

Master of Natural Resources Capstone Proposal Guidance

Your capstone proposal should be a well-written document that provides your committee members with sufficient information to understand and evaluate your plans for your capstone project. The proposal is an avenue for you to clearly define your project, receive feedback from your committee members, negotiate expectations for what the final capstone report will include, and establish a work plan. A well-written proposal can usually be adapted to become the introduction and methods section of your final capstone report.

We encourage you to review the MNR Capstone Report Guidance as you develop this proposal. The guidance document will provide you with a better understanding of our expectations for your capstone project and final report.

We will evaluate your proposal based on three main criteria:

1. *The value of the proposed project* – Is your project well conceptualized? Will it make a significant contribution to understanding natural resources management? Does the project meet an existing need? Does it provide an opportunity for you to integrate concepts and perspectives gained through your MNR program of study (i.e., will the project be interdisciplinary and draw upon all of the MNR core areas)? How does the project relate to your professional goals?
2. *Project feasibility* - Does your proposal serve as a reasonable and useful guide for you to proceed with your project and for your committee to know what to expect when they receive the final report? Does the proposed project have a reasonable scope for an MNR capstone? What is the timeline for project completion? Are any approvals needed before you proceed (e.g. IRB approval for interviews). Will you be able to make adjustments if necessary as your project proceeds?
3. *Your ability to express yourself in writing* - This proposal may be the first opportunity for your committee to review your writing. The committee will evaluate your ability to communicate your ideas effectively and clearly. We encourage you to discuss your project with your chair (and with your committee in your committee meetings) prior to drafting the proposal. Your proposal submission should be your BEST draft, not your first rough draft.

Please Note: The committee expects you to use the Track Changes feature in Word when making revisions and corrections so they can review changes and revisions. The following website gives excellent instructions on how to use the track changes feature <http://shaunakelly.com/word/sharing/howtrackchangesworks.html>.

The Capstone Guidance document is available on the MNR website (<http://qcnr.usu.edu/mnr/>.)

Your proposal should include the following sections:

- A problem statement: This is an introductory paragraph or two that succinctly describes the problem you are addressing, why it is important, and how it will be addressed in the report. This is a critical element of your report, setting the stage for everything that follows. *See the MNR Capstone Report Guidance document (Appendix III) for more information about problem statements.*
- The audience for your project's findings: Indicate who needs or would benefit from your capstone project and why.
- Background information: Provide some history or context for the problem or situation you will address in your project. What is already known? What has already been done? Are there approaches that have been more or less successful? Only include information relevant to your problem statement, project goals and objectives.
- Project goals and objectives: Your goals are the broad, general intentions of your project. Your objectives are more specific and indicate how you will achieve the goals. Objectives should be measurable or easy to assess.
- Methods: If your project will involve original data collection, describe methods or approaches. Most capstones are not based on original data, but rather synthesize and interpret existing data. Therefore, in this section, describe the sources and types of data you will likely use and any time or geographic constraints on the data. Discuss how you will analyze the data collectively to address your problem and meet your objectives.
- Expected results: The capstone project is intended to be interdisciplinary. Your proposal should indicate how your project will address or incorporate the MNR's different core areas: ecology, human dimensions, policy, economics and administration. We encourage you to be integrative and think about how the different dimensions affect each other. Your ability to use quantitative methods and spatial information management is usually shown through your analytical techniques, mapping, or other tools used in your analysis.
- References: Make sure you include and cite all relevant sources of information. There is no need to cite everything you have read! Choose a citation format and be consistent in using it. Many of our students use the APA format (see www.apastyle.org). *See the MNR Capstone Report Guidance document for more information.*

Submit your proposal to Melanie Conrad (Melanie.conrad@usu.edu) who will record the date received and distribute it to your chair or all committee members as appropriate.