

CSUS 805
Proposal Development for Interdisciplinary Inquiry

Spring 2021
NR Room 406 and Zoom
Mondays, 5:20-6:10 PM (possibly to be changed)
Zoom link: <https://msu.zoom.us/j/93037770511>
Meeting ID: 930 3777 0511
Passcode: CSUS805

Instructor : John M. Kerr, Professor
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Office hours : by appointment (I am quite flexible)

MSU course catalog description: Preparation of proposals for inquiry in practical and research settings. Application of inquiry concepts and practices in designing projects or research. Professional oral and written communications in sustainability inquiry. Processes of peer support and critique.

Number of credits: 1

Grading system: pass/fail

This course serves: CSUS graduate students writing their proposal for the dissertation, thesis, or project. Required for first-year CSUS Master's students.

Purpose: Provide structure and guidance as students draft their research or professional project proposal.

Learning Outcomes

Emerging from the course with their completed proposal, students will:

- Learn different approaches for structuring a proposal and identify one suitable for them
- Express clearly how their research or inquiry is rooted in existing literature (and, for Plan A or PhD, how it is intended to fill a gap in the literature)
- Describe the conceptual and epistemological foundations of their research or professional project
- Identify and spell out a method that is compatible with those conceptual and epistemological foundations and helps achieve what the student needs
- Make a plan for collecting and analyzing data (Plan A/PhD) or a plan for conducting their project (Plan B)
- Learn different approaches for organizing their writing

- Learn different approaches for organizing their time
- Demonstrate knowledge of procedures related to IRB protocol development and human subjects research, and appreciate why those procedures are important. (Complete and submit an IRB application as appropriate.)

CSUS students in the course will build on skills they previously learned in CSUS 802 and apply them to their own specific plan of research or inquiry.

The instructor's role will be to provide 1) instruction on the basics of writing a proposal and 2) a structured timeline to help students keep on track with their proposal. Each student's advisor is required to work closely with the student as they prepare their proposal according to the timeline established in the syllabus. The course instructor is expected to provide only limited substantive feedback on each student's proposal. Peer review will play an important part in this course, with structured opportunities for students to share their work with each other and provide feedback throughout the semester.

Required reading

Reading requirements will likely be customized to each student. (No specific requirements common to all students.). We will be flexible depending on students' needs.

Assessments (grading)

This course is pass/fail.

Passing the class requires:

- making excellent progress on the proposal (and preferably defending it by the end of the semester)
- attending and participating in class
- completing small assignments
- contributing to peer review of other students' work

Milestones to achieve:

- finalize research or inquiry questions
- complete literature review
 - for Plan A/PhD this most likely includes the broad area of the literature, gaps in the literature, key conceptual foundations of the research, and background about the context.
 - for Plan B this likely includes the broad area of the literature and the lessons learned from the literature.
- complete methods section
 - For plan A/PhD this likely includes plans for data sampling, collection and analysis.

- For plan B this is more flexible depending on the project. At a minimum it includes the plan for conducting the project.
- complete “so what” summary: what this research/inquiry will contribute and why it matters
- submit the final proposal to your committee and defend the proposal
- submit your IRB application (if applicable – that might come later)

Topics to be covered in the course to help achieve the milestones

Note: given the small size of the class, our schedule can be flexible so that we address students’ needs. Here is a suggestive list of things we will cover.

1. Initial review of research/inquiry questions
2. Figuring out a style and structure for the proposal that work for you
3. Situating your work in existing literature
4. Writing strategies
5. Work (time management) strategies
6. Field work strategies under Covid
7. IRB applications
8. Preparing your presentation

NOTE: a one-credit course implies 15 contact hours during the semester. These 15 hours can either be spread out over the course of the semester or concentrated into a shorter period. Officially, this year CSUS 805 meets for 50 minutes each week and runs through the whole semester. But we will be flexible and run the course according to students’ interest and needs. So, for example, in previous years we met for more than 50 minutes each week and ended the course in early April.

Weekly schedule

The weekly schedule will be developed as we go, depending on students’ interests and needs.