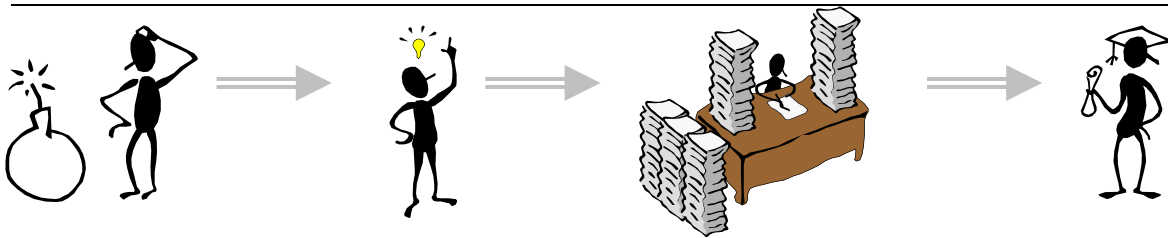


KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY
PHD PROGRAM IN INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

INCM 9600: Dissertation Proposal Colloquium
Fall 2022

Prof. Darina Lepadatu

Class Meetings: Thursday 11 am- 1:00 pm (every two weeks), room 117
Office Hours: Thursdays 1-2 pm and by appointment
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COLLOQUIUM DESCRIPTION:

Congratulations!! You have almost completed your graduate coursework and are now ready to focus on your own research question. This colloquium offers an opportunity to share and discuss with faculty and colleagues your dissertation research idea from its conceptualization to its final planning. The course guides you through the process of turning research questions you would like to explore in your dissertation into a preliminary draft of a dissertation research prospectus. In addition, you will critique and help to improve each other's proposals and have the opportunity to build a dissertation support network.

This course is largely designed as a learning community where you can provide feedback and learn from each other at every step of the process. Think of this course as an opportunity to develop your own research and as a forum to discuss your ideas and concerns about the research process with your peers. The success and fun of the colloquium will depend on your involvement and active participation! Your selection of research topics, your engagement in our discussions, and the feedback you provide to your colleagues will determine the extent to which we will all learn from each other and mutually benefit from our insights.

What is a Dissertation?

Before presenting the course logistics it is important for everybody to understand the nature and objectives of a dissertation project, so we can ensure that all assignments are completed with these objectives in mind. A Ph.D. dissertation is a lengthy, formal document that argues in defense of a particular thesis. The research performed to support a thesis must be both "original" and "substantial" and the dissertation must show it to be so. Dissertations must be grounded in theory and following the scientific method, i.e., defending the thesis (and any derived hypotheses) based evidence collected that either support or rejects it. The essence of any dissertation is critical thinking, not

experimental data. The integration of theory, the definition of concepts and the analysis of the evidence are at the heart of the work. A dissertation concentrates on principles: it derives recommendations/best practices and states lessons learned, and not merely the facts behind them. In general, every statement in a dissertation must be supported either by a reference to published scientific literature or by original work. Moreover, a dissertation does not merely repeat the details of critical thinking and analysis found in published sources; it uses the results as fact and refers the reader to the source for further details. How do we build up to this challenge?

COURSE LOGISTICS:

Participants are expected to:

1. **Attend every class!!** The utility of this course, perhaps more than that of any other course, is determined by you. Your absence may not only jeopardize the quality of your own work, but may also directly impede the research progress of your colleagues. Therefore, unexcused absences are unacceptable and will factor negatively toward your final grade.
2. **Read ahead** and be prepared to discuss the material assigned for that day in an open-minded, analytical and thoughtful manner.
3. **Be critical, yet respectful** of the subject matter and each other. View this seminar as a cooperative learning experience among colleagues. We all want to learn from each other, so be sure to provide your colleagues with **constructive criticism**. Avoid simply tearing down somebody else's work. Instead, indicate what you like about your colleague's ideas, thoughts, arguments, line of reasoning, evidence, etc., and why you like it. If you disagree with or are unconvinced by a particular argument or if you feel that a segment of your colleague's paper needs revisions, discuss concrete ways for improving the argument or its presentation.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

