

August 29, 2007 OGPR SSHRC workshop
(summary of ideas; prepared by Shauna Butterwick, September 5, 2007)
For more info about good proposals see “Tips for a Successful Application” on the
EDST website: www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/workshop

1. What makes an excellent program of study description as part of your proposal?

- One that is clear, progresses in a logical way (each sentence sets up the foundation for the next sentence),
- explains key ideas in accessible language,
- grabs the reader's attention with its importance/significance (shows where the gaps are and what contributions can be made by the research),
- includes a purpose statement and the key research questions,
- shows awareness of and makes links to key relevant literature and concepts,
- shows a logical link between the problem being explored, the research questions and the methodology.
- Follows the instructions to the letter
- is manageable in scope (something a doctoral student can undertake)
- provides both a description of the larger problem (zoom out) and then focuses on what aspect of the problem the researcher will address
- is clear on why this matters, why we should care (significance) and why this should be funded and not something else
- makes the student come alive
- is absolutely free of typos and grammatical mistakes

2. What is the best way to prepare a program of study description? (How long will it take and what kind of feedback should you get?)

- follow the subheadings outlined in the proposal
- begin to fill in the information
- work with faculty and revise, revise, revise
- take full advantage of all opportunities within department and elsewhere
- have a faculty member from another dept. review it (as well as someone within your dept)
- read other successful proposals
- leave yourself 6 weeks (even more if possible)
- listen to the feedback you get.
- Get rid of extra words and unnecessary preambles e.g. "The intent of this study is"...change to "This study will

3. What should you think about when selecting your referees?

- Ideally get faculty who know well your work and your capabilities.
- Get tenure track faculty, rather than sessional lecturers.
- Find academics rather than other connections e.g. employers, colleagues (IF they cannot speak from a foundation of academic knowledge about your proposal); if these referees can write from that perspective and their work involve academic kinds of research, then they can provide a good letter.
- If you mention your advisor in your proposal, then get a letter from her.
- Ideally find someone whose own research is in the area you are working in.
- Ask them directly if they can write a strong letter for you and if they have any hesitation, find someone else. Their hesitate might reflect the fact that they don't know you very well and not have anything to do with the merits of your proposal.
- You must include their original signed copy as part of your package (if they send the letter directly to you, do not open the envelope, add it to your package that you submit; they can also send the letter directly to the grad secretary who will open it, date it, add it to your application, with the envelope attached).

4. What is the best way to interact with / approach referees?

- Approach them early, not last minute.
- Give them your proposal and any other materials they would need to write a strong letter e.g. a resume or outline of previous experiences that are relevant.
- Help them by identifying what you think are unique aspects of your project and background.
- Send them the reference form as one of your attachments with the info about you filled in. Follow up with reminders about the deadline.

5. What should you include in your description of your track record?

- Relevant academic work e.g. masters thesis if recent.
- Publications, conferences, awards, presentations, relevant work experience
- Relevant contributions such as creation of a program or curriculum
- Focus on strengths (not gaps)

Treat this as a learning process. The process is highly competitive; good applications are not always funded ☹. Try again the next year. Pay attention to what you can control, e.g. make sure it's complete and free of errors (don't be making last minute changes if you don't have time to proof read it – give it to someone else to proof read)

HAVE FUN & KEEP BREATHING!

