Course Overview
Designing effective research is an essential skill, not only for academics, but for many in public, private and non-profit sectors. In a basic sense, this involves the ability to identify a problem, formulate questions and/or hypotheses to investigate that problem, marshal a set of methods that allow you to gather data, evaluate those data in order to answer your questions (or test your hypotheses) and finally, draw conclusions based on your empirical evidence. As graduate students, this has immediate and practical relevance, since you need to develop a research project for your dissertation, thesis or Master’s papers. This class is intended to give you the basic conceptual tools needed for designing your research. It will also examine certain conceptual and ethical issues involved with research, but which are rarely discussed in other classes. As such, the class will involve a mix of the conceptual/theoretical and the practical. To a large degree, the class will focus on proposal writing, since research proposals are the clearest formulation of a research design. Proposal writing involves both theoretical work – how we think about research, what certain concepts mean, how and why processes affect different groups in different ways, etc. – and practical work – how we do research. Proposal writing is a basic skill and something that you’re likely to have to do throughout your career, even if you don’t become an academic or professional researcher. NGOs and local governments live by grants, and the skills involved in proposal writing are transferrable to a wide range of professional work.

The class is organized into two basic parts. During the first half of the semester, we will mostly focus on theoretical and conceptual issues involved with research: how to identify a research question or literature to engage with, questions of knowledge production, problematizing “the field,” and research ethics. We will spend three weeks reading about and discussing various aspects of research ethics: (a) the politics of positionality and representation; (b) the politics of publishing and the hegemony of English as an academic lingua franca; and (c) the politics of the Institutional Review Board. This first half of the class will take us to Spring Break. Following Spring Break, we will shift course a bit and spend five weeks systematically working through the five essential components of any research proposal: (1) the research statement; (2) the research questions (or hypotheses); (3) the theoretical framework; (4) empirical context; and (5) research methods. During this section of the class, you will read lots of (mostly successful) grant proposals to evaluate and compare. We will have faculty guests visit class each week to discuss their own
proposals and approaches to research. You will also work in groups to workshop your own proposal elements (which you will be writing as part of class assignments). The final two weeks of the semester are reserved for student-selected topics. You will have the opportunity to selected topics and readings that interest you, and lead discussion and/or activities.

Course Requirements
This class involves a moderate amount of reading. You are expected to do all required readings (some weeks have additional, recommended readings) prior to class. Most weeks also require some writing. Writing assignments must be printed (not hand-written), and free of spelling and grammatical errors. During the first half of the semester, you will be responsible for submitting five short papers that critically respond to the week’s readings. These will be graded. You will also need to submit short reflective pieces that draw connections between the readings and your own research. These will not be graded, but I will read them and give you written feedback. During the second half of the semester, you will write critiques of proposal sections you read, and will also need to draft your own proposal section (research statement, research questions, etc.). Again, these will not be graded, but I will read them and give you written feedback.

The final assignment for the class will be an proposal for your own MA or PhD research, in the format of a National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement (NSF DDRI) grant.

Readings
There is one required text for this class:


This is available at the SU Bookstore in Schine Student Center, or can be purchased online.

Additional readings are available on Blackboard, in the folder labelled “Readings.” They appear in the order you are to read them for class.

Sample research proposals, which you will read during the second half of the semester, are available in the folder labelled “Sample proposals.” These appear alphabetically by author, and you may read them selectively, in any order you wish.

Grading
Your grade for this class will be based on a combination of your in-class participation, weekly writing assignments, and final proposal. Your five critical response papers (submitted weeks 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7) will be graded. Your other writing assignments throughout the semester will not be graded, but you are expected to submit them and you will receive written feedback on them. Grades are distributed as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>25 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical response papers</td>
<td>25 points (5 pts each)</td>
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<td><strong>Final proposal</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100 points</strong></td>
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Learning Outcomes
By the end of this class, you should be able to:

- Write a successful research proposal
- Critically evaluate research proposals written by other scholars
- Identify and critically evaluate the core elements of research design
- Identify the core elements of your own research (including research objectives, research questions or hypotheses, and research methods)
- Situate your own research in the context of relevant theoretical and empirical literatures

Personal Electronics
Please be sure that your cell phones are silenced before coming to class. Texting during class will not be tolerated. Use of laptops for any purpose other than note taking (or other activities directly related to class) is not acceptable. This is common sense and common courtesy. Persons using electronic devices inappropriately during class will be asked to leave.

Missing Class
You are expected to attend and actively participate in every class meeting. If you need to miss class for any reason (religious observance, illness, personal issues, travel) please notify me ahead of time via email. You are expected to do the readings and make up written assignments for any class you miss.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity
Plagiarism is a very serious breach of academic honesty, and will not be tolerated in this class. If you are caught plagiarizing you will automatically fail the course. There will be no exceptions.

Syracuse University’s Academic Integrity Policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Under the policy, students found in violation are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered as described in the Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric. SU students are required to read an online
summary of the University’s academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice.

The Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric establishes recommended guidelines for the determination of grade penalties by faculty and instructors, while also giving them discretion to select the grade penalty they believe most suitable, including course failure, regardless of violation level. Any established violation in this course may result in course failure regardless of violation level.

For more information, please see Syracuse University’s academic integrity policy: [http://academicintegrity.syr.edu](http://academicintegrity.syr.edu)

**Disability-Related Accommodations**

Students who require disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 304 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to Dr. Perreault and review those accommodations with him. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services [http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/](http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/)

**Add/drop policy**

It is the policy of the Geography Department that students must obtain FIRST the signature of the instructor and THEN the signature of the department chair if they wish to drop or withdraw from this course.

