

## Putting Together an Excellent Concept Paper or Prospectus

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The *concept paper*, or *prospectus*, although highly abridged, is comprised of many of the same items found in a dissertation proposal. These specific elements of the concept paper (prospectus) may vary depending upon the academic program and the chosen degree. Programs typically provide a grading rubric that serves as an outline for the required components and students are encouraged to follow those rubrics closely in developing their Concept Paper.

Carefully examine the following sample concept paper (prospectus) and vigilantly put together one for your research proposal. Make sure you share this with the members of your committee and those who will be closely involved with approving your research.

### **Sample *Bill of Fare* (Prospectus/Concept paper) for a Proposal conducted in 2004.**

**Title:** The Application of the 12-Step Programs by Alcoholics Successful in Aftercare: A Descriptive Study

**Problem Statement:** Alcohol abuse is one of the most critical problems facing society Jainchill (2000). The 12-step program has been purported to be the primary model for the treatment of alcoholism (Brooks & Penn, 2003). Yet, to date, there has been little, if any, formal evaluation as to the actual use and application of this program for those who are able to maintain abstinence. In order to provide the most effective and expeditious treatment for alcoholics, it is necessary that a descriptive study be conducted to determine to what extent those who have been successful in aftercare have utilized the 12-step program.

**Introduction:** In the popular book: *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional*, Kaminer (1992) took witty potshots at the omnipresent self-help programs and authors of books helping people confront anyone and anything in their lives who they can blame for their unhappiness. In an interview with Kakutani,(1995) Kaminer addressed the social implications of a society engaged in these types of solutions to their problems, and argued that they foster passivity, social isolation, and attitudes contrary to democracy. Kaminer went on to tell Kakutani: "At its worst, the recovery movement's cult of

victimization mocks the notion of social justice by denying that there are degrees of injustice" (p.2). However, she insisted that AA is not included in this list of *pseudo-help* programs and that AA itself is beyond reproach.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to evaluate a group of successful participants in Alcoholics Anonymous with respect to their degree of use of the program's 12 steps. Since the 12-step program is hailed as the paramount means of successfully treating those suffering from chemical dependency (Hayes, Blacksher, Dodd, Fox, Lewis, & Wittman, 1993), it is important to ascertain the actual use of the program for those who have been successful in aftercare.

**Theoretical Framework:** The researcher is taking a postmodern constructivist view, and contends that to maintain sobriety, the knowledge obtained in the treatment program is likely to be invented or constructed in the minds of people who have participated in the program. People create knowledge, ideas, and language, not because they are true, but rather because they are useful. Perhaps those who are successful in care have constructed a modified theory based on the information they have received.

**Research Question:** To what extent is the 12-step program being used by those who have been successful in care for at least 1 year?

**Significance:** This study will be able to reach people that have not been reached before. The researcher will elaborate on his personal qualifications to obtain the desired information. If the study reveals that successful patients only practice part of the program, then this information could aid counselors in seeking a more concentrated and abridged treatment regime, thus saving patients, their family, and society both time and money.

**Background:** 12-step program development; alcoholism as a disease, history of alcoholics anonymous, addiction identification.

**Nature of the Study:** This will primarily be a descriptive study but the researcher will also utilize ethnographic and evaluative techniques. The researcher believes that in order to elicit accurate information from this population, the investigator must have personal knowledge of this disease. The researcher plans to discover what the participants believe or perceive they have experienced. The investigator further believes that nothing can be understood apart from the context within which it was experienced.

**Literature/Research Review:** Aftercare, alcoholism, the 12-step program, AA, alcohol as a disease, other programs for recovery and treatment of substance abuse, evaluation of other recovery programs. (Proposal: 20–40 pages, Dissertation: 50–70 pages.)

**Scope:** The participants will be alcoholics who have maintained sobriety for at least 1 year. Abusers of substances other than alcohol will not be included in the study.

