11.233 – RESEARCH DESIGN FOR POLICY ANALYSIS AND PLANNING

MIT | FALL 2019
9:30-12:30 (T)
CLASS ROOM: 9-217

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and by appointment

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1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

We all have to write research proposals. As graduate students, they are prerequisite for research and getting a degree. As academic faculty or research staff they fund almost all research efforts. In government you need to write proposals to justify your policies and programs. For those working for non-profits or other non-academic organizations and firms, grants based on proposals keep important activities financially afloat and projects well structured. More than this, however, proposals are tools for thinking. If you can propose a project clearly, you understand it. If you can articulate a research design clearly, you are ready to execute it. If you can write a grant clearly, you have moved from the world of issues and problems to the world of focused questions. As it frees your creativity, a proposal provides a structure for action. As it structures your thinking, it prepares you to act. Part art, part science, the proposal is a skill best learned by doing, as well as by evaluating examples. Although some find it difficult to settle on a research question, a research proposal focuses your thoughts, and provides you with an entry point to what will inevitably expand into a host of interesting sub-questions and applications.

The primary objective of this course is to contribute to professional development by helping students learn (1) to conceptualize and design a research project, (2) to write a research proposal, and (3) to provide constructive peer review and criticism. Components of this process include but are not limited to: identifying a general research area and the people who are doing the best work within it, critical reading of the literature, conceptualizing and operationalizing a research problem and question, linking a question to appropriate literature and theory, identifying appropriate data and methods of analysis, circulating drafts of proposals for comment and feedback, revising drafts, and the oral and written presentation of the research proposal. This course provides first-year PhD students with opportunities to develop these skills.

In line with the interdisciplinary nature of urban studies and planning, the course explores different ways of knowing within the social sciences. At the same time, we examine how planning history and inquiry relate to such broader processes of knowledge production. Throughout the semester, the course reviews basic principles and strategies of research design, and examines the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches. These discussions will draw on empirical research in urban studies and planning to both expose you to forms of knowledge production within the field and help you situate your own research interests within broader planning debates. The main objective is to not only help you become a more sophisticated reader of literature, but also be capable of designing and conducting your own independent research as a scholar.
2. Course Requirements & Evaluation

The seminar requires active participation in discussions and critical reflection on the course materials. You should be prepared to discuss the main points of the readings, ask questions, provide constructive feedback, and generate and share critical perspectives. Some weeks you may be required in advance to read and come prepared to summarize a particular article. Other weeks you may be asked to comment on the main arguments and ideas of the readings. Your performance in these assignments and discussions will determine your participation grade.

Beyond that, the course requires you to complete a number of written assignments throughout the semester. Descriptions of the assignments and class materials will be available to students on Stellar or via Dropbox. Please see the table below for a list of the assignments, their due dates, and corresponding percentages of the final grade. The assignments were designed to help you through the process of developing a research proposal, which is the main requirement for the course and is due at the end of the semester. While you may write a proposal of your choosing, most students elect to write a proposal for their first-year paper.

Submission guidelines:

- All written assignments should utilize the following format: Times New Roman, 12-point font, 1.00 spacing, 8.5 x 11 paper, 1-inch margins all around. Assignments should conform to the page limit specified in the assignment description, unless otherwise noted.

- Please upload your work via the Stellar site under the homework tab by the due time. Assignment due dates are listed on the syllabus. Feedback (timing of receipt of response will vary depending on the receipt of document) will be provided in a timely manner upon receipt of the required document.

