ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES SEMINAR: RESEARCH METHODS

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SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry

Spring 2020, F 9:30-10:25 am, Marshall 111

DESCRIPTION

Overview

This one-credit seminar is designed to provide instructor and peer support for graduate students developing formal proposals for their master's thesis or doctoral dissertation research, in conjunction with participants’ primary efforts with their advisor(s) (major professors) and steering committee. All MS and PhD students with a human dimensions or policy aspect to their research are welcome. MPS students working on a project that requires development of a research proposal are welcome, too. For all participants, the aim is to have a research proposal completed for approval by the students’ respective steering committees by the end of the semester, so that data collection may commence shortly thereafter.

Prerequisites

There are no formal prerequisites for this course. Prior completion of EST 603, Research Methods and Design, or equivalent, is highly recommended.

Objectives

The primary objective for this seminar is completion of a formal proposal for master's thesis or PhD dissertation research. Support will be provided toward participants achieving several intermediate objectives, including:

- Defining a research question, clearly and succinctly;
- Reviewing prior, related scholarship on that question;
- Selecting appropriate method(s) for data collection and analysis;
- Developing a detailed plan for data collection and analysis, including practical considerations;
- Identifying all necessary and appropriate permissions required to carry out the proposed study (e.g. steering committee, partner organization, Institutional Review Board); and
- Giving an oral presentation of the research proposal for feedback and support from seminar participants.

Additionally, this course is intended to help participants identify and engage in the practical and interpersonal strategies necessary for successfully launching graduate research.
Requirements
- Read all required texts, in advance of the scheduled session
- Attend all class sessions & participate in class discussions
- Timely completion of all intermediate and final assignments

Recommended
- Attend all Environmental Studies Spring Seminar Series events

Expectations
- Regular communication with thesis advisor(s) & steering committee

Grading
Research proposal & presentation  50%
Intermediate assignments (8)  30%
Attendance & participation  20%

Communication
Office:  211B Marshall
Hrs.:  M 1:30 – 3:30 pm, W 3:30 – 5:00 pm, & by appointment
E-mail:  <dsonn@esf.edu>
URL:  http://www.esf.edu/es/sonnenfeld

TEXT

Recommended

Bookstore
ESF Virtual Bookstore, available via myESF. For further information see:
http://www.esf.edu/students/books.htm

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Focus. The major assignment for this seminar is a completed, formal research proposal for a master's thesis, PhD dissertation, or MPS synthesis project.

Contents. Each of the following components should be included in the proposal: title, abstract, statement of problem/ research question, justification, review of the literature, formal statement of research question, dependent and independent variables, hypotheses, research design and methods, measures for protection of human subjects, research schedule, resource requirements, budget, funding sources, bibliography.

Intermediate deliverables. Research question and abstract (Week 2). Topic reflection (Week 3). Working bibliography (Week 5). Literature review (Week 6). Research methods outline
(Week 8). Research methods (Week 9). Human subjects protections (Week 10). Research practicalities (Week 11). «Draft» research proposal, including introduction (Week 12).

Oral presentation. Present your proposal in class, 10-15 min., including questions and discussion (Weeks 13/14). (20% of assignment grade)

Completed proposal. 20 pp. maximum (double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman), plus cover sheet, abstract, references, and appendices. Spelling- and grammar-checked; appropriate use of citations and references. Due at beginning of the regularly scheduled Final Exam period for this course. (80% of assignment grade)

SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Jan.17) – Introduction

*** Participant introductions ***

Personal introduction
Program/ Advisor/ Steering committee
Research topic
Research status
What would be most helpful from this seminar?

Expectations/ assumptions

Master's thesis – traditional format
   Ch.1 Introduction*
   Ch.2 Literature Review *
   Ch.3 Methods*
   Ch.4 Results
   Ch.5 Discussion

* Included in research proposal

Master's thesis – manuscript format
(Ph.D. dissertation – traditional & manuscript formats)
Advisor/ Steering committee

Aims of this seminar

Provide instructor and peer support for research proposal development process
Primary effort is between student, advisor & steering committee
A participatory seminar (not a lecture course)
Help participants identify practical and interpersonal strategies necessary for successfully launching graduate research

Syllabus review

Textbook
Grading
Deliverables
Selecting a Research Topic

Selecting a topic
The relationship between theory and method
What makes a problem/topic interesting?
What is researchable? Feasibility...
The 'so what?!” factor
The value of simplicity

Research question
What is a research question?
What makes a good research question?

Abstract
Elements of an abstract

RECOMMENDED:
Bui, ch 1, "Overview of the Master's Degree and Thesis"
Bui, ch 2, "Selecting a Research Topic"

OTHER:

*** Homework Assignment #1 – Research Abstract (due Fri. 1/25) ***
*** Meet w/ advisor(s) and take steps towards establishing/meeting with Steering Committee ***

Week 2 (Jan. 24) – Research Proposals

*** Discussion of research questions/abstracts (Homework Assignment #1) ***

Research proposals (review)
Why write a research proposal?
Who reads your research proposal?
What is included in the research proposal?

