Research Proposal Guidelines
Dr. Robert T. Pennock

This assignment has two main purposes. The first is to help prepare you to research and write your thesis / research term paper. Whenever you set out to produce a major research project, whether it will result in a scholarly article or book, or an undergraduate thesis or term paper, it always helps to begin by trying to articulate as precisely as possible what you aim to accomplish and how you plan to proceed. Trying to map out the project as fully as you can, in advance, will help you identify ambiguities and weaknesses in your ideas, avoid potential pitfalls, and focus your subsequent research.

The second main purpose is to give you practice with a task that you will likely find yourself performing throughout your professional career. Research proposals are regularly required for everything from a Master’s theses and Doctoral Dissertations to grant applications to governmental agencies and private foundations. Your goal in any such proposal is to convince the reviewer(s) of the merits and feasibility of your project. If you are unable to develop your ideas with sufficient care and write about them precisely and persuasively, you won’t get the grant or have your proposal approved.

Every RFP (Request for Proposals) will have its own specific guidelines, but for this assignment I am asking for a simplified version of some of the most common requirements. Your proposal should include the following sections:

1) **Introduction to Topic**: In one paragraph, introduce the general topic and give enough background information about the question area your proposal falls into that the reviewer will be able to understand the context of your specific thesis.

2) **Statement of your thesis**: Explain the goals of your project and state your specific thesis in as clear and precise a manner as you can. A thesis statement should be a **proposition** that, when your research is complete, you will be prepared to put forward and defend. This section of your proposal should be one compact paragraph, and must include an explicit statement of your thesis. (Remember that this is a research **proposal**; you must always expect to have to refine, revise or perhaps even abandon your thesis on the basis of the evidence you find as your research progresses.)

3) **Significance**: In a brief paragraph, you should explain why your topic is interesting and why your thesis is worth pursuing.

4) **Methods/Lit. Review**: In a couple of paragraphs, explain the methods you propose to use and the steps your will take in your research. This will help demonstrate that the project is feasible. If this is primarily a scholarly paper rather than an experiment, this section should describe the results of your initial review of the literature on the topic, showing that you are familiar with the scholarly work that has been done by others.

5) **Annotated Bibliography**: Include an **annotated** bibliography of at least six primary source items beyond the materials read in class.

**Length**: 4 pages. Parts (1-4) should take from 2 to 2 1/2 pages, double-spaced. Part (5) should take one and a half pages, single-spaced.