1 Key information

Instructor: Assistant Professor David Hsu, office 9-334, ydh@mit.edu
Time & Place: Wednesdays, 9 am - 12 pm, room 9-451
Contact: Best is by e-mail: ydh@mit.edu, I usually reply in 1-2 business days.
For anonymous feedback, use anonymous.org/anonemail.html.
Office Hours: TBD; book an appointment at DUSP-CRON-utility.
Website: Be sure to check Stellar settings for notifications and materials.

2 Learning Objectives

My goal is to teach you how to:

1. take apart individual papers (yours and that of others) to understand how they work
2. structure your work into an academic or professional format
3. break-down the process of writing into discrete and manageable steps
4. revise, edit, and re-envision your research
5. navigate and participate in the peer review process
6. be a good colleague to your classmates

3 Introduction

This is a practical class towards a very abstract goal, that is, to teach you a concrete process to develop your capacity for independent scholarship. Becoming an independent scholar in your own right requires contributing to the scholarly literature, and making a meaningful contribution to the literature requires a strange blend of thoughtful reflection, creative insight, and mundane craft. All of these elements are improved by both solitary work and engagement with other scholars, which happen above all through the written word. Writing is about sitting down and committing words to paper (or at least a file). So in this class, we are only going to focus on, and discuss, what you write and show to the class. Therefore, to enable good discussions, you will each be writing, reading, and re-writing a lot, and getting feedback on your work.

This is the second in a sequence of three classes in our doctoral program designed to teach you this process. You developed a research idea into a proposal and plan in 11.233. You then gathered data during IAP. During the first year or so, you are also simultaneously learning methods of analysis appropriate to your area of interest. During this class, you will also be working with your advisor or collaborators to develop your work into a publishable format, which your advisor will grade in 11.801.
It is worth remembering a few things about your first-year paper (FYP). First, you write the FYP to go through the process once, because for many of you, the FYP will be the first time where you alone are responsible for conceiving of and writing up research from beginning to end. Second, the ultimate requirement for your PhD is for you to write your dissertation as proof that you can execute this process. The relationship between the FYP and dissertation depends on every student and their circumstances: this might ultimately be a project in collaboration with others, or your advisor, or solo; this might get published or it might not; it might point the way to your dissertation research, or it might be a tangent or side branch that you fully explored but turn from later. Third, and finally, it is worth keeping in mind that you will be repeating (and getting better at) this process over the rest of your long academic careers. What you put into your first-year paper, what it becomes, and what you get out of it, is really up to you!

Furthermore, the act of writing down your thoughts to communicate creates an artifact in time with both permanent and temporary aspects. If you are successful in writing something that people want to read, then you should expect to receive feedback from me, your student colleagues, your advisor and collaborators, your committee, peer reviewers, editors, and down the road, other scholars who want to learn from and build on your work. You will also look at your work differently in time. Through all of this, and with the best of intentions from everyone, most people will not perceive your work the same way, or be in agreement on how to go forward. A diverse cacophony of feedback is just the nature of academic research (and life). You need good feedback to improve your work. The thing to be really concerned about is not getting any feedback, which only indicates indifference.

This class therefore seeks to reproduce this diversity of opinion by focusing on workshopping, feedback, and different viewpoints from other students and faculty. Deciding what to respond to, how to change your work in response to feedback, is also up to you. The author Neil Gaiman gives some wonderful advice for writing: “Remember: when people tell you something’s wrong or doesn’t work for them, they are almost always right. When they tell you exactly what they think is wrong and how to fix it, they are almost always wrong.” (You can also read about other authors and their rules here; your mileage may vary).

Finally, becoming an independent scholar is also about becoming a part of a community. Though you will certainly encounter criticism of varying quality throughout your career, in this class we will all work to build our skills as thoughtful, constructive, and helpful collaborators on your individual projects.

