Course Objectives

By the time you get around to taking this course, you have undoubtedly conducted research already. So what makes academic research "scientific" or "rigorous"? How do you know if what you have found through your research is “true", or at least, “valid”? Moreover, will your research matter or be useful to the real world? This course is intended to introduce students in urban planning (primarily at the master’s level, but also undergraduates and doctoral candidates) to debates around the uses of qualitative research, elements of research design, and methods of qualitative data collection and analysis. By the end of the course, you should be well equipped to undertake your own fieldwork, and feel confident in your ability to assess the design, execution, and interpretation of qualitative research.

The course builds these skills by asking you to design a research project. Students who plan to do a thesis can use this class to develop a thesis proposal. Others can develop an imagined research project in an area of interest, but write small on Cornell’s campus. For instance, students interested in social equity in access to food might design a research project concerning this issue in the context of Risley Hall. In either case, at the beginning of the semester, you will select a research topic, a question, and a case through which to investigate your question. Over the course of the semester, we will practice different qualitative research. Some of these will ask you to test the methods on your specific project (for instance by interviewing someone, or observing your case in some way). For other methods, such as archival research and questionnaire design, we will practice as a group on a class research project – the design of open spaces on Cornell Campus. You will reflect on your experience with different methods, and then determine which one(s) you feel will be most appropriate for your research. At the end of the semester, you will compile, synthesize, and edit the assignments you developed throughout the course into a well-crafted 10-page proposal for future research to be submitted to an imaginary CRP research grant. The proposal will have a specific research question, supporting literature review, justification of case selection, explanation of methods of data collection and analysis, and discussion of research ethics.

Intended Learning Outcomes

The national accreditation system that reviews professional planning programs requires that each course make clear three kinds of pedagogic objectives: those relating to "general planning knowledge," "planning skills," and "values and ethics."

This course will introduce you to the following kinds of Planning Knowledge:

- Forms, uses, strengths and limitations of qualitative research, and its relationship to quantitative research
- How qualitative research has been used in the urban planning context
Give you a chance to practice the following **Planning Skills:**
- Design reliable and valid research in support of efforts to improve urban environments
- Gather and analyze qualitative data
- Learn to give and take constructive criticism through peer reviews
- Draft grant proposals

And push you to develop your personal **Planning Values and Ethics** by:
- Learning about and discussing examples of historic and contemporary research that has compromised the rights and well being of human subjects
- Evaluating the ethics of your own research proposal and responsibility to research subjects

**Assignments – 10 Steps to Success!**

This class has 10 assignments that break the research proposal down into small, manageable steps. Assignments are due before class (usually, but not always, on Thursdays) on Blackboard.

**Class Participation (10%)** – Students are required to attend all classes and contribute to class discussions. The course is run primarily as a seminar / workshop, with limited amounts of lecture.

**A1 (Due 8/31 – 5%): Review and assess 2 submitted theses.** Find and review two theses relevant to your areas of research interest and write a maximum of two pages (double spaced) discussing your reactions to the way the students framed their questions, the methodological and analytical approaches taken, and the analysis and credibility of the conclusions. Bachelors, masters, and doctoral students should find past theses at their own level. Be prepared to discuss your comments and critiques, especially as they inform your own process.

**A2 (Due 9/12 – 15%): Identify a topic, question, and possible literature.** Write a short paragraph about the topic, issue, or puzzle that you are interested in addressing. Follow this paragraph with up to three questions that you think you would like to answer in your thesis. Use the recommendations in the readings to help you systematically work through your ideas. Identify 2-3 areas of literature that inform your research question and identify 3 key publications in each area. Write one paragraph about each area summarizing the readings for that area, and a final paragraph synthesizing the literature and how that leads you to your research question.

**A3 (Due 9/19 – 5%): Select a site.** Write a paragraph about the site you have chosen to conduct your research. Explain why this is an appropriate site to study your question, the unit of analysis, and how you will obtain access to the site.

**A4 (Due 10/3 – 10%): Field notes from site observation.** Spend at least one hour participating in and/or observing your site. Write up your field notes (two-pages, double spaced) of your observations, drawing on the readings.

**A5 (Due 10/12 – 10%): Transcript of interview.** Conduct an interview with someone regarding your research site and topic. The interview should last about 15-30 minutes, and be recorded. Transcribe your interview in full.

