

M.A. Sustainable Communities Prospectus Guidelines

The prospectus is meant to serve as a road map for you and your committee. The following outline is meant as a guide for developing your map.

1. Research Questions

- Clearly identify the core questions that you are trying to answer in this study.
- What do you want to know and what do you want to teach the reader?
- Start by brainstorming: write down everything you are asking about the topic. Then see if your questions fall into clusters of issues. Put these clusters into a priority listing, from most important to least important. Ask yourself, which questions must be answered in order to achieve my goal. Keep in mind that you are writing a thesis of approximately 60-90 pages and cannot answer all the questions that might arise around your topic.

2. Description, purpose and significance of your project:

- Describe your project, including information on “who, what, where, when, and how.”
- State your purpose and your objectives.
- Explain how your project is related to the theme of the SUS program.
- **Address the “so-what” question:** Why is this project important? Who is it important to? Why did you choose to work on it? You may want to consider how your project remedies the weaknesses in existing structures. And how is your project relevant to an existing community?
- You should also address the question of your preparation to undertake this project: What is your background or expertise that prepares you to do this project?

3. Review of the literature:

- Give an overview of the literature that you will draw on in your work.
- What has been written on your topic that is of relevance to your particular project?
- How have people treated the problem you are now addressing?
- What have been the major shifts in thought or the trends in approaching the problem?
- How does your project contribute to the discussion? (e.g., does it extend or apply the discussion?)
- **What have you already read and what do you still need to read in order to write your thesis?**

4. Theoretical Assumptions

What are the assumptions that underlie your work? For example, if you are writing about health care, you'll want to make it clear how you understand the idea of health and health care. Are you an advocate of holistic health? That's an assumption that guides your project; another way to talk about it is as a "frame." This section is about acknowledging the assumptions behind your project. You'll want to name the thinkers and approaches that have influenced your approach, both to the particular question at hand and to the overarching topic. An approach to health care issues might, for example, assume both metaphysical holism and a feminist critique of power and hierarchy.

5. Method:

- How will you go about finding the answers to your research questions?
- Will you interview people? Survey people? Analyze written documents? Develop a creative project? Develop a curriculum? What is your outcome and how will you achieve it?

***Important Note:* If you are planning to do any work with human or animal subjects, you must receive approval for your project from the Institutional Review Board. This approval must be secured well in advance of your actual research. Information and applications are on the web at <http://www4.nau.edu/ovp/irb/index.htm>.**

6. Bibliography

- Develop a bibliography of relevant books, articles, websites, etc., that you intend to read as part of your research and as you write your thesis/final project. I recommend that you place an asterisk beside the works that you have read so that both you and your committee have a sense for the reading that you have done and have left to do.
- As you begin to work on your thesis/final project, consider developing a note-taking/quote-taking system as well as a system for collecting all bibliographical information that you will later need for end notes or footnotes. You may want to use index cards that you file in a box or keep an on-going list in a notebook. Just remember that it can be a little nightmare to track down bibliographical information after the fact!

7. Thesis Committee/Status/Timeline:

- Who are you considering for your thesis committee?
- What is the current status of your project?
- Develop a detailed timeline to degree completion. Indicate when you expect to finish major portions of the project and when you expect to defend your project to your committee.