- Please name the assignments as follows: your last name_assignment name_date (e.g., Glasmeier_Assignment 1_09.11).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Date Assignment is Introduced</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Percentage of Final Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Topics into Questions</td>
<td>09.10</td>
<td>09.16 (by 7pm)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Brief Literature essay</td>
<td>09.17</td>
<td>10.01</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Problem Statement + Outline of potential research design</td>
<td>10.01</td>
<td>10.08</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>COHUES Online Test</td>
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<td>10.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Proposal Literature Review</td>
<td>10.08</td>
<td>10.22</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Research Design, Methodology, Measurement</td>
<td>10.22</td>
<td>11.05</td>
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<td>6. Proposal Draft</td>
<td>11.05</td>
<td>11.19</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>7. Proposal Feedback to Peers</td>
<td>11.05</td>
<td>11.29</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Proposal Presentation (In Class)</td>
<td>11.05</td>
<td>12.03</td>
<td>5%</td>
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All students are expected to:

- Complete and submit the assignments on time (late submissions will not be accepted).
- Identify a faculty advisor for the research proposal and discuss at least two drafts of the proposal with that advisor. Provide constructive feedback to your peers on a continual basis both formally and informally.
- Give a 15-minute oral presentation of your research proposal in class.
- Prepare a research proposal suitable for submission to either your committee or an outside organization/agency.

As aforementioned, the assignments are geared towards moving you through the research proposal-writing process in a timely and orderly fashion. Throughout the semester you will be assigned formal peer reviews of another students’ work. You also are expected to provide constructive feedback to each other during class sessions. You are encouraged to provide mutual review outside of the class structure, especially for those of you with common or similar interests and approaches. There is a great amount to be gained from constructively evaluating and commenting on each other’s proposals. Everyone can get a degree, so graduate research is not really a competition with your classmates. If applying for outside funding you will rarely be compared to other students from your own university and everyone who succeeds in getting outside funding frees up local funds for other students.

There are three types of assignments for the class: A) reading assignments; B) written commentary, discussion and review; and C) written drafts of parts or all of your proposal.

A. Reading Assignments

All readings will be posted to the Stellar site and should be done before class. We will conduct class discussions of the readings. We may adjust readings during the semester once we are more familiar with students’ interests. Changes in reading assignments will mainly be adjustments and will not change volume.

B. Proposal Drafts and Final Proposal

You will begin writing sections of your proposal early in the semester and submitting them for instructor and TA review. Each assignment adds to and builds on the previous one. Once posted, your proposal section will be viewable by everyone in the class so that you may provide feedback to each other. The instructor and TA will also offer individual feedback.

You will present a draft of your proposal in class towards the end of the semester (December 03, 2019). You are to use presentation software and use a slot of 15 minutes, no longer.

The final proposal length should not exceed 10 pages single-spaced. You can add two pages of graphics or maps and a bibliography. The font used must be those required by NSF: Arial, Courier New, Palatino Linotype, or Times New Roman. If using Times New Roman, the font size cannot be smaller than 11 point. For all other listed fonts, the font size must be at least 10 point. Symbol fonts may be used to insert Greek letters or other special characters, but the font size requirement still applies. Smaller type may be used for figures, graphs, diagrams, charts, tables, figure legends, and footnotes: but it must be legible and all text must be in black. By listing many of the elements of proposals and specifying their format, we are providing a heads up to you that we expect you to submit to us documents that follow a consistent format, one that would be expected by a review panel as if
you submitted the proposal to a potential funder. Colors can be used in figures. Paper must be standard size (8.5 x 11 inches), with margins of at least one inch on all sides. Students will identify early in the semester the kind of audience for whom they are writing the proposal (e.g. their committee, SSRC, NSF etc.). By this specification, you are defining your selected audience. Keep this in mind as audience shapes communications style, tone, and format. The structure of the proposal may vary but important components like the research question, significance of the research, the literature review and methodology sections will be in common to all proposals irrespective of the targeted audience. The final proposal is to be sent to the instructor and TA by email and uploaded to Stellar on December 20, 2019. Consider these as “submission ready”. That means no typos, no dangling sections, no poorly worded sentences, no missing elements. In essence, we are expecting a picture-perfect proposal ready for review.

Grading

We will grade each piece of written work you submit with a grade of A, B, C or D to indicate where it stands according to the following criteria.

