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## GEOGRAPHY 7101, AU 2017: RESEARCH DESIGN

**Professor:** Becky Mansfield

**Contact:** the Carmen site for this course <https://carmen.osu.edu>

**Office Hours:** By appointment, 1054 Derby Hall

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Research design and proposal writing are challenging tasks. They require 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. Many texts on research design, for example, leap from literature review to data gathering and analysis, as if “reviewing the literature” is somehow analogous to producing a conceptual framework, constructing an object of inquiry, asking questions, 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, we look at the structure of research proposals. We will read and discuss successful proposals for the sake of understanding how and why some research proposals seem to hang together better than others.

Second, we will explore issues regarding what counts as valid knowledge—issues regarding “epistemology” and “generalizability.” The goal is not to introduce all the different approaches to scholarly inquiry that you might consider nor to have students think only about their own approach. Instead the goal is to introduce a few prominent approaches and use them to explore how differences in approach affect research design, including how to frame the object of inquiry, pose questions, and identify necessary evidence. Exploring different approaches also helps you understand a range of different types of geographical inquiry, which is enormously useful as you read and even evaluate others’ work (e.g. as a proposal referee).

Third, throughout the semester you will work on your own proposals and have them discussed 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 and compelling thesis and/or dissertation.

## ASSIGNMENTS

There are two main components of your grade in this class, each worth about half your grade: 1) Your contributions to each week's class and 2) The progress you make on your own proposal.

### 1. Contributions to each week's class

- Written Introduction/Topic. Due 10 am on Friday 18 August: NOTE THAT THIS IS BEFORE THE SEMESTER BEGINS. Write a paragraph introducing yourself: background, goals, etc. Write another paragraph describing your research interests, that is, what you are hoping to study and what about it you find compelling (make a pitch to the rest of us!).
- Written preparation for discussion of provided readings. Due 2pm Tuesday on the weeks listed. Seminar readings (Weeks 2, 4, 6-8, 10-13). Discussion will center on what the authors are actually saying and how that relates specifically to research design. To prepare:
  - Identify key passages (~3 per required reading) and write why you think they are key.
  - Write a few sentences (per reading, not per passage) on what the lessons might be for research design *overall*.
  - Write a few sentences (per reading) on what the lessons might be for *your* research. At times this might feel like a stretch, but do it anyway! This forces you to think about how your research might take very different forms.Examples of successful proposals (Weeks 2, 4). Discussion will center on identifying what makes each proposal compelling—interesting, important, and coherent (or not!).
  - Write a few sentences on what you see as the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal.
  - Identify where in each the author states their object of inquiry, questions/hypotheses, and evidentiary needs (it may be in more than one place). What techniques does the author use to make these clear to you, the reader? How easy were they to find? How easy were they to understand?
  - Share any observations you may have comparing/contrasting the assigned proposals.
- Written and oral peer commentary during the Workshops on proposals-in-progress. The workshops run in the following manner: 1) The author has 1-2 minutes to introduce their work, if they want to. 2) The discussant has a few minutes to summarize and raise key issues for discussion. 3) The group discusses the proposal *while the author remains silent*; the goal is not to criticize per se but to generate ideas for the author to use as they move forward. 4) The author can briefly respond. *Everyone is expected to participate in these discussions, even if the research is very different from yours.*
  - Topic workshop (Week 1): Read all introductory topics in advance and participate in discussion of them. You do not need to prepare written comments.
  - Presentation workshops (Weeks 15, 16): Participate in the discussion of each presentation. You do not need to prepare in advance.
  - Proposals-in-progress workshops (throughout the semester):
    - Read all draft proposals in advance and participate in discussion of them (i.e. have comments ready to share). *You are certainly welcome to provide written comments but are not required to do so.*
    - Twice during the semester, you will be assigned as discussant for one author. As discussant:

- Prepare written comments on the proposal (to be uploaded to Carmen by the day after the workshop)
- Offer short oral comments; the goal is not to go over all your written comments but to start the discussion within the larger group.

## 2. Research proposal

- Written: three rounds. First two rounds: Due 10am on the Friday before your workshop. Final round: Due by 10am on Monday Dec 11. The three general stages are outlined below, BUT THE ACTUAL ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE TAILORED TO YOUR INDIVIDUAL NEEDS. You may move through all stages, or stay at one stage all semester, or maybe we will reorder/recombine for specific purposes.
  - An initial problem statement. At this stage, you begin to turn your *topic* into an *object of inquiry*. Use existing information and scholarly literature to describe the topic and what makes it interesting and important. Include information about what is and is not known about the topic and what you want to learn by studying it. The statement should contain at least the hint of broad research questions, whether stated in question form or not (e.g. questions, hypotheses, paradoxes).
  - An expanded research problem. At this stage, you further conceptualize your topic and transform it into a research problem. To do this, you develop your *conceptual framework* (i.e. using ideas and approaches in existing scholarship) and apply it hone your *research object*, identify specific *research questions*, and start to identify the sort of *evidence* you will need.
  - A complete proposal. At this stage, you further refine the work you have already done and you incorporate *methods*: clarify your evidentiary needs and identify some methods that will enable you to gather and analyze the data that will provide that evidence. These methods should be logically connected to (i.e. follow from) the research problem as identified in the previous stage.
- Research proposal presentation. At the end of the semester—before you submit the final written assignment—you will present your research in oral (and visual) form. This is good practice (you might think of this as a pitch to a funding agency, or to your committee members). And in some cases people include different things in the oral version than in the written—things that turn out to be crucial for making the written version make sense. The final written version should take into account the presentation experience and feedback.

