Overview

This course is intended for MURP students to learn to design a research project and write a good research proposal for their capstone or thesis. It will impart the essential theoretical and methodological grounding to conduct graduate level research in urban and regional planning. It is ideal for a student in the third semester of the MURP program, aiming to complete the capstone/thesis in the following semester(s). It will allow a student to develop a proposal that she can present to her advisory committee. However, a student who might have begun writing the capstone/thesis will also likely find the course useful, and is therefore encouraged to enroll.

The course will largely follow the seminar format, supported by lectures, including some by guest speakers. During the semester, a student enrolled in PLAN 650 is strongly encouraged to work closely with her advisor in developing a substantive research topic and foci. Clarity about the area/topic of interest will yield a sound, full-fledged research proposal at the end of the semester, which, in turn, will see the student transition smoothly and expeditiously into the actual writing phase of the capstone/thesis document. Thus, a student who intends to take this course is also urged to utilize the summer prior to taking the course exploring possible research topics, and collecting relevant information and preliminary data.

Learning objectives

The course will introduce the students to and hone their skills in the various aspects of good research design in urban and regional planning and the social sciences. The skills acquired from this course will also enable students to write effective research proposals for fellowships, grants, etc. Specifically, a student will learn to do the following:

- write an appropriate literature review for framing one’s research
- understand what a good theoretical/conceptual framework is and produce one
- develop strong (clear, simple, feasible) research questions and formulate appropriate hypotheses (where applicable)
- learn about data collection and management, broadly
- choose appropriate research methodologies (including mixed methods and case studies) to analyze data to accurately fulfill research objectives
- write research findings in a professional way – knowing how to write about qualitative and quantitative analyses; proper citing and referencing for academic and professional writing in planning; and presenting tables, charts, graphs, images, etc.
Course texts

Course readings will be from books as well as scholarly articles, and other materials. Articles and some other readings will be available on Laulima. As these will provide the bulk of the class readings, students are required to purchase the following two books:


And the following book is recommended if your research will use inferential statistics:


These are some other references that MURP students will likely find useful:


The following are excellent guides for improving one’s writing, in general:


The “Other resources” folder on Laulima’s course website will provide supplementary resources.

Assignments and assessment

While developing a full proposal over the course of the semester, students will submit short assignments – the deconstructed elements of a research proposal – that they will present to and discuss with their peers. They will also perform peer review and learn to offer constructive feedback to their classmates on the materials they will present in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment/criterion</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction/Problem statement/Abstract</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research questions</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literature review and theoretical framework</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data and methodology</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Proposal presentation</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Final written proposal</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation and peer review</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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The instructor will provide more information later about individual assignments. Although attendance does not carry points, to pass the course a student must not miss more than 2 class sessions without the instructor’s consent.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 25</td>
<td><strong>Course introduction and the research process</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Readings</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>September 1</td>
<td><strong>Identifying and stating the problem; the significance of the research project</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What topic(s) would you like to explore?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why would it be a worthwhile planning problem to investigate?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to assert the significance and relevance of the issue?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Draft of Introduction</td>
<td><strong>Readings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Booth, Colmb, and Williams. 2008. Chapters 1-2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pajares, Frank. 2007. “The elements of a proposal.” Available at <a href="http://www.uky.edu">www.uky.edu</a> [Read sections 1-3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 8</td>
<td><strong>Framing research questions and hypotheses</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>How to articulate research questions?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Practical problems and research problems</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The purpose of hypothesizing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Draft of research questions</td>
<td><strong>Readings</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Submit Introduction</td>
<td><strong>Suggested reading</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>September 15</td>
<td><strong>Situating research within the literature</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why is a literature review important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the elements of a good literature review? Organization, logic, thoroughness, breadth, gaps, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The annotated bibliography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit research questions</td>
<td><strong>Readings</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Draft of literature review**


**Other materials/resources**


Example of a literature review on a planning topic (long version and summary):


Example of annotated bibliography: [https://www.planning.org/research/hazards/pdf/hazardsbibliography.pdf](https://www.planning.org/research/hazards/pdf/hazardsbibliography.pdf)

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## Week 5

**September 22**

**Creating a theoretical and/or conceptual framework**

Understanding the distinctions between and purposes of theoretical and conceptual frameworks

How does a theoretical/conceptual framework help in structuring and organizing research?

**Readings**


**Suggested reading**


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## Week 6

**September 29**

**Data: what, whys, and hows**

Understand what data are; common sources of data for urban planning research

What data to find and where?

How to use data for research?

**Readings**


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## Week 7

**October 6**

**Analyzing data and overview of research methodologies**

Quantitative and qualitative data and methodologies

Why do researchers integrate quantitative and qualitative data and/or methodologies? When and how?

**Readings**


**Suggested reading**


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**Week 8**

**October 13**

**The case study**

The merits [and perils] of doing case study research, especially for urban planning

Doing case studies with resource and time limitations

Concluding accurately and properly using case study data

**Readings**


**Suggested reference**


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**Week 9**

**October 20**

Continue working on proposals individually or in groups in class.

**No readings**

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**Week 10**

**October 27**

**Mixed methods research**

What is mixed methods research and how to do it well?

The whys and hows of mixed methods for urban planning research

**Readings**


**Suggested readings**


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**Week 11**

**November 3**

Making and supporting knowledge claims
### Submit data and methodology

**Readings**

**Other readings**

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### Week 12

**November 10**
**Research ethics; citations, formatting, and presenting visual/graphical data**

**Readings**

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### Week 13

**November 17**
**Reporting and presenting research findings; issues of style**

**Readings**

**Suggested reading**

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### Week 14

**November 24**
**After the proposal**
Developing the research document. Disseminating findings.

**Readings**
https://www.planning.org/nationalcenters/ (Brochure of the American Planning Association’s National Centers for Planning is included)

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### Week 15
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 1</td>
<td><strong>Student presentations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 8</td>
<td><strong>Student presentations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 11</td>
<td><strong>Final proposal due</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Week 16**