

## **Department of Political Science**

### **Master's Research Proposal Guidelines**

Name of Candidate, Title of Thesis, Promoter, Co-promoter, and Degree

The title of the thesis must be concise but informative.

#### Background and rationale

In this section, a background to the proposed study has to be given, thus an explanation of why the study is being undertaken. Reference is usually made to existing knowledge that has already been generated in relation to the field of investigation. This may include a short review of relevant on the topic. The purpose of this section is to indicate, at a macro-level, what the research is about and why it is undertaken, thus to identify the broad field of interest. With the general aim of the study as a point of departure, this section contextualises the topic by indicating the origins of reasons for the research; the background to the research; where the research field fits into the applicable discipline; and the theoretical and practical relevance of the research.

#### Problem statement and focus

In this section, the precise nature of the research problem must be clearly formulated, taking into account, in particular, the meaning of the central concepts posed in its problem statement. The problem statement should be stated in not more than a single paragraph, and should formulate the focal point of the thesis concisely, intelligibly and clearly. The purpose of this section is to develop a problem statement that will serve as the foundation for the study and that will clearly explain the key elements of the proposed study.

## Goals, theoretical points of departure, research questions and/or hypothesis/hypotheses

Although the statement of the problem poses the central question addressed in the thesis in a concise and focused form, this heading offers the opportunity of formulating the goals more systematically. Assumptions and/or points of departure on which the research will be based and the theoretical framework(s) within which the research will be undertaken are also, as far as possible, stated under this heading, and provisional research questions or hypotheses, where relevant, formulated. The purpose of this section is to indicate, at a micro-level, why the research is done and what you expect to find or conclude. This section, therefore, transforms your general research ideas (topic and theme) into a statement of the research problem and a specific research question. The research question is not a mere rephrasing of the working title in question form, but a more incisive question. The main research question may be broken down into secondary sub-questions. However, be realistic and do not identify too many questions since you have to answer all the questions that you pose. Two to four sub-questions should be sufficient. Also formulate explanatory propositions (or hypotheses) – that will be subject to analysis and assessment (or verification / falsification) – in the form of provisional responses or tentative answers to the main and secondary research questions. This section should also include a brief conceptualisation of key terms used as part of your research question. See to it that there is a logical correlation between your working title, the aims and objectives of your study, your research problem(s) and question(s), and your explanatory propositions.

### Research design and methods

Students must clearly state what approach(es) and methods they intend using to address and attempt to solve the proposed problem. They should indicate their familiarity with possible controversies or limitations that exist in their field of research regarding the methods in question and/or potential problems and how they are planning to approach these. In the case of quantitative empirical research, details must be provided of the way in which key concepts will be operationalised and the manner

### Outline of the study

In this section the student should indicate the title of each chapter and briefly state what the aim of each chapter is. The section can also include deadlines for the completion of each chapter.

### Bibliography

The bibliography (using the Harvard-format) only includes the sources actually referenced or cited in this research proposal.

Proposals should be between 2500 and 3000 words.