Topic Proposal:

Pitching a Problem You Can Help Solve

Major Project 2 Assignment Sheet

Sample due dates, from an 8-week hybrid course (your syllabus has the dates for your class):

WHAT	WHEN / HOW MUCH
Length	Draft: at least 500 words. Revision: at least 1,000 words. Both in the mode of language (memo-style proposal)
Weight	10% of your final grade
Draft	Week 3: Sunday, 11:59pm, on Canvas
Peer response to a classmate	Week 4: Tuesday, 11:59pm, on Canvas
Revision workshop	In class, Week 4: Wednesday
Revision (firm)	Week 4: Sunday, 11:59pm, on Canvas

Weekly Writing 3, a draft of your interview request email, is also due Sunday of Week 3. Don't send it yet. We'll workshop a few in class on Wednesday of Week 4, and you'll send yours for real by Sunday of Week 4.

Assignment Overview

Our committee is working on one question: what can our university do to help students obtain entry-level positions in their field? In your job application documents, you claimed a role on that committee and an area of expertise. Now you'll use that expertise to propose **one specific problem** inside the committee's question that you can research and help solve.

Your proposal is a memo to the committee and our sponsor. It asks them to approve your topic, and it shows them you have a realistic plan for getting the evidence. Once it's approved, it becomes the foundation of your problem-solution report (at least 1,800 words, built on a live interview and at least three outside sources, draft due Friday of Week 6).

The biggest decision here is scope. “Our students can’t find jobs” is a topic for a whole university. A problem you can work on in three weeks sounds more like these (made-up examples, not facts about our university):

- Students in 8-week sessions miss career events that happen mid-session.
- Students in a clinical program finish rotations without knowing how to describe those hours on a résumé.
- Transfer students don’t know the career center exists until their final year.

Notice that each one names who is affected and what, specifically, goes wrong. Yours should too.

Why This Assignment?

At work, very little gets done without someone saying yes first. Proposals are how you get that yes: they ask a reader with authority to commit time, money, or attention to your idea. Carolyn Miller calls genres like this “social action,” and a proposal is a clear case. It isn’t a report about a problem. It’s a request to do something about one.

A proposal also helps a team coordinate. When every member of our committee says in writing what they’ll work on, we can spot overlap, divide the work, and see the gaps. That’s writing to “get things done” with other people (Wardle).

Finally, it saves you time later. The decisions you make here (your problem, your interview subject, your first sources) are the decisions your report depends on. Making them now, and getting feedback on them, means you won’t be scrambling over the break.

What to Include

Write your proposal as a memo with headings, in roughly this order. The word counts are a guide for the revision, not a formula; together they land a little over 1,000. Your 500-word draft should touch every section, even briefly, with the most development in The problem and Your plan. Those are the parts your peer reviewer can help with most.

SECTION	WHAT IT DOES	ABOUT
Memo heading	To: the committee and our sponsor. From, Date, and a Subject line that names your problem ("Proposal: Career events for 8-week-session students"), not "My Proposal."	—
Summary	The problem, why it matters, what you'll do, and what you're asking for, for a reader who has one minute. Write it last.	75–125 words
The problem	Who is affected, where, when, and what it costs them. Use evidence you already have: your experience, something a classmate or staff member said, a source. Show that it fits the committee's question.	250–300 words
Why you	Your committee role and expertise from your job documents, and what that expertise lets you see that others might miss.	100–150 words
Your plan	Who you'll interview, why they're credible, and how you'll reach them (live conversation, by Sunday of Week 5). Two or three questions you plan to ask. At least two sources you've found or the kinds of sources you'll look for.	250–300 words
Scope and limits	What you will not cover, what could go wrong (your interview falls through, say), and your backup plan.	100–150 words
What you'll deliver	Your report draft (Friday of Week 6) and revision (Wednesday of Week 7), and how your work could feed your team's presentation. Mention any overlap with a classmate's topic and how you'll split it.	75–100 words
The request	Ask for approval, directly, in a sentence or two.	25–50 words

Use the GAO "Highlights" page from Week 3 as a model for stating a problem plainly. You're not writing findings or recommendations yet, but the same clarity applies: say what the problem is before you explain it.

Format, Length, and Your AI Use Statement

- **Format:** memo format with headings and short paragraphs, single-spaced with a blank line between paragraphs, the way workplace proposals usually look. Submit a .docx or PDF on Canvas.
- **Length:** at least 500 words for the draft and at least 1,000 words for the revision, not counting the memo heading, references, or AI statement.
- **Style:** plain language. Go back to the Federal Plain Language Guidelines: lead with the point, use "you" and "we," and cut words your reader doesn't need.
- **Sources:** if you mention a source, give your reader enough to find it. A short APA reference list is good practice; we'll cover APA in class in Week 4, and it's required in the report.
- **AI use statement:** end with a short statement saying whether you used AI and how: which tool, for what, and which parts of the proposal it touched. If you didn't use AI, say so. I'll ask for it before I read the proposal.

Peer Response and Revision

1. **Sunday, Week 3:** submit your draft on Canvas by 11:59pm. Canvas assigns you one classmate's draft on Monday morning.
2. **Tuesday, Week 4:** post your written response to that classmate by 11:59pm (150–250 words, in the Canvas comment box). Answer these:
    - In one sentence, what problem is the writer proposing? If you can't say it in one sentence, tell them.
    - Could this be researched in three weeks? Does it fit the committee's question?
    - Is the interview subject credible, and can the writer realistically talk to them live by Sunday of Week 5, during a holiday week?
    - What would our sponsor ask that this proposal doesn't answer yet?
    - Name one thing to cut and one thing to add.
3. **Wednesday, Week 4, in class:** read the response you got, write a short revision plan, and we'll look at one or two drafts together. We'll also workshop a few interview request emails before you send them.
4. **Sunday, Week 4:** submit your revision by 11:59pm. This date is firm. Send your interview request for real by the same night.

A strong revision changes more than sentences. If your peer response or your interview request showed you a better problem, a sharper scope, or a different person to talk to, change the proposal to match.

Things to Keep in Mind

- **Line up your interviewee now,** even though you won't email them until next week. You'll send the real request by Sunday of Week 4, and the interview has to happen by Sunday of Week 5, which is a holiday week. Ask for a time early in the week, and keep a backup person in mind.
- **A proposal promises; it doesn't prove.** You don't need answers yet. You need a clear problem, a believable plan, and a reason to trust you with it.
- **Check the meeting minutes before you commit.** If a classmate is circling the same problem, talk to them now and split it, or pick a different angle. Overlap is normal at work; ignoring it isn't.
- **Pick a problem you can get evidence for.** If you can't name a single person who knows about it, choose another problem.
- **Write for a busy reader.** Put the point first in every section. Our sponsor should be able to read your summary and know what you're asking for.

As always, reach out if you're stuck on scope. That's the hardest part of this assignment, and it's worth a quick email before Sunday.