

Honors in Engaged Liberal Arts Proposals

If a proposal for a research-based thesis, typically called a prospectus, is a plan for creating new knowledge,¹ a proposal for an Honors in Engaged Liberal Arts project is a plan for developing one's capacity to solve a problem, enhance a civic asset, or otherwise catalyze meaningful change within a community. Proposals of both types establish the need for and feasibility of doing the work. Below are some guidelines for writing a HELA proposal.

Process: You are encouraged to discuss a draft or drafts of your proposal with an Honors Advisor prior to submitting a more polished version to the Honors Academic Board (HAB) for review. Both the drafting and the consultation are intended to help you clarify for yourself, and for a growing audience, the nature of your project, its challenges, and your aspirations for it. Although some changes may be made to the project after the final proposal is submitted, the HAB-approved proposal serves as your commitment to the project's goals and development plan (i.e., coursework, mentorship, timeline). Significant changes to your project will need to be approved by an Honors advisor or the HAB.

Audience: The initial audience for this proposal includes an Honors advisor; it may also include a faculty or community mentor on the project if you have already identified one. Because you're making a case for doing the particular project you have in mind, you may use your proposal to enlist the mentorship of faculty or community members. The audience for the final version of your proposal will be the Honors Academic Board; you'll submit it as your application to declare the HELA plan.

Format: The length of the document should be sufficient to its purpose: that is, there is no requisite length or format but the following components should be included in some measure. You may organize them in any order that you feel suits your style and rhetorical needs (i.e., within a narrative presentation, in distinct sections, etc.) and the needs of your intended audience(s). In the early portions of your proposal, you should establish why you believe this to be a timely and meaningful project.

Guiding questions to consider and to address insofar as they apply to your project

Background

What sparked your interest in the project? What problem are you trying to solve or what already positive aspect of the community are you trying to enhance? What need do you hope to address? What work has been done by others in this area before? What "field work" have you done, or are you preparing to do? What prior experience studying or engaging with this issue do you have?

Proposed project

Describe your project as fully as possible and offer a rationale for it. What additional courses and non-credit bearing experiences will help you accomplish your goals? Courses and experiences may help you continue to define and understand a problem and/or the community you're working in, to build skills, or to practice traditional methods or design innovative methods for accomplishing the project's desired outcomes, etc. As you consider how prior and

¹ Elizabeth Wentz, *How to Design, Write, and Present a Successful Dissertation Proposal* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2014), 1.

proposed learning experiences will inform your project, also note how their point values contribute to the overall required minimum of 30 Advanced Engagement Points. Remember that the project itself will contribute points toward that total. You should submit an Advanced Engagement Point spreadsheet along with your proposal.

Schedule

Explain your personal timetable for completing the project within the time frame required. Does your particular project require special timing? For instance, are you coordinating your project to coincide with a group's needs or a site's availability?

Budget

What costs (aside from U-M tuition) are likely to be incurred in preparing you to carry out the project? For instance, consider non-credit bearing, capacity-building experiences that may entail costs. Project expenses: If you are proposing a large-scale project, such as a building, a product prototype or launch, or a program that would need an operating budget, you do not need to forecast a detailed budget at this stage, but instead, signal your awareness of likely costs, the need to build a budget and source funds (and suggest any sources you're already aware of).

People

Most HELA projects will be proposed and conducted by individuals, but if you are proposing a collaboratively-led project, you'll need to address that from the outset of your proposal. Do you already have mentors on the faculty or in the community who are good candidates for supervising your HELA progress? If not, have you identified any potential mentors or supporters? Does your project depend on any person's or organization's approval or "greenlighting"?

Sources

Cite any sources you've referred to in the proposal, and/or list references for works that inform your project. There is no prescribed style guide; APA, MLA, Chicago Style, etc. are all acceptable.