This course has a single objective: To help you develop a research proposal for your dissertation! As such, all assignments are directly related to that objective. A research proposal is a detailed map that is useful for the successful completion of a research project. It helps the researcher know where s/he is going, how s/he is going to get there, what s/he will accept as evidence to support or reject his/her research thesis and/or hypotheses, which milestones to complete and, finally, when the project is finished. By clearly communicating the ideas underlying your research and the planned activities at each step of the research process also helps reviewers (your dissertation committee!!) evaluate the merits of the project and the feasibility of the research and provide detailed feedback. Your assignments for this course include the presentation of your research topic and methodology as outlined below and the feedback you provide on your colleagues' research ideas. Specifically, you are required to complete the following assignments:

Topic Statement (ungraded) – In 2-3 pages, please present the topic you intend to research (either in form of a research question or a thesis statement), the rationale for why you want to research it (what is the underlying problem and why is it important?), and what you expect the implications of your findings to be (the “So What?” question). It is a good idea to start with an attention-grabbing story and cite 2020 government statistics about your case/ country study. The concluding paragraph of your Introduction

should start with the "Purpose of my project is...". Please include your primary and secondary research questions.

IRB Proposal (5 %) – Any research involving human subjects requires the approval by the Institutional Review Board to ensure that "people who participate in research are treated ethically and in compliance with all federal and state laws and regulations." As such, your IRB proposal must provide information on the purpose of the research, nature of the data to be collected, data collection procedures, instruments, methods for recruiting subjects, and on the risks and benefits of the study. Please go to kennesaw.edu/irb and have the IRB application completed in Cayuse by the end of the course (You will officially submit your application after you defend your research proposal). **Please note that international research involves a letter of approval from official authorities in the country of study who could be your contact person and advise on the cultural appropriateness of your research methods.**

Literature Review (15%) – Based on the idea that knowledge is cumulative and that we can learn from what others have done, a literature review serves to share with readers the results of other studies related to your topic and situates your project within the larger, ongoing scholarly debate. In addition, it identifies gaps in existing knowledge and suggests how your project intends to close them. As appropriate, use the sources you have found useful in framing your topic, spell out your research question(s) or hypotheses, outline the underlying problem(s) and policy implications, and present your ideas for how your research will generate new knowledge, i.e., what results do you expect to find?

In general, your literature review serves to help you conceptualize your research idea, i.e., define, discuss and analyze the main important concepts to be explored in your proposal. In order to write an effective literature review, you ought to present and discuss the most important theories and recent empirical studies related to your research topic. Specifically, your literature review should answer the following questions: What theoretical framework informs your assumptions? Which school(s) of thought underlies your hypotheses? What, based on existing (empirical and theoretical) knowledge, do you expect to find in your research (e.g., what is the relationship between your variables)? What gap in our existing knowledge will your research fill? To what extent does the research explore creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts? How can you generalize from your findings, i.e., what are the larger theoretical, empirical and policy implications of your (expected) findings? As with any academic paper, your main source of information should be scholarly books and refereed, peer-reviewed articles. Minimize the use of non-refereed information (such as newspapers, magazines, information from the Internet, etc.) and use non-academic sources only for illustration purposes or if your topic has been insufficiently explored in academic sources. You may want to consult Locke et al., Chapter 4 for details on drafting a literature review. Your literature review should be 1200-1500 words (double-spaced).

Conceptual Mapping: https://www.westpoint.edu/sites/default/files/inline-images/centers_research/center_for_teching_excellence/PDFs/mtp_project_papers/Chamberlain_14.pdf

Structure of Literature Review:

Major concepts and variables (definitions and existing research on the relationship between your variables)
Conceptual Mapping

Theoretical Framework

Background on your Case Study/ Conflict (basic country information related to the social, economic and political context (population, development, major problems etc.), map, brief history of the conflict)

Research Design and Methods Section (10%) – In your methods section, you inform readers how you plan to tackle your research problem and answer your research question(s). In this section you describe how you operationalize the key concepts you identified and discussed in your literature review (e.g., defining your dependent and independent variables and hypothesizing their expected relationship), and justify your methodological approach (quantitative, qualitative or mixed method) and, the choice of the specific tools you plan to use for collecting and analyzing your data. In this section, you also describe the strengths and limitations of your approach and selected methods.

