



Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP)

Guidelines for Writing a Successful Proposal

Writing a research proposal will help you clarify your project and will give you valuable experience. All proposals submitted to the Summer Undergraduate Research Program are read and scored by a selection committee made up of faculty from each of the schools on campus. Someone in your school will read your proposal, but faculty members who are not familiar with your discipline will also read it. For this reason, a successful proposal should be written in such a way that an intelligent reader who is not familiar with your field could still understand the research question you are proposing and the significance of this research in a larger context.

Proposal Contents

The effectiveness of your proposal will depend on your ability to explain the nature, context, and scope of the project. The selection committee will also be looking for an indication that your project will be more than just a learning experience-what does it contribute to your field that we do not already know? Your proposal should include the following information:

Section 1 - Abstract: A summary of your research question and your project design. This is 3-5 sentences long and is a short summary of the technical part of the proposal.

Section 2 - Research Question and Significance: What is the background for the problem you are tackling? What is the question that you want to explore and why is it an interesting and important question? Try to write this first part so that the average newspaper reader can understand it. Then write a summary of the key prior work done (by others and by you).

Section 3 - Project Design and Feasibility: How will you go about exploring your research question? What computation or experimental tools or characterization equipment will you use? How will your samples be prepared or what computational approach will you take? Describe the experiments you will run. Present a time table.

Section 4 - Dissemination of Knowledge: Please indicate that you will participate in the Undergraduate Research Symposium in the spring of the following year or explain why you can't. What form will your final report take? Will you participate in an external conference, write a paper with your advisor or other students, or participate in an external poster session.

Section 5 - Personal Background: What courses or work experiences have prepared you to undertake this project?

Proposal Format

Your proposal may be up to three pages long. Submit it as a pdf file. We recommend at least a 12-point, serif font (such as Times or Palatino). Illustrations may be used in the body of the proposal. Do not include a cover sheet, resume, or other attachments. Instead, include any relevant information in the body of your proposal. **Remember to spell check!** You are asking for money and your proposal should be a reflection of your commitment to the project.

Review a Draft

You are highly encouraged to work closely with your faculty advisor at least once to review the draft prior to submitting the proposal for consideration.