Applied Thesis Proposal Format

Title Page

The page should include the following information:
- Title of applied thesis project
- Student's name
- Advisor/committee chair
- Two committee members (remember: you only have ONE committee chair!)
- Client/partner organization/community
- Name of site sponsor
- Date proposal is submitted to advisor and site sponsor

Summary of Project Issues

About one paragraph that identifies the issues the client organization would like the applied thesis project to address. This is where the student articulates the **problem** for which their deliverables will identify potential **solutions**.

This section is not a summary of the thesis project; it is a summary of the context that creates a **need for the thesis project**.

The student should keep in mind that the primary audience for the proposal is the client, specifically the site sponsor; committee members constitute a secondary audience. So the proposal should be written in a style that is targeted to the client organization's communication practices. For most client organizations, this means no footnotes, bibliography, etc.

Deliverables

A summary of what the student will deliver to the client at the end of the project. This is where the student describes potential **solutions** to the **problem** identified in the previous section. The description of the deliverables should cover both *forms* and *contents*. *Forms* might include one or more of the following: a written report; a verbal presentations; a video; a series of interactive meetings with members of the client organization; a website; a training program; or a manual. The *contents* of the deliverables are the student's findings regarding the issues that the client organization wants help with.

This is a good place to list the research questions, since they will shape the contents of the deliverables.

Project Design

This is a description of the stages or major activities of the applied thesis project. These stages will commonly include data collection, analysis, and preparation of deliverables. However, each project is different, so types of stages may vary considerably.

Each stage of the project should be described in detail. For instance, a data collection stage should identify what methods are being used (participant observation, in-depth interviews, etc.), and what population is being examined. The student should be as specific as possible, for instance specifying how many interviews are planned; how many hours will be spent doing participant observation; and what the demographic breakdown of the subjects will be. The student should also explain how each stage of the project contributes to the outcome of the applied thesis, so that the client understands its importance.

Ownership of research data should be made clear in this section (see notes below).

The student may also want to include plans for regular client meetings. For instance, they could say that they would like to meet once a month with their site sponsor.

Timeline

A chart that displays the entire duration of the project from start to finish, and indicates when each stage will be begun, and when completed. Stages may overlap. The stages listed in the timeline should be identical to those listed in the Project Design section. A Gantt chart is ideal – if you don't know what it is, Google it.

Costs (if applicable)

This section should be included if the student is seeking a paid internship or consultancy.

Student's Background

A one-paragraph summary that demonstrates the student's preparation to engage in the applied thesis project. The student should describe relevant experiences in any of the following: previous jobs, other ethnographic fieldwork projects, and educational background.

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Notes

Explanation of Terms

- "Client" is used as shorthand for client/partner organization/community – since there is so much diversity among thesis projects, it is hard to come up with a single term that is appropriate for everyone
- "Site Sponsor" is used as shorthand for the person in the client organization who sponsors the thesis project. This is the person who will mentor the student, and who will primarily be responsible for leading whatever change effort may result from the thesis project. Or, at least, they should play a role in advocating for that change process. We have struggled with how that role should be labeled.

Ownership of Research Data

It is important for students to develop a clear understanding with their client about who owns the data that the student collects for the thesis research project. This understanding should be developed before the research begins. It is often a good idea to have the agreement in written form; for instance, it could be incorporated into the thesis proposal.

In general, students should emphasize to their clients that the value of their project lies in the *findings*, not the raw data. Although data collection activities such as ethnographic fieldwork may be what the client associates with anthropology, the student should be clear that cultural analysis informed by theory is an essential part of our approach and our value to clients. Anthropologists should not be regarded as mere data providers.

In many cases, students will have an ethical obligation to their study participants to keep data out of the hands of the client. For instance, a thesis that is a study of the client organization will often involve the collection of opinions by employees who need to be kept anonymous in order to protect them. IRB regulations can be used by students to help justify their ownership of the data to clients.

In some cases, it may be appropriate for the organization to have access to the data. For instance, studies in design anthropology may collect data on product use where giving the client access to the data would not put study participants at risk. In that case, the IRB application and Informed Consent Forms must explicitly state that the client organization will receive a copy of the data collected by the student. This means that:

- One or more people at the client organization should be listed as key personnel on the IRB application
- Those people will need to take the online ethics training required by the IRB

The client organization will have an especially strong argument for access to the data if the student is an intern or permanent employee of the client organization. However, we have had a number of organizational studies by students who were permanent employees where the student successfully negotiated exclusive ownership and access to the data.

Protecting Client Organizations

Sometimes client organizations don't want thesis findings to be made public. For instance, if the project involves an organizational assessment, the organization may want to protect itself from the publication of any negative findings. There are several approaches to addressing this need:

1. While all master's theses are published on the UNT Digital Library, it's possible to delay publication by up to 5 years.
2. The student can anonymize the organization by using a pseudonym and not providing contextual information that might allow readers to identify it.