For **quantitative studies**, your methods section ought to contain detailed information on:

- **The research design** – Are you conducting a survey, a (quasi-) experiment, secondary data analysis? Why is this the best method to answer your research questions?
- **Operationalization of variables; hypotheses**
- **Sample and study participants**– Who will participate in your study? How do you select your sample and what type of sampling do you use?
- **The instrument** – What kind of instrument(s) are you using to collect your data (e.g., existing or newly developed measures, scales or indexes)? Why those? How do you ensure reliability and validity of your instrument? Be sure to include your instrument or, at a minimum, sample measures with your proposal.
- **Data Collection Procedures** – How and where (e.g., location or field site) do you plan to carry out your study? What activities are involved? How long will it take? When do you plan to collect data?
- **Ethics** - What are the ethical challenges of your study? Are there any conflict of interest involved in your study? Is participation in your study putting your human subjects at risk? Are you dealing with vulnerable populations and if yes, what measures are you taking to protect your subjects? How are you going to handle highly sensitive and potentially (re)traumatizing topics? Are you going to provide any incentives for your participants? What are the benefits for your participants? What are you going to give back to the community in exchange for sharing their stories? Please add a stand-alone section on Reflexivity discussing: the dynamics of being an insider/outsider for this study; how does your own identity/ position affect how you will collect and analyze data?

For **qualitative studies**, your methods section ought to contain detailed information on:

- **The research design** – Are you conducting ethnographic field research, interviews, participant observations? Why are they the best methods to answer your research questions?
- **Sample and subjects** – Who will participate in your study or who will you observe? How do you select your sample and how do you recruit participants?
- **The instrument** – What kind of instrument(s) are you using to collect your data (e.g., interview or focus group guide, content analysis, observation chart)? Why those? How do you ensure reliability and validity of your instrument? Be sure to include your instrument or, at a minimum, sample measures with your proposal.
- **Data Collection Procedures** – How and where (e.g., location or field site) do you plan to carry out your study? What activities are involved? How long will it take?

- When do you plan to collect data? How are you going to get access to the field site and participants?
- **Ethics** - What are the ethical challenges of your study? Are there any conflict of interest involved in your study? Is participation in your study putting your human subjects at risk? Are you dealing with vulnerable populations and if yes, what measures are you taking to protect your subjects? How are you going to handle highly sensitive and potentially (re)traumatizing topics? Are you going to provide any incentives for your participants? What are the benefits for your participants? What are you going to give back to the community in exchange for sharing their stories? Please add a stand-alone section on Reflexivity discussing: the dynamics of being an insider/outsider for this study; how does your own identity/ position affect how you will collect and analyze data?

Research Proposal (40%) – Having completed your topic statement, literature review and methods section, it is now time to put it all together in a comprehensive draft of your research proposal. Your research proposal is intended to convince readers that you have a worthwhile research project and the theoretical knowledge, methodological skills and competent design to complete it. Your research proposal should contain the following elements:

- **Abstract** – provide a brief summary of your research idea, including your main thesis, rationale for conducting the research, theoretical framework, methodology, expected results and their implications. Abstracts are intended to help readers quickly ascertain the research purpose (200-250 words).
- **Introduction** – introduce your study and its purpose, present your rationale, discuss the intellectual merit of your research, and provide an outline of the sections of your proposal.
- **Background Section/Literature Review** – show the lineage of your topic from the background of existing knowledge, both theoretical and empirical, from previous investigations and, as appropriate, from contemporary practice. Develop your theoretical frame, conceptualize your key variables, present your central hypotheses, identify gaps in existing knowledge and discuss the specific contributions of your research.
- **Methods Section** – explain and justify the procedures you plan to employ in your study for data collection and analysis; discuss limitations of your methodological approach.
- **Ethics** – explain how you ensure that your research does not cause any harm to your subjects, that participation in your study is voluntary and based on informed consent, that anonymity or confidentiality is maintained and that the expected benefits from your study outweigh any foreseeable risks. For further detail see <http://www.apa.org/monitor/jan03/principles.aspx>.
- **Expected Results** – discuss what you expect to find and what the implications of those expected results are for your specific area of study and, more generally, for the field of international conflict management.
- **Conclusion** -discuss the significance and potential impact of your study; what are its theoretical, methodological and practical implications?
- **Appendices**. Instrument of Investigation. Consent form (interviews); cover letter (survey).
- **Format (5% of research proposal grade)**. The proposal must:
 - be typed, double-spaced with the Times font size 12.
 - Include a title page, table of content and abstract.
 - have one-inch margin on all sides.

- conform to the American Psychological Association (APA) style
- be error-free regarding grammar and spelling.
- be approx. 20-25 pages in length, excluding the title page.

In addition to developing your proposal, your grade in this class will depend on the quality of your feedback and comments on your colleagues' proposals. Specifically, we will assess performance on the following:

Peer Reviews (10%) – At every stage of the proposal development, you will review one of your colleague's progress and the quality of his/her proposed research. You should provide the author with written and oral comments on each assignment. Peer reviewers will be assigned based on common or complimentary research interests once all of you have decided on your research topic, theoretical frame and methodological approach. This way you will hopefully receive not only stylistic advice but also substantive suggestions for improving the overall quality of your proposal.

Participation (10%) – Designed as a learning community, the success of this course depends on your active participation and your constructive feedback and comments on your colleagues' ideas. Please note that your grade may be lowered for unexcused absences, tardiness, disrespect for others or inadequate participation during in-class exercises and discussion.

Note: Your literature review, methods section and draft proposal are to be submitted to the instructor and your peer reviewer at the same time.

EVALUATION AND GRADES:

Topic Statement	ungraded
IRB Proposal	5%
Literature Review	15%
Methods section, incl. instrument	10%
Peer Reviews	10%
Participation	10%
Mock proposal defense	10%
Final proposal	40%
Total	100%

Final grades will be appointed as follows:

90 -100 points	A
80 -89 points	B
70-79 points	C
less than 70 points	F

Grading Scale:

The following general grading scale will be used for participation, presentations and completed assignments for this course:

- A to A- (90-100 points): The student makes very strong contributions to the course. Class discussion, comments, presentations and completion of assignments exceed expectations, reflect a great deal of thought about the material and move progress in the course ahead in a constructive manner (e.g., not merely

criticizing colleagues and their work, but also suggesting concrete useful directions for advancing their projects).

- B+ to B- (80-89 points): The student contributes meaningfully to the course. Class participation, presentation and completion of assignments meet expectations as outlined in the syllabus (e.g., pointing to weaknesses/limitations in the literature and colleague's work, but only occasionally making constructive suggestions for overcoming those limitations and advancing current knowledge).
- C+ or lower (<79 points): The student does not contribute meaningfully to the course. Class participation, presentations and/or completion of assignments are limited to more or less repeating existing knowledge, rarely making new contributions to the field, and/or are filled with mistakes and inaccuracies.
- F: The student was a net drain on the course, rarely if ever speaking in class and failing assignments.

Important Information for Students

Course Delivery

KSU may shift the method of course delivery at any time during the semester in compliance with University System of Georgia health and safety guidelines. In this case, alternate teaching modalities that may be adopted include hyflex, hybrid, synchronous online, or asynchronous online instruction.

Face Coverings

Based on guidance from the University System of Georgia (USG), masks are encouraged based on individual preference and assessment of personal risk.

