

**Master's Proposal Guidelines**  
**Approved by the General/Experimental Faculty on 11/8/17**

**Preamble:** A written and oral proposal for the Master's thesis is required of students in the General/Experimental program. The details of the proposal, including the format of the written proposal and the scheduling of the oral proposal, may differ across clusters and committees. Students should work closely with their advisor and committee to identify the most appropriate format of the written proposal and timing of the oral proposal.

1. The Master's thesis provides the opportunity for graduate students to demonstrate their ability to independently conceptualize, design, and analyze a meaningful piece of research. Critical parts of the Master's proposal include a knowledge of the relevant literature and theory, the ability to integrate the proposed study into the existing literature and theory, and the ability to recognize the limitations, strengths, and implications of the study.
2. A Master's proposal should include a written document justifying the proposed research. The length of the proposal depends on the topic of interest, the student's cluster, and the preferences of the committee; students should work with their committees to identify the best approach to the written proposal. The written proposal generally outlines the background literature and builds a strong case for study hypotheses, research design, and data analytic approach.
  - a. In the social and developmental clusters, the proposal should occur early in the research process. Committee approval depends on the quality of the written and oral proposal, and may be contingent on specific changes to the proposed study recommended by the committee. Approval decisions are not affected by how far along the student is in the research project. Thus, we strongly urge students to propose and gain approval to move forward with the study as early as possible. Ideally, proposals should occur before data collection has begun. Students who use existing data sources for their thesis should not conduct key data analyses prior to the proposal. Further, although the use of existing data sources is acceptable, students should be aware that proposals will only be approved if they can make a compelling case that the existing dataset is well-suited and appropriate for addressing key study hypotheses.
  - b. In the biobehavioral cluster, the proposal generally occurs after some data have been collected and a primary research question has been identified; the proposal often includes a description of study findings from the preliminary studies as well as the identification of a plan for an additional series of studies.
3. The Master's proposal should be the work of a graduate student with the guidance of a faculty mentor.
4. The written proposal should be in the best shape possible prior to submission to the committee. The role of committee members is to evaluate the proposal and the candidate, not to design the study, help write the proposal, or help design data analytic approaches.
5. The candidate should know her/his data analytic plan and be able to justify it.

6. Students should submit the written Master's proposal to the committee two weeks before the proposal meeting unless all committee members agree to waive the two-week period. Committee members should share with the committee any serious concerns about the readiness of the written proposal via email at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled meeting. The meeting may be rescheduled at the discretion of the committee chair.
7. The Master's proposal meeting for the oral proposal should be scheduled for a 2-hour block, but may end early. Candidates should clearly communicate the start time and end time of their proposal to all committee members as soon as the proposal is scheduled.
8. In the oral portion of the proposal, the candidate should present an oral overview of the proposal that should last approximately 15-30 minutes. The presentation should include a brief literature review, rationale for and hypotheses of the study, methods, data analytic strategies, and preliminary data if available.
9. The great majority of the proposal meeting should focus on committee member questions for the candidate.
10. The oral proposal of the Master's proposal is the task of the candidate, not the primary faculty mentor. Faculty mentors should refrain from answering questions from the committee during the oral proposal.
11. A final meeting among committee members without the candidate present should occur to make one of the following decisions:
  - a. Proceed with the Master's study;
  - b. Proceed with the Master's study with a list of changes to the proposal;
  - c. Re-write aspects of the proposal and re-submit to committee members.
  - d. Re-write aspects of the proposal and hold another proposal meeting;
  - e. Hold another proposal meeting;
  - f. Start on a new proposal.