Approvals needed
Major professor(s)
Steering committee
Sponsoring/cooperating organization (as applicable)
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Ch.1 Introduction
Research question
Rationale
Context (scholarly, policy, location)
Significance
Limitations
RECOMMENDED:
Bui, ch 2, "Selecting a Research Topic" (review)
Bui, ch 5, "How to Write Chapter One, Introduction"

*** Homework Assignment #2 – Topic reflection (due Fri. 2/1) ***

Week 3 (Jan. 31) – Research Workshop #1
*** Debrief: Topic reflection (Homework Assignment #2) ***
+ The art of successfully working with your thesis advisor(s) and Steering Committee

Week 4 (Feb. 7) – Literature Review I
*** Informal check-in ***

Ch.2 Literature review

Review of the literature
Identification of the scholarly/policy domain(s) in which the proposed study will be situated
Key scholarly/research/policy contributions in those domains
Significant debates, controversies
Important gaps

Proposed study
Your proposed (synthesized) theoretical framework
The anticipated contributions that your study will make to this/these field(s) of study

Practicalities
Reliable sources/accessing scholarly literature
Identifying relevant, peer-reviewed journals
Annual reviews/review essays
Bibliographical databases
Properly citing and referencing source material

RECOMMENDED:
Bui, ch 3, "Using the Literature to Research Your Problem"
Bui, ch 6, "How to Write Chapter Two, Literature Review"

OTHER:

*** Homework Assignment #3 – Working Bibliography (due Fri. 2/15) ***

Week 5 (Feb. 14) – Literature Review II
*** Discussion of Working Bibliographies (Homework Assignment #3) ***

Ch.2 Literature review (review)
Review of the literature
Proposed study
Practicalities (review)

RECOMMENDED:
- Bui, ch 3, "Using the Literature to Research Your Problem" (review)
- Bui, ch 6, "How to Write Chapter Two, Literature Review" (review)

*** Homework Assignment #4 – Ch.2 Literature Review (due Fri. 2/22) ***

**Week 6 (Feb. 21) – Research Workshop #2**

*** Debrief: Ch.2 Literature Review (Homework Assignment #4) ***

**Week 7 (Feb. 28) – Research Methods I**

*** Check-in on overall progress with thesis research projects ***
+ Including update on formation/status of Steering Committee, etc.

Research stages (review)

Overview of research methods (review)
- Quantitative (multivariate) methods
- Qualitative (interpretive) methods
- Using available data
- Multimethod and applied research methods

Ch.3 Research methods
- Proposed method(s) for data collection
  - Justification for this/these selected method(s)
  - Limitations of proposed method(s)
  - Measures to be taken to address/mitigate these limitations
- Proposed procedures for data coding, entry and management
- Proposed procedures for data interpretation and analysis

RECOMMENDED:
- Bui, ch 7, "How to Write Chapter Three, Methods"

OTHER:

*** Homework Assignment #5 – Research methods outline (due Fri. 3/8) ***

**Week 8 (Mar. 6) – Research Workshop #3**

*** Discussion of research methods outline (Homework Assignment #5) ***
+ Why choose that/those particular method(s)? Implications of this choice?
+ Ready for next steps in research project development?
+ Any changes in research question?
+ Any questions? challenges? problems?
+ Reflections on the research project as a whole

*** Homework Assignment #6 – Ch.3 Research Methods (due Fri. 3/22) ***

**Week 9 (Mar. 13) – Human Subjects Protection**

*** Debrief: Ch.3 Research Methods (Homework Assignment #6) ***

Foundations (review)

Who are 'human subjects'? (definition)
Why do they need protection, and from whom?
How are they protected, and by whom?
Federal guidelines and regulations, incl. the Belmont Report
Professional codes of conduct
SU/ ESF Institutional Review Board procedures

Applications

RECOMMENDED:
Bui, ch 4, "Conducting Ethical Research"

OTHER:
Singleton & Straits, Approaches to Social Research, ch 3

*** Homework Assignment #7 – Human Subjects Protection (due Fri. 3/29) ***

**SPRING BREAK**

**Week 10 (Mar. 27) – Research Nuts & Bolts**

*** Discussion of human subjects protection (Homework Assignment #7) ***

Resource requirements & provision

Projected expenses/ overview of options
   Staffing (e.g. research assistants)
   Materials and equipment needed
   Testing and data analysis expenses
   Transportation, accommodations, other expenses

Proposed budget
   Projected expenses (required & optional), itemized & (sub-) totaled
   Justification

Funding
   Funding obtained
   Funding applications pending
   Additional resources utilized
   Gaps and contingencies
Timeline

Checklist of approvals needed/ obtained

*** Homework Assignment #8 – Research practicalities draft (due Fri. 4/5) ***

Week 11 (Apr. 3) – Research Workshop #4

*** Discussion of research practicalities draft (Homework Assignment #8) ***

*** Homework Assignment #9 – Research Proposal draft (due Fri. 4/12) ***

+ Including draft introduction

Week 12 (Apr. 10) – Research Workshop #5

*** Debrief: Research Proposal draft (Homework Assignment #9) ***

Weeks 13 & 14 (Apr. 17, 24) – Presentations

Finals Week – Finalized Research Proposals Due

NOTICES

Accommodations

SUNY-ESF works closely with Syracuse University’s Office of Disability Services (ODS) in assisting students with learning and physical disabilities. If you think you may need accommodations in this course related to a disability, you may contact the ESF Division of Student Affairs, 110 Bray Hall, tel. 315.470.6660, for assistance with the process. You may also contact ODS directly at Room 309, 804 University Avenue; visit the ODS website; or call (315) 443-4498 or TDD: (315) 443-1371, for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting academic adjustments. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic adjustments and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since academic adjustments may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Fire alarm procedures

If a fire alarm sounds, exit the building immediately to the designated area for this course. Stay together as a class, until released. Take all personal belongings with you, including electronics, backpacks, coats and keys. Please let your instructor know in advance if you might have any special needs in case of a building evacuation. For further information, contact the Division of Student Affairs, tel. 315.470.6660.