

GEOGRAPHY 7101, SP 2025: RESEARCH DESIGN

BASIC INFORMATION

This in-person class meets Wednesdays 2-5 PM, in Derby Hall 1116.

Instructor: Professor Becky Mansfield, faculty, Department of Geography. **Email:** Mansfield.32@osu.edu

Office: 1054 Derby Hall.

Office hours: I am happy to talk with you outside of class! I am available to meet before class or by appointment, in-person or Zoom.

See the course Carmen for all course materials. If you need assistance with Carmen, please contact *OSU Tech Help and Support*: <https://ocio.osu.edu/help>, 614-688-HELP (4357)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Research design and proposal writing are challenging tasks. They require us to articulate how our research is *interesting and important* (both topically and conceptually), while also requiring us to show the *logical connections* among our topic, concepts, object of inquiry, research questions, necessary evidence, and methods. Yet even as students are required to produce compelling research proposals, the research design process is also strangely cloaked. Many texts on research design, for example, leap from literature review to data gathering and analysis, skipping over what are arguably the most important (yet difficult) parts of research: producing a conceptual framework, constructing an object of inquiry, defining questions (or hypotheses or objectives), and identifying necessary evidence to answer those questions. This course fills in these missing steps, focusing on the things that make a research project compelling. We do this in three ways.

First, the course provides information, tips, and perspective on practical skills for designing research, such as the structure of research proposals, finding and using literature, writing, and ethical review.

Second, the course addresses broad questions about what counts as valid knowledge in geography. These are philosophical, ethical, and political questions about what knowledge is, what it is for, whose knowledge counts, and so forth. The goal here is to explore these issues in the context of research design: how questions about knowledge affect how one approaches the literature, frame objects of inquiry, pose questions, identify necessary evidence, choose methods, etc.

Third, the course helps you develop your own research project. Rather than producing a fully formed research proposal, the goal is to have you identify and refine your *research problem*: the object of study at the heart of your research design. Applying the skills and knowledge you learn in this class to your own research will hopefully get you a little further along with regards to completing a coherent and compelling thesis or dissertation that makes the sorts of contributions you desire.

Note that the course schedule (below) has several weeks after Spring Break that are listed as To Be Decided. I have left these open so that as a group we can decide on topics for those weeks: things we haven't covered, or things we have touched on but as a group we want to delve into further. (Ethics? Generalizability? Situated knowledges? Mixed methods? Sources of funding?) I will be expecting each of you to contribute to choosing content for those weeks.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Readings:** Please do all readings prior to class. To prepare for discussion, you will submit reading responses and (occasional) related activities. The readings and specific prompts will be provided in Carmen. As noted above, I will also be expecting you to help choose readings (or other activities) for the final weeks of the course.
2. **Your research:** You will work on your research in stages, focusing on situating your work in the literature and defining your research problem (whether empirical, theoretical, or methodological!).
 - a. **Initial research statement.** A write-up of your current ideas for your research.
 - b. **Area of specialization literature review.** Based on independent reading, choose and describe your area of specialization, the history of this part of the field, and the themes and questions within it that are interesting and useful for your research.
 - c. **Presentation.** Based on your literature review, teach the rest of the class about your area of specialization and what you see as the important themes and questions.
 - d. **Draft conceptual framework.** Move from the broad focus of the literature review to a narrower focus on the specific concepts and ideas that will help frame your research, including how the existing literature provides tools for your research and how you see your research contributing to this literature. Incorporate information from your literature review but be more focused and go deeper (read more!) on relevant concepts and ideas.
 - e. **Draft problem statement.** Based on your research statement, literature review, and conceptual framework, you will identify your “research problem.” Defined by you, the research problem incorporates your conceptualized object of inquiry, your questions (or objectives), and necessary evidence. As such, it provides the link between literature and methods. *Incorporate relevant parts of your research statement, area of specialization, and conceptual framework—revised as necessary to fit your evolving research design.*
 - f. **Final revised problem statement.** Revise everything based on the feedback you receive.
3. **Workshop:** At the end of the semester, you will share your draft problem statement with the other students, and you will read and comment on everyone’s work. Workshops are for learning to give and receive constructive criticism. Please enthusiastically comment on what works well, gently point out spots that don’t work so well, and make suggestions for improvement. The goal is to help each student do their best work (it is not to make other students do the work as you would do it!).
 - a. **Discussant.** You will be assigned as the main discussant for one other student’s work. This means introducing their work and providing broad comments. You will provide written comments to that student by the day after class.
 - b. **Workshop participant.** You will prepare comments to share orally on all other students’ written work.

GRADING

My working assumption is that all students will get A’s in this class. My expectation is that, as a graduate student, you will complete all the assignments, on time, and with care; this includes attending and participating in all classes. This expectation affects my approach to grading.

