

CRES 4880 Topics  
Conflict Resolution Institute  
Spring, 2011

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## **Preparing a Grant Proposal**

***Introduction.*** What is the best way to formulate and evaluate Conflict Resolution policies and programs? On what basis should governments, schools, or corporations create, manage, and study program impact of mediation efforts? How can we discover whether a particular policy is wise and worth the investment? Although political opinion and expert views are often expressed about whether peace programs and conflict resolution practices are effective for creating calm in society, an alternative means to address these issues, a dispassionate and more objective way, is through the lens of methodology reasoning.

*Methodology consists of a system of logical rules and conventional procedures for examining observable information, along with explicit criteria and standards for evaluating research investigation results.*

***Purpose.*** This course has been designed to cover some of the key elements of social research methods that are important principles of *evidence-based* policy, a relatively new approach in the United States (though a directive practiced in Great Britain) known for its rigor and precision in careful data collection—including quantitative and qualitative methodology analysis and expert opinion to build facts and findings from context-free, context rich, and colloquial environments into a coherent whole—to support informed decision-making capability. The evidence-based movement is gaining momentum in a variety of professional disciplines such as business management, educational reform, criminal justice, health care, and public policy.

Originally developed in the field of medicine to critically assess existing research with respect to validity, documentation, and methodological appropriateness as a way to measure significant outcomes and pass on the discoveries of “what works” to the practitioner community, information that would be applied in solving patients’ pain, this approach helps clarify analytical frameworks and reveal underlying, often implicit, assumptions about how things operate. Its purpose is to understand a problem, analyze the possible ways to address it, and explore the probable impact of choosing alternative paths.

What constitute best practices? Evidence-based policy is anchored in a sound analysis of trends, projections, and probabilities derived from observations and accumulated (not isolated) experience built on patterns rather than constructed from beliefs, theories, or a hunch of what might work. An *evidence-based* policy approach is particularly apt when selected policies may have failed to achieve what they were designed to accomplish, or when programs seem to be formed out of political compromise rather than grounded in substantive aspects, or when program impact is simply unknown.

***Objectives.*** In this course, students will acquire conceptual training and rudimentary technical tools, skills essential to an evidenced-based policy-making process, to become:

1. *Consumers* of research evidence—to keep current with developments in the field;
2. *Evaluators* of research evidence—to judge quality of results; and
3. *Producers* of research evidence—to create strategies for investigating problems.

**Recommended Text:**

Locke, Lawrence F., Waneed Wyrick Spirduso and Stephen J. Silverman (2007).  
*Proposals that Work: A Guide for Planning Dissertations and Grant Proposals.* latest Edition. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

**Assignments:**

Good research depends on good planning: carefully outlining a problem to be investigated, becoming knowledgeable about what others who have already done research on it have learned and concluded; knowing what you are looking for with a fair degree of precision; and how your approach to examining the issue is unique so it will add to the cumulating knowledge base. A proposal also lists all sources of information that will be used, and evaluates the quality and accessibility of relevant data, and estimates the time necessary to finish the project and write up the results. The essence of good research rests on a solid research proposal: having a great recipe of the content and procedural steps of what you will do.

Thus, in this course you will learn how to craft a research proposal, completing the customary pieces—described below—required by funders leading up to a formally submitted document. In this process you will become familiar with techniques for completing a literature review and summarizing findings, judging the quality of research results, comparing different studies and their impact. You will not be required, nor would there be any time, to carry out the research project you are proposing. That part of the research enterprise, which is far easier than thinking through the proposal itself, would come later—as an independent study, or thesis project. In this class, you are building the best recipe but not baking the cake.

The course will be run as a lecture-workshop. The instructor will provide materials on each of the topics, and we will often discuss the developing research proposals of class members and consider various obstacles they face which inhibits progress. Everyone is learning about the methodology process and most will experience moments of conceptual struggle on this path, so please come forth with your frustrations and confusions.

1. A Concept Paper (1-3 pages)  
Due April 1. not graded.

Description: A concept paper is an idea for a research proposal that may turn into a research project. It contains two sections: statement of a problem with research questions, and a context for examining the issues. For statistical, scientific proposals, hypotheses are also listed. Statement of the problem: identify a researchable problem for study. Why is it important to analyze? What makes it an interesting puzzle or issue for research? Questions to address: questions of impact (how has this affected that?) “Why” questions, i.e. what accounts for this development? Context: cases, time frames, circumstances, comparisons.

Pitfalls: Avoid questions that are too broad to be manageable or that lack research direction (e.g. How is bullying in schools being confronted?). Rephrase as: How effective are current practices in peer mediation school programs? Avoid questions that are too narrow, where the answer is easy, or answer is only opinion (e.g. Does the U.S. have a strategy to bring peace to Iraq?). Rephrase as: What was the political process that brought about the USIP decision to create the Iraq study group? Avoid questions that cannot be answered or assessed (e.g. what are the pros and cons of Restorative Justice programs in middle schools?). Rephrase as: How do Restorative Justice community programs affect the local crime rate?