A  Excellent work that is well written and structured, demonstrates original and critical thinking and argument, and uses appropriate evidence and references.

B  Good professional work with room for improvement in writing, organization, content, argument, critique and/or use of evidence and references.

C  Not yet at an acceptable level because of poor writing, organization, limited content or use of reference materials, does not demonstrate original or critical thinking.

D  Late or inadequate submission that does not address the assignment or meet basic standards of writing, content or critical thinking.

Expect us to be detailed and critical in assigning initial grades but will always give credit as you improve during the semester. We say this as we are charged with giving you the best possible training in proposal writing. To achieve this lofty goal, we must treat you as an applicant applying for funding, a post doc seeking a post, a research scientist seeking multi-year early career research support. Don’t forget or get lost in minutia. We are your champions. We are training you to be successful and enabled to achieve your goals. Recognize that the use of a grading system utilizing alphabetical scores is not punitive; instead we are examining and evaluating your work to enable you to get as close as possible to a winning skill set that is replicable and applicable to multiple situations.

3. COURSE POLICIES

A. Attendance

While it may seem obvious, you are required to attend all class sessions. If you will miss a session, be courteous and let us know in advance. Keep in mind that you need to be present to get a good participation grade.

B. Class start and finish
It is disruptive when you arrive late or leave early, so be mindful of the time and the impact your behavior has on your instructor and colleagues.

C. Late submissions/ non-submissions

In general, late submissions of assignments will not be accepted and you will receive a zero for any assignment submitted late. We understand that things happen in people’s lives and therefore, exceptions will be made in extraordinary circumstances. If you are granted an extension for any of the assignments, you will be given an alternate deadline for submission. Failing to meet alternative dates is unacceptable, except in the most unusual circumstances. If you need to arrange in advance to receive an incomplete for the semester, you will be given an alternate date by which you will need to submit outstanding work (by email). All papers must be turned in no later than six weeks prior to the start of the next semester. Work not received by the agreed upon date will receive a zero/no credit and will be used in computing your final grade for the course.

D. Writing

Doctoral work requires that you have the ability to effectively communicate your ideas in writing. If you have difficulty writing in American-style English or in communicating your ideas in papers, you will be asked to seek assistance at the MIT Writing and Communication Center (WCC) to ensure that you are able to achieve your potential in your written work. As a rule of thumb, you should get in the habit of having your graduate student colleagues review and comment on your work before making a submission. Papers should be perfect upon submission. Typographical mistakes, missing elements, and poor form will affect your grade.

Whether or not we ask you to visit the student writing center, WCC, all students should know that the WCC offers free one-on-one professional advice from communication experts (MIT lecturers who have advanced degrees and who are all published scholars and writers). Take advantage of this help! The WCC works with graduate students, post-docs, faculty, and undergraduates and can help you strategize about all types of academic and professional writing as well as about all aspects of oral presentations (including practicing classroom presentations & conference talks as well as designing slides). The WCC also helps with all English as Second Language issues, from writing and grammar to pronunciation and conversation practice. The WCC is located in Kendall Square on the corner of Main and Hayward Streets (E39-115, 55 Hayward Street). To register and to make appointments, go to https://mit.mywconline.com/. To access the WCC’s many pages of advice about writing and oral presentations, go to https://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center/.

Be aware that the center is heavily utilized. Students often have to wait and to schedule an appointment. Walk-ins are possible but not advised. If you need help with something and it requires a 24-hour turn around, do not get distressed or upset at the center’s staff if you arrive and the schedulers indicate there is no slot available to assist you. The point of us saying this is, you need to plan ahead and see the center’s staff in advance, do not expect the center’s staff to provide basic grammatical review on the drop of a hat.

E. Length for written work

If you are able to complete a first-rate assignment in less space than is allocated, you are invited to do so. However, keep in mind that longer is not better. We will read and grade only the specified number of pages for an assignment, so exceeding the specified length does not work to your advantage.
F. Disabilities

If you have a documented disability, or any other problem you think may affect your ability to successfully complete planned assignments, please see the instructor as soon as possible (preferably before the start of the term) so we can work together to accommodate your needs.