4 Structure

We will begin the class with a series of short intensive discussions laying out some basic steps towards writing a scholarly paper. Since we all work in different fields and areas of interest, these lectures will sketch out general steps and features in the landscape. After giving you some time to pull together your work from IAP and the fall semester a bit, we will begin the heart of the course, which is workshopping your papers. Each of you will get two rounds of one-hour of discussion devoted to your written work; you will each write four reviews for your classmates; and everyone will participate in discussion very week.
5 Norms, expectations

- submit your work well ahead of time, so each of your classmates can come to class prepared with their feedback
- do the reading and be very prepared for discussion, with notes, talking points and discussion questions as appropriate
- attend, be mentally present and engaged in every class

6 Laptops, tablets, or cellphones in the classroom

There is a large and robust literature that indicates that the vast majority of people:

- are able to read on screens with similar comprehension or speed (Dillon, 1992), BUT:
- are less productive when multi-tasking and are unable to perceive this: APA summary
- are distracted by the laptops of others (Hembrooke and Gay, 2003; Sana et al., 2013).

Therefore, please bring paper materials as necessary to refer to the readings during discussion.

7 Schedule

Numbers at the center indicate student to be reviewed (in parentheses), and two peer reviewers, to be randomly assigned on the first day of class. We will also randomly select three people to begin discussion of the three written works in each class, to ensure student engagement and preparation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>9-10 am</th>
<th>10-11 am</th>
<th>11-12 pm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2/8</td>
<td>Introduce class</td>
<td>Academic paper structure</td>
<td>Writing a peer review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2/15</td>
<td>Publication process</td>
<td>Handbook chapter &amp; non-academic writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2/22</td>
<td>(1) 3 12</td>
<td>(7) 9 2</td>
<td>(13) 15 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>(2) 4 13</td>
<td>(8) 10 3</td>
<td>Guest: Ben-Joseph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3/15</td>
<td>(3) 5 14</td>
<td>(9) 11 4</td>
<td>(14) 16 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3/22</td>
<td>(4) 6 15</td>
<td>(10) 12 5</td>
<td>(15) 1 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3/29</td>
<td>(5) 7 16</td>
<td>(11) 13 6</td>
<td>Guest: Glasmeier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>(6) 8 1</td>
<td>(12) 14 7</td>
<td>(16) 2 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>4/12</td>
<td>(1) 3 12</td>
<td>(7) 9 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>4/19</td>
<td>(2) 4 13</td>
<td>(8) 10 3</td>
<td>Guest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>4/26</td>
<td>(3) 5 14</td>
<td>(9) 11 4</td>
<td>(13) 15 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>5/3</td>
<td>(4) 6 15</td>
<td>(10) 12 5</td>
<td>(14) 16 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>5/10</td>
<td>(5) 7 16</td>
<td>(11) 13 6</td>
<td>(15) 1 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>5/17</td>
<td>(6) 8 1</td>
<td>(12) 14 7</td>
<td>(16) 2 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8 Preparing for class & assignments

All documents on Stellar unless noted otherwise.

• Feb. 8: Introduce class; academic paper structure; writing a peer review
  – Prep: Read this draft syllabus; note any questions. No need to print this draft; I will bring a final paper version to class for you.
  – Your work: Write down what you did and didn’t accomplish over IAP. Reflect on whether your plan was realistic, and what this means that you have to do going forward. We will discuss this in class.

• Feb. 10: Publishing process; handbook chapter; non-academic writing
  – Read a draft chapter from the International Handbook for Planning Education that I’ve been reviewing, on Stellar.

• Feb. 22 - Apr. 5: First round of review
  – Everyone:
    * Revise your short abstract (less than 300 words).
    * Make a draft outline of the sections of your paper. Make a checklist of what you will have to do to complete each section.
  – Student presenting, one week before class:
    * submit an outline and pieces of your paper as you have them, including abstract, and at least one of the following: introduction, literature review, methodology, or discussion sections. Minimum 1500 words that are intended to be part of your FYP and must have advanced significantly from your proposal.
    * submit a paper or piece of writing (maximum 30 pages) as an “exemplary work” – that you may be aspiring to, modeling your paper after, or that your advisor recommends – so we can discuss how it works, how it might differ from your envisioned paper, and perhaps how to get there. Since many of you may be working on your literature review first, you may want to look for a comprehensive literature review in your area/field. You may also want to talk to your advisor about this.
  – Reviewers, four days before class:
    * submit reviews of a minimum 500 words.
• Apr. 12 - May 17: Second round of review

  – Everyone:
    * Reflect on past reviews; revisit your checklist
  – Student presenting, one week before class:
    * submit draft paper with all of its parts, a list of at least three (3) target journals, and this paper must roughly conform to the publication guidelines of one of them, most importantly in total number of words. Do your best to sketch out the complete paper, even if parts remain in draft form or need to be completed later.
    * response letter to your reviewers, that details how you have changed your work in response the feedback that you received in the prior round.
  – Reviewers, four days before class:
    * submit second reviews of a minimum 500 words.