2. A Pre-Proposal (6-10 pages)  
Due April 22. not graded.

Description: A pre-proposal builds on the concept paper woven in with substantive issue background and a literature review of previous research findings on the hypotheses or questions addressed. A literature review covers central ideas, theories, how others have addressed the question(s) you seek to answer in your proposed research, using the scholarly literature on the topic and it goes beyond the immediate context you are covering. It may also include broader theoretic explanations to account for the relationship in the hypotheses, and policies, laws, and official declarations to solve a problem.

Pitfalls: The cumulative evidence in favor of your hypothesis and in opposition to it is not summarized and you fail to conclude the overall picture of what is known and not known about your problem of study. The missing links in the cumulative evidence and how your study will help answer those problems is not addressed. The research consulted is to slim or dated.

Exemplar on Literature Review: Steve Chan (1997). “In Search of Democratic Peace: Problems and Promise.” *Mershon International Studies Review*.

3. A Draft Research Proposal (10-15 pages)  
Due May 20. not graded

Description: A research proposal specifies a plan for organizing material around guiding questions and/or hypotheses and consist of a set of programmed steps listed in the following order describing how data will be gathered and analyzed. It incorporates the concept paper and the pre-proposal containing: statement of the problem; questions/hypotheses; contextual background; literature review; strategy of analysis—the “research design” on the information/data you need to thoroughly answer your question(s) and hypothesis, where you will get the information, the sources, how you will collect the materials, how you will decide the quality of the evidence, where you might encounter missing information, and how you will make compromises for this deficiency; and a closing statement of project significance summarizing why the proposed project is important, and how your analysis strategy will help to understand the problem better and get closer to a solution; and References.

Pitfalls: statement of problem is well developed, but literature review and analysis strategy are not. Thoroughness is key—how much data, where and how to get it, And what previous research has shown. How to match data to your problem.

4. A Final Research Proposal. (15 ms. pages max)  
Due June 3. graded

Specifications include an abstract, problem statement, background, relevant and thorough literature review, detailed analysis strategy (data collecting and processing and interpretative guidelines, and problem significance each section logically linked to the next, organized into a coherent, well-written narrative.

Pitfalls: research problem is unfocused, relatively unimportant, not puzzling; literature review fails to address questions posed in problem statement; methodology is incomplete or inappropriate, writing unclear. Most common problems: research questions are not adequately addressed through the investigative analysis strategy and literature review is to slim.

**Meeting Schedule**

Friday, March 25  
Session 1

The Research Proposal  
Definitions, Crafting, Significance

Friday, April 2  
Session 2

Data Collection  
Aggregate, Survey, Content Analysis, Event, Experiments

Friday April 8  
Session 3

Data Collection  
Selecting Domains: Cases and Time Frames

Friday, April 22  
Session 4

Research Design Structure  
Non-Experimental, Quasi-Experimental, Experimental

Friday, April 29  
Session 5

Data Analysis and Interpretation  
Bivariate and Multivariate Techniques

Friday, May 27  
Session 6

Proposal Presentations  
Bring copies of a 1 page abstract for distribution

## Types of Professional Writing

### The Essay:

A statement of opinion and personal analysis about a social problem.

### The Research Paper:

A statement of a problem and a review of what others have said about it. This is commonly known as a descriptive-explanatory secondary analysis paper, or term paper, requiring no original research.

### The Research Proposal:

A statement of a problem, an analysis of the previous literature (essays, theories, and empirical findings) that has addressed it and a summary of the main answers that emerge; a strategy for investigating the matter further, outlining the *primary* information and evidence needed to do so, the structure of the cases, time, variable measurement and hypothesis-testing procedures.

**The Research Report.** A report of research summarized and analyzed as specified in a research proposal, including the research proposal contents. This is commonly known as an explanatory-predictive primary analysis paper, requiring original research.

Examples:

Giacomo Chiozza. (2002) "Is there a Clash of Civilizations? Evidence from Patterns of International Conflict Involvement, 1946-97" *Journal of Peace Research*. 39. 711-734.

James L. Gibson. (2004) "Des Truth Lead to Reconciliation? Testing the Causal Assumptions of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Process." *American Journal of Political Science*. 48. 201-217.

Lawrence R. Jacobs and Benjamin I. Page. (2005) "Who Influences U.S. Foreign Policy?" *American Political Science Review*. 99. 107-123.

The best sources for ideas for a research project are found in professional journals:

*Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*  
*Terrorism and Political Violence*  
*International Interactions*  
*International Studies Quarterly*  
*International Organization*  
*International Negotiation*  
*Negotiation Journal*

*American Political Science Review*  
*American Journal of Political Science*  
*Conflict Mgmt and Peace Science*  
*Peace and Conflict*  
*Journal of Conflict Resolutions*  
*Journal of Peace Research*  
*Civil Wars*