

## GEOGRAPHY 7101, AU 2014

# Research Design

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**Office:** 1054 Derby Hall

**Office Hours:** By appointment

**Seminar hours:** Monday, 2:15-5:00pm

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### Course Description

Research design is a challenging task. It requires us to articulate how our research is *interesting* and *important* (both empirically 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; it is, as Michael Watts notes, a “public secret”. Many texts on research design, for example, leap from the literature review to data gathering and analysis, as if a literature review is somehow analogous to a research object and question. Part of the difficulty is that research design is often conducted in a silo-like environment, and looks almost magical from the outside; the intellectual labor is hidden. And there are also a number of other aspects to graduate training which crowd out the research design process: coursework, teaching, qualifying exams, and now the pressure to publish.

This course will help you with research design—and more specifically proposal writing—by filling in some of the missing steps and issues. In particular, we will focus on how to construct a research object, ask questions, and identify necessary evidence to answer those questions. We focus on the things that make a research project coherent, intelligible, and compelling—that is, rather than jumping to methods, we address the things that make the choice of particular methods make sense. We do this in two ways. First, we spend a good deal of time looking at the structure of research proposals. We will read and discuss successful proposals for the sake of understanding how it is and why it is that some research proposals seem to hang together better than others. (Or maybe we will disagree, which also will be instructive.) Second, we will explore issues regarding epistemology, that is, what counts as valid knowledge. Indeed, although we speak of research design as a practice, it should not be mistaken as a straightforward, nuts-and-bolts exercise unmediated by questions regarding claims about how to know the world. To understand these issues regarding what counts as valid knowledge and how that affects research design, we will cover overarching issues regarding objectivity (e.g. positivism and situated knowledge), ethics (e.g. IRB and reflexivity), and validity and generalizability.

Throughout the semester, you will work on your own proposals, and present them in the seminar. You will leave this class with a proposal under your arm, peer-reviewed by your colleagues and closely scrutinized by me. Hopefully this will get you a little further along with regards to completing a coherent, intelligible, and compelling thesis and/or dissertation.

## **DISABILITY SERVICES**

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

## **OSU COUNSELING AND CONSULTATION SERVICES**

A recent American College Health Survey found stress, sleep problems, anxiety, depression, interpersonal concerns, death of a significant other and alcohol use among the top ten health impediments to academic performance. Students experiencing personal problems or situational crises are encouraged to contact the OSU Counseling and Consultation Services (292-5766; <http://www.ccs.ohio-state.edu>) for assistance, support, and advocacy. This service is free to students and is confidential.

## Research design assignments

1. **THE PROPOSAL IN STAGES (The form and final length will be decided on an individual basis)**
  - a. **\*A topic statement:** A paragraph describing your *topic* and what you find interesting and compelling about it.
  - b. **\*Initial problem statement:** Expand the topic and its relevance. This assignment has two, distinct parts.
    - i. *Topical* literature search and annotated bibliography: Find, read, and annotate at least 10 articles that are central to your emerging research interests.
    - ii. Write an initial problem statement: Use the literature from your bibliography to expand from a simple topic to a problem. Describe what we do not know about your topic and what we learn from studying it. This statement should contain at least the hint of research questions, whether stated in question form or not (e.g. questions, hypotheses, paradoxes).
  - c. **Conceptual framework:** Identify and discuss some key concepts that will help you define and refine your *topic* into a *research object*. These are probably hinted in what you have written so far: you are interested in the topic in some ways but not others; here you make that explicit by identifying and discussing key conceptual literatures on these. This assignment has two, distinct parts.
    - i. *Conceptual* literature search and annotated bibliography: Find, read, and annotate at least 10 articles that are central to your emerging research interests.
    - ii. Write an initial conceptual framework: Identify and discuss key conceptual literatures and how they intersect. Start to identify conceptual questions as well: what might be your *conceptual contribution*.
  - d. **\*Research object, questions, and necessary evidence:** Revise and refine your initial problem statement and initial conceptual framework, bringing it all together into a *research object*. Make explicit your *research questions* and start to identify the sort of *evidence* you will need.
  - e. **Evidence and methods:** Identify the form of evidence you will need and some methods that will enable you to gather and analyze the data that will provide that evidence. This assignment has two distinct parts:
    - i. *Methodological* literature search and annotated bibliography: Find, read, and annotate at least 10 articles that are central to your emerging research interests.
    - ii. Write an initial section on evidence and methods: This section should be based on your conceptual framework, object of inquiry and research questions, and methodological literature search.
  - f. **\*Complete (draft) research proposal and presentation:** Produce a complete, draft research proposal for the rest of the class to read. In class, provide a brief presentation: a “pitch” for why your research is interesting and your proposed research compelling and cohesive!
  - g. **Complete research proposal:** A revision, based on the feedback you received. You’ve done it! You have a complete research proposal.
2. **PEER REVIEW/WORKSHOPS:** For the 4 assignments above that are marked with an asterisk (also underlined in the course schedule), students will read BEFORE CLASS the work of the other students, and will be prepared to offer constructive criticism. You will provide *written* comments for a smaller number of students (to be decided).