- For assignments associated with your contributions to each week's class, I generally provide neither a grade nor feedback. I provide feedback if there is a problem with the quality of your assignments or participation, and I will lower your final grade if there is an ongoing problem. I will lower your final grade if assignments are missing or late.
- For assignments associated with your proposal, I provide written feedback, but not a grade; I will let you know if I have concerns that might lower your final grade.

Attendance is required. If you miss a day, you must complete an essay (2-3 pages, single spaced) on the seminar readings for that day. The essay must not just summarize but raise substantive issues. On workshop days, you must provide substantive written commentary to all the presenters in that day's workshop. Essays and commentaries for missed classes will be due the following week, at the beginning of class. If you do not turn in your essay/provide commentary, I will lower your grade by one step (e.g. A to A-, or A- to B+).

Regardless of how well you do on other parts of the course, you will fail if you do not turn in the "final revised research problem" or if you miss more than three class sessions.

That said, if there is some issue in your life that is making attendance (and active participation) difficult, please talk to me as soon as possible so that we can determine if alternative arrangements are appropriate and possible. I can be flexible about assignments and due dates.

GENERATIVE AI POLICY

The assignments in this course exist not just for you to demonstrate that you have done something (e.g., a reading) but are part of the learning process: you will deepen your understanding of course material and your ability to apply this material through doing these assignments. Generative AI cannot replace your own engagement with the material and the assignments.

Given this, I prefer that you not use AI. I am more interested in your unique ideas and engagement, even if imperfect, than in what ChatGPT or Copilot (for example) have to say. Some of you may choose to use AI anyway. For the purposes of this course, I will consider generative AI to be like any other internet search: **you may not simply cut and paste what AI generates without proper care and attribution. Doing so will be considered academic misconduct. If you use AI for an assignment, you must *say you have done so and include the prompts you used.***

SCHEDULE (subject to change)

Week 1, Jan 8: Introduction/ About research design

No Assignment

Week 2, Jan 15: Overviews of research design in geography

Read: Wentz 2014 (chapters 4, 7, 9, 10—all short), Clifford et al. 2023 (chapter 1)

Optional reading: Foss and Waters 2016 (chapter 9, on writing)

Due: Initial Research Statement

Week 3, Jan 22: Reading research proposals

Read: Provided proposals

Due: Discussion with advisor about proposal expectations: Write up

Week 4, Jan 29: What is geographical research and knowledge?

Read: Lovell et al. 2023 and Rosenberg 2023 (Handbook of Methodologies in Human Geography); Oswin 2020, Faria and Mollett 2020, Eaves 2020 (commentary and responses on An Other Geography);

Hamilton 2020

Week 5, Feb 5: “The literature”: literature reviews, journals, etc.

Read: Wentz 2014 (chapter 5); there will be extra activities associated with this reading

Week 6, Feb 12: Rethinking “the literature”

Read: Latour 1987 excerpts; Mott and Cockayne 2017; Giesecking 2020

Week 7, Feb 19: Approaches and objects of inquiry: beyond divides

Read: Lawson 1995; Lave, Biermann, and Lane 2018; Zhao 2022

Due: Area of Specialization (due Friday, Feb 21)

Week 8, Feb 26: Presentations on Area of Specialization

Due: Presentation

Week 9, Mar 5: Perspectives on validity and generalizability

Read: Montello and Sutton 2013; Gobo 2008

Week 10, Mar 12: SPRING BREAK

No class or assignment

Week 11, Mar 19: Topics: TBD based on class interest

Read: TBD

Week 12, Mar 26: AAG in Detroit NO CLASS

Due: Draft Conceptual Framework

Week 13, Apr 2: Topics: TBD based on class interest

Read: TBD

Week 14, Apr 9: Topics: TBD based on class interest

Read: TBD

Due: Draft Problem Statement

Week 15, Apr 16: Workshop: Written Problem Statements

Due: Comments on peers' work

Week 16 FINALS WEEK, no class

Due: Final revised problem statement

DISABILITY SERVICES

The university strives to maintain a healthy and accessible environment to support student learning in and out of the classroom. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic, or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion.

If you are ill and need to miss class, including if you are staying home and away from others while experiencing symptoms of a viral infection or fever, please let me know immediately. In cases where illness interacts with an underlying medical condition, please consult with Student Life Disability Services to request reasonable accommodations. You can connect with them at slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; or slds.osu.edu.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, The Ohio State University and the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the University's Code of Student Conduct, and that all students will complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. Students must recognize that failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University's Code of Student Conduct and this syllabus may constitute Academic Misconduct.

The Ohio State University's Code of Student Conduct (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University or subvert the educational process. Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism,

collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination. Ignorance of the University's Code of Student Conduct is never considered an excuse for academic misconduct, so I recommend that you review the Code of Student Conduct and, specifically, the sections dealing with academic misconduct.

