

GUIDELINES OF CONCEPT PAPER DEVELOPMENT BY PHD APPLICANTS

1. INTRODUCTION

A concept paper is meant to give the university an informed idea of the applicant's areas of research interest in order to avail the necessary assistance for them to develop a full research proposal and allocate supervisors to give the necessary assistance. Applicants should therefore be as specific as possible. Concept papers vary in format and specifics depending on the university, but are generally concise documents containing accurate relevant information and persuasive arguments to enable decision making. These guidelines are intended to guide applicants on how to develop the concept papers as part of the application process.

2. PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A CONCEPT PAPER

1. Selection of Research Field- Each University has got specialized fields of research and therefore students have to research within those fields only. It is a requirement for the students to clearly select a research field as only offered by the University and anything outside what is offered will not be acceptable. For example, a student cannot select Robotics as a research field when it is not among the ones offered within the University. The student's selection will be always guided by the list of the research fields that have been clearly listed by the University.

2. Generate an area of interest- This is an area where you have a curiosity. What are you curious about (within the general area of specialization/field where you wish to do your research)? A student who wishes to specialize in public administration would for example be curious about public service values.

A student who wishes to do research in computer science may be very curious about systems security or internet fraud. A student who wishes to specialize in business administration may be curious about the increasing corporate governance crisis. A student who wishes to specialize in management may be curious about management styles adopted by CEOs in Uganda. The selection of this area is influenced by a number of factors including;

- The applicant's knowledge of the state of scientific discipline of his or her area of specialization
- The applicant's knowledge of the Social problems
- The applicant's personal values and research expertise in a particular field
- Social premiums
- Practical considerations and accessibility to the research subjects
- Financial constraints-applicants must gauge their financial strength to select an area of research.
- The applicant's research paradigm-qualitative, quantitative orientation or both
- Educational background will determine what initial knowledge the applicant can bring into the research.

3. Choose one of the areas of curiosity and develop some specific questions (this is called "question framing"). Many research questions can be classified as (1) exploratory (just trying to find out about something); (2) descriptive (trying to obtain descriptive data, such as average age, income, etc.) and (3) explanatory (trying to explain the relationship between variables, like your major in college and your future earnings). Think about answers to certain questions-it is common for a good researcher writing a concept paper to ask the following questions:

- What will be the research unit? - will the study be on individuals, groups, structure, systems etc?
- What is the level of research? - first level (relationship between individuals), second level (relationship between individuals and groups) and third level (relationship between groups)
- What key variables are to be explored in the intended study?
- What are the anticipated relationships among the variables identified?
- What hypothesis (if any) does the applicant have on the variables identified?

4. Formulate a possible research topic or title based on the answers above. In particular, once you are clear on your variables and anticipated relationship, it becomes clear to formulate a tentative topic for investigation

which will be discussed and approved by your supervisor. The title should not exceed 20 words and should be clear and concise.

5. Do any of your questions lend themselves to a research hypothesis?

If so, write out any hypotheses. A research hypothesis is an "educated guess" about relationships that may explain behavior and phenomena. Sometimes we refer to our research hypothesis as our thesis or theses (plural). If research hypotheses involve quantitative data, they may be tested statistically through statistical hypothesis testing. Note that developing hypotheses may require some preliminary research or prior knowledge (which is why a hypothesis is called an educated guess).

6. Identify the ideal evidence (data) and how you will probably try to gather that evidence (your methodology). You are very likely to need multiple types of evidence (data). The methodology you will probably have to use will include the following:

Review literature on history through secondary sources about the area of your proposed research

Think about what type of data you may need to conduct your study and address your curiosity

Think about the methods you are likely to use to get the data that you wish

Think about the population and sample from which you are likely to get the information