### Seminar expectations

**My baseline expectation is that seminar participants will come every week having read the assigned readings in their entirety. I also expect seminar participants to come prepared with something substantive to say about the week's readings.**

- Our discussion of seminar readings will center on two basic questions. First, what are the authors saying, and how does this compare across the readings? Second, what is it about the readings that relate specifically to the problem of research design?
- Our discussion of proposals will center on different questions. First, what do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of this proposal? Second, what is the research object and what are the evidentiary needs of each proposal, and where and how does the author communicate those? Third, do you have any observations across the assigned proposals?

Attendance for all seminars is required. **If you miss a seminar, you must complete an essay (minimum 5 pages, double spaced) on the readings for that day. The essay should not be a summary; it should raise substantive issues. Essays for missed classes will be due the following week, at the beginning of seminar. If you do not turn in your essay, I will automatically take 10% off your final grade.**

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 make alternate arrangements.

### Evaluation

Discussion of readings: 20%

Constructive peer commentary (written and oral): 20%

Research design (presentation): 10%

Research design (written): 50%

Note that there is no separate grade for the individual research design assignments. These assignments still are REQUIRED and it is CRUCIAL (for yourself and your peers) that you complete all of the preliminary assignments and do so ON TIME. **I will deduct up to 5% from your final course grade FOR EACH INSTANCE of a missing, late, or incomplete assignment (the points will be subtracted from your research design (written) grade).**

If you are having difficulty, to avoid this deduction please talk with me BEFORE AN ASSIGNMENT IS DUE so we can determine if alternative arrangements are appropriate and possible.

Standard OSU grading scheme.

### **Academic integrity**

Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research and other educational and scholarly activities. The Ohio State University and the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) expects 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 in this syllabus may constitute "Academic Misconduct."

The Ohio State University's Code of Student Conduct (Section 3335-23-04)

([oaa.osu.edu/coam/home.html](http://oaa.osu.edu/coam/home.html)) 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 COAM. 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. If you have questions about this policy or what constitutes academic misconduct in this course, please contact me.

**Seminar schedule**, subject to change. *Note that assignments are due on WEDNESDAYS.*

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**Week 1**

**Sep 1:** NO CLASS: LABOR DAY

**DUE Wed, Sep 3:** A one-paragraph description of your topic is due to the Carmen Discussion by 5pm. (You might want to include a short introduction to yourself, too!)

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**Week 2**

**Sep 8:** Introduction and TOPIC WORKSHOP

- Watts, M. 2001. *The Holy Grail: In Pursuit of the Dissertation Proposal*. Berkeley: Regents of the University of California. Available on-line at <http://iis.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/InPursuitofPhD.pdf>.
  - Other students' topic paragraphs, in Carmen Discussion (be prepared to comment on your own and others'!)
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**Week 3**

**Sep 15:** Structuring a good research proposal/ Reading proposals

- National Science Foundation. 2004. *A Guide for Proposal Writing*. Available on-line at [http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2004/nsf04016/print\\_toc.htm](http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2004/nsf04016/print_toc.htm)
  - Przeworski, A. & F. Salomon. 1995, rev. 1998. *The Art of Writing Proposals*. Washington DC: Social Science Research Council. Available on-line at <http://www.ssrc.org/publications/view/7A9CB4F4-815F-DE11-BD80-001CC477EC70/>.
  - Proposals, to be provided
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**Week 4**