### Due dates, in summary

#### Upload to Carmen:

Introduction/Topic	10am Friday 18 August
Written preparation for discussion	2pm each Tuesday
Discussant commentary—written	5pm Wednesday, one day after the workshop
Proposal, round 1 and 2	10am on Friday before your workshops
Proposal, round 3	10am Monday 11 December

#### In class:

Oral peer commentary	During all workshops
Discussant commentary—oral	During the assigned work-in-progress workshop
Proposal Presentation	28 November or 5 December

## GENERAL POLICIES

*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 try to check in with you if assignments are missing or late—but your grade may be lowered whether I speak to you or not. And I generally provide feedback if there is a problem with the quality of your assignments or participation—your grade will be lowered if there is an ongoing problem. For assignments associated with your proposal, I provide extensive written feedback, but not a grade; I will let you know if I have concerns that might lower your final grade.

I provide feedback in Carmen by replying to the appropriate Discussion post (e.g. replying to your weekly discussion preparations or to a Proposal draft.) If something needs to be more private, I will contact you individually via Carmen's email.

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 also 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 written version of the proposal or 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.

## **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.

### **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) 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.

Wk.	Date	Seminar (~2:15-3:15)	Seminar Readings	Workshop (~3:30-5:00) Read:
1	Aug 22	Introduction to Research Design		Topics
2	Aug 29	Research Proposals	NSF 2004 and Pages 63-64 of NSF 2017 (Merit Review...) Przeworski and Salomon WinklerPrins <i>Optional:</i> Hernon and Schwartz, Watts	Successful proposals
3	Sept 5	<i>Individual meetings: sign-up for time</i>		
4	Sept 12	Literature searches	Wentz	Successful proposals
5	Sept 19	Lecture: Knowledge Production		Proposals-in-progress
6	Sept 26	Literature as an object	Latour	Proposals-in-progress
7	Oct 3	Positivism	Kitchin Ch 1 of Montello and Sutton	Proposals-in-progress
8	Oct 10	Validity and generalizability	Ch 8 and 11 of Montello and Sutton	Proposals-in-progress
9	Oct 17	<i>Individual meetings: sign-up for time</i>		
10	Oct 24	Relationality and poststructuralism	Graham et al. Pages 270-284 of Harvey Pages 139-145 of Foucault	Proposals-in-progress
11	Oct 31	Rethinking generalizability	Gobo Small	Proposals-in-progress
12	Nov 7	Feminist generalizability	Pages 575-590 of Haraway Lawson	Proposals-in-progress
13	Nov 14	Ethics/IRB	Price OSU ORRP Explore <a href="#">OSU IRB website</a> , and <a href="#">Training Requirements</a>	Proposals-in-progress
14	Nov 21	NO CLASS		NO CLASS
15	Nov 28	Presentations (full class)		
16	Dec 5	Presentations (full class)		

## Reading list

- Foucault, M. 1977. Pages 139-145 of Nietzsche, genealogy, history. In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. D. F. Bouchard, 139-164. Ithaca: Cornell.
- Gobo, G. 2008. Re-conceptualizing generalization: old issues in a new frame. In *Sage Handbook of Social Research Methods*, ed. P. Alasuutari, L. Bickman and J. Brannen, 193-213. London: Sage.
- Graham, I., R. Shaw, D. Dixon, and JP Jones, III. 2010. Theorizing our world. In *Research Methods in Geography*, ed. B. Gomez and JP Jones, III, 9-25. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Haraway, D. 1988. Pages 575-590 of Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14, 575-599.
- Harvey, D. 2006. Pages 270-284 of Space as a keyword. In *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Development*, 117-148. London: Verso
- Hernon, p and C Schwartz. 2007. What is a problem statement? *Library & Information Science Research* 29: 307-309. (Optional)
- Kitchin, R. 2006. Positivist geographies and spatial science. In *Approaches to Human Geography*, ed. S. Aitken and G. Valentine, 20-29. London: Sage.
- Latour, B. 1987. Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-62) of *Science in Action*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lawson, V. 1995. The politics of difference: examining the quantitative-qualitative dualism in poststructuralist feminist research. *Professional Geographer*, 47, 449-457
- Montello, D. and P. Sutton. 2006. Chapters 1, 8, 11 (pp. 1-16, 137-156, and 213-229) of *An Introduction to Scientific Research Methods in Geography*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- National Science Foundation. 2004. *A Guide for Proposal Writing*.
- National Science Foundation. 2017. Merit Review Principles and Criteria. Pages 63-64 in *Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide*. NSF 17-1, 30 January 2017.
- OSU ORRP. 2010. Investigator Guide. Ohio State University Office of Responsible Research Practices.
- Price, P. 2012. Introduction: Protecting Human Subjects across the Geographic Research Process. *Professional Geographer* 64, 1-48.
- Przeworski, A. & F. Salomon. 1995. *The Art of Writing Proposals*. Washington DC: Social Science Research Council.
- Small, M.L. 2009. 'How many cases do I need?' On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research. *Ethnography* 10 (1):5-38.
- Watts, M. 2001. *The Holy Grail: In Pursuit of the Dissertation Proposal*. Berkeley: Regents of the University of California. (Optional)
- Wentz, L. 2014. Chapters 5 and 7 (pp. 37-54, 81-96) of *How to Design, Write, and Present and Successful Dissertation Proposal*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- WinklerPrins, M. 2015. How Not to Get a DDRI Award. AAG Newsletter, June 16, 2015.