

## **Problem Statement Help** (adapted by Dr. Sherry Lowrance)

Resource:

Ellis, T., & Levy, Y. (2008). Framework of Problem-Based Research: A Guide for Novice Researchers on the Development of a Research-Worthy Problem. *Informing Science*, 11, 17-33.

The dissertation problem needs to be very focused, because everything else from the dissertation research logically flows from the problem. Through your research, your aim is to obtain information that (in part) solves a problem. So, the problem statement should do three things:

- Specify and describe the problem (with appropriate citations)
- Explain the consequences of NOT solving the problem
- Provide some sort of evidence regarding the knowledge needed to solve the problem. (i.e., what is unknown)

Here is one way to construct a problem section (keep in mind you have a 250-300 word limit, but you can write first and edit later):

It is helpful to begin the problem statement with a sentence: *“The problem to be addressed through this study is...”* Then, fill out the rest of the paragraph with elaboration of that specific problem, making sure to “document” it, as NCU reviewers will look for research-based evidence that it is indeed a problem (emphasis also on timeliness of the problem, supported by citations within the last 5 years).

Next, write a paragraph explaining the consequences of NOT solving the problem. Who will be affected? How will they be affected? How important is it to fix the problem? Again, NCU reviewers will want to see research-based citations.

In the final paragraph, you will explain what information (research) is needed in order to fix the problem. This paragraph shows that the problem is worthy of doctoral-level research. What isn't known about the problem? Presumably, if your problem and purpose are aligned, your research will investigate exactly this issue. Have other researchers investigated the issue? What has their research left unanswered?

### **Another way to tackle the Statement of the Problem:**

The Statement of the Problem section is a very clear, concise identification of the problem. It must stay within the template guidelines of 250-300 words but more importantly, must contain four elements as outlined below. A dissertation worthy problem (stated in 250-300 words) should be able to address all of the following points:

- >identification of the problem itself--what is "going wrong" (Ellis & Levy, 2008)
- >who is affected by the problem



- >the consequences that will result from a continuation of the problem
- >a brief discussion of 1) at least 3 authors' research related to the problem; and 2) their stated suggestion/recommendation for further research related to the problem

Use the following to work on the Statement of the Problem by first outlining the section as follows:

1. One clear, concise statement that tells the reader what is not working, what is "going wrong". Be specific and support it with current studies.
2. Tell who is affected by the problem identified in #1.
3. Briefly tell what will happen if the problem isn't addressed.
4. Find at least 3 current studies and write a sentence or two for each study that
  - i. briefly discusses the author(s)' work, what they studied, and
  - ii. state their recommendation for further research about the problem