

## Environmental Studies Senior Thesis Proposal Guidelines

The primary goal of the Environmental Studies senior thesis is the development of analytical, critical, and contextual thinking skills that are vital for the creation, expression and transmission of ideas. As an interdisciplinary major, the guidelines for a senior thesis need to be flexible to accommodate studies that range from the physical, biological, and Earth system sciences to the social sciences to humanistic studies. The guidelines presented below are primarily for physical, biological, Earth system, and social science projects. As such, these guidelines will apply to the majority of the senior theses. However, for thesis projects that are humanistic-oriented studies, such as historical geography, and use a narrative-descriptive approach, the thesis advisor, student, and Environmental Studies director will work together to develop the appropriate guidelines for the theses in these disciplines.

The information for each section will vary to some extent depending on the discipline within which you are working and the type of investigation you are conducting (e.g., field study, laboratory investigation, human-subject survey, etc). Under each heading are the types of information that should be included. It does not have to be in the specific order provided.

**Introduction – The purpose of the introduction is to tell the reader about the purpose, importance, and potential application of the research. The introduction addresses questions related to the “what” and the “why” of the research. It includes:**

- a. A purpose statement concisely states **what** will be studied and **why** this work is important in terms of the significance of the problem or issue being addressed.
- b. The significance of the study needs to address **why** the study is important and **why** the reader should care. The significance can be described in terms of, two or more of the following:
  - Generation of new knowledge about the topic
  - Importance to understanding the system or systems that are being studied
  - Importance to the potential application
  - Influence on understanding various aspect of societal or behavioral change
- c. References to support the justification are required. More details can be provided below in the Literature Review.
- d. One or more of the following - specific research questions, hypotheses, or objectives - briefly and clearly described.
- e. Operational definitions of technical terms, jargon, or special word uses are provided.
- f. Potential assumptions, potential limitations to the scope of the study.
- g. The introduction ends with a transition statement that contains a summary of the key points.

In the introduction of the thesis proposal, you will need to provide a literature review regarding the problem and relationship of the project to previous work on the topic. The literature review provides support regarding **“the what”** is to be studied, **“ why”** it is important or significant, as well as to the examination of how others have approached the problem. This is where you will use the information from your reviews of the literature. The review should consider and/or include the following:

- a. Literature used to support the problem statement.
- b. Discussion and summary of previous research as it relates to supporting the identification of a problem, question, or hypothesis.
- c. Concise summaries of the literature that helps to put the research in the context of current theory and practice and/or describes the conceptual framework for the study.
- d. Provide a literature-based description how others have approached this problem and the extent to which they have used quantitative or qualitative approaches.
  - Identify research variables (quantitative studies), or
  - Identify themes or perspectives to be explored (qualitative)
- e. Literature is drawn from acceptable peer reviewed documents including academic journals, books, government documents, among others. If other, less rigorously reviewed, sources are used, a justification is provided. A minimum of 10 sources need to be used.
- f. The review integrates current and relevant knowledge of the subject about how others have approached it.

**Materials and Methods – In this section, you identify how you are going to conduct your research project.**

- a. Research Design and approach
  - Includes a description of the research design and approach
  - Use information from your literature review to provide a justification of your design and approach
- b. Sampling Methodology and Data Collection
  - Describe all procedures and techniques used
  - Describe where the samples/data will be obtained
  - Describe the sampling method used
  - Describe and defend the sample size
  - Describe the eligibility criteria for and number of study participants (if applicable)
  - Acquisition and Quality Assurance of Data
- c. Descriptions of instrumentation or data collection tools, if appropriate, including
  - Name of instrument
  - Type of instrument
  - Variables measured by the instrument
  - Approach used to quality control your data – standards, accuracy and precision involved related to all procedures and techniques used.
  - Reliability and validity of survey instruments (if applicable)
  - How scores are calculated (if applicable)
- d. Data Analysis
  - Includes a description of how the data will be processed and analyzed
- e. Confidentiality issues (if applicable)
  - Measures taken to protect the rights of participants are summarized.
  - An IRB needs to be obtained if needed.

**Timeline**

In this section, indicate, using a calendar format, or table the detailed timeline for completion of your project. This timeline will show the reader that you have thought through the actual “doing” of this project, and you have estimated that you will be able to complete this project in a timely manner.

## References

You must list all references cited in your proposal. Your proposal should cite all the sources from the literature that are relevant to your project. This list should include **at least 10 publications** from peer-reviewed scientific journals. **A short reference list is a sign of a poorly researched project.** Use a standard reference format when you cite and list references.

## Figures

Figures can be an important communication tool in a thesis proposal. All figures should be of the highest quality possible, and must include a caption. Figures adapted from other sources must include a reference to that source. Smaller figures may be placed floating within the text, but large figures should be placed on their own page within or at the end of the text.

## Format

The final proposal must be typed, double-spaced, and paginated. Use a 1" margin everywhere. Use a 10-12 point font. Section headings, as outlined above, must be present. Some guidelines concerning length: as long as it needs to be, but no longer! Probably 5 pages will be too short, more than 15 pages probably is too long.

## Budget

(use additional space for each category as necessary)

A budget is necessary to complete research endeavors; detailed budgets allow people to see how funding for research will be utilized, and identifies any in-kind expenditures and/or contributing parties. A thesis budget is not required within your proposal but you may wish to develop one that details the costs related to your thesis such as buying equipment, obtaining copies of articles, collecting data, analyzing the data/information, traveling and attending conferences.

## Proposed Budget

Research Student:	
Thesis Title:	
Thesis Advisor:	
Thesis Reader:	

Category	Details	Cost
<b>Stationery</b> (list items)		
<b>Printing / Copying</b>		
<b>Postage</b>		
<b>Equipment</b> (list items)		
<b>Travel</b>		
<b>Laboratory Expenses</b> (list details)		
<b>Other</b> (list details)		
<b>Total Amount Sought</b>		\$
<b>Amount Approved by Environmental Studies Director</b>		\$
<b>Signature of Director:</b>		

TITLE

An Undergraduate Thesis Proposal

By

Presented to

The Environmental Studies Program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Bachelor of Science/Arts

Major: Environmental Studies

Emphasis Area:

Thesis Advisor: Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Thesis Reader: Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Lincoln, Nebraska

Date:

## Project Time Line Examples

Phase	Days	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7
1. Content Analysis	3							
2. Content Collation	3							
3. Course Analysis	1							
4. Course Design	1							
5. Course Writing	4							
6. Review & Refine	2							

