**School of Public Management and Administration**

**Research proposal in preparation of a research project**

***\*The proposed title:***

**Name of candidate:**

**Student number:**

**Telephone number:**

**E-mail address:**

***Declaration regarding plagiarism***

The School of Public Management and Administration emphasises integrity and ethical behaviour with regard to the preparation of all written proposals. Although the lecturer will provide you with information regarding reference techniques, as well as ways to avoid plagiarism, you also have a responsibility to fulfil in this regard. Should you at any time feel unsure about the requirements, you must consult the lecturer concerned before submitting an assignment.

You are guilty of plagiarism when you extract information from a book, article, web page or any other information source without acknowledging the source and pretend that it is your own work. This doesn’t only apply to cases where you quote verbatim, but also when you present someone else’s work in a somewhat amended (paraphrased) format or when you use someone else’s arguments or ideas without the necessary acknowledgement. You are also guilty of plagiarism if you copy and paste information directly from an electronic source (e.g., a website, e-mail message, electronic journal article), even if you acknowledge the source.\*

You are not allowed to submit another student’s previous work as your own. You are furthermore not allowed to let anyone copy or use your work with the intention of presenting it as his/her own.

Students who are guilty of plagiarism will forfeit all credits for the work concerned. In addition, the matter will be referred to the Committee for Discipline (Students) for a ruling. Plagiarism is considered a serious violation of the University’s regulations and may lead to your suspension from the University. The University’s policy regarding

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[*http://upetd.up.ac.za/authors/create/plagiarism/students.htm.*](http://upetd.up.ac.za/authors/create/plagiarism/students.htm)

For the period that you are a student at the School of Public Management and Administration, the following declaration must accompany **all** written work that is submitted for evaluation. No written work will be accepted unless the declaration has been completed and is included in the particular proposal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *I (full names & surname):* |  |
| *Student number:* |  |

***Declare the following:***

1. *I understand what plagiarism entails and am aware of the University’s policy in this regard.*
2. *I declare that this proposal is my own, original work. Where someone else’s work was used (whether from a printed source, the Internet or any other source) due acknowledgement was given and reference was made according to departmental requirements.*
3. *I did not copy and paste any information directly from an electronic source (e.g., a web page, electronic journal article or CD ROM) into this document.*
4. *I did not make use of another student’s previous work and submitted it as my own.*
5. *I did not allow and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of presenting it as his/her own work.*

*Signature Date*

Your research proposal should have the following basic format (Do not submit these basic outline instruction pages with your proposal):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Paper size | A4 |
| Font (body text) | Arial, 12pt |
| Line spacing (body text) | 1½ spacing |
| Language setting | Use the English (UK) settings in MS Word. |
| Grammatical expression: Tense | A research proposal is always future-directed. A proposal is, therefore, mostly written in the future tense (e.g., Qualitative research methodology will be used). There is one important exception to this rule! The literature review section which reports on existing knowledge relevant to the proposed study. This is written in the present tense, for example Kumar (2000:17) argues that …. |
| Margins | Normal |
| Heading numbering and format | As shown in document |
| Paragraph formatting | Paragraphs should be justified (that is: the text should be aligned evenly along both the left and right margins to form a square box). |
| Page numbers |  |
|  Front page | None |
|  Table of Contents   * List of figures * List of tables * List of acronyms | Roman numerals, small caps (e.g., i, ii, iii) |
|  Body of proposal   * List of references * Appendices | Arabic numerals starting at 1 (e.g., 1, 2, 3) |
| Binding | Not applicable |

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Each document should be provided with a table of contents, which should be on the page following the cover page. It is often preferable to divide the text of a document into different divisions. This is done by means of headings that are indicated in the Table of Contents, for example:

1. INTRODUCTION
2. PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1

*2.1.1*

If there is a need to have further sub-divisions on completion of the threefold division, bullets should be used. **Sub-divisions should not be reflected in the Table of Contents**. In the text itself, linking sentences should be used between the different sub-divisions to ensure the flow of information. The same format should be used within the text (HEADINGS IN CAPITAL, sub-divisions in small caps).

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The introduction is the part of the study that provides the reader with the background information for the research reported.

* You have to provide a BROAD overview of the topic, introduce key terminology (**focus on the big picture**).
* Narrow down to your FOCAL topic.
* Don’t neglect the why? Remember to indicate WHAT you will research and WHY?

The purpose of the introduction/background is to establish a framework for the research, so that readers can understand how it is related to other research.

* What is the gap in the research you will be filling?
  + For example:
    - * No research in your country or industry on the topic.
      * Existing research is outdated.
      * Existing research has methodological issues? – lack adequate sampling – demonstrate LACK.

