

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS PROGRAM CAPSTONE RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSAL GUIDE

Follow your seminar instructor's instructions and deadline for submission. If your seminar instructor does not give specific instructions on the proposal (or "prospectus") or does not require a formal written proposal for your research project, use this guide to develop your project proposal. Research project proposals in the social sciences typically include the following:

RESEARCH SUBJECT: Your project must **COMBINE** your **IR TOPIC** and **REGION** concentrations **AND** be appropriate for the focus of the seminar in which you are enrolled. What are the "big ideas" discussed in class and assigned readings? Consult your seminar instructor with regard to the research question you have in mind. You may also consult the IR Capstone Advisor if you have questions on selecting an appropriate subject.

PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW: What have previous scholarly researchers shown about the general subject? What specific research projects have been published in scholarly literature on this particular subject? Where does your project fit in the research literature, and how is it a unique contribution? That is, what is new about your project? What is your project's "value added"?

RESEARCH QUESTION: What specific question about this topic do you want to answer? This question must be broad enough to be sustainable for an in-depth research project and narrow enough to be feasible for a one-semester course (not a doctoral dissertation or master's thesis!). Social science research is objective, so not about your opinion but about what patterns can be discerned from systematic analysis of some discrete set of information/data. A research question is not speculative: social scientists research facts to identify patterns and then analyze those patterns. Ask what/who/why/how/when/where.

HYPOTHESIS: What is your preliminary answer to the research question you have posed? That is, what do you think the answer is before you complete your research? Why do you think that's a likely answer? (HINT: What does the scholarly literature suggest? How might you further test findings presented in earlier studies?)

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: Your answer to your research question – indeed, your topic choice and research question itself – will be framed by your theoretical perspective on international relations. Identify the theory that informs your research and acknowledge how your theory's assumptions shape, influence, and may bias your research. Anticipate and respond explicitly to possible criticisms of your analysis from other theoretical perspectives.

RESEARCH DESIGN/METHODOLOGY: The project must be analytic, not merely descriptive. How will you operationalize your thesis? How will you collect the information / data to answer your research question? How will you analyze that data / information systematically? Identify your primary sources/data set. Will you use quantitative or qualitative methods? Which specific method, and what are your primary sources? What are the advantages/disadvantages of this specific method and of these types of primary sources? Consider validity, reliability, and ethical issues in designing your procedures.

[ANNOTATED] BIBLIOGRAPHY: Using a standard citation style, list the books, academic journals, public speeches, documents, or archives consulted in your preliminary research. Ask your seminar instructor if APA, MLA, Chicago, or other citation style is preferred – see SU Library *Citation Guides*: <http://researchguides.library.syr.edu/citation/>. Summarize each author's research question, thesis, method, theory, analysis, and findings. This preliminary annotation will enable you to develop a full *literature review* for your paper and the instructor to provide further suggestions to assist your research.