be helpful to write the executive summary last, after you have completed the rest of the proposal.

(2) An *introduction*: Introduce your project, and say what you intend to cover in the proposal.

(3) A *context* and *research question*: Briefly state the context in which you intend to undertake your study. This context should frame your research question. The research question is a concisely worded statement (in the form of a question) of exactly what you intend to study. Make sure it is worded in a way that allows you to provide an explanation (e.g., do not write a yes/no question). The question should also reflect the overall research approach and strategy.

(4) A *literature review*: Your literature review provides the theoretical context for your study. What is already known on this topic? You should find articles, books, or book chapters on your topic, summarize them briefly (in 2-3 sentences), and combine them to show where your study fits into the issue you are studying. A review of existing literature is a good place to start when you are developing a research project, as it provides clues as to what sort of research is necessary. Your literature review should summarize the results of at least eight articles.

(5) An *hypothesis*: You should clearly state what hypothesis you are testing, or what working hypothesis will guide your research. You may also suggest anticipated findings.

(6) A *methodological design*: This is the heart of your proposal. How do you intend to study the issue you have identified? Your methods should stem from your research question, and should address your hypothesis. You should discuss the general approach you intend to take, what variables you will use, how you will operationalize and measure your variables, how you will ensure validity and reliability in your measures, how you intend to collect data, and how you intend to analyze your data. Use the draft methodological design that your group prepared to complete this portion of the proposal.

(7) A *justification*: This is the so-what issue. Prepare a clear statement summarizing the utility of this research. Who will benefit from the results of your research? Why is your research important? What contribution will it make? This is where you "sell" this project.

(8) A *conclusion*: Provide a one- or two-paragraph conclusion that summarizes the study and leaves the reviewer with a sense of how important this project is.

(9) *Attachments*: Provide a c.v. (résumé) for each project member.

Due Date:

Your final proposal is due on **December 1, 2005**. Make sure you submit your proposal on this date; no late proposals will be accepted.

Tips for Preparing an Effective Proposal:

• Be concise. You must present enough information that the reviewer can understand what it is you intend to do, how you intend to do it, and what purpose it will serve. You do not need to present any research findings or extensive theoretical discussions, however.
• Take time to develop a clear research question. A well-conceived and well-written research question will make the rest of the proposal much easier to prepare.
• Be clear **how** you intend to address your research question. Use the frameworks provided in the text and the other course material to develop your methodological approach. Develop a strong research design (given the topic of this class, this is probably the most important element in the proposal).
• Make sure there is a consistent and logical link between your literature review, your research question, your methods, and your justification.