TO EMPHASISE:

In an introduction, the researcher should:

* create reader interest in the topic;
* lay the **broad foundation** for the problem that led to the study;
* place the study (YOUR FOCAL POINT) within a larger context of the scholarly literature; and
* reach out to a specific audience.

1. **PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

In this section you need to make explicit and clear the research issues that will structure (shape and organise) the research. The framework is vital for guiding the research, for ensuring coherence and for establishing the boundaries of the project. In this section you need to demonstrate that you have a good sense of the debates in literature around the topic. Mere appeal to your own experiences or general knowledge is inappropriate. The literature review is crucial to formulating the framework of the research. For your research proposal, the literature review should draw on a limited number of sources. The mini-dissertation itself will expand on the literature.

*In this section you will therefore need to indicate:*

What is the academic/research **CONCEPTUAL FOCUS** within which your research project is located? What does the literature reflect about the development of the issue? In what context (historical, geographical, social) is most of the literature located? What is the history of your area of study? What are the most recent findings in your area of study? What gaps and contradictions exist among these findings? What new research questions do these findings suggest? Consult a few introductory texts, some standard articles, and chapters in standard works or in topical online text in order to sketch an orientation of the kinds of academic debates in the field.

In what **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK** will you be developing your discussion? That is to say, what is the starting point or point of departure of your research in relation to the literature in the field? What are some of the assumptions you are going to start from? How will you be interpreting some of the key concepts? In terms of what are you going to be analysing or investigating the particular focus of your thesis? Is there a gap in the previous literature? Have you identified an inadequacy in the existing body of literature? In relation to current knowledge (as reflected in the literature), what do you intend to do? What theoretical model relates to your research topic? Consult some of the major texts and some recent articles to demonstrate that you have a clear sense of the major positions and trends in the field of study.

*NB: The purpose of the preliminary literature review section is to establish the conceptual framework for the study, to indicate where the study fits into the broader debates (where, in the on-going conversation, does it fit?), and so, to justify the value or significance of your research project against the backdrop of previous research*.

An example is the following: if you are writing about procurement in the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), then the preliminary literature review offers a theoretical perspective on procurement, where it comes from, why it is necessary, who is involved and the processes involved, its legislative environment as well as empirical research done on the topic in a similar context.

1. **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

A **research problem** is a **statement** about:

* an area of concern;
* a condition to be improved;
* a difficulty to be eliminated; and/or
* a troubling **question** that exists in scholarly literature, in theory, or in practice that points to the need for meaningful understanding and deliberate investigation.

A persuasive problem statement consists of 3 parts:

* the ideal;
* the reality; and
* the consequences.

Well-constructed problem statements will convince your audience that the problem is worth investigating.

Your strategy is one of contrast by situating the ideal scenario next to the situation as it exists. In this way, you not only persuade the reader that a problem exists, but then go on to emphasise the consequences of ignoring or addressing the problem.

*STATEMENT 1: (DESCRIPTION OF THE IDEAL SCENARIO)*

Describe the goals, desired state or the values that your audience consider important and that are relevant to the problem.

(BUT)

* Connect statements 1 and 2 using a term such as: but, however, unfortunately or in spite of.

*STATEMENT 2: (THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION)*

Describe a condition that prevents the goal, state, or value discussed in STATEMENT 1 from being achieved or realised at the present time.

*STATEMENT 3: (THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE AUDIENCE)*

Using specific details, show how the situation in STATEMENT 2 contains little promise of improvement unless something is done. Then emphasise the benefits of research by projecting the consequences of possible solutions as well.

***AN EXAMPLE OF A PROBLEM STATEMENT (NB:*** the**bold** colour is only used to emphasise – also – your problem statement will not have a heading “the ideal”, “the reality” and “as a consequence” – these serve as a guide)

**The ideal:**

**Public health** promotes the welfare of the entire population, ensures its security and protects it from the spread of infectious disease and environmental hazards, and helps to ensure access to safe and quality **care** to benefit the population (Reference).

However:

**The reality:**

There is specific evidence (facts, statistics, reports, etc) that the quality of health care in South Africa has been compromised by various challenges that impact negatively on healthcare quality. Improvement in quality care means fewer errors, reduced delays in care delivery, improvement in efficiency, increased market share and lower cost (reference/evidence).

**As a consequence:**

The decline in quality health care has caused the public to lose trust in the healthcare system in South Africa. **Therefore**, ……

1. **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The research objectives summarise what is to be achieved by the study. Objectives should be closely related to the statement of the problem, for example if the problem identified is low utilisation of child welfare clinics, the general objective of the study could be **to identify** the reasons for this low utilisation, in order to find solutions.