Student Resources: KSU is committed to student success, and we have a number of different student resources to help you achieve your goals. From technological support to tutoring and advising services to counseling and other wellness resources, there are many departments and individuals here at KSU who are ready and wanting to help. For more information about KSU Student Resources, please go to <https://cia.kennesaw.edu/instructional-resources/syllabus-resources.php>

Institutional Policies: For official policies concerning academic integrity, disruption of campus life, web accessibility, reasonable accommodations, withdrawal from classes, copyright law, protecting student's rights (FERPA), sexual misconduct, and other important policies, please use the link below for Federal, BOR and KSU Student Policies: <https://cia.kennesaw.edu/instructional-resources/syllabus-policy.php>

Student Success in Graduate Courses. The quality of your writing is a key factor of success in this class and the doctoral program. Please note that the expectations for professional writing are considerably higher in a doctoral program. I strongly encourage you to take proactive steps to improve your writing by soliciting feedback from your peers and faculty as well as scheduling appointments with the Graduate Writing Program at the KSU Writing Center:

<https://writingcenter.kennesaw.edu/gwp/index.php>

READINGS:

There is one **required** book, which is available for purchase at the Campus Bookstore, but we recommend several basic Research Methods textbooks.

Locke, L., Spirduso, W., Silverman, S. (2013). *Proposals that Work: A Guide for Planning Dissertations and Grant Proposals*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publ. (6th ed.)

Recommended readings:

Bloomberg, Linda, Volpe, Marie. 2018. *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation. A Road Map from Beginning to End*. Sage Publ. (4th edition)

Durdella, Nathan. 2018. *Qualitative Dissertation Methodology: A Guide to Research Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publ. ISBN: 9781506345161

Bryman, Alan. 2016. *Social Science Research Methods*. Oxford University Press (5th edition)

Creswell, J. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Approaches*. Sage publ. (5th edition)

Pyrzczak, F. (2014). *Writing Empirical Research Reports: A Basic Guide for Students of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Routledge. (8th edition)

Galvan, J. (2017). *Writing Literature Reviews: A Guide for Students of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Routledge. (7th edition)

Yin, Robert. 2017. Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods. 6th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publ. ISBN: 9781506336169

King, Nigel, Horrocks, Christine, Brooks, Joanna. 2018. Interviews in Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publ. ISBN: 9781446274972

Saldana, Johnny. 2015. The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers. 3rd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publ. 9781473902497

Proposed Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Aug. 18	The Function of the Proposal Read: Locke et al., Ch. 1
Sep. 1	Refining Your Topic and Ethical Considerations Read: Locke et al., Ch. 2 Topic Statement due in D2L
Sep. 15	The Structure of the Proposal Read: Locke et al., Chs. 3 & 4 Discuss the Conceptual Mapping of your Dissertation
Sep. 29	Writing Your Literature Review Read: Locke et al., Ch. 5

Discuss the structure of Lit Review

- Oct. 13 Designing Your Methodology
Read: Locke et al., Chs. 6 & 7
Literature Reviews due in D2L
Discuss the INCM dissertation of your choice
- Oct. 27 Discussing Your Methodology
Discuss your instrument of investigation in class
- Nov. 3 Putting it all together
Read: Locke et al., Chs. 8 & 9
Research Methods section (incl. instrument) due in D2L
Prepare your IRB proposals in Cayuse (but you will submit it after you pass your proposal defense)
- Nov. 17 **Draft Dissertation Proposals for peer reviews due by Email!!**
- Nov. 28 Peer Reviews due by Email!!**
- Dec. 1 Mock Defense Proposal presentations**
- Dec. 8 Final Research Proposals due in D2L**
- Dec. 15 Final Grades due**

APPENDIX A**Kennesaw State University
Institutional Review Board****Approval Request for Research with Human Participants¹****(Sample Questions for Cayuse Application)****Question 2: The description of the research should include brief comments on:**

a. **Purpose of research:** Briefly describe the purpose of the research. Describe the problem to be investigated, the reason for conducting the research. Include any broadly stated research questions or issues being investigated. You may wish to include hypotheses.

