This course develops skills in research design for policy analysis and planning with an emphasis on the logic of the research process and its constituent elements. Through the semester, the course moves from conceptual aspects of research design to concrete data collection techniques and from an emphasis on positive approaches to those that are more interpretive. The course relies on a seminar format so students are expected to read all of the assigned materials and come to class prepared to discuss key themes, ideas, and controversies. Since the materials draw broadly on the social sciences, and since students have diverse interests and methodological preferences, ongoing themes in our discussions will be linking concepts to planning scholarship in general and considering how different epistemological orientations and methodological techniques map on to planning specializations.

Books
The following two books can be easily ordered online or are available within the MIT Libraries. All other required readings are available on the course Stellar site.


There are also two additional books that would be helpful references for you to purchase even if not required:


Participation
This seminar requires active participation in discussions and critical reflection and assessment of the course material. While quantity matters, this portion of your grade ultimately will be based on the quality of your participation. Therefore, 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 asked in advance to read and come prepared to summarize a particular article. Other weeks you will be asked to comment on the main arguments and ideas of readings. Your performance in these assignments and discussions will be the factors that determine your participation grade.

Written Assignments
The assignments are designed to help you apply concepts from the readings and discussions to your research interests and to give you an opportunity to experiment with different approaches to research. The main assignment for this course is a research proposal. While you may write a proposal of your choosing,
most students elect to write a proposal for their first-year paper and use the homework assignments to make progress toward completing this proposal.

All assignments should be submitted in 12 point Times Roman font, 8.5 x 11 paper, 1 inch margins all around. The assignments should conform to the page limits specified with all being single-spaced unless otherwise noted. You should bring a hard copy of every assignment to class. You also should submit your work via Stellar site via the Homework section of the site. Stellar closes at noon or when class starts on the day the assignment is due.

Deconstructing theory and research frameworks – Due 9/22. Choose one article from the provided list of planning theory articles uploaded on Stellar (and report your choice to me and Eric by 9/15). Write one paragraph summarizing the article’s main argument. In a second paragraph, write a few sentences identifying the theory (or theories) referred to in the article and discuss the author(s)’ use of said theory (or theories) in helping to situate the article’s main points (e.g., how effective or appropriate was the reference to theory, was there a clear theoretical framing, etc).

Research Question and Summary – Due 9/29. Your assignment is twofold. First, choose one reading from the uploaded list of Most Cited Articles and write a brief one paragraph description of the background literature reviewed in that article and what you understand to be the article’s main research question(s). Second, with regard to your own work, write a short description of: 1) the problem that is driving your research; and 2) a clearly articulated research question(s). You should write no more than one paragraph about the problem or puzzle that underlies your interest. You then should conclude by stating a single, well phrased, research question. For this assignment you should draw on information from the readings about what makes a good question. It is recommended that you discuss this assignment with your advisor (i.e., schedule an appointment with your advisor and send a draft of your research question a few days in advance of your meeting) before making your submission.

Questions, Hypotheses, and Variables – Due 10/6 – Revisit your research question and rewrite it to reflect your current thinking. Once you have settled on what you believe is a well-phrased question, write at least three hypotheses. Then identify the dependent variable and the independent variables for each hypothesis. For each variable, suggest how it could be operationalized and measured. If the study you envision will not include hypotheses and variables and measurement, you should note this in your assignment. However, since the goal is for you to test out these fundamentals of research design, you should adapt your question so that it enables you to complete the assignment.

COUHES - Due 10/13. Complete the CITI Social & Behavioral Research Course [and pass the online exam. You should send a copy of your “Completion Report” to the TA (you will need to copy and paste the information from the report into a document). This assignment is graded as full credit/ no credit. http://web.mit.edu/committees/couhes/humansubjects.shtml

Survey sampling and survey questions - Due 10/27. Develop a survey or structured-interview instrument that is no longer than three pages. You should include a variety of different question formats to demonstrate your knowledge of the range of question types. Be sure to include a sentence at the top that clearly states your research question, followed by two or three sentences describing what you want to accomplish with the instrument. The instrument should be related to your first-year paper / final proposal topic.

Interview questions and respondent selection criteria - Due 11/3. Develop a conversational or semi-structured interview guide. This should be no longer than one (1) page. Be sure to include a sentence at the top that clearly states your research question, followed by another sentence or two summarizing
what you want to accomplish with the instrument and the approach you are taking. Your questions should illustrate that you understand the intent of open-ended questions and that you grasp the intent of follow-up, probing questions. The instrument should be related to your first-year paper / final proposal topic.

Case selection criteria - Due 11/17. Discuss the rationale for case selection or sampling for your research. This assignment should be no longer than one (1) page. Be sure to include a sentence at the top that clearly states your research question, followed by another sentence or two summarizing the approach you are taking and anything we should have in mind about your intended research as we read the assignment. Your summary should present your rationale for why you are selecting specific cases. This should be interpreted broadly to encompass your study, so can include the rationale for (a) case site (or comparative case site) selection; (b) survey population and sampling method; or (c) target interview participants and selection methods. For those of you conducting case studies and interviews, you may need to discuss both a and c. Your discussion should be informative about your rationale, methods of selection/ identification of locations and/ or participants, and limits to your approach.