The general objective of the study states what researchers expect to achieve by the study in general terms. It is possible (and advisable) to break down a general objective into smaller, logically connected parts. These are normally referred to as specific objectives. **Specific objectives** should systematically address the various aspects of the problem as defined under “statement of the problem” and the key factors that are assumed to influence or cause the problem. They should specify **what** you will do in your study, **where** and **for what purpose.**

*Herewith an example:*

**STUDY focus**: A study into the cost and quality of home-based care for HIV/AIDS patients and their communities in Zimbabwe, developed at an HSR workshop, for example, had as its general/core objective:

The **core objective** of the study is to:

* **explore** to what extent community home-based care (CHBC) projects in Zimbabwe provide adequate, affordable and sustainable care of good quality to people with HIV/AIDS in order **to identify** ways in which these services can be improved.

The secondary objectives of the study are to:

* **identify** the full range of economic, psychosocial, health/nursing care and other needs of patients and their families affected by AIDS.
* **determine** the extent to which formal and informal support systems address these needs from the viewpoint of service providers as well as patients.

And so on….

The objectives also serve as headings for your subsequent chapters, for example to **describe** the environment within which procurement is implemented in the DPSA (as research objective) becomes Chapter 2 or 3: An environmental analysis of the implementation of procurement in the DPSA.

1. **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Research questions are most often used in qualitative inquiry, although their use in quantitative inquiry is becoming more prominent. The research questions indicate a very tight link to the research objectives. In essence, it mirrors the research objectives. It represents the research objectives in a question format, for example:

* **Research objective**: The core objective of the study is to determine the impact of study skills programmes on student achievement.
* **Research question**: What is the impact of a study skills programmes on student achievement?
* **NB: Formulate research questions around your secondary objectives as well**.

1. **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The function of this section is to give your reader a clear indication of the means by which you hope to achieve your research aims/objectives, to outline a procedure which, if necessary, can be repeated by others, and to indicate the sources of data that will be used.

* 1. **Approach and design**

Describe which **approach and design** your study will follow. Detail why the approach is relevant and explain the advantages and disadvantages of the approach and design as it relates to your topic. The research design needs to go into some detail about the methods and procedures to be used. In other words, you must say ***how*** you are going to investigate what it is your study will focus on.

* Which? Qualitative or quantitative (ONLY define and argue the one your study will adopt)
* Why?
* Define and discuss benefits and limitation as it will pertain

For example, your research objective could be to analyse the nature of absenteeism in a department, then your approach might be qualitative and you will use content analysis as a design choice.

Should your research objective be to assess the relationship between employee engagement and employee performance, your research approach might be quantitative and your design choice could be survey design.

*You need to tell your reader about* the **research** **approach** YOU will use for obtaining information and data. (*How* you will obtain the information and data?) Will you use documentary, and/or **qualitative, quantitative and/or mixed-methods**? Why is the selected approach most apt for your study?

**6.2 Data collection**

If you will use **quantitative methods**, which data collection technique/s will you use - survey or structured questionnaire, etc.? If you are intending to use a **qualitative method**, which data collection technique/s will you use - unstructured interview, semi-structured interview, open-ended questionnaire, participant observation, focus group discussion, etc.?

Where appropriate, how you intend to **verify** the reliability of the information and data you collect, should be included in this discussion.

**NB:** Besides having to forward clear definitions/descriptions of the aforementioned, you have to provide a **justification** for your choice of research method/s and data collection technique/s - (*why* you will use, from the range of available methods/techniques, the particular methods/techniques you propose and is the method/technique appropriate for your research aims/objectives and questions?) This discussion should be substantiated with appropriate literature in support of your choice.

***For example,*** your research objective could be to analyse the nature of absenteeism in a department, then your approach might be qualitative and you will use a case study design with open-ended interviews as a data collection tool.

**6.3 Population and sampling**

Identify your **population**. Describe your population/the size (departmental information, number of people working there, their mandate and programmes, etc.). If **sampling** is appropriate, explain which sampling technique (probability or non-probability sampling) will be used and why.

**NB:** If you are administering two (2) different data collection techniques, for example an open-ended interview and a focus group discussion, to two (2) different samples, you have to discuss the population and sampling technique applied for each data collection technique/tool.

If your research objectives lead you to use **secondary sources of information/secondary data,** which will be the only source of data your study will draw on, you will NOT include a heading: Population and sampling. Instead, you will describe what **document analysis** is about, what information/secondary data was purposely selected and included in your study, and why?