9 Grading

This class is required for doctoral students, and it is appropriately graded in terms of P/D/F (pass, ‘D’, and fail) because frankly, no one will ever look at your grades again. Nonetheless, here is the grading breakdown for you to know what I think is important:

| Submitted work for review (2) | 33% |
| Submitted reviews (4)         | 33% |
| Thoughtful preparation and contributions to discussion | 34% |
| **Total**                     | **100%** |

The only way that I will fail you is if you do not attend class or fail to submit work for consideration, which wastes the time and commitment of the entire class, me included.

9.1 Attendance

It goes without saying that you should be present for every class, since this is a core doctoral class and we are working on all of your papers together. The only excused absences are for extreme physical or emotional circumstances. To document these circumstances and preserve your privacy, you need to contact the Office of the Dean of Graduate Education (http://odge.mit.edu); if they decide that an absence is warranted, they will then send me a generic note.

9.2 Discussion criteria

You should come prepared for discussion each week by having done the reading and by doing active and critical reflection on the readings. Since we will start with three random people to present the reading and start discussion, you may want to write a set of talking points or discussion questions in advance.
9.3 Paper criteria

The submitted work will be graded on the extent that it advances your work from the proposal towards a workable FYP. The reviews will be graded on the extent that they are helpful, constructive, and have real insight into ways for the author to move forward. Also, in general:

- Format: Avoid overly fancy graphic layouts for your paper. Please use black text, white paper, 1.5 or double-spacing, a font with serifs, minimum font size 11.
- Bibliographies: Anything that you submit (paper or review) should include a full bibliography in a common citation format (for example, University of Chicago). This will not count towards the total word count of the paper.
- Tables & graphics: You are encouraged to use any tools that you need to communicate, such as maps, figures, or tables, but these exhibits may not exceed 10% of the total number of pages. Captions and references help to integrate graphics and text. These exhibits will also be graded for clarity, cogency, and the degree to which they support, inform, or extend the argument presented in the text.

9.4 Snow days (!):

Per MIT policy, in the event of a snow day, we cannot schedule mandatory make-up classes. In that event, we may bump some of our guest lectures so we can focus on reviews and modify our class schedule accordingly.

9.5 Extensions

Due to the tight schedule for reviewing each other’s work, there can be no extensions on your submitted work. See policy on attendance above.

9.6 ADA accommodations

Any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact me as soon as possible to make necessary arrangements with MIT’s Student Disabilities Services: http://web.mit.edu/uaap/sds/index.html.

9.7 Academic integrity

Plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, cheating, and facilitating academic dishonesty are academic crimes. It is your responsibility as students and scholars to understand the definition of any such activities, and to avoid and discourage them. Engaging in these activities either knowingly or unknowingly may result in severe academic sanctions, and you are therefore expected to familiarize yourself with MIT’s policies: https://integrity.mit.edu.
10 Tidbits about writing

10.1 Writing Center:

They write:

“The WCC at MIT (Writing and Communication Center) offers free one-on-one professional advice from experts in communication and rhetorical theory (MIT lecturers who all have advanced degrees and who are all are published scholars and writers). The WCC works with undergraduate students, graduate students, post-docs, faculty and staff members.

The WCC helps you strategize about all types of academic, creative, job-related, and professional writing as well as about all aspects of oral presentations (including practicing your presentations & designing slides). No matter what department or discipline you are in, we help you think your way more deeply into your topic, help you see new implications in your data, research and ideas. The WCC also helps with all English as Second Language issues, from writing and grammar to pronunciation and conversation practice, from understanding genre conventions to analyzing what particular journals require.

The WCC is located in Kendall Square (E18-233B, 50 Ames Street). To register with our online scheduler 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 http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center/. The Center’s core hours are Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.; evening hours vary by semester: check the online scheduler for up-to-date hours.”

11 Issues TBD on first day

1. decide order of student reviews and submissions
2. any other questions?

Last updated: February 3, 2017
References


Zwaf, E. (2013). 8 reasons I accepted your article.