

SWLF 4005 – Research Essay Guidelines

Social Welfare and Social Development

The Research Essay is an elective course in Social Welfare and Social Development for students completing an Honours program and who have an average of at least 75% in their SWLF courses. The Essay is 10,000 to 12,000 words (roughly 30 to 35 pages) and is based on primary and/or secondary research. You will work largely independently but under the supervision and guidance of a full-time faculty member. You will need to be self-motivated and a good manager of time.

The Essay is normally in the form of an argument and a sustained defense of that argument. Unlike a doctoral thesis (and, to a lesser extent, a Master's thesis), the Research Essay does not have to be original, in the sense of constituting a substantial “addition to knowledge” (generally defined as “saying something that no one else has said before”). The Essay should, however, be a sophisticated work that makes effective use of the scholarly literature in a project that demonstrates a thorough understanding of the topic under investigation. The Essay will occasionally be descriptive but must be primarily analytical.

You will write on a topic you have selected. You should meet with a potential supervisor in January of your third year of university to discuss possible Essay topics. Once you have a tentative topic, you can begin to compile a reference list while thinking about possible ways to approach the Essay.

By February 15 of your third year, students completing the Honours Specialization must fill out the attached application form to indicate that they plan to register in SWLF 4005. Shortly after registering, students should meet with their faculty supervisor (Dr. Chen, Dr. Litalien, or Dr. Patriquin) to develop a formal proposal. The proposal must be handed in by April 15.

The main sections of the proposal should be five to seven double-spaced pages (1,500 to 2,100 words). You must also have a separate cover and a reference list. The proposal provides details of your topic, develops a tentative argument, and sets out a timetable for research and writing. In addition to the cover page, it should include the following sections (with suggested page lengths in brackets):

1. **Background/Context** (one page): Provide a succinct summary of the topic you propose to address. Why is this topic important/interesting/timely/problematic? What is the central question you want to address? Note that it is important to have a *question*, as opposed to stating that you are going to “investigate” something or that the Essay will be “about” a certain topic. Planning to write “about” a topic is a good beginning, but this plan needs to be elaborated into a research question. Instead of a question, you may want to frame the proposal as a *critique* (that is, as challenging the “truth claims”) of some theory, perspective, argument, interpretation, or public policy (though this critique can be easily reframed as a question).
2. **Research Process** (one page): What work have you conducted on this topic (through university courses, fieldwork, community service learning and/or employment)? What other tasks will you need to undertake in order to complete the Essay (elaborate on anything that goes beyond reading the materials in your reference list, such as developing interview questions or questionnaires, learning new software, and so on)? Do you have access to the resources you need to complete the Essay?
3. **Tentative Thesis/Argument** (two to four pages): Based on your preliminary research, what do you expect to argue in the Essay? What is your defense of this argument likely to entail? What theoretical perspective(s) frames the argument? What have other scholars had to say on this topic? Also, include a list of six to eight sub-titles (in addition to the Introduction and the Conclusion) to indicate the basic organizational framework of the proposed Essay.

4. **Timetable** (one page): What are the tasks you need to accomplish and on what dates will these be completed?
5. **References** (two to three pages): Provide a list of 20 to 30 references in APA format divided between (a) those you have read and (b) those that you plan to read. The references may include but must go beyond readings assigned for your courses.

Please note that a research ethics protocol will need to be completed and submitted to the university's Research Ethics Board (REB) if your Essay involves human subjects. This includes interviews, tests, questionnaires, observations, and focus groups. You should receive any necessary approval from the REB after you hand in your proposal but before you leave for the summer. For further information, including protocol due dates and protocol forms, see:

<http://www.nipissingu.ca/academics/research-services/reb/Pages/default.aspx>

It is important to spend significant time developing your proposal. A solid proposal will help you write a solid Essay. It should be evident that you have conducted some research and reading on the topic. At the same time, the proposal is not expected to have definitive conclusions nor must it be based on copious research. It is a *plan* of work. The proposal is not the Essay.

The student and the supervisor will meet in late April or early May to revise the proposal so that the project is of manageable proportions (you must be able to answer your central question in 30 to 35 pages). At this meeting, you will also discuss the research process and develop a timetable for the summer. A follow up meeting will be held in early September to revisit the timetable and agree on expectations for the upcoming academic year. The meetings in the early Fall will likely be weekly or biweekly, though they may become less frequent as the Essay progresses and perhaps more frequent again as deadlines approach.

Throughout the academic year, you should be submitting drafts of sections of the Essay to your supervisor for comments. Drafts should be handed in at least three days before a scheduled meeting. By December 10, you must have a significant portion of the research completed and a solid draft of some sections of the Essay written (at least 10 pages). The first draft of the entire Essay must be submitted by March 15. The supervisor will read the draft and provide comments by March 31. The final Essay is due on April 15. The Essay will be graded by your supervisor.

As the Essay progresses, much of what is in the proposal is likely to change. Some proposed sections will be moved; others will be dropped; new ones will be incorporated. Some books and articles will be deleted from the reference list, while others will be added. And so on. The proposal will guide your research; it is not a template to be followed fastidiously. The Essay will undergo numerous changes as you conduct further research and especially as you begin writing.

**SWLF 4005 – Application for Research Essay
Social Welfare and Social Development**

Student Name: _____

Student Number: _____ Nipissing E-mail: _____

Title of Proposed Essay: _____

Brief Description of Proposed Essay: _____

I am currently a third-year student: _____ Yes _____ No

I am currently registered in a Bachelor
of Arts (Honours Specialization) in
Social Welfare and Social Development: _____ Yes _____ No

(If you answered “yes” to the above question, proceed to Student Signature and Date.)

I am currently registered in a Bachelor
of Arts (Honours) – Double Major in
Social Welfare and Social Development: _____ Yes _____ No

My second major is: _____

I am completing a Research Essay
in my second major: _____ Yes _____ No

Student Signature: _____

Date: _____

continued ...

To the Student: *Once you have completed the above section of this form, please submit it by **February 15** to Dr. Chen, Dr. Litalien, or Dr. Patriquin.*

To the Dean: *If tentatively approved by the program, the application will be sent to the Dean of Applied and Professional Studies for final approval.*

To the Registrar's Office: *If approved by the Dean, this form will be forwarded to the Registrar's Office to confirm that the student is eligible to enrol in SWLF 4005. The Registrar's Office will inform the student so she/he can register in the course.*

Tentative Approval (Program)

Name of Faculty Member: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Further Information (*optional*): _____

Final Approval (Dean)

Name of Dean: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

(*Please check one:*) Approved: _____ Denied: _____

If approved, the Dean will send this form to the Registrar's Office with a copy to the faculty member. If denied, the form will be returned to the faculty member.