G. Academic Misconduct

Plagiarism and cheating are both academic crimes. Never turn in an assignment that you did not write yourself or turn in an assignment for this class that you previously turned in for another class or are submitting in whole or in part for another class during the same semester. If you do so, it may result in a failing grade for the class, and possibly even suspension. Please see either of us if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism. Anyone caught cheating or plagiarizing will be reported to the Provost in line with recognized university procedures.

Helpful Links:

- “Tomorrow’s Professor” Blog: https://mailman.stanford.edu/mailman/listinfo/tomorrows-professor
- “The Professor is In” Blog: http://theprofessorisin.com/
- MIT Libraries’ productivity page and references page:
  - http://libguides.mit.edu/references
  - http://libraries.mit.edu/research-support/productivity-tools/
4. Course Schedule & Readings

(Readings are subject to change)

Week prior – Preparatory Readings on Planning History
To prepare for our first class, we ask you to (re-)familiarize yourself with the broad outlines of planning history, including important theoretical discussions in the field. The initial readings provide students with a common foundation and vocabulary in the field of urban planning. These building blocks will enable us to jointly explore research design practice in urban studies and planning.


Additional resource

1) 09.10 – An Introduction to Planning and Urban Studies

On planning


On developing a research project


Recommended readings


2) 09.17 – Proposal writing: From Research Questions to Research Design

The aim of this class is to get you started on the path towards developing your research proposals. In the second half of the class we will discuss and provide feedback to each other on the research topics you outlined in your first assignment (due 09.16 by 7 pm). You will be able to access your peers’ assignments on Stellar. Please make sure to take a look at them before class.


Assignment 1 by your peers.

**Recommended**


3) 09.24 – Ways of Knowing: The construction of ideas, their portability, and understanding


4) 10.01 – Concepts, Measurement, and Validity

In addition to the specific readings below, in this class we will also discuss examples of past student proposals so that you can see where they were when they started and what their final research proposal looked like.


Past student proposals available on Stellar.

Recommended


5) 10.08 – Causality and Econometric Analysis


6) 10.15 – No Class (Columbus Holiday)
7) 10.22 – Sampling and Survey Research


**Ethics in Research**

What is COUHES, really? Why does it exist, does it have its intended effect? How do we act responsibly as researchers? How do we guide others in being responsible?


AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct: https://www.planning.org/ethics/ethicscode/

Please also skim the following news articles. We will discuss the examples in class.

Baker, M. 2015. “Over half of psychology studies fail the reproducibility test.” (Largest replication study to date casts doubt on many published positive results.) https://www.nature.com/news/over-half-of-psychology-studies-fail-reproducibility-test-1.18248.


8) 10.29 – The Case Study Approach


Fairfield, T., 2013. “Going where the money is: Strategies for taxing economic elites in unequal democracies.” *World Development*, 47, pp. 42-57. *(Attention to methodological Appendix)*

9) 11.05 – Fieldwork, Interviews, and Ethnographic Methods


10) 11.12 – Historical Analysis, Archival Research, and Text Analysis

Skim the readings below. Please read in-depth the ones related to your interests. Pay special attention to research design and methods.


11) 11.19 – Mixed Methods and Spatial Analysis

Skim the readings below. Please read in-depth the ones related to your interests. Pay special attention to research design and methods.


12) 11.26 – Student to Student

A conversation among your peers. Stock taking is a gallant exercise, made more meaningful when engaging with others who have been through the experience you are currently engulfed in and wondering about. The professor will not be in on this conversation to enable free flowing conversation and idea exchange.

13) 12.03 – Student Presentations and Draft Proposal Feedback

14) 12.10 – From the proposal onward, what happens next: planning your future, staying happy by staying healthy while seeking the PhD