Undergraduate Research Month Abstract Guidelines & Instructions

This year, all first-year Monroe scholars will be required to write an abstract describing their research project. Your abstract will be published online by the Charles Center and will serve as the formal presentation of your research, fulfilling your presentation obligation.

This document contains instructions, guidelines, and formatting standards to help you prepare your work for submission. We have also included two sample abstracts for your reference. Please read through everything included here BEFORE submitting your abstract!

Important context

An abstract is a short, paragraph-long description of a research project, providing information about the research questions/objectives; the context for the work; research methods; and major findings.

Abstracts are often included on the first page of published papers or book chapters. They are usually the first thing people read when they encounter a research paper – and sometimes the only thing they read! An abstract is also often required if you apply for research grants, or to give a talk or poster at a conference. So, it is important that your abstract leave a good impression! Although it can be challenging, writing a succinct and engaging abstract is a critical skill for all researchers.

Not only does your abstract need to be short and interesting, but it should also be written in easy, non-technical language. Avoid using jargon that only people in your field would understand. Remember, these abstracts will be read by students, faculty, and others across many disciplines!

Key components to include in your abstract

**You must address at least one aspect of ALL of the five prompts below**

1. What were you studying, and why did you go looking for it?
   - State the question that your research addressed. This may be stated as a formal hypothesis, but it should be concise and not overly detailed.

2. What is the context for your research? What previous ideas, experiments, concepts, etc. did you build upon? What gaps were left in the literature that you tried to fill?
   - Summarize in a sentence or two your review of other papers and books that you used as background.
   - Do not include the details of who conducted previous studies or how, unless the identity of previous researchers is relevant, such as if it was Darwin or Freud. Generally, abstracts do not contain citations of the literature.
   - Here is an example: “Longitudinal studies exploring this question across the last quarter of the 20th century confirmed the hypothesis, but the latest of those
studies reported a third strongly correlated variable that has not yet been thoroughly explored.”

3. How did you conduct your research? What methods did you use?
   ● While this might seem self-explanatory, try to avoid using too many details or jargon/technical language. Remember, this abstract will be read by people in many different disciplines that might not understand your field!
   ● If you collected original data, state simply how many subjects were in the study, what observations you recorded, etc. Do not interpret, just describe.
   ● If you analyzed an existing database, identify it.
   ● If you reviewed literature, describe how you picked what to include and exclude. For example, if your method was a systematic comparison of 15 studies, state in your abstract how you selected the studies to be included and how you resolved inconsistencies among them.

4. What were your results? What did you find? Or, if your research is not yet complete, what were some preliminary findings or future directions?
   ● Briefly describe your findings, and address what your study adds to what was known before about this question – even if this is only to say that you were able to replicate earlier studies or to arrive at similar findings using a new data set.
   ● If you have one or two strong findings, you should state them, but do not include statistical details.

5. Was your original hypothesis supported? What might your results mean? How would you interpret your findings?
   ● State if your hypothesis was either supported or nullified based on your findings.
   ● Interpret or explain the implications of your findings. You might include in the abstract a brief "teaser" for whatever next research step may be motivated by your findings.

Formatting requirements
Your abstract must conform to the standards listed below.

● There is a 250-word limit. You may not exceed 250 words total, but fewer is fine.
   ○ This word limit does NOT include the words of the title, your name, or your advisor’s name - only the abstract itself.
● Your abstract should be typed on a Word Document, saved under the file name LastName.FirstName.Abstract (.doc or .docx). Please use single-spaced 12-pt Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins and no indentations. You should include the following information in your abstract file:
   ○ First line: your name; in the format: last name, first name
   ○ Second line: advisor’s name with NO titles (Dr., Prof., etc.) included; formatted as last name, first name
   ○ Third line: TITLE in ALL CAPS.
Fourth line: abstract; written in complete sentences, with no indentation or line breaks.

- All abstracts should be submitted by uploading to the Google Form by Mar. 19 at 12:00 pm EDT.
- Check very carefully for typos before submitting your abstract via the Google Form – this will be displayed for your peers and profs to see!

**Two sample abstracts (one from Biology and one from Anthropology/Archaeology) with correct formatting are included below**

McSweeny, Sally
Washington, Delores
MERCURY EXPOSURE AND CHRONIC FOOD STRESS ELEVATE BLOOD CORTICOSTERONE IN A MODEL SONGBIRD, THE ZEBRA FINCH
Bird abundance across North America has declined by nearly 30% in the past 50 years, making it crucial to understand contributors to losses, including environmental contaminants. Mercury is a widespread, persistent aquatic pollutant increasing in abundance. Its impact on songbirds, a large and diverse but declining taxon, is poorly understood. We studied mercury’s effect on the environmentally sensitive hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, which controls the hormone-mediated stress responses. We tested the effect of chronic, sublethal dietary mercury on baseline corticosterone hormone level in captive adult zebra finches. Birds were subject to mercury alone or in combination with daily, unpredictable food removal. Mercury alone and combined with food stress resulted in elevated baseline corticosterone compared to controls. As expected, birds that took longer to sample within three minutes had higher corticosterone across the control, food stress, and mercury stress groups, reflecting the beginning of the stress response. However, in the dual stress group, longer sampling latency was associated with similar corticosterone levels, suggesting a disruption of the stress response. This is the first study to demonstrate in a laboratory that sublethal mercury exposure elevates baseline corticosterone in adult songbirds, and there is evidence that the stress response is altered when combined with another stressor.

Owens, Timothy
Francisco, Jorge
MAINTAINING THE FRAGILE ORDER: ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE END OF EMPIRE IN NIGERIA
In 1953, as British control of Nigeria was coming to an end, Western archaeologists performed a field season at the sacred Yoruba city of Ilé-Ifé which involved the excavation of sacred shrines combined with establishment of a new museum. These actions were officially sanctioned by the sacred leader of the Yoruba, the Oni, but created considerable tension between these researchers and segments of Ilé-Ifé’s local population. This paper will combine contemporary field diaries of the archaeologists Bernard Fagg and AJH Goodwin, obtained from archives in Glasgow and Cape Town, with secondary ethnographic data to reconstruct the history of this field season from the perspectives of both the researchers and segments of the local community. Such a comparison of these primary and secondary sources will permit investigation into local ontologies as a means of explaining why such tensions occurred. This analysis offered insights into the often contrasting logics of the Western scholars and the local population, highlighting
the various ways in which these divergent groups conceptualised “the past”, material culture, and archaeological practice which explained some of the historical dynamics at work. Specifically, it was revealed that archaeological activities at particular shrine sites stimulated considerable local opposition as a result of anxieties about spiritual repercussion in light of the excavation of sacred areas. Meanwhile, the researchers themselves justified their activities in the name of scientific inquiry and the “safeguarding” of Yoruba heritage while the Oni’s authority over the city was strengthened by centralising recovered artefacts in the new museum.