If I suspect that a student has committed academic misconduct in this course, I am obligated by University Rules to report my suspicions to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. If COAM determines that you have violated the University's Code of Student Conduct (i.e., committed academic misconduct), the sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in this course and suspension or dismissal from the University.

If you have any questions about the above policy or what constitutes academic misconduct in this course, please contact the instructor for this course.

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS

Ohio State has had a longstanding practice of making reasonable academic accommodations for students' religious beliefs and practices in accordance with applicable law. In 2023, Ohio State updated its practice to align with new state legislation. Under this new provision, students must be in early communication with their instructors regarding any known accommodation requests for religious beliefs and practices, providing notice of specific dates for which they request alternative accommodations within 14 days after the first instructional day of the course. Instructors in turn shall not question the sincerity of a student's religious or spiritual belief system in reviewing such requests and shall keep requests for accommodations confidential.

With sufficient notice, instructors will provide students with reasonable alternative accommodations with regard to examinations and other academic requirements with respect to students' sincerely held religious beliefs and practices by allowing up to three absences each semester for the student to attend or participate in religious activities. Examples of religious accommodations can include, but are not limited to, rescheduling an exam, altering the time of a student's presentation, allowing make-up assignments to substitute for missed class work, or flexibility in due dates or research responsibilities. If concerns arise about a requested accommodation, instructors are to consult their tenure initiating unit head for assistance.

A student's request for time off shall be provided if the student's sincerely held religious belief or practice severely affects the student's ability to take an exam or meet an academic requirement and the student has notified their instructor, in writing during the first 14 days after the course begins, of the date of each absence. Although students are required to provide notice within the first 14 days after a course begins, instructors are strongly encouraged to work with the student to provide a reasonable accommodation if a request is made outside the notice period. A student may not be penalized for an absence approved under this policy.

If students have questions or disputes related to academic accommodations, they should contact their course instructor, and then their department or college office. For questions or to report discrimination or harassment based on religion, individuals should contact the [Office of Institutional Equity](#).

Policy: [Religious Holidays, Holy Days and Observances](#)

GRIEVANCES AND SOLVING PROBLEMS

According to University Policies, if you have a problem with this class, you should seek to resolve the grievance concerning a grade or academic practice by speaking first with the instructor or professor. Then, if necessary, take your case to the department chairperson, college dean or associate dean, and to the provost, in that order. Specific procedures are outlined in Faculty Rule 3335-8-23. Grievances against graduate, research, and teaching assistants should be submitted first to the supervising instructor, then to the chairperson of the assistant's department.

COUNSELING AND CONSULTATION SERVICES

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing.

If you or someone you know are suffering from any of these conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting ccs.osu.edu or calling [614-292-5766](tel:614-292-5766). CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on call counselor when CCS is closed at [614-292-5766](tel:614-292-5766) and 24 hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

DIVERSITY

The Ohio State University affirms the importance and value of diversity of people and ideas. We believe in creating equitable research opportunities for all students and to providing programs and curricula that allow our students to understand critical societal challenges from diverse perspectives and aspire to use research to promote sustainable solutions for all. We are committed to maintaining an inclusive community that recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among all members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach their own potential. The Ohio State University does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, race, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, pregnancy, protected veteran status, or any other bases under the law, in its activities, academic programs, admission, and employment.

To learn more about diversity, equity, and inclusion and for opportunities to get involved, please visit:
<https://odi.osu.edu/>
<https://cbasc.osu.edu>

HARASSMENT

The Ohio State University is committed to building and maintaining a community to reflect diversity and to improve opportunities for all. All Buckeyes have the right to be free from harassment, discrimination, and sexual misconduct. Ohio State does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, pregnancy (childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery therefrom), race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or protected veteran status, or any other bases under the law, in its activities, academic programs, admission, and employment. Members of the university community also have the right to be free from all forms of sexual misconduct: sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual exploitation.

To report harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct, or retaliation and/or seek confidential and non-confidential resources and supportive measures, contact the Office of Institutional Equity:

Online reporting form at equity.osu.edu,

Call 614-247-5838 or TTY 614-688-8605,

Or Email equity@osu.edu

The university is committed to stopping sexual misconduct, preventing its recurrence, eliminating any hostile environment, and remedying its discriminatory effects. All university employees have reporting responsibilities to the Office of Institutional Equity to ensure the university can take appropriate action:

- All university employees, except those exempted by legal privilege of confidentiality or expressly identified as a confidential reporter, have an obligation to report incidents of sexual assault immediately.
- The following employees have an obligation to report all other forms of sexual misconduct as soon as practicable but at most within five workdays of becoming aware of such information: 1. Any human resource professional (HRP); 2. Anyone who supervises faculty, staff, students, or volunteers; 3. Chair/director; and 4. Faculty member.