**Sep 22:** Reading more proposals / The "literature"

- Proposals, to be provided
  - Healey and Healey. (2010) How to conduct a literature search in *Key Methods in Geography, 2nd edition*
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**Week 5**

**Sep 29:** Objectivity? Positivism and Situated Knowledges

- Hacking, I. 1983. Positivism. In *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science*, 41-57. Cambridge University Press
  - Haraway, D. 1988. Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14, 575-599
  - Lawson, V. 1995. The politics of difference: examining the quantitative-qualitative dualism in poststructuralist feminist research. *Professional Geographer*, 47, 449-457
  - Wyly, E. 2011. Positively radical. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35, 889-912
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**DUE Wed, Oct 1:** Your initial problem statement (including the annotated bibliography) is due to Carmen by 5pm.

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**Week 6****Oct 6:** INITIAL PROBLEM STATEMENT WORKSHOP

- Read other students' problem statements and prepare comments (more specific guidelines about what to read and prepare will be provided)

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**Week 7****Oct 13:** Objectivity? Dialectics and genealogy

- Harvey, D. 2006. Space as a keyword. In *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Development*, 117-148. London: Verso
- Foucault, M. 1977. Nietzsche, genealogy, history. In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. D. F. Bouchard, 139-164. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

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**Week 8****Oct 20:** Objectivity? Actors and "facts"

- Latour, B. 1987. Pages 1-100 of *Science in Action*. Harvard University Press.

**DUE Wed, Oct 22:** Your conceptual framework (including the annotated bibliography) is due to Carmen by 5pm.

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**Week 9****Oct 27:** Reading more proposals

- Proposals, to be provided

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**Week 10****Nov 3:** IRB/ institutional ethics

- 2012. Protecting Human Subjects across the Geographic Research Process: Special Issue. *Professional Geographer*, 64, 1-48. **Read in this order:** Price (Intro), Freundschuh, Trudeau, Price, Martin and Inwood, Ritterbusch.
- Review OSU's IRB Application for Initial Review of Human Subjects Research form and appendices at <http://orrrp.osu.edu/irb/initialreview/index.cfm>.

**DUE Wed, Nov 5:** A statement of your Research Object, Questions, and Necessary Evidence is due to Carmen by 5pm.

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**Week 11****Nov 10:** RESEARCH OBJECT/QUESTIONS/EVIDENCE WORKSHOP

- Read other students' statements and prepare comments (more specific guidelines about what to read and prepare will be provided)

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**Week 12****Nov 17:** Reflexivity

- Review Haraway 1988 from Sep 29
- Rose, G. 1997. Situating knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography*, 21, 305-320.
- Nagar, R. & F. Ali 2003. Collaboration across borders: moving beyond positionality. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 24, 356-372.
- Benson, K. & R. Nagar 2006. Collaboration as resistance? Reconsidering the processes, products, and possibilities of feminist oral history and ethnography. *Gender Place and Culture*, 13, 581-592.

**Wed, Nov 19:** An initial statement of evidence and methods (including the annotated bibliography) is due to Carmen by 5pm.

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**Week 13****Nov 24:** Validity and generalizability

- Montello, D. and P. Sutton. (2006) "Reliability and validity" and "Sampling" pages 137-156 and 213-229 in *An Introduction to Scientific Research Methods in Geography*. Sage.
- Gobo, G. (2007) "Sampling, representativeness and generalizability," pp. 405-426 in *Qualitative Research Practice*, Seale, C., G. Gobo, J. Gubrium, D. Silverman, eds. Sage.

**Given the timing of Thanksgiving, we will discuss how to make draft proposals available to others prior to the presentations on Dec 1.**

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**Weeks 14-15**

**Dec 1:** DRAFT PROPOSAL/PRESENTATION WORKSHOP

**Dec 8:** DRAFT PROPOSAL/PRESENTATION WORKSHOP, CONT.

**Th. Dec 11, 4-5:45pm:** DRAFT PROPOSAL/PRESENTATION WORKSHOP, CONT. (This is the time scheduled for the final for this class; we will use this time if we need it for presentations)

- Read other students' drafts and prepare comments (more specific guidelines about what to read and prepare will be provided)

**Due one week after your presentation:** Your revised, complete proposal

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