Proposal Draft - Due 12/1. Submit a draft that will serve as the foundation for your final proposal. In one paragraph, state your research question and provide a brief summary of the body of theory where you expect to situate your research. In the remainder of the space allocated, elaborate on the elements of research design discussed in class. This should include discussion (not necessarily in this order and modified as appropriate to suit the approach of your study) of your unit and level of analysis, summary of key variables, issues of measurement, validity, and reliability (as well as threats to validity and reliability), and the rationale for your case selection. It also should include a discussion of the data collection and analysis approach you envision using. It is expected that you will submit this assignment to your advisor, that you will have a meeting to discuss your ideas and progress, and that you will make revisions prior to making your final class submission. At the top or end of the document, indicate the name of your advisor and the date when you are scheduled to meet. The assignment can be up to ten (10) pages in length, double-spaced.

Proposal Feedback – Due 12/8. We will arrange for you to swap your proposal draft with one of your colleagues. Drawing on your understanding of the class materials, you should provide detailed written comments on how the proposal can be improved. Your comments should be about one page single-spaced. Be sure to give consideration to all of the elements of good research design, particularly the clarity and “researchability” of the question being posed, operationalization of constructs, quality of hypotheses, discussion of internal and external validity, appropriateness of the data collection method for answering the question being posed, and quality of description of data collection protocols. A proposal may include some or all of the elements, depending on the question being asked and epistemological foundation on which the study is built.

Final Proposal - Due 12/15. The final submission may be up to fifteen (15) double-spaced pages of text. This length is exclusive of references and instruments. You should follow the format of a standard research proposal discussed in class. You also are required to include an Appendix of up to one page in length that states when you met with your advisor and what changes you made to your proposal as a result of this meeting.

Grading

- Deconstructing theory – 3%
- Research question and summary – 4%
- CITI Exam – 4%
- Interview instrument – 6%
- Questions, hypotheses, variables – 6%
- Survey instrument – 6%
- Case selection – 6%

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Proposal draft 15%  Proposal feedback – 10%
Final proposal – 20%  Participation – 20%

Final grades are based on a weighted average for the term. Grade cutoff points are as follows:

- A = 93-100%
- B+ = 87-89%
- B- = 80-82%
- C = 73-76%
- D+ = 67-69%
- D = 63-66%
- A- = 90-92%
- B = 83-86%
- C+ = 77-79%
- C- = 70-72%
- D- = 60-62%
- F = <60

Course Policies

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.

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.

Late submissions/non-submissions: In general, late submissions of assignments will not be accepted and you will receive a zero for any assignment not turned in on time. 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. 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). 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.

Writing: Doctoral work requires that you have the ability to effectively communicate your ideas in writing. If you have difficulty writing in proper English, you should seek assistance at the MIT Writing and Communication Center. If we suggest you visit the writing center, you should do so as our intent is 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.

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.

Disabilities: If you have a documented disability, or any other problem you think may affect your ability to perform in class, please see me early in the semester so we can work together to accommodate your needs.

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 me 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/

**Weekly Readings**

**9/8**  
**Introduction to Policy and Planning Inquiry**
The Telegraph (2005) “In the beginning there was the Flying Spaghetti Monster”

**Recommended Readings**

**9/15**  
**Ways of Knowing in Policy and Planning Research**
Recommended Readings
Medawar, Peter. 1964. “Is the Scientific Paper a Fraud.” BBC Talk

9/22 Theorizing and Theories

**Additional Reading for Written Assignment**

Review list of planning theory articles uploaded on Stellar and choose one for use in your written assignment.

9/29  From Literature Reviews to Research Questions


**Additional Reading for Written Assignment**

Uploaded onto Stellar is a recent *Most Cited Articles* list from four major planning journals. Choose one for use in your written assignment.

10/6  Research Proposals and Research Ethics


FURTHER HELPFUL REFERENCES FOR ASSIGNMENT:


**Recommended Readings**


10/13 Columbus Day Holiday – NO CLASS - COUHES/CITE Exam Due
Read all of the COUHES web materials and complete the human subjects training and exam. Follow links from homepage at: http://web.mit.edu/committees/couhes/

10/20 Survey Sampling, Methods, and Questionnaire Design


Recommended Reading


10/27 Causality and Experimental Designs
(Invited speaker – Dr. Matthew Wai-Poi, World Bank Economist – Indonesia Office)


Recommended Readings


11/3 Interviewing


**Recommended Readings**


11/10  **Veteran’s Day Holiday – NO CLASS**

11/17  **Case Study Selection and Data Collection Methods**

* (Invited speaker – Dr. Atul Pokharel, Post-doctoral Fellow, Brown University)


**FURTHER HELPFUL REFERENCE BOOK:**


**Recommended Readings**


11/24 Navigating DUSP and the First Year Paper (Student-led Session w/ other Doctoral students)


Review a few first year paper proposals and papers posted on the stellar site.

12/1 Field and Ethnographic Methods/Introduction to Qualitative Analysis


Recommended Readings


12/8 Knowledge and Action in Scholarly Research


Recommended Readings