JHU-AAP-ESP
Independent Research Project
Proposal Guidelines

A proposal is a document that serves as a guide to the research you will undertake in your Independent Research Project. It should be at least 6 pages and no more than 10 pages (double spaced), and should include an informative yet succinct title. A project title is worth thinking about and is necessary. Coming up with a good title is worth it as it forces focused thinking about what you want to do. Note that the proposal title need not be the same as the final project title as your focus may change in the course of conducting your project. The proposal should include the sections listed below and should be as specific as possible. Please number your pages. The general process of proposal development is to discuss the project generally with your advisor, the course instructor, and your mentor, but then you should be sure to have some back-and-forth with your mentor to refine the proposal before it is submitted to the course instructor for approval.

a) **Introduction.** This section should include a ‘statement of purpose’ as well as objectives for the project. It should address specifically what the project will be about and why anyone would care about the topic and your anticipated findings. Including one or more research questions and/or hypotheses to be tested is highly recommended.

b) **Literature Review.** This section should review your topic, identifying what is known about it and what is not. From this should come a discussion of what your contribution will be to the existing body of knowledge. Be sure to review the academic literature as well any ‘gray’ literature and materials available on the web. It is important to make the review comprehensive the focus should be on citable references, by which we mean mostly peer reviewed academic publications. The library offers excellent tutorials on research and can help you refine your literature searches. We recommend that you engage with the services available to you! Please think carefully about what constitutes a citable reference; there is much more to a research literature than a quick search via a search engine!

c) **Methods.** What type of methods will you use to answer your research question or test your hypothesis? If you have to sample data describe how you will select data, and what your criteria will be for sampling. Describe whether your methods will be quantitative or qualitative. Be as specific as possible. How will you obtain your data? If primary data collection, explain, and if this involves human subjects, alert the course instructor promptly as human-subjects clearance may be necessary.

d) **Plans for Analysis.** What are your plans for analyzing your data? Will you use specific statistical or other tests or methods of analysis?

e) **Expected Findings.** This is hard to do but try to anticipate what you might find.
f) **Planned Deliverables.** What will be the product of your project: a report, a white paper, a GIS layer, a presentation to stakeholders, a paper to be submitted for peer review? Be specific and realistic.

g) **Timeline.** Include specific dates for when pieces of the project are to be shared with your mentor and the course instructor. Include dates and deliverables beyond the minimum required in the IRP Guidelines, this will help you (and your Mentor) stay on track. This schedule should be vetted with your mentor so that you both have clear, agreed upon expectations and commitments for when you will give each other work.

h) **References.** Include all references cited in your proposal.