

3. This topic is relevant to the study of public administration for the following reasons:

4. Theoretical public administration or public policy literature relevant to my topic includes the following. (Provide a working bibliography of 8 - 10 books and journal articles.)

5. Substantive literature relevant to my topic includes the following. (Provide at least 15 sources of literature from coursework or other substantive sources.)

6. Identify what methods of research you believe may be necessary to research your topic. For surveys, interviews, and statistical analysis of existing data, describe what you propose to ask and whom, if necessary, you will need to contact for permission to proceed.

The prospectus is a very detailed outline or plan for the proposed research. Since it describes in detail the rationale, the relevant literature and theories, the method(s) of research and the proposed data collection technique, the prospectus is the skeleton of a finished research paper. The prospectus is not a basic introduction to the research paper, but is the conceptual framework on which you will build the finished product as well as the design of the research you will conduct.

1. Statement of the Research Problem.

Numbers 1 and 2 relate to identifying your research problem and formulating that problem into a statement. In the process of identifying the problem, you should answer this question: what is it that you want to investigate? The problem may be selected on the basis of (a) having personal experience, (b) examining the literature, or (c) talking with knowledgeable persons in an area of interest. Problem formulation may require frequent reformulation as you think more about it. Formulating your research question should drive your research.

Research is an attempt to discover an answer to a question. Even though questions about social problems have no definitive answer, research projects can offer the best or most plausible alternatives based on existing knowledge and theory applied to an observed problem. A solid prospectus begins with the statement of a problem that is manageable and not too wide ranging. Generally, a research question is following by a description of the problem or situation. The description will offer the reader a general idea of the current problem you have identified, while the research question identifies what specific aspect of the problem you plan to study. The research question needs to clearly identify the specific issue involved and let the reader know why the answer is important. A clear and unambiguous statement of the problem should be offered in the introduction.

There are usually three elements needed in this process:

First, the general subject area should be discussed. For example, a student might outline some basic information about low income housing policies in the United States; deregulation; organizational reform, etc.

Second, the introduction should narrow the subject to a specific and manageable topic for the research paper. For example, low income housing policy in Corpus Christi TX; deregulation of electricity supply; the organizational reform of a particular public or nonprofit agency.

Third, the formulation of the research questions(s) or the statement of the hypotheses that will identify a particular problem of interest and/or concern should be clearly stated. Here are some examples: How effective is the low income housing policy in Corpus Christi, TX? What have been the successes and failures of deregulation of electricity supply? How efficiently is the new organizational structure functioning?

2. Theoretical Framework of the Research Problem.

After defining the topic of interest and research question, you need to identify relevant literature that can help you study this problem. In this section, you should offer information on academic literature that relates to the theoretical foundation for your research. This will anchor the topic of your research in the public administration or public policy literature.

For example: An administrative consultant might propose that increasing salaries of office personnel would increase productivity in the unit. The proposition assumes that higher pay causes increased effort. The concept is the abstract idea that two variables (pay and productivity) are related. The general theory would be one that implies that monetary reward inspires individuals to work harder.

To build your theoretical framework for your research paper, look carefully in the literature assigned during coursework in the MPA program. By reviewing the literature related to the theories you are familiar with from your coursework, you should begin to develop your hypotheses.

3. Review of the Substantive Literature.

In addition to reviewing the theoretical literature, you will need to review substantive literature that relates to your research topic. This part of the literature review provides a discussion of research findings in books and articles regarding similar or related problems and is not limited to public administration or public policy literature. The focus is on the substance of the problem being addressed. In most cases, your literature review cannot be fully comprehensive, but you should display an awareness and understanding of the main studies that have been conducted relating to your subject. The substantive literature review should offer a brief overview of findings that are about your specific research topic.

4. Description of Research Methods.

Once the theoretical framework and substantive literature review have been accomplished, you will need to determine how you will answer your research question. At this point in the paper, you must include a thorough discussion of the research design and data collection method. Explain why these are the best

for the analysis of the problem. You should be able to identify whether quantitative and/or qualitative methods are appropriate to your topic. The studies in your literature review can give you hints about methods that have been used in your topic area and also about methods that have yielded less satisfactory results.

You must explain what data you intend to collect, the data sources you will use, and how you plan to collect it, and what analyses you will conduct. Provide as much detail as possible about your methodology. For example, if you intend to collect data using a survey, will it be a self-administered questionnaire at a site, a mail or internet survey, personal interviews, or telephone interviews? How many people will you survey and how will they be selected? The research methods section must be clearly linked to the research question you intend to answer and to the data you will collect. At this point, ask yourself: When I have collected this information, will I be able to answer my research question? The answer should be a resounding – YES!!!

TYPES OF RESEARCH PAPERS

- 1. Policy Analysis.** If your research question/problem seeks a best way to solve a problem, then you are probably proposing a policy analysis. Policy analyses compare a number of alternate approaches to solving a problem. Policy analysis involves an effort to accumulate reliable research about each of those alternatives and determine which alternative offers the best solution to the problem. It is important to narrow the scope of the problem in such a way that you can measure potential outcomes of the various solutions, i.e. should the best outcome be the most cost-effective solution, or the simplest to implement, or the fastest, etc. Establishing these criteria will help you identify the best solution.
- 2. Program Evaluation.** If your research question/problem focuses on the operation and effects of a public or nonprofit program, your project will take the form of a program evaluation. Program evaluations document and assess the activities, outcomes, and costs of public programs. The results generally are used to improve the program and inform decision makers about future operations. An evaluation is probably the best approach if you are interested in questions such as: Is the program being implemented as intended or designed? Is the program having the desired effect? Is the program cost-effective?

3. Administrative Analysis. If your research question/problem assess an administrative program and makes recommendations to improve that program or operation, you might consider structuring your research in the form of the administrative analysis. There are two subtypes:

- A general administrative analysis provides understanding of an organization from a variety of aspects (planning, budget, personnel, organizational structure, policy).
- A case study is an in-depth analysis of one aspect of an organization.