**A6 (10/24 – P/F): Complete IRB human subjects training.** Complete the CITI Basic Human Subject Research Training and pass the online exam. Send a copy of your “Completion Report” to the GTRS. This assignment is graded as full credit/ no credit. Keep in mind that the exam takes several hours to complete, so plan accordingly.

**A7 (Due 11/2 – 15%): Rough draft of grant proposal.** Submit a rough draft of your proposal (5 pages). Your proposal at this stage should have: 1a) an introduction that frames your research and states your research question; 2) a brief literature review informing your research question; 3) an outline of your case selection rationale and data collection methods.
A8 (Due 11/16 – 10%): **Analysis of data.** Select one of the analytical techniques taught in class and apply it to one of the forms of data you have collected about your site. Submit a two-page analysis of the data.

A9 (Due 11/28 – 10%): **Presentation of proposal.** Develop a 5-slide, 5-minute presentation of your research proposal and give it in class. All proposals are due on 11/28, although half the class will present on Tuesday (11/28), and half will present on Thursday (11/30). There will be time for students to give each other feedback on their proposals after each presentation.

A10 (Due 12/7 – 10%): **Final proposal.** Write a final proposal (10 pages, double-spaced, exclusive of references). This version should respond to the feedback you received from the instructor and peers, and include additional sections on data analysis and research ethics that were not in the draft version.

**Readings**
All readings will be available on the password protected Blackboard course website, or placed on course reserve. For your own convenience and future resources, you may want to purchase the following books, from which I have assigned several chapters. These cannot be made available digitally due to copyright regulations, and will be available on course reserve.


**Technology**
Use of laptops and cellphones are not permitted in class unless otherwise indicated.

**Written Work**
The Knight Institute for Writing provides seminars and other assistance with writing, including a walk-in service in the evenings on four locations across campus. See bit.ly/2h6nsgQ

**Academic Accommodation**
If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, please provide us with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services (sds.cornell.edu). You are expected to give two weeks notice of the need for accommodations.

**Academic Misconduct**
Please remember that plagiarism is a serious offence that can result in expulsion from the University. Never 1) turn in an assignment that you did not write yourself, 2) turn in an assignment for this class that you previously turned in for another class. Cornell’s Code of Academic Integrity and Acknowledging the Work of Others is found in the *Policy Notebook for the Cornell Community* at bit.ly/2u2lTAj.
# OVERVIEW OF SYLLABUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignment Dues (by 8am)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T August 22</td>
<td>Introduction to the course</td>
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<tr>
<td>R August 24</td>
<td>Ways of knowing</td>
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<tr>
<td>T August 29</td>
<td>Epistemological approaches to knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>R August 31</td>
<td>Overview of research design</td>
<td>A1: Review past theses</td>
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<tr>
<td>T September 5</td>
<td>From topics to questions</td>
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<td>R September 7</td>
<td>From questions to literature reviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>T September 12</td>
<td>Unit of analysis, case selection, sampling</td>
<td>A2: Topic, question, literature</td>
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<td>R September 14</td>
<td>Workshop on reading grant proposals</td>
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<td><strong>Elements of Research Design</strong></td>
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<td>T September 19</td>
<td>Principles of archival research (at Kroch Library)</td>
<td>A3: Select site</td>
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<td>R September 21</td>
<td>Workshop on archival research</td>
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<td>T September 26</td>
<td>Principles of participant observation</td>
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<td>R September 28</td>
<td>Workshop on participant observation</td>
<td>A4a: Observe site</td>
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<td>T October 3</td>
<td>Principles of interviewing</td>
<td>A4b: Submit field notes</td>
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<td>R October 5</td>
<td>Workshop on interviewing</td>
<td>A5a: Conduct an interview</td>
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<td>T October 10</td>
<td>Fall Break, No Class</td>
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<td>R October 12</td>
<td>Mixed methods (Rizal Sutikno, guest)</td>
<td>A5b: Submit interview transcript</td>
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<td>T October 17</td>
<td>Principles of survey research</td>
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<td>R October 19</td>
<td>Workshop on designing survey questionnaires</td>
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<td>T October 24</td>
<td>Ethics of researching human subjects</td>
<td>A6: IRB Training</td>
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<td>R October 26</td>
<td>Workshop on writing grant proposals</td>
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<td><strong>Qualitative Research Methods</strong></td>
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<td>T October 31</td>
<td>Strategies in data analysis</td>
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<td>R November 2</td>
<td>Analyzing visual materials: maps and photos</td>
<td>A7: Draft research proposal</td>
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<td>T November 7</td>
<td>From grounded theory to coding</td>
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<td>R November 9</td>
<td>Process tracing and historical narratives</td>
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<td>T November 14</td>
<td>Ethnographic narratives</td>
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<td>R November 16</td>
<td>Validity and reliability</td>
<td>A8: Analysis of data</td>
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<td>T November 21</td>
<td>Making social science matter</td>
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<td>R November 23</td>
<td>Thanksgiving, No Class</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Analyzing Qualitative Data</strong></td>
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<td>T November 30</td>
<td>Student presentations</td>
<td>A9: Presentation of proposal</td>
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<td>R November 30</td>
<td>Student presentations</td>
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<td>R December 7</td>
<td>Final Proposal Due</td>
<td>A10: Final proposal</td>
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ASSIGNED READINGS  
(subject to change, follow the version on Blackboard, which will be most up to date)