**Limitations:** The researcher will only work with adults who have completed the AA 12-step program. The researcher will need to rely on self-reporting of what steps were employed.

**Delimitations:** The study will be narrowed to include only graduates of an alcoholic treatment center in Southern California who currently reside in the Southern California area. Only the 12-step program will be evaluated.

**Assumptions:** There is an assumption that people will answer truthfully. Since participation will be voluntary and anonymity will be preserved, this is a reasonable assumption. Voluntary participation, encouraging participants to voice their own views, and assurances that there are no right or wrong answers helps overcome the need to give socially acceptable answers.

**Methodology:** This study will use a quantitative descriptive research design that includes ethnographic and evaluative components to describe the way things are and provide triangulations of findings. Descriptive research involves observation and description of variables as they are distributed throughout a population (Campbell & Stanley, 1966). Quality observation (i.e., measurement) is at the heart of descriptive research (Heppner & Wampold, 1992). Both qualitative and quantitative data will be collected.

The intent of this study is to determine how the 12-step program is actually being utilized. The population to be studied is alcoholics who have maintained sobriety for at least 1 year. The sample will come from graduates of an outpatient alcohol treatment center in Southern California and will include approximately 50 men and 50 women, ages 20–60. Participants will be selected with the help of personnel from the center and the willingness of patients to participate in the study. The researcher will construct a survey designed to answer the research questions that will be validated through a panel of experts and the VREP data validation survey (Simon & Goes, 2013). In addition, personal interviews will be used to triangulate the findings. The survey will make use of a visual analog scale with multiple means of assessing the utilization of each step of the 12-step program. A pilot study will be used to test for reliability. Permission to conduct the study will be obtained. Using descriptive statistics, I will report on the step(s) most utilized by the group as a whole and by other criteria such as age and gender. The data will be analyzed to determine if there is a linear correlation between the independent variables gender, ethnic group, age, occupation, and other factors with the dependent variable the use of the 12 step program. Chi-square analyses and multiple regression will be used to determine the association between the independent variables and dependent variable.

**Operational Definitions:** sobriety, abstinence, 12-step program, successful treatment.

**Social Impact of Study/Contribution to Leadership:** Perhaps crime caused by alcoholism could be curtailed if there was an effective treatment for alcoholics. In this day of *instant everything* and *fast food*, there is a constant search to condense and distill effective programs for the most expeditious implementation. If this study shows that successful patients do not utilize certain steps in the 12-step program, then health care leaders should conduct an investigation of those steps might be studied in greater detail to determine their fruitfulness.

#### References

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## **Prospectus/Concept Paper Template for YOUR Study**

**Title:** Provide a tentative title for your dissertation. In a quantitative study, the title should concisely identify the variables being investigated and the relationship among those variables (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010). Eschew words that do not add substance or words that are misleading. The brevity of the title belies the importance of a good title.

**Introduction:** (sketch)

**Background:** (sketch)

**Problem Statement:** (Write in full)

**Purpose:** (sketch)

**Significance:** (sketch)

**Theoretical Framework:**

**Research Questions/Hypotheses:**

**Nature of the Study:** (select type(s)): Provide a rationale for the paradigm (qualitative/quantitative/mixed), as well as your reasons for choosing a particular methodology.

**Definitions:** Make sure these are unique connotations for terms in the study. Provide references for each definition.

**Assumptions:**

**Limitations:**

**Scope of the Study:**

**Delimitations:**

Literature Review: (areas to investigate, themes, strengths and weaknesses)

Methodology: (Qualitative/Quantitative/Mixed Method).

Study Design: (e.g. correlational, experimental, phenomenological)

Population/sample

Instrumentation (validity and reliability)

Data :

How will you:

Collect?

Organize?

Analyze?

Interpret?

Predict?

Protection of Human Participants: (informed consent, data security)

Social Impact/ Contribution to Leadership: (give details)