Writing a Proposal for GECC4130 Senior Seminar course

A proposal is not an outline of a project. It serves far more important purposes. A proposal should help you to (1) narrow down your research focus, (2) explore resources available for the research, (3) examine feasibility of the study, and (4) lay out steps for carrying out the investigation. To achieve these objectives, a proposal should include the following basic elements.

1.　　An introduction to the research problem

To begin a study, you must have an unambiguous research question. Choosing a subject matter for investigation does not mean that you already have a research problem. A phenomenon can be studied in many ways for addressing different questions. Therefore, you need to narrow down your research focus to a particular problem in the proposal. A problem statement should identify distinct concepts and hypothesize their relations with each other. To help readers comprehending the research question, the introduction section should describe backgrounds of the study and discuss values of the investigation. Usually one to two paragraphs would be adequate for the introductory purpose.

2.　　Literature review

Previous research is an extremely valuable resource in guiding your own study. You should know what has been done and what needed to be done with regard to your own specific question. Literature review will help you to clarify key concepts and to grasp nature of the issue, and it will further guide you to frame the study in addressing common, unresolved questions in the field. Be selective when reviewing the research literature. You need to take an active role in organizing the literature in such a way that it helps you to formulate a sound question and to generate reasonable expectations (or hypotheses) for your analysis. Often, you may revise your initial research questions and hypotheses after a thorough reading of the literature. This section requires a few paragraphs to accomplish the above tasks.

3.　　Research design

There are many ways to conduct a research. You need to figure out which is the best strategy for answering your research questions. Survey, case study, and experiment are some of the popular methods. Describe the method and explain the rationale of your research strategy. In the research plan, you need to identify study subjects, elaborate key concepts, describe the data collection procedure, and explain the methodology. In addition, you need to assess feasibility of the study, such as cooperation from the subjects, sample size required, and budget and manpower constraints. A few paragraphs will be sufficed for this section.

4.   Research planning

The proposal should include a work schedule to control progress. There should be a reasonable amount of time allocated to each research stage. You should also identify the difficulties you may encounter and develop a contingent plan for handling these difficulties. Since this study is a group project, you may consider specifying the division of labor in your team. This part can be summarized in a table format that includes job descriptions, completion dates, and responsible persons.

You should also give some indications to the kind of analysis you plan to conduct. If you anticipate the use of specific analytical techniques – quantitative analyses (e.g. univariate, bivariate, or multivariate analyses), qualitative analyses (e.g. qualitative content analysis of interviews or newspaper editorials), and so on, you may say it in your proposal and describe how you will accomplish that. More important, you need to spell out the purpose and the logic of your analysis.

5.   Cross-disciplinary collaboration

Cross-disciplinary collaboration is an essential element of the GECC4130 Senior Seminar course. You should describe and explain your idea of synergy and applications of cross-disciplinary knowledge and/or non-formal education experiences in the project.

Your collaboration plan should correspond with your suggestions made at the topic proposal submitted earlier and/or the previous sections *methodology* and *planning* of your proposal.

Besides knowledge and skills from your academic discipline, your non-formal education experiences are also elements that can be integrated in your collaboration plan. In the scope of academic knowledge, both practical and intellectual skills may be considered, e.g. the applications of methodologies such as data collection, analysis and modelling are commonly aware of; whereas theoretical framework based on concepts and theories indeed also serve as your "thinking apparatus" facilitating your approaches, deduction, arguments and derivation. For non-formal education experiences, it refers mainly to your experiential learning from your outside-classroom campus life — your personal and social soft skills awareness to diversity, creativity, communication and problem-solving skills, horizon beyond your chosen disciplines and etc.

The actual collaboration achieved in your project may deviate from that written in your proposal. There is a *reflection paragraph on cross-disciplinary collaboration* required in your Final Written Report, in which you will evaluate the collaboration suggested here and elaborate on the actual synergy achieved at the project. You may find in the end your proposed collaboration was successfully achieved, partially achieved, revised, or even with unanticipated collaboration occurred. Deviation from the original proposal is common and could be trivial, *the actual synergy achieved during the project and the process of reflection are rather valuable and of intellectual importance.*

6. Bibliography

You need to compile a reference list in the proposal. The list should include books and articles, serving as the knowledge base for your study. The list should have at least ten references. Be sure to present the list in an acceptable format (e.g. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 4th edition).

7. References

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李逆熵 2009《格物致知: 思考與研究方法概要》香港: 經濟日報出版社