

WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY IN AFRICA



*Addressing Gender Disparity and Fostering Equity in
University Education*

549 Arcturus Road,
Manresa Park, Harare
Zimbabwe
Tel: +263 4 2934552/4
Mobile: +263 772 235670
Email: smombeshora@gmail.com
Web: www.wua.ac.zw

From the Office of the PhD Programme Coordinator

Guide to Writing a PhD Research Proposal

PhD research proposal is a requirement

All prospective PhD students are required to include a research proposal with their application to study at Women's University in Africa. Please read these guidelines which will assist you in preparing your research proposal.

What is a PhD research proposal?

A PhD research proposal is an outline of your proposed project that should:

- Define a main question or problems to be tackled and the approach to answering the main question;
- Articulate why is the question or problems being investigated; why it is interesting and important; highlight the originality or analytical significance and/or policy relevance of the research;
- Explain how it adds to, develops or challenges existing literature in the field;
- Highlight to potential supervisors and/or funders why you are the right person to undertake the research; and
- Explain how you will complete your research project within the required timeframe of 3 years full-time and 4 years part-time.

The PhD research proposals may vary in length, but generally speaking, a proposal should be no more than 5,000 words, or 10 pages in length; 1.5 line spacing using size 12 Times New Roman font.

Why is a PhD research proposal required?

Prospective supervisors use the PhD research proposals to assess knowledge of existing literature, the originality and quality of the potential students' ideas and how they will enhance existing literature, critical thinking ability and the overall feasibility of the proposed research projects.

How should the PhD research proposal be structured?

A generic PhD proposal has the following structure:

Title

A working title of your proposed research which should show that the potential PhD candidate has thought through what he/she is hoping to achieve.

Abstract

An abstract is a brief overview of the general area of study that summarises *what* you want investigate, and *why* and *how* you are proposing to undertake the research (length of abstract should be no more than 300 words)

Introduction

This section should introduce the subject matter of the proposed the research topic.

Example

Introduction

With the rise in global warming and increasing pollution levels, it is becoming essential to find a viable alternative to the internal combustion engine petrol powered car.

The aim of this project is to create two designs for a fuel cell powered car, the main criteria being environmental friendliness in terms of both emissions and materials.

This report presents the designs for two such cars, each of which includes the following components: engine, fuel, wheels, accessories, safety features and materials. Car A is aimed at the upper end of the market, while Car B is a mid-range vehicle suitable for family use.

A description of the design and an analysis of operational efficiency for each car are followed by a comparison of the two designs. Finally, the most cost efficient design is recommended.

(Source: <http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/writing/engineering/technical-report/4.1.xml>)

The introduction should also briefly introduce subsequent sections of the research proposal.

Literature Review

You should develop your proposal to demonstrate that you are aware of the important issues, themes and debates in the relevant literature, identifying existing gaps, both theoretical and practical. You must refer to key articles and texts and briefly show that you understand how they are relevant to your research area. A PhD is an original piece of work and so you should demonstrate that your proposed area has not been studied before.

Statement of the Research Problem

The problem needs to be stated in one all-embracing sentence. Such statement then needs to be expanded to make it clearer.

Objectives, Key Research Questions or Hypotheses

In this section you need to outline the aims and objectives of the research. What are the key questions that your research seeks to answer? If you have hypotheses, what are hypotheses?

Research Methodology

You need to explain the methodological approach and the methods of investigation that you will use and explain why they are the most appropriate, the limitations and ways of mitigating the limitations.

Research Ethics

Potential researchers applying to enroll at WUA should be familiar with the basic ethical principles. Research ethics refer to the moral standards of right and wrong conduct that apply every research field. Research ethics provides guidelines for the responsible conduct of research. You should state what ethical issues may arise in your proposed research and how you will address these issues.

Timeline/Research Plan

You should provide an outline of the timeline of the research, indicating how long different tasks are envisaged to take and the sequence of the project in the time available.

References

Within the proposal you should utilise the Harvard system of referencing i.e. the author's last name followed by the year of publication and where necessary the page number, e.g. Mombeshora and Le Bel (2009:282) or if the citation is at the end of a sentence (Mombeshora and Le Bel, 2009:282). You need to include a bibliography of all authors and texts cited within the research proposal.