

Research Proposal Guidelines

GEN 410
(Erion)

Overview

Your final assignment for this course is to present, in both written and oral presentations, a research proposal for your GEN 411 (Baccalaureate Capstone II) project.

Most generally, GEN 411 requires “[T]he production, presentation, and defense of a research paper that addresses a specific academic topic related to the College’s General Education Core.” Furthermore, “Research projects must demonstrate significant knowledge within the selected topic area, an understanding of its place in an integrated intellectual framework, and a high level of skill development.” Since this is a serious research project, you should organize your work around not only a broad topic, but also a specific *thesis* that answers an important *research question* (or series of questions) within your chosen topic area. You will have some freedom to choose your topic and thesis, though you might consider adopting one of the strategies below when making these choices:

- (1) Revisit a problem or idea introduced by Wilson, Postman, Wills, and/ or Achebe, but explore it in greater detail. Note that you may find interesting topics in sections of our texts that were not assigned; Wilson, for instance, devotes his later chapters to such captivating subjects as human nature, art, ethics, and religion.
- (2) Revisit a problem or idea introduced in GEN 110, GEN 220, GEN 230, and/ or GEN 240, but explore it in greater detail, in an integrated fashion.
- (3) Explore in an integrated fashion a problem or idea that falls under one or more of the General Education themes, but that you have not yet had the chance to study in depth.
- (4) Explore connections between a problem or idea related to your major and one or more of the General Education themes. Note that it is *not* enough to simply explore, say, some technical problem in computer science; however, you may be able to generate an acceptable project by studying a *related* problem with significant links to the liberal arts and sciences. *Aim for (weak) consilience!*

See also the relevant chapters from Booth, Colomb, and Williams’ [The Craft of Research](#).

More specific requirements for GEN 411 projects are determined by individual instructors, so GEN 410 proposals may require some revision in GEN 411; nonetheless, the GEN 410 proposal represents an important first step in the completion of the GEN 411 project.

Written Proposals

Your written proposal should be 1-3 pages long, using a 12- or 14-point font. (It is more important, though, that you devote sufficient space to establishing your ideas than that you meet some minimum or maximum page count.) Use one-inch margins on all four sides, and place a single staple in the upper left-hand corner of your proposal.

As for your proposal's general structure, try to follow the suggested format. The longest and most important section of your proposal will be your Introduction, in which you describe your proposal for an audience of non-experts in a way that is both interesting and informative. Make sure that you explain why your project is important, and why your audience should take your work seriously. Sketch out any preliminary lines of argument that you have identified, and briefly summarize your research plans in this section, so that your audience can better evaluate your proposal's chances of success. Note that the Introduction of your written proposal will likely serve as the foundation for your oral presentation; thus, it may help to include in this section the sort of information that you would use to introduce your project to your classmates.

Finally, remember that your writing should improve dramatically if you scrutinize multiple drafts of your proposal. Written proposals are due at the end of our final class meeting; those turned in after that point will be marked down *one full letter grade per calendar day* that they are late.

Oral Presentation

Your presentation will probably share the same basic structure and content as the Introduction to your written proposal, serving to teach the rest of us about your current plans for GEN 411. After a brief and attention-grabbing introduction to your topic, you should clearly and carefully present your research questions and plans for answering them before inviting questions from the rest of the class. Feel free to use the blackboard, overhead projector, handouts, etc., to make your presentation lucid, and be sure to speak clearly, using notes if necessary. Presentations should last 10-15 minutes, including at least 5 minutes for questions from the audience. The presentation schedule will be determined during the coming weeks.

Finally, you should note that audience presence and participation will be especially important during the student presentations. Thus, *I expect everyone to attend and participate in the presentations of others*. I will also give special weight (positive or negative) to such engagement when calculating the attendance and participation component of your final grade.