

Semester Project - Formal Proposal

The next step of the Semester Project is to bring together all your reading and research so far to develop a **formal proposal** for your work. This is a common step in almost any academic and creative endeavor: it is not enough to have a good idea and to go through with it; it is important to explain your thinking and convince others that you have a good idea.

Submission: The final proposal is due on *Sunday, November 12th*. You are welcome to submit this formal proposal as a written essay (~3-4 pages), or as a recorded presentation (~10-12 minutes).

Organization: While the subsections below are formatted as a list of questions, please do not format your Formal Proposal as a list of answers. Your proposal should flow smoothly (with separate sections, corresponding to the “parts” below) in which you address the topics, not an itemized list of responses.

Part 1: The ecological system (3pts)

Note: Please make sure to use citations to trusted sources to support your writing in this section

Introduce your ecological system with the relevant information for giving context to your project. Here is some of the type of information that is essential for understanding an ecological community:

- **Where is it?** What is the ecological landscape around this region (e.g. what is the temperature and precipitation regime)? What is the social landscape around this region (e.g. is it in a large city and thus exposed to lots of human activity)?
- **Who or what are the dominant factors?** Are there particular species that are key to the functioning or stability of this system? Note that the “key player” can also be an abiotic factor, e.g. in a desert the dryness might be the driving factor that determines the structure and functioning of the system.
- **What are some of the key environmental challenges this system faces?** Beyond simply rising temperatures – which unfortunately is a threat that almost every ecological system is facing – what are some environmental challenges that your system might experience in the coming decade? Who (plants, animals, humans, ...) is affected by these challenges?
- **Why are you investing your energy in learning about this system? Why should your audience care about it?**

Part 2: The message you want to convey (2pts)

- **What do you want your audience to know about your ecological community?**
- **How do you want your project to affect your audience?** In other words, after your audience engages with your presentation, what do you hope they do differently?

Part 3: The project format (3pts)

- **With some detail, explain your project format.**
 - For example, if you are recording a podcast, will it be a solo narration, an interview, or a mix? How long do you expect it to be?
 - Or, if you are writing poetry, how many poems do you expect to write, and in what form?
 - Or, if you are making a website, how much will be dedicated to visuals, text, or other media?
 - Or, if you are making infographics, how many will you want to make, and of what size?
 - *Regardless of format, please use this section to think through the logistics of what you are doing. This will help you identify any materials/equipment you might need, constraints you might face, etc.*
- **Why is this format appropriate for conveying your message?** What are the strengths of this format that you can leverage as part of your project?

Part 4: What will you learn (2pts)

- **What have you learned already about your ecological community that has surprised you, and that you think will surprise your audience?**
- **What are some skills that you will have to develop to complete this project?**
- **Do you expect these skills to be valuable in other personal or professional contexts?**

Part 5: How do you define success for this project? (3pts)

- At a personal level, why did you choose to focus on this ecological system and on this format? What do you hope to get out of completing this project?
- Apart from “content” features like relevance of the information, credibility of sources, clarity of message, quality of the final product, etc., what are some features that you think are relevant to how this project gets graded? Are there parts of the “process” of developing the project that are hidden from the final product?
 - e.g. If you have to learn a whole new skillset to implement part of your goal.
 - e.g. If this project represents you taking a big risk/overcoming something you have been nervous about for a while.

Part 6: Sharing your work (2pts)

Note: The “Final Exam” slot for this class will be scheduled similarly to “poster sessions” at academic conferences, where you are stationed at a “booth” with your project, and classmates cycle through to hear about your work. Even if your work is difficult to engage in this format - e.g. if you are recording a video that will be hard for people to engage with without being able to listen to all the narration – think of this opportunity as a way to pitch/share your work with classmates.

- **What is the most effective way to get your classmates excited about your project?**
- **Would you like to share this Semester Project publicly on the Course Website?**
- **Would you like to share this Formal Proposal publicly on the Course Website?**