

GEOGRAPHY 7101, SP 2019: RESEARCH DESIGN

Professor: Becky Mansfield

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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

1. **Seminar:** Please do all readings prior to class. To prepare for discussion:
 - a. **Reading responses.** For seminar readings, you will submit reading responses prior to class.
 - b. **Analyze proposals.** Twice during the semester you will read successful proposals and analyze how they work.

2. **Your research:** You will work on your proposal in stages, focusing on situating your work in the literature and defining your research problem (whether empirical, theoretical, or methodological!).
 - a. **Initial research statement (Jan 14).** You will do a short write-up of your current ideas for your research. Course content the first two weeks will provide extra guidance.
 - b. **Draft literature review (Feb 4).** You will do independent reading to help you clarify your area of specialization and the themes and questions within it that are interesting and useful for your research. *Include a revised research statement as lead-in to this assignment: you are building the proposal.*
 - c. **Presentation (Feb 11).** Based on your literature review, you will 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 (Mar 4).** You will move from the broad focus of the literature review to a more narrow focus on the specific concepts and ideas that will help frame your research, including how the existing literature both provides tools for your research and has remaining gaps that your research will address. *This should incorporate information from your literature review, but be more focused. It should also include a further revised research statement.*
 - e. **Draft problem statement (April 15).** Based on your research statement, literature review, and conceptual framework, you will identify your “research problem.” This provides the link between literature and methods. *This should include a further revised research statement—as an introduction—and revised conceptual framework.*
 - f. **Final proposal (April 29).** Revise everything!
 - g. **Work logs:** In most weeks that do not have explicit assignments related to your proposal, you will turn in a log that describes the work you have been doing toward your research (e.g. reading, writing). Each week’s log should add on to the previous weeks (rather than submitting a stand along paragraph each time).

3. **Workshop:** Twice in the semester you will share your work in progress 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 really 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 student’s written work.

GRADING 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.

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 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.

DISABILITY SERVICES The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. 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. You are also welcome to register with Student Life Disability Services to establish reasonable accommodations. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; slds.osu.edu; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

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	Topic	Read before class	Due (before class unless otherwise stated)
1	Jan 7	About Research Design		
2	Jan 14	About research proposals <i>Attend job talk</i>	NSF 2004 Pages 63-64 of NSF 2017 (on Merit Review) Przeworski and Salomon WinklerPrins Wentz 4, [7,] 10	Initial research statement FRI 1/18 10am
3	Jan 21	No class: MLK day		
4	Jan 28	Reading research proposals <i>Attend job talk</i>	<i>To be assigned</i>	Analyze two proposals Submit work log
5	Feb 4	No class: work on your Literature Review		Draft Literature Review WED 2/6 5pm
6	Feb 11	Presentations on Area of Specialization / themes		Presentation
7	Feb 18	Introduction to Knowledge Production Rethinking “the literature”	Graham et al. Pages 1-44, 60-62 of Latour	Reading response Updated work log
8	Feb 25	Positivist epistemologies	Kitchin Ch 1 of Montello and Sutton	Reading response Updated work log
9	Mar 4	Relational epistemologies	Henderson and Sheppard Pages 270-284 of Harvey Harrison Pages 139-145 of Foucault	Reading response Draft Conceptual Framework FRI 3/8 5pm (or as late as MON 3/11 5pm)
10	Mar 11	No class: Spring Break		
11	Mar 18	Workshop: Written Conceptual Frameworks	Other students’ conceptual frameworks	Prepare discussant comments (written comments due after class) Prepare oral comments for all students
12	Mar 25	Perspectives on validity and generalizability	Ch 8 and 11 of Montello and Sutton Gobo Small	Reading response Updated work log
13	Apr 1	Feminist epistemologies and perspectives on validity	England Pages 575-590 of Haraway Lawson	Reading response Updated work log
14	Apr 8	Ethics	<i>To be assigned</i>	Reading response Updated work log
15	Apr 15	Reading research proposals	<i>To be assigned</i>	Analyze two proposals Draft Problem Statement THUR 4/18 10am
16	Apr 22	Workshop: Written Problem Statements		Prepare discussant comments Prepare oral comments for all students
	Apr 29			REVISED proposal Mon 4/29 5pm

Reading list

- England, K. 2015. Producing Feminist Geographies: Theory, Methodologies and Research Strategies. In *Approaches to Human Geography*, ed. S. Aitken and G. Valentine. London: Sage.
- 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.
- Harrison, Paul. 2015. Poststructuralist Theories. In *Approaches to Human Geography*, ed. S. Aitken and G. Valentine. London: Sage.
- 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
- Henderson and Sheppard. 2015. Marx and the spirit of Marx. In *Approaches to Human Geography*, ed. S. Aitken and G. Valentine. London: Sage.
- Kitchin, R. 2015. Positivistic geographies and spatial science. In *Approaches to Human Geography*, ed. S. Aitken and G. Valentine. 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.
- 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.
- Wentz, L. 2014. Chapters 4, 7, 9, 10 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.