

PRELIMINARY APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH DEGREE (MPHIL / PHD)

Outline of Proposed Research

When you apply to enrol as a research student you will need to prepare an outline proposal. This will be used as the basis for discussion at your interview. It will also be used as the starting point for preparing your submission.

The schematic outline below is a guide to the headings it would be wise to cover in your proposal. Some, like the section on theoretical context, may be open to a very wide range of approaches and interpretations and may not – especially in a mainly theoretical based proposal – be really distinguished from the historical or contemporary context. Others, like the survey of the contemporary context, are essential to all submissions.

You may, if you wish, use the headings below to define the sections of your proposal or you may use them just as a checklist for the contents of a proposal made in a different way.

Title:

This should express the main area of investigation, implying its questions and potential argument or standpoint. While being a working title, which will inevitably change over time, it is important that you are as specific and precise as possible. The title should be brief, and reflect the main question of the project. You should avoid over-long or technical words, and phrases such as ‘an investigation into...’

Subject Area, Aims and Objectives:

Define briefly your subject and the main concerns of the investigation, including a set of aims and objectives that will guide your research. If your proposal is primarily practice based, you should also use this section to describe your vision of your practice and the way in which you work in your practice on your preoccupations and concerns. It is worth thinking hard about this section, as it will form the basis of your study for the next few years (though it will inevitably evolve as you make progress). After defining your subject, you might find it helpful to think about the main concerns of the project as questions you are asking yourself, to which you hope to find the answer. The aims and objectives are important because they declare the criteria for your investigation, against which the success or failure of your project can be assessed. If you find it difficult to articulate your aims and objectives you might find it helpful to think of your aim as the most significant questions or problems you hope to tackle. Your objectives are the steps by which you will meet this aim. Your proposal should normally have one or two aims, followed by a series of around 6 objectives. The idea is that by the time you have met all your objectives, you should have achieved your aim.

Historical Context:

There is no single history that suits all investigations but you should identify the various strands of history that relate to your particular research. It may be a history of ideas and concepts that have influenced the development of a particular area of art and design, the history of the medium or technology in which you work, or a particular part of the history of Art, Design or Media.

Contemporary Context:

As far as you are able, define the contemporary work that relates to your field of investigation.

You must do this for the following reasons:

- i) to demonstrate that you are aware of the field in which you are working
- ii) to demonstrate that your proposed research will have distinct features which will make it potentially original
- iii) to form the basis of links with other research work to which you will contribute or on which you will build

Theoretical Context:

There is a great choice of options in this area; none of them exclusive. An element of theoretical context is important for every kind of project, though the degree of theoretical content will vary; particularly for practice based work. You should be able to demonstrate the ways in which you evaluate your own work and that of others, and the sources you use to inform your evaluation. A theoretical context will help you avoid simply asserting a position and support you in the reflective approach that is needed for a research degree. Three different kinds of theoretical context are outlined below (but these are not exhaustive and you may prefer a different model). They are defined with a bias towards a practice-based proposal. If your proposal is entirely theoretical and critical, only the first and possibly the second might apply:

- i) Critical Theory – definition of the critical concepts and terms you will use in order to evaluate or critique your experimental work
- ii) Parallel Theory – a definition of theoretical fields which may share concepts with your experimental work but has no simple, direct relationship. This acknowledges that practice and theory are seen as distinct discourses.
- iii) Projective or Generative Theory – theory that is used to define intention and guide the experimental work you will do.

Methodology:

Your research method and approach will need to be defined in all cases but in practice based areas of study, methodologies are less well established, so you may like to think about the following questions:

- What are the basic methods and procedures you will adopt in discovering and recording research information?
- if it is a practice based proposal, how does the theory relate to the practical experimentation ?
- what is the theory for?
- what process of experimentation will you use?
- how will you record what you do and keep track of what you have done?

Ethical Dimensions of the Research:

If you feel that there are ethical considerations that need to be taken into account then you should address them briefly now. There is a comprehensive ethical policy at AUCB which is intended to safeguard researchers, participants and others on whom the proposed research might impact, directly or indirectly. If you are offered a place at AUCB then you will address any ethical issues formally when you apply to register your research proposal in your first year. In broad terms, the University College expects all research to respect participants' rights (commercial, intellectual and civil, dignity (including privacy and confidentiality), safety and well being.

Work Plan:

Make a prediction of the major stages of the work (probably not more than 5) and the minor subdivisions (if appropriate). Take care if aspects of the research will run concurrently.

Prediction of the Form of the Final Presentation for examination for the award of a PhD:

Think about the form of the final presentation; this may be a written thesis or, if it is a practice based study, a combination of a written critique and a defined body of work; e.g. a short animated film plus production material.

Main Study List and Bibliography:

List the main reference works which you will use for your research (no more than 1 page of A4). These may be films, paintings, TV programmes, curated collections or websites as well as books or journal articles. Citations must be consistent and adopt Harvard, the recognised standard system.