Basic Research Proposal Components
(adapted from McNair student input and SLU Fellowship Guidelines)

Title: An engaging title that accurately and concisely describes your proposed project.

Abstract: A 250-300 word abstract, written for a general audience. Briefly outline what your project is about/what you are proposing.

Introduction: Provide a brief overview of your project, who you are, and what the proposal is going to consist of. Explain the purpose of your research, why it is exciting and why it is worth pursuing.

Theoretical Context/Literature Review: This section provides a brief overview of the academic literature (journal articles, books, etc.) that is relevant to your project. These may be resources you’ve encountered in your courses or those you’ve found on your own. This section demonstrates that you understand an area of academic literature (i.e. sociology of crime) in which your project will be situated.

Research Question/Goal: Articulate what the goal or driving question of your research is. In other words, what do you want to study/what do you hope to find? This allows you introduce the primary topic you are engaging with and why you are doing the research in the first place.

Research Methodology: In this section, you demonstrate how you are going to carry out your project (i.e. interviews, collecting data, creating a piece of art, etc.). What shape will the project take (literature review, art display, etc.), and, more importantly, why have you chosen that shape or medium over other ones? Lay out the materials you are going to need and the resources you are going to use, university wise or personal. Important: if you plan to include human subjects in your research, you’ll need to have the project approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Conclusion: Wrap everything up. This is your chance to really bring your ideas together, and more importantly, directly and clearly express to the reader how the research project you just detailed is valuable in terms of your personal goals, and more broadly, that it is a valuable contribution to the university. Really stress how this is not simply an isolated project. It is also connected to your learning goals, your major goals, university goals, and your future research interests.

Appendices:

A. Bibliography: Include a list of the sources mentioned in your literature review and any other sources that you think will be relevant to your project.

B. Timeline: In a data table or in bullet form create a timeline for your project. For instance, I’ll begin this art piece in the beginning of June and finish it by the end of the month, etc.

C. Past Experience: In a table lay out any previous experience that you feel prepared you for this project. For example, list a class you took, who taught it, what semester/year, and in a sentence or two say why it prepared you for the project. This section demonstrates that you have the necessary background to complete the project. My column headings were “Class/Previous Experience”, “Skills Learned”, and if it was a class, “Grade Received.”

D. Budget: In a data table lay out the budget, resources, or materials needed and their cost. If there is no cost, simply list the supplies needed and where you will get them. If you use university resources, such as a special lab, certain materials, or archives, stress how you are taking advantage of the materials and sources the university provides.

Final Notes: Be confident and assertive! The key to a good proposal is synthesis between method, subject, and how that method and subject fits into the framework of the university and your specific experiences.