b. **Nature of data to be collected:** Describe the type of data to be collected such as demographic data, answers to open-ended questions, responses to Likert scaled statements, specimen to be collected, video tapes, audio tapes, etc.

c. **Data collection procedures:** Describe the manner in which data will be collected. This section should describe exactly what participants are being asked to do; e.g., participants may be asked to participate in a focus group discussion, or participants may be asked to complete an online survey using [SurveyMonkey](#).

d. **Instruments to be used:** Describe the "instruments" to be used; i.e., questionnaire, interview outline, survey, etc. Email a copy of each with your approval request form and consent form or cover letter.

e. **Method of selection/recruitment of participants:** Describe how participants will be identified and contacted; e.g., if students in classes will be asked to complete a survey, then list the specific classes and instructors. It is generally better if the person administering a survey is not the instructor of record. Attach any advertisements to be used.

f. **Participant age range, number and gender:** Provide expected age range even if all participants are expected to be adults. If there is a chance that participants may include minors, make certain that appropriate consent is included. Provide the expected number of participants and the expected distribution of males and females.

g. **Incentives, follow-ups, compensation to be used:** Describe incentives that will be given to participants, as well as any methods used to avoid penalizing those who do not participate. IRB generally recommends against extra credit in classes.

Question 3. Risk:

Provide a complete description of any procedures that may involve any risk to the participant and indicate alternative procedures that may be used, if any. The legal or

¹ www.kennesaw.edu/irb

ethical concerns involved should be addressed, safety precautions to be taken should be listed, and a justification for procedures involving risks or discomforts included. If the research involves any potential risks to the participant, participants must be advised of the risks and the availability and limits of treatment for any sustained injuries. Note that risks may be physical, psychological, social, economic or legal.

Question 4. Benefit:

Research involving human participants must not be conducted unless the benefit to the participant AND the importance to humankind outweigh any potential risk to the participant. Describe any and all benefits from conducting this study.

Question 5. Informed Consent is a Requirement:

Informed consent means the knowing consent of an individual (or his/her authorized representative) is so situated as to be able to exercise free choice without undue inducement or any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, or other forms of constraint or coercion.

Consent must be obtained by using a [consent form](#), which is signed by study participants, or by using a [cover letter](#), which provides for unsigned consent if study participation is expected to be [anonymous](#). Review of the [consent checklist](#) will help ensure that your consent document contains all of the required elements. Different consent document formats may be used, but **documents must address all of the items included in the sample consent form or letter**. If deception is employed in your research, describe how participants will be deceived, the necessity for deception and your debriefing procedures, including the timing and information to be presented to the participant. The IRB requires a written debriefing for studies involving deception. If you will be utilizing an online survey program to collect data, you must notify your participants in your consent document as to whether [Internet Protocol addresses](#) will or will not be collected by the online program.

Question 6. Vulnerable Participants:

In research with minors or other vulnerable populations, informed consent is especially necessary, and in most cases, will be obtained from parents or legal guardians. An understandable explanation of the research procedures and an opportunity to volunteer to participate should be supplied to the participants as well as their authorized representative. This is called "assent." Their wishes determine their participation. If your research will not include minors, then the consent form or cover letter should state that only persons 18 or older are eligible to participate. Vulnerable populations may include cognitively impaired, economically disadvantaged, educationally disadvantaged, elderly, homeless seeking social services, people with Parkinson disease, Latinos or others with limited understanding of English, pregnant women, students and employees.

Question 7. Future Risk:

Whenever possible, the participants should remain anonymous; otherwise appropriate confidentiality should be maintained. Procedures for maintaining confidentiality should be described in detail, including who will have access to the data and on what basis. If survey instruments are to be used, list the anticipated date identifiers will be removed

from the completed instruments. Describe how data will be stored, as well as how and when it will be destroyed. Provide justification if identifying information will be retained and indicate measures used to protect the participants' confidentiality.