Tuesday 8/22 – Introduction

RESEARCH DESIGN

Thursday 8/24 – Ways of Knowing


Recommended


Tuesday 8/29 – Epistemological Approaches to Knowledge: Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research


Recommended

Thursday 8/31 – Overview of Research Design


Recommended
Bolker, Joan. 1998. Chapter 2, “Choosing an Advisor and a Committee.” In Writing Your Dissertation in
**Fifteen Minutes a Day.** New York: Henry Holt.

**Tuesday 9/5 – From Topics to Questions**


**Thursday 9/7 – From Questions to Literature Reviews**


Helpful summary: University of Minnesota Duluth, "How to write a lit review": http://www.d.umn.edu/~hrallis/guides/researching/litreview.html

**Tuesday 9/12 – Units of Analysis, Case selection and Sampling**


Read pages 1-19, skim remainder of book as interested.


**Recommended**


**Thursday 9/14 – Workshop on reading proposals**

Sample proposals – TBA

**Recommended**

Tuesday 9/19 – Historic Archival Research (field trip to Kroch Library)

Recommended

Thursday 9/21 – Workshop on archival research
Pick one of the following:
Lily Baum Pollans. 2017. Either Chapter 4 (Seattle) or Chapter 5 (Boston) in Waste Ways: Regimes and resistance on the path to sustainable urban infrastructure, Regimes and resistance on the path to sustainable urban infrastructure (Dissertation). Cambridge, MA: MIT. Available online at: https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/108953

Tuesday 9/26 – Principles of Participant Observation

Recommended

Thursday 9/28 – Workshop on Participant Observation
Examples


Tuesday 10/3 – Principles of Interviewing


Examples of Uses of Interviews:


Thursday 10/5 – Workshop on Interviewing


Tuesday 10/10 – Fall Break, no class

Thursday 10/12 – Mixed Methods (Rizal Sutikno, guest lecture)


Additional readings TBD

Examples of mixed methods research


Tuesday 10/17 – Principles of Survey Research
Examples of Questionnaires:

Thursday 10/19 – Workshop on Designing Survey Questionnaires

Tuesday 10/24 – Research Ethics
Take the Cornell IRB Human Subjects Training. Select the “IRB – Basic” option at: http://www.oria.cornell.edu/training/citi/login/index.cfm
PICK ONE of following two examples:

Recommended

Thursday 10/26 – Putting Together a Research Proposal
Tuesday 10/31 – Strategies in Qualitative Data Analysis

Thursday 11/2 – Visual media: photos and maps
Examples of visual media in research:
  Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis (1942), Introduction, and browse through the photographs in the rest of the book.

Recommended

Tuesday 11/7 – From Grounded Theory to Coding

Examples of Use of Interviews Analysis:


Thursday 11/9 – Process Tracing and Historical Narratives


Example

Lily Baum Pollans. 2017. Chapter 3 in Waste Ways: Regimes and resistance on the path to sustainable urban infrastructure, Regimes and resistance on the path to sustainable urban infrastructure (Dissertation). Cambridge, MA: MIT. Available online at: https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/108953

Recommended


Tuesday 11/14 – Ethnographic Narratives


Thursday 11/16 – Sources of Error, Reliability, Validity


Tuesday 11/21 – Making Social Science Matter


Thursday 11/23 – Thanksgiving, No Class

Tuesday 11/28 – Student presentations

Thursday 11/30 – Student presentations

Thursday 12/7 – Final Proposals Due