Think about how you are likely to analyze the data that you may collect

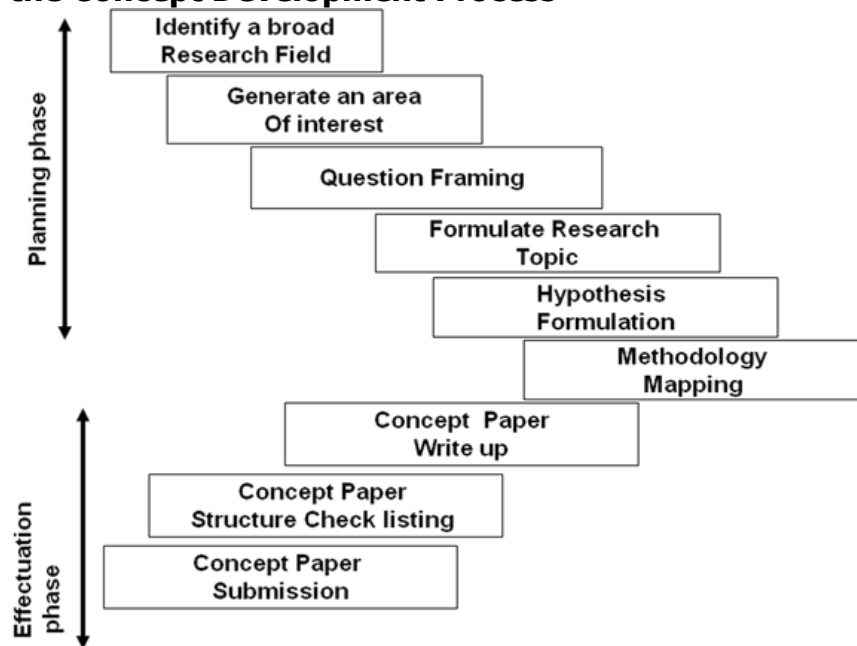
7. Write a Concept Paper. Draw on what you have developed in terms of areas of curiosity, research questions, research hypotheses, data sources, and methodology. Begin with a very direct and explicit statement of your area of interest and your research question(s). This should take about one paragraph. Move on to state your research hypotheses, or thesis statement. This should take another paragraph or so. Conclude with a discussion of your proposed methodology. This should take another paragraph. The entire Concept Paper should be at least 2 pages and not be more than 10 pages, double-spaced. Citations are appropriate if you used any sources in developing your Concept Paper.

8. Before turning in your concept paper, go through this checklist to make sure your concept paper is of the highest quality possible:

1. Are you proposing to research something that is really of interest to you?
2. Are your research questions truly appropriate for academic inquiry, or are they more appropriate for casual or non-scholarly consideration?

3. Are your research questions actual questions that can be researched through academic means (e.g., library sources, interviews, surveys, etc.) or are they opinions or attitudes that can't really be researched?
4. Does your concept paper attempt to research an area of interest to you and ask (and propose to answer) specific questions, or is it trying to solve some problem (finding solutions to problems is not appropriate for a research paper, although you may make policy recommendations as a result of your findings).
5. Are your questions specific?
6. Are your questions answerable through research?
7. Have you stated at least one hypothesis (research or statistical)?
8. Have you identified the data you will need and how you will get it (methodology)?
9. Have you included citations, if appropriate, and a reference list or bibliography?

Summary of the Concept Development Process



3. STRUCTURE OF THE CONCEPT PAPER.

As a guide and to encourage uniformity in assessment of the concept papers, all applicants should structure their concept papers; taking into account the preceding process guidelines; as follows;

• **Cover page**-include the title of your research, your names as they appear in the academic documents, the area of specialization of the PhD as advertised and months and date

• **Introduction**-Briefly tells us about the area of your proposed interest and why such area is of significance to study. Justify why such an area is of utmost importance to do research about (not more than 3 paragraphs)

• **Problem statement**-Briefly state what the problem of the investigation will be for the proposed study. Give evidence of the magnitude of the problem by either giving the statistics where applicable or citations. Remember your problem can be theoretical or practical and whichever you opt to address, make sure you have 'convicted' the problem (two paragraphs)

Research Questions, Objectives and Hypotheses. Formulate the key 'questions which your study intends to explore. The questions should be in harmony with the formulated objectives and any hypotheses if any; given the natural relationships among the three. Not more than 6 research questions/ objectives should be formulated

Literature-Briefly review the current literature about the proposed area of 'research. Use journal sources and primary sources like dissertations within your area of specialization. At this level, you can show how current you are aware of the debates and developments within your chosen area of research (2-3 pages would be adequate)

• **Methodology.** Finally, you should briefly describe the methodology you intend to follow in conducting the proposed research. You need to show in this methodology the research orientation in terms of research paradigm qualitative, quantitative or both

• **References.** The last part of your concept paper should be a list of references (all works cited in the text) and ensure you follow the American Psychological association style of referencing (APA). Its guidelines are available on the World Wide Web.

4. **FURTHER CONTACTS:**

In case you have further issues about the PhD application process, and specifically for specializations in management, public administration, economics, development studies, and business administration, send an email to: deangrad@utamu.ac.ug