Question 8. Illegal Activities:

Participants must be assured that their data will be confidential in any research, but if individually identifiable data relate to illegal activities by identifiable persons, no guarantee can be given if disclosure of the data should be required by law. When anonymous questionnaires are involved, but written informed consent must be obtained, the consent form can be signed and returned separately to prevent any possibility of linking names with the data.

APPENDIX B

**National Science Foundation
Division of Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences
SBE Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grants
Dissertation Due Dates: February 28th and October 15th**

Proposals for Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grants submitted to the Sociology Program must comply with and have the following information:

- **Due Dates - February 15 and October 15:** Projects should be received in the Sociology Program by these dates. Requested start date for projects recommended for support may begin July 1 (for February 15 submissions) and on March 1 (for October 15 submissions).
- **Project Duration:** 12 months
- **Project Budget:** Dissertation grants are for \$10,000 or less. Funds are for expenses associated with conducting the dissertation research (e.g., data collection, field work, payment to subjects, survey expenses, software, microfilm, data transcription, file creation and data merging, courses on specialized skills such as those offered at the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), travel, and expenses incurred at sites away from the student's home institution). The grant does not support stipend, salary and tuition reimbursement.
- **Proposal Title** should begin with, "Doctoral Dissertation Research:..."
- **P.I.:** The dissertation advisor should be listed as the Principal Investigator. The dissertation student is being listed as the Co-Principal Investigator.
- **Project Summary:** Students must clearly address, in separate, labeled, sections within the one-page limitation, both of the NSF merit review criteria in the Project Summary. The intellectual merit portion should include, minimally, background information on the research (theory, prior research), research hypotheses and/or questions, and a description of methods and expected findings. The broader impacts portion might address such questions as: How well does the activity advance discovery and understanding while promoting teaching, training or learning? What may be the benefits of the proposed activity to society? (see the [Grant Proposal Guide](#) for more detail).
- **Project Description** must not exceed **10** single pages. Do not send transcripts and letters of recommendation but include any questionnaire or survey guide for original data collection, up to five pages. Include after the 10 page project description.
- **Font and Spacing:** Proposals must have 2.5 cm margins at the top, bottom and on each side. The type size must be clear and readily legible, and conform to the following three requirements: 1) the height of the letters must not be smaller than 10 point; 2) type density must be no more than 15 characters per 2.5 cm; (for proportional spacing, the average for any representative section of text must not exceed 15 characters per 2.5 cm); and, 3) no more than 6 lines must be within a vertical space of 2.5 cm. The type size used throughout the proposal must conform to all three requirements. While line spacing (single-spaced, double-spaced, etc.) is at the discretion of the student, established page limits must be followed. The guidelines specified above establish the **minimum** type size requirements, PIs, however, are advised that readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in selection of an appropriate font for use in the proposal.
- **IRB:** For proposals involving human subjects, please be sure to include the Human Subjects Certification form from the submitting institution. If the certification is pending, please include information to that effect on the cover sheet. The institutional form certifying that the project has been approved should be scanned and incorporated in a file in the supplementary documents section of the proposal. **PLEASE DO NOT WAIT UNTIL YOU HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED OF FUNDING TO START THE APPROVAL PROCESS.**
- Proposals that violate these regulations in an attempt to squeeze in more information antagonize

reviewers and may be returned without consideration.

- All proposals must be submitted electronically via [Fastlane](#) or [Grants.gov](#).
- Co-Review: The Sociology Program does not co-review dissertation proposals with other programs.

Also, only one dissertation proposal may be under consideration at NSF at any given time.

If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact the Program Directors.

Dissertation Advice to Students

The Sociology Program dissertation improvement grants are awarded to support high quality doctoral dissertation research in sociology. The suitability of a research idea is based on the extent to which the research contributes to sociological theory and knowledge, not on specific topics. Grants are for direct research costs associated with either original data collection or the analysis of existing datasets. Direct research costs may include such things as dataset acquisition, additional statistical or methodological training through ICPSR (Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research) meeting with scholars associated with the original data set, and fieldwork away from the student's home campus. More information about the nature of dissertation grants, applicant eligibility, and proposal and grant processing is given in the solicitation, [SBE Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grants](#).

