

GEOGRAPHY 7101, SP 2026: RESEARCH DESIGN

BASIC INFORMATION

Meetings

This in-person seminar meets on Tuesdays 2:15-5:15 PM in Derby Hall 1116.

Instructor

Professor Becky Mansfield, faculty, Department of Geography

Instructor email

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Instructor office

1054 Derby Hall

Instructor office hours

By appointment as convenient, either in-person or Zoom

Course materials

Materials are provided in Carmen. If you need assistance with Carmen, please contact *OSU Tech Help and Support*: <https://ocio.osu.edu/help>, 614-688-HELP (4357)

University syllabus statements

See the [university's statements](#) on Academic Misconduct, Artificial Intelligence and Academic Integrity, Religious Accommodations, Disability Statement (with Accommodations for Illness), Intellectual Diversity, Grievances and Solving Problems, and Creating an Environment Free from Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct

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 scholarly literature, frames objects of inquiry, poses questions, identifies necessary evidence, chooses 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.

ASSIGNMENTS

Readings, with responses and/or activities

Due before class. The readings and specific prompts are provided in Carmen.

Your research

Done in stages, focusing on situating your work in the scholarly literature and defining your research problem (whether empirical, theoretical, or methodological!).

1. **Initial research statement.** Write about your current ideas for your research.
2. **Discuss expectations with your advisor.** Each advisor and student is different: what will you need to do?
3. **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.
4. **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.
5. **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.

6. **Draft problem statement.** Based on your initial research statement, literature review, and conceptual framework, 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.*
7. **Final revised problem statement.** Revise everything based on the feedback you receive.

End of Semester Workshop

This is a workshop of everyone’s Draft Problem Statements. Learn to give and receive constructive criticism, helping each student do *their* best work (which might not be how you would do it!). Please enthusiastically comment on what works well, gently point out spots that don’t work so well, and make suggestions for improvement.

- **Discussant.** For the in-class workshop, you will be assigned as the main discussant for one other student’s work. This means starting the conversation by providing broad comments. You will provide written comments to that student by the day after class.
- **Workshop participant.** You will provide feedback on all other students’ written work orally, as part of the workshop discussion.

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. You **MUST** turn in the “final revised research problem” to pass the course.

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 course grade by one step (e.g. A to A-, or A- to B+). **You will fail the course if you miss more than three class sessions.**

If you are having problems. 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 for writing. I am more interested in your unique ideas and engagement, even if imperfect, than in what Gemini or Copilot (for example) have to say. I know that some of you prefer to use generative AI for grammar and translation, and so I do not prevent it entirely. Instead, for the purposes of this course, I 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 describe the prompts you used.**

SCHEDULE (subject to change)

Week 1, Jan 13: Introduction/ About research design

No Assignment

Week 2, Jan 20: 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 27: Reading research proposals

Read: Provided proposals

Due: Discussion with advisor about proposal expectations: Write up

Week 4, Feb 3: 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)

Week 5, Feb 10: “The literature”: literature reviews, journals, etc.

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

Week 6, Feb 17: Rethinking “the literature”

Read: Latour 1987 excerpts; Mott and Cockayne 2017; Giesecking 2020; Mansfield 2021

Week 7, Feb 24: Approaches and objects of inquiry: beyond divides

Read: Lawson 1995; Lave, Biermann, and Lane 2018; Hong, Zhao, and Zhou 2025

Due: Area of Specialization (due Friday, Feb 27 at 5pm)

Week 8, Mar 3: Presentations on Area of Specialization

Due: Presentation

Week 9, Mar 10: Perspectives on validity and generalizability AND AAG PRACTICE

Read: Montello and Sutton 2013; Gobo 2008

Week 10, Mar 17: SPRING BREAK / AAG meeting

No class or assignment

Week 11, Mar 24: Ethics / IRB

Read: [AAG’s Statement of Professional Ethics](#) (2025)

Complete: [CITI training](#) (if you have not already done so: this is about 5 hours of work)

Week 12, Mar 31: In-class writing time

Due: Draft Conceptual Framework (due 11:59pm)

Week 13, Apr 7: Careers, CVs, and Resumes

Read/Watch: Kelsky 2015 (Read parts of interest + Chapters 14 and 24 on CVs); Beyond the Professoriate (video on non-academic careers and resumes)

Week 14, Apr 14: CV/Resume workshop

Due: A CV and a Resume

Due: Draft Problem Statement (Due Friday April 17 at 11:59pm)

Week 15, Apr 21: Workshop: Draft Problem Statements

Due: Comments on peers’ work

Week 16, Apr 28: FINALS WEEK, no class

Due: Final revised problem statement (due Tuesday, April 28 at 5:15pm)