**The EH Prospectus – A Handout**

A prospectus is an overview of an extended intellectual project. It describes your project in enough detail that prospective contributors can evaluate it.

Its goals are, first, to help you organize your topic and your approach to that topic and, second, to help your committee guide you toward making an original contribution to your subject.

EH students are required to present their prospectus to their committee by week 2 of the third semester.

In simplified terms, your prospectus will:

1. *Explain* the topic you’ve chosen – why it is important to your area of study and why it matters to you.
2. *Review* the literature on this topic – put differently, what is the ongoing conversation your work will join?
3. *Suggest* an approach for understanding your topic – that is, what theoretical lens will you bring to bear, what methodological approach will you take?
4. *Outline* the chapter-by-chapter path your thesis will follow.

It may help to recognize that the prospectus is necessarily a work of fiction. You are projecting a set of possible ideas into a future where much can change. Still, a concise presentation of your interest and your approach is a time-tested method for sharpening research efforts and an important staging ground from which you and your mentors can build a worthy capstone to your EH experience.

*TITLE of THESIS/PROJECT*

Thesis/Project Prospectus

Environmental Humanities Graduate Program

University of Utah

Date

Your Name

**Masters Committee:**

Name 1, Chair

Name 2

Name 3

**The Prospectus in Detail**

*Introduction*

Introduce your project:

Why does it matter to you? Why is it important for a broader audience? End with a direct statement of your research question (a thesis statement).

*Literature Review*

Situate your proposed thesis/project in the current conversation that is taking place around the topic. This serves as a very broad literature review – include citations - showing you are aware of what others are doing on the topic. Consider this a “funnel approach” where you begin with a broad conversation and then narrow the discussion as you guide it towards your specific topic. The discussion could include how others are addressing your specific topic, theoretical applications you hope to engage, or a methodological approach.

*Major Issue and Research Questions*

Orient what your project aims to do. What is the major issue your project is addressing, and what are the major research questions your project will directly address? You will generally have two to three major questions guiding your research. Always make sure the research question directly addresses the major issue of your project.

*Roadmap*

This will generally proceed in the following order: 1) why your work is significant and why it matters in the current context; 2) identify your theoretical framework – what thinkers and theories are guiding your approach and justify how you apply those theories to your project; 3) identify your method and justify why you apply that method to your project; 4) provide an outline for each section/chapter of your project; 5) provide a timeline for your project completion; 6) finally, discuss how your project contributes to the larger field of Environmental Humanities.

**Introduction (1 page)**

Why do you care? Why should readers care?

One helpful approach is to fill in these blanks:

Topic = “I will study …”

Question = “Because I want to find out …”

Significance = “To help readers understand …”

**Project Significance – Why it Matters (2 pages)**Describe what environmental issue(s) your project addresses. Are there divides, binaries, destructive patterns, power structures, gaps, or ecological needs that your work hopes to address? If so, what makes your approach significant and timely? Again, cite individuals who are contributing to your thinking or who serve as models on what to do/not do on the topic (i.e. who is exemplary and who falls short). This is also an opportunity to take sides – identify who you are aligning yourself with in the environmental field (e.g. consider the diverse thinkers you encountered in the foundations course).

**Theoretical Framework (1 page)**Identify the major theories that guide your project – ecocriticism, poststructuralist theory, deep ecology, resiliency, ecofeminism, performance, bioethics, phenomenology, etc. – and why they are applicable to your work. Clearly identify how this theoretical framework orients your perspective and how it contributes to your project. Again, cite major contributors to your theoretical framework.

**Method (1 page)**Identify your method and your specific rationale for using that method in your project. Your method will be influenced by your topic and your theoretical framework. Methodological approaches can range from close textual analysis of literary texts to the natural history of a place to ethnographic research on human-nature interactions to a visual analysis of photographs and spaces. The most important thing is that you identify your method and clearly articulate your rationale for using it.

Please note, if the research project involves human subjects, either directly or indirectly, prior approval or exemption by the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) must be secured before members of the supervisory committee can approve the formal prospectus. A complete discussion of the university's regulations regarding the use of human subjects and the procedures for requesting project approval is available on the IRB web site <https://irb.utah.edu/>

**Chapter Outlines (2-3 pages)**

This is where you will briefly outline each chapter/section of your project. Typically, for a masters-level thesis/project, your manuscript will consist of an introduction, 3-4 chapters, and a conclusion. For each of those parts, you will provide a 3-4 paragraph description of what you plan to address in that section. What stand-alone texts/case studies/issues will be addressed in each chapter and what is the major question or topic you hope to develop in each of those chapters. Always identify how each of those chapters directly contributes to your overarching project and major research questions.

**Timeline (1 page)**

Clearly layout your plan of action for getting the work done. If your project requires site visits or field work, state when you plan to complete that work. Indicate when you plan to have drafts completed for your chair to review and when you plan to defend your work in order to graduate. This is a great way to find out if particular committee members might have conflicts with your deadlines (e.g. sabbaticals, or leaves of absence).

**Contributions to Environmental Humanities (1 page)**

This is similar to showing the significance of your project, but it does so at a larger scale. How does your work advance research in Environmental Humanities and how might it be a legacy to the discipline?

**Works Cited**

Provide bibliography for every work you have cited in your prospectus.