

**CSUS 805**  
**Proposal Development for Interdisciplinary Inquiry**

Spring 2020  
Mondays 5:20-6:40 PM  
306 Natural Resources Building

Instructor : John M. Kerr, Professor  
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**MSU course catalog description:** Preparation of proposals for inquiry in practical and research settings. Application of inquiry concepts and practices in designing projects or research. Professional oral and written communications in sustainability inquiry. Processes of peer support and critique.

**Number of credits:** 1

**Grading system:** pass/fail

**This course serves:** CSUS graduate students writing their proposal for the dissertation, thesis, or project. Required for first-year CSUS graduate students.

**Purpose:** Provide structure and guidance as students draft their research or professional project proposal.

**Learning Outcomes**

Emerging from this course with their completed proposal, students will:

1. Situate their work in relation to sustainability scholarship
2. Situate themselves within an inquiry paradigm and explain how it contributes to development of their own inquiry practice and choices.
3. Identify current gaps in the literature or practice, including the purpose, need, or motivation for a given piece of research/professional work.
4. Critically assess the quality of published references within the literature.
5. Integrate diverse strands of the literature into a multi, inter or transdisciplinary, problem-focused literature review that explains what is known about the problem from the existing literature, the limitations of this literature, and implications for future research
6. Formulate research questions & research goals that are aligned with strategies for data collection and analysis
7. Explain the advantages and disadvantages of different research designs.
8. Evaluate the suitability of different methods for a specific research question

9. Demonstrate knowledge of procedures related to IRB protocol development and human subject testing, and appreciate why those procedures are important. (Complete and submit an IRB application as appropriate.)
10. Identify and appraise a sampling strategy that is appropriate to the chosen methodology.
11. Produce a defensible proposal for a professional project, thesis, or dissertation.

These learning outcomes will be attained through the course and through interaction with the student's advisor as the course proceeds and as they develop their research proposal. For each student, all the learning outcomes will be targeted towards their specific inquiry. Levels of competency are given in parentheses. Several of these learning outcomes build on CSUS 802, and then are applied to the student's own proposal.

The instructor's role will be to provide 1) instruction on the basics of writing a proposal and 2) a structured timeline to help students keep on track with their proposal. Each student's advisor is required to work closely with the student as they prepare their proposal according to the timeline established in the syllabus. The course instructor is expected to provide only limited substantive feedback on each student's proposal. Peer review will play an important part in this course, with structured opportunities for students to share their work with each other and provide feedback throughout the semester.

### **Required reading**

Booth, W.C, Colomb, G.G, Williams, J.M. 2008. The craft of research. Chicago: University of Chicago.

(Note that an electronic copy can be downloaded from the MSU Library web site.)

### **Assessments (grading)**

This course is pass/fail.

Passing the class requires:

- making excellent progress on the proposal (and preferably defending it by the end of the semester);
- attending and participating in class
- completing small assignments
- contributing to peer review of other students' work

### **Topics to be covered (at a glance)**

1. Finalize research questions
2. Situate your work in existing literature
3. Writing strategies

4. Work strategies
5. Finalizing your literature review
6. Writing up your data collection procedure
7. Writing up your plans for data analysis
8. IRB applications
9. Writing up the broader implications of your project
10. Tying up the whole product

***NOTE:** a one-credit course implies 15 contact hours during the semester. These 15 hours can either be spread out over the course the semester or concentrated into a shorter period. Officially, this year CSUS 805 ends in late March, but we will be flexible and run the course according to students' interest and needs.*

### **Weekly schedule**

The weekly schedule will be developed as we go, depending on students' interests and needs.