
**RIT Department of STS/ Public Policy
Public Policy Program
Senior Project Guidelines**

DRAFT: 5 December 2006

RIT Public Policy Department Senior Project Guidelines

1. Purpose

This document outlines the senior project process and general research design considerations related to the BS in Public Policy senior project.¹

2. The Role of the Senior Project

The senior project is a requirement for the BS in Public Policy. It is nominally a 4 credit effort, although some students may request to extend this to 8 credits with permission. The project is graded as a normal course.

The senior project is an opportunity for a student to demonstrate independent research capabilities to themselves, the Department, and the science, technology, & public policy field. Conducting a senior project is a time-consuming, tiresome, frustrating, and stressful activity—yet, it has great rewards! Knowing that you have contributed a solid piece of work to the field ought to give you a great feeling of personal and professional accomplishment. And it rounds out the skill sets you need to solve real world problems plus design and manage a project on your own.

The research questions you will ask will likely be very specific. Importantly, they will also be “testable” in some fashion. Most of you will ask a question or state a hypothesis then construct a research design that will allow you to “test” that hypothesis. Your analytical approach may be qualitative or it may be quantitative—but in the end, it should be getting to the answer of a very specific, well-defined question. We also encourage students to explore innovative *projects* in addition to formal research studies. While most Sr. Projects will be formal research studies, acceptable projects could include building a website, developing a dataset, writing a software program, conducting a literature review, among others. Another important distinction between the senior projects and the MS thesis is that your senior project can be group projects.

3. Senior Project Process

a. Proposal

Students must first complete a senior project proposal before they can register for senior project (0521-405). Senior project proposals require approval by your project advisor. You will have the advisor sign-off on the proposal as part of the title page (see attached sheet). The proposal development stage is an important part of your overall effort, and you **MUST** budget time for it. More information about the proposal is contained below.

b. Senior Project Advisor

Your senior project advisor is very important. The advisor will work closely with you, and you should allocate time in your schedule to meet regularly with him/her. Project advisors should be full-time faculty at RIT but they can be outside of the STS/Public Policy department.

¹ The “Basic Research Design” section has been adapted from a similar document developed by Professor Benjamin A. Most Thanks to Professor Rhonda Calloway for introducing this document to the department.

In thinking about project topics, students should visit various faculty on campus and talk about both the student's and the faculty's interests. Often there are research projects that faculty have "on the back burner" that would make excellent senior projects. Importantly, the student and advisor should be able to communicate well with each other, since open and frequent communication is needed for a successful project.

c. Registering for Senior Project

Once a student has approval for the project proposal, the work begins. The department registers the student for 0521-405 Senior Project. The department will arrange for senior project registration once an approved proposal is received.

d. Potential for 8 Credits

When warranted, students may request to take an additional 4 credit hours of senior project upon approval from the project advisor and the department. Registration for the additional 4 credit hours is contingent on:

- the level of effort of the entire project meriting 8 credits hours and,
- demonstrating sufficient progress during the first 4 credit hours.

e. Project Presentation

Students are expected to present the results of their project once completed. Many times, this occurs at the annual COLA Student Research Conference held each spring.

f. Final Project Deliverable

The final project should be submitted to the project advisor for approval. Once a senior project is accepted, a final copy must be signed and submitted to the department. After receipt of a final project document, and assuming other graduation requirements are met, the student receives appropriate certification for graduation.

4. Components of the Project Proposal

There are many different ways to organize your research. For examples, there are books in the library and on-line sources that you can consult. This document presents guidelines that are acceptable within the Public Policy Program.

The project proposal should consist of the following parts:

- a. A title page (with room for signature—see attached sheet for the proper format)
- b. A one-page, single-spaced abstract (approximately 250 words).
- c. The body of the proposal (approximately 8 pages). The proposal should be double-spaced and must consist of the sections outlined below under "Basic Research Design." Citations should be in APA style.
- d. A detailed milestone chart, preferably a Gantt Chart
- e. A single-spaced bibliography (APA style)

5. Basic Research Design

These notes will inform you about expectations for your project proposal. The major headings are provided as guidance and can be used. You are encouraged to add your own subheadings.

Abstract (1 page)

The abstract should consist of a short statement of the problem or question and a brief summary of how the problem will be analyzed. The abstract may also end with a statement of your anticipated results and contribution.

Introduction (approximately 2 pages)

Identify the research problem and tell why it is important to study (how it is relevant to policy and why people would care). This section of the proposal provides the reader with some background about the problem. Explain how and why the question arises. Ask yourself what we would know or understand if we knew the answer to the question. Ask yourself whether or not your analysis could conceivably be expected to provide a definitive answer to the question or a clear-cut solution to the problem. Ultimately, be able to answer the question: “So what?”

Literature Review (approximately 3 pages)

Present a brief, analytical summary of the major schools of thought or approaches to the problem. This usually involves describing and analyzing the most pertinent 10 scholarly documents, articles and government reports for your general topic and specific research question. Here you need to summarize the state of extant knowledge based on findings reported in other studies. In addition, you are to describe what is not known or well understood; what needs replicating, testing, or further examination; and hence, the reason why you are researching the topic. Note that the purpose here is not to present an encyclopedic or exhaustive survey. The literature should instead be reviewed in a way which sets up what you want to do. It should also be designed to build toward the latter stages of your paper in which you will show where your research builds upon or fits into the existing literature. Ultimately, you should be able to tell us what is already known and not known about the problem.

Methodology (approximately 4 pages)

Here, you present a research framework (a model, theory, or set of hypotheses) and the analytic method (e.g., a survey, simulation, etc) that will allow you to answer the research question you described in the Introduction. Simply put, you describe the method that you are going to use to explore your problem and justify the use of this method based on existing literature and its feasibility. Remember you should propose a work product that can be completed in 4 to 8 credit hours worth of effort.

Most of you will want to confront your ideas with data. If so, you must also state and justify your data collection methods (e.g., surveying students on music downloading activities). Data collection techniques must be clearly specified (e.g., your sample selection design – how you’re selecting students to be surveyed). You can use a subheading such as *Data Collection* for this section. You must specify in detail where and how you will gain access to the data that you will need. This will require a review of sources in the library, other universities, government agencies, companies, and so on. If you are planning on doing interviews or conducting surveys, specify

how, when, where, with whom, etc. What is most important is to be as specific as possible so that your advisor can evaluate your plan. Many promising projects are derailed because a critical piece of information cannot be acquired.

If you are interested in a project which does not include an empirical phase (as is sometimes the case in analytical studies and simulations), explain in this section you will specify the model and undertake some assessment of its utility.

If you are using a case study approach in your analysis, you should discuss which case(s) you will use and how you will use these cases. For example, will you employ a time-series, cross-sectional, single-case study or some other type of design?

The upshot here is you should be able to tell us *how* you are going to answer your question. Both internal and external validity concerns should be addressed.

Expected Results (approximately 1-2 pages)

You will need to discuss some or all of the following in this section: (a) specifically what you can learn from this study, i.e., what you will be able to infer logically from the different possible results; (b) the likely generality of the results to other cases (i.e., why your work has greater meaning and importance); (c) the limitations of the design; and, (d) the policy relevance of the research.

The upshot here is you should tell us what you expect the study will show and how it will contribute.

Milestone Chart and Timeline (approximately 1 page)

You should include a chart that identifies key deliverables and their due dates. It is often useful to start with the end date in mind, and move backwards in time to the present. You should work with your advisor to make sure he/she is “on board” with your milestone expectations.