**6.4 Data analysis strategy**

Data analysis strategy is based on your approach, design and methods you used in your data collection i.e. qualitative case study using documents as source of data may for e.g. follow a thematic analysis strategy in analysing/presenting the data. You need to define and describe the nature and relevance of your data analysis strategy. Thus, the plan for **data analysis**. (In terms of what criteria are you going to analyse your findings? What methods are you going to use for analysis? Don’t merely say, for example, that you are going to use ATLAS-ti – say *why* this would be appropriate to use.)

1. **LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

Limitation and delimitations are related to your chosen methods and the way in which you demarcate your study. You need to provide information as to what the proposed limitations of your data collection methods may be as well as the delimitations pertaining to i.e. use of a case study (inability to generalise from a single case study to a whole population). **NB:** Time and money would not be valid limitations.

For example, you might have only studied Hispanic mothers because they have the highest rate of obese babies. Delimitations are often strongly related to your theory and research questions. If you were researching whether there are different parenting styles between unmarried Asian, Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic women, then a delimitation of your study would be the inclusion of only participants with those demographics and the exclusion of participants from other demographics such as men, married women, and all other ethnicities of single women (inclusion and exclusion criteria). A further delimitation might be that you only included closed-ended Likert scale responses in the survey, rather than including additional open-ended responses, which might make some people more willing to take and complete your survey. Remember that delimitations are not good or bad.

1. **ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Every research has to acknowledge that their study will have ethical implications for participants, specifically if people are to be involved during the collection of data i.e. interviews, questionnaires, observation, focus groups and so on. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that these participants are protected. You need to describe how you will protect your participants and ensure informed consent.

In short,

* You will ensure that you have the appropriate training and preparation for conducting the research.
* You will ensure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects you will work with are protected.
* You will protect the identities and interests of those involved.
* You guarantee the confidentiality of the information given to you. You will conduct your research in accordance with the ethical and professional guidelines as specified by the university.

The document (click the link) below, compiled by academics at the University of Stellenbosch, provides excellent information pertaining to ethics in the use of secondary data found, the public domain).

<https://www.sun.ac.za/english/faculty/healthsciences/rdsd/Documents/Undergraduate%20Research/Publication%20Incentive%20Fund/Guidance%20on%20protocols%20using%20secondary%20data%2020210215%20.pdf>

1. **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The significance of the study has to address two questions. Firstly, what is the academic significance of the study? Secondly, what is the practical significance of the study? In short, who will the study assist, how and in what way. Academic significance speaks to the academic contribution the study will make to Public Administration as a discipline, while the practical significance speaks to the nature of the discipline as an applied discipline. Your significance should relate to your orientation, thus, your theoretical contribution to the body of knowledge. A study can have theoretical, methodological and practical significance.

1. **PRELIMINARY FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH**

This section allows you to identify the content for each of the chapters that you will need to address your topic. Remember that your framework should correspond to the objectives identified for the research. Also remember that your framework is determined by the approach and design of your study. Most research essays will comprise five/six chapters and there is a difference between qualitative and quantitative studies.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Qualitative studies** | **Quantitative studies** |
| **Chapter 1:**  Introduction, preliminary literature review/conceptual framework, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, research methodology, significance of the study, framework and concluding remarks.  **Chapter 2:**  Conceptualisation of your topic within the Discipline of Public Administration - use a descriptive heading for your chapter i.e. *Theoretical framework supporting supply chain management in the Public Service*  This particular chapter will comprise two sections, namely: a) locating the study in the discipline of Public Administration and, b) reviewing the literature as it pertains to your chosen topic.  **Chapter 3:** Policy/legislative chapter  **Chapter 4:** Analysis and findings chapter    **Chapter 5:** Recommendations and conclusion  In qualitative studies, all chapters have descriptive headings and do not follow a prescribed structure  The above is an example and could change depending on the topic (there could be for example no empirical work and a desktop study does not warrant a chapter on analysis and findings. | **Chapter 1:** Introduction and outline  **Chapter 2:** Literature review  **Chapter 3**: Research methodology  **Chapter 4:** Findings  **Chapter 5:** Recommendations and conclusion    Quantitative studies follow a prescribed structure as presented above.    *When your study is a mixed-methods study you should be led by the research objectives in making decisions as to how to present your chapters*. |

The above should be written in paragraph format.

**LIST OF REFERENCES**

Alphabetical list of the sources used in drafting the proposal. Include ALL sources consulted. Remember that if you used a source in for example the preliminary literature review, or anywhere else in the document, it must be included in the list of references. Ensure that you follow the Harvard method of referencing and be consistent. Detailed information is available in the SPMA Referencing Guide.