Writing Your LEEP Project/LEEP Fellows Proposal

Writing a “good” proposal

What makes a good LEEP Project?
• The best projects – whether existing or self-designed – will:
  • Use course material to help solve the problem or execute the project
  • Identify a well-defined project deliverable
  • Highlight clear outcomes for the student
  • Describe a connection to an external organization
  • Discuss the support provided by a faculty mentor

How will the proposals be reviewed?
• Proposals will be reviewed by a committee comprised of faculty and staff members. The committee will consider the entire application – including the project proposal, transcript, résumé, and letter of recommendation. As they review the proposals, they will read for project feasibility, connection to course material, clarity of project description and goals, and the strength of the external connections, among other factors.

Who can help me with my proposal?
• Work with your faculty mentor. Your faculty mentor will be the most familiar with your project, and has likely written and reviewed project proposals before, so s/he will know the best way to craft a strong proposal.
• The consultants in the Writing Center can help review your proposal prior to submission. Schedule an appointment online by going to: https://clarku.mywconline.com/ or by calling the Writing Center at (508) 793-7405 (on campus x7405).
• The staff in the LEEP Center can help answer questions about your project. Attend daily drop-in hours (2 – 4 pm) in the LEEP Center for quick individualized assistance, or email Ruby Maddox at rmaddox@clarku.edu.

Understand the Components of the Proposal

Writing the project proposal
• All students must submit a document outlining the project proposal along with their application. The components of the proposal are:
  • Project abstract
  • Project description
  • Preliminary bibliography
  • Budget and budget justification
  • Timeline and benchmarks
  • Anticipated outcomes
  • LEEP Essay

A description of each section of the project proposal is below.
**Project abstract – 150 word maximum**

- The project abstract provides an executive summary of the project. It should open with a statement of what you will be doing, followed by an explanation of how you will do it. Next you should state why you are doing it – what is the intellectual or practical merit? End by describing what you hope to achieve (i.e., identify the project deliverable) by the end of the project.

**Project description – up to 4 pages, double-spaced**

- The Project Description provides details of the project, and describes how it will be implemented.
- Below is a suggested format. Note that it follows the structure of the abstract, with elaboration on each sentence.
  - **Introduction.** Open with a description of what you’ll be doing for your project. State the problem, puzzle, or project goal.
  - **Approach to your project.** Follow this section with a description of how you’ll complete your project. Discuss your benchmarks and processes in detail as best you can.
  - **Support for the project, and academic connections.** Next, discuss why the project is important. What is it about your project that has scholarly and practical significance? What academic or scholarly resources do you expect to consult over the course of the project? What connections to coursework do you expect to make?
  - **Outcomes (or, Expected Findings).** End by describing both the personal and project-based outcome(s) of your project. For the project: What are some tangibles or deliverables that you will be able to demonstrate your work at the end of the project? For you: What will you get out of this experience? For example: Fall Fest presentation, presentation at regional/national meeting, journal publication, fellowship proposal, senior thesis, career development, practical experience, etc.
  - What is the project deliverable?
- The order of these sections may be switched (e.g., the literature review section can precede the methods), and other relevant sections added, so long as each section is clearly identified.

**Preliminary bibliography – approximately one half-page**

- What academic resources will you rely on to help you complete the project?
  - Provide a list of articles, books, and other scholarly resources that were consulted as you crafted the project description and/or you plan to use to complete your project
- This section may be itemized.

**Budget and budget justification – approximately one half-page**

- Financial description of project and any explanatory notes
  - Provide details of how you will use the money
  - Consider things like: supplies, transportation, housing, and food
- See section on budget below for details
- This section may be bulleted, or presented in table format.

**Timeline and benchmarks – approximately one half-page**

- What are the benchmarks for the project? What is your timeline for meeting these benchmarks and for completion of the project?
  - Benchmarks break the project into stages. Think: What is the first step? How do later steps depend on previous steps? How long will each step of the project take? At what points will you report back to your site supervisor or faculty mentor?
- This section may be presented in table format.
LEEP essay – up to 2 pages, double-spaced
• All students submitting a LEEP Project/LEEP Fellows application must respond to the following prompt:
  • Why do you want to complete a LEEP Project? Why do you want to complete this LEEP Project? Why is this experience right for you at this particular juncture in your college career?
  • As you answer these questions, consider what in your past academic, co-curricular, and extracurricular experience leads you to this particular project. Think about what you hope to gain – both personally and professionally – by completing this project. Finally, end by stating how you think you will be able to demonstrate your accomplishments upon completion of the project.
• This section should be written as a narrative.

Make sure your proposal is well-written
• What does it mean to have a well-written proposal? On a basic level, it means a proposal that is free from grammar, syntax, and spelling errors. On a broader lever, however, it means:
  • The proposal is well-structured
  • The rationale for the project is clear
  • The means (methods) of completing the project are logical
  • The scope of project is feasible
  • The proposal is detailed, well-researched, and thought-through
  • The project and the proposal is thoughtful, reflective, and meaningful

Let’s look at each of these in turn.

The proposal is well-structured
• The components of the application are listed above. Use them to divide your proposal into sections, and be certain to address the prompts for each section.

The rationale for the project is clear
• Why should people care about your project? Why is it a problem worth addressing? Is the research question novel?

The means (methods) of completing the project are logical
• Are the steps for completing the project well-defined? Are you using the correct methods or tools to do so?

The scope of the project is feasible
• Can you complete the project in the expected timeframe? Do you have the resources to do so? Is your sample size or are your materials reasonable? Do you have the necessary technical or subject matter expertise?

The proposal is detailed and well-researched
• Do you know what you need to do to complete the project, and have you provided evidence indicating so? Have you provided a level of detail so that the reviewers can understand exactly what you will be doing, and how?

The project and the proposal is thoughtful, reflective, and meaningful
• In your proposal and in the essay, is the motivation for the project clear? Are the connections to your academic coursework logical? Are the connections to your future plans compelling?
Preparing your budget and budget justification

- The budget is the financial description of the project; the justification lists any explanatory notes
- This section should be researched and supported with evidence
- Each item in the narrative must appear in the budget, and vice versa
- Break down each item into parts and give specifics
  - Provide material and supply specifications, quotes, hourly rates, stipend breakdowns, and travel details
- Be realistic, but do not underestimate your needs
- Be certain that your figures add up correctly

If all funded proposals will receive $2500 (if no other funding sources are available), why do I have to provide a detailed budget?
- A detailed budget signals to the reviewers that you have carefully thought about the feasibility and execution of your project and provides, with a reasonable degree of confidence, that your project can be completed.
- In the event that this application cycle is particularly competitive, the budget and budget justification may be used by the committee as a deciding factor when making funding decisions.

IRB approval

Students who, as part of their project, will be conducting research using human subject must have applied for and received IRB approval prior to the start of their project. Students should consult their faculty mentors with questions about seeking IRB approval.

Common mistakes

- The most common proposal mistakes are:
  - Poor writing
  - Inaccurate costs
  - Typos
  - Budget ≠ Narrative
  - Vague objectives
  - Last minute writing
  - Assuming reviewers are experts in field
  - Buzzwords
  - Ignoring instructions
  - Idea ≠ Grant purpose

Deadlines

When are proposals due?
- There are two deadlines: Friday, February 26 and Friday, April 15.
- Submit to whichever works best for you and your project; there is no competitive advantage to submitting either deadline.

When will I know if my application has been accepted?
- The committee expects to make decisions within two-three weeks of each proposal deadline.