As a general rule, proposals that review well are those that clearly state a central research question, make an argument that engages and/or debates relevant literatures, specifies the data the student will gather and the analytic procedures the student will apply to those data. Additionally, strong proposals state what the researcher expects to find or show through the research. Projects designed primarily to "expand," "explore," or "develop" our understanding of a phenomenon tend to be too preliminary for NSF support. Likewise, the Sociology Program does not fund evaluation projects or those with a primarily applied focus. NSF-funded sociology proposals tend to be theoretically framed and make clear contributions to sociological theory, and the strongest proposals have a research design that permits falsifiability so that the PI can be wrong as well as right.

When preparing the proposal, write clearly and concisely. Reviewers will include sociologists from a variety of specialty areas. It is possible that no specialist from your particular area of research will be on the panel. Defining key terms and keeping your proposal free of jargon will ensure that all reviewers will be able to understand your proposal and evaluate it fairly.

The proposal should not include any appendix unless the student PI has received permission from the NSF program director. Students are, however, allowed to include copies of their survey instruments and interview guides if they are completing original data collection. Please limit these materials to five pages and insert at the end of the project description. Proposals without explicit permission for appendices may be held up or returned without review. Remember that reviewers are not obligated to read appendices, so critically important information should be in the body of the proposal. Letters testifying to local institutional sponsorship need not be appended but definitely should be cited in the proposal.

Students should use their judgment to determine how much space to allot to various portions of the discussion of the research. For example, students analyzing existing datasets will probably need to devote more space to the theoretical discussion and engagement with extant literature. In contrast, those designing their own study, whether quantitative or qualitative, will need to apportion more of their space to explication of the measurement instrument, fieldwork, or data-gathering efforts. Likewise, different analytic techniques require more or less discussion. Regardless of how much space the student devotes to discussion of theory and method, it is crucial that these be tightly connected.

Descriptions of data, regardless of type, should address how the specific data are appropriate to the theoretically motivated question(s) asked. Issues such as sampling, generalizability, reliability and

validity are crucial components of this discussion regardless of data type (quantitative or qualitative). Thus, proposals should specify how the student will use the data to generalize to a relevant population or theory. In addition to consideration of the quality, type and appropriateness of data, students should be similarly informative about their plan for data analysis.

Reviewers recognize that plans change in the process of research; nonetheless, they will look for a clear description of how the student will use the data to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. Listing software programs or methods (participant observation) does not provide sufficient information to reviewers nor demonstrate that the student has seriously considered all phases of the research process in designing the proposal. Reviewers should be able to look back to the specific research aims and understand the purpose of the data collection and analytic strategy.

In sum, there are no pre-determined page lengths for sections of the project description; what is important is that reviewers know what the student PI intends to do, why she or he is doing it, exactly how the student will conduct the research and analyze the data regardless of its form.

Finally, remember that reviewers understand that there are no perfect strategies for conducting research. Thus, they look for evidence that the student is knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses of the approach selected. In a competitive review process where NSF can only fund a subset of excellent proposals, students should include a discussion of how the new knowledge their particular study produces will yield generalizations that advance sociological knowledge.

As a proposal preparation tool, consider the following checklist:

1. What is the research question?
 2. Have you entered into a dialogue with the literature?
 3. What is the project's theoretical contribution?
 4. What do you expect to find?
 5. How will you know if you are wrong? (falsifiability).
 6. What, where and when will you conduct your research?
 7. What kinds of evidence (data) will you gather?
 8. How will you analyze the data?
 9. Has your proposal been read (multiple times) by others before submitting to NSF?
 10. Have you included the **required** sections of the project: Scientific merit? Broader impacts?
 11. Have you applied for or obtained human subjects (IRB) approval?
- * Note: Students doing international research, having a formal affiliation with a foreign research institution, may be eligible for additional funding. Please contact the appropriate program in NSF's Office of International Science and Engineering [OISE](#).