**Religious observances**

SU’s religious observance policy recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class. **NOTE:** Completion of the form on MySlice only provides me notification about your absence. It is **your** responsibility to come and see me about any work that you may miss. You will be expected to complete your work before the religious observance in question. Note as well that this policy covers only religious observances, not travel days. For more information, see: [http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm](http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm).
Course Schedule

Week 1:

January 22  Course introduction: So you want to be a geographer?

Readings: Watts: “Essentials for research design”

“The Nietschmann Syllabus: A Vision of the Field”

Assignment: No writing assignment this week, but come to class prepared to discuss the readings

Week 2:

January 29  Which conversation do you want to be a part of? Choosing a question

Guest presenter: Christina Leigh Dietz, Maxwell School Office of Grant Development (topic: “Identifying sources of funding for your research”)

Readings: Valentine 2001: “At the drawing board: Developing a research design”


Harden 2012: “Framing and reframing questions of human-environment interactions”

Rhoads 2004: “Whither physical geography?”

Blue and Brierley 2016: “But what do you measure? Prospects for a constructive critical physical geography”

Sui and DeLyser 2012: “Crossing the qualitative-quantitative chasm I: Hybrid geographies, the spatial turn and Volunteered Geographic Information (VGI)”

Assignment: 1-2 page critical response to the readings
Also, write a brief (750 word) reflection in which you (a) describe your research interests, and (b) situate these within the broader literatures

Week 3:
February 5 Producing knowledge, locating “the field”

Required Readings:
Massey 2003: “Imagining the field”
Katz 1994: “Playing the field: Questions of fieldwork in geography”
Sidaway 2013: “Geography, globalization and the problematic of area studies.”
Koch 2016: “Is a ‘critical’ area studies possible?”
Radcliffe 2017: “Decolonising geographical knowledges”

Recommended Readings (read at least one of these):
Sundberg 2005: “Looking for the critical geographer, or why bodies and geographies matter to the emergence of critical geographies of Latin America”
Mistry, et al. 2015: “Between a rock and a hard place: Ethical dilemmas of local community facilitators doing participatory research projects”
Elwood 2008: “Negotiating knowledge production: The everyday inclusions, exclusions and contradictions of participatory GIS research.”

Assignment: 1-2 page critical response to the readings
Also, write a brief reflection on your ‘field.’ Where do you do your research and what is your relationship to that place?

Week 4:
February 12 Writing competitive proposals
**Guest presenter:** Christina Leigh Deitz, Maxwell School Office of Grant Development

*Tom at Inter-American Foundation Meeting, Mexico*

**Required Readings:**
- Timur Hammond’s Proposal Writing Notes
- Solis, “Preparing competitive research grant proposals” (Solem et al., chap. 11)

**Recommended Readings:**
- Foote, “Time management” (Solem et al., chap. 1)
- Monk and Jocoy, “Career Planning: Personal goals and professional contexts” (Solem et al., chap. 2)

**Assignments:** No writing assignment this week

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**Week 5:**

**February 19**

**Research ethics 1: Ethical commitments and positionality in field research**

**Required Readings:**
- Hay and Israel, “Private people, secret places: Ethical research in practice” (Solem et al., chap. 12)
- Valentine 2005: “Geography and ethics: Moral geographies? Ethical commitment in research and teaching”
- Skelton 2001: “Cross-cultural research: Issues of power, positionality and ‘race’”
- Sultana 2007: “Reflexivity, positionality and participatory ethics: Negotiating fieldwork dilemmas in international research”

**Recommended Readings**
- Sundberg 2015: “Ethics, entanglement and political ecology”
- Kobayashi 2001: “Negotiating the personal and the
Assignment: 1-2 page critical response to the readings
Brief (750 word) reflection on the ethical considerations you confront in your research

Week 6:
February 26  Research ethics 2: Ethics of publishing and knowledge production

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<tr>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Brunn 2009: “Academic publishing” (Solem et al., chap. 13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Batterbury 2017: “Socially just publishing: Implications for geographers and their journals”</td>
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<td>Paasi 2015: “Globalization, academic capitalism and the uneven geographies of international journal publishing spaces”</td>
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<td>Garcia-Ramón 2003: “Globalization and international geography: The questions of languages and scholarly traditions”</td>
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<td>Fregonese 2017: “English: <em>Lingua franca</em> or disenfranchising?”</td>
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<td>Castree 2006: “Geographical knowledges, universities, and academic freedom”</td>
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<td>Wainwright and Büscher 2017: “From a New Deal to Projekt Deal: Time for solidarity with German scholars.”</td>
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Assignment: 1-2 page critical response to the readings

Brief (750 word) reflection on the politics of language in your research. Are there ethical considerations associated with your use of language? What audience(s) will you write for?

Week 7:
March 5 Research ethics 3: Navigating and negotiating the IRB
Guest speaker: Jeanne Diederich, IRB/ORIP Administrator
Office of Research Integrity and Protections

Required Readings:
Curran 2006: “Ethical considerations for research in cross-cultural settings”

Dyer and Demeritt 2009: “Un-ethical review? Why it is wrong to apply the medical model of research governance to human geography”

Martin 2007: “Bureaucratizing ethics: Institutional review boards and participatory research”

Butz 2008: “Sidelined by the guidelines: reflections on the limitations of standard informed consent procedures for the conduct of ethical research”

Recommended Readings:
Dhanju and O’Reilly 2013: “Human subjects research and
Readings
(read at least
one of these)

- the ethics of intervention: Life, death, and radical geography in practice
  
  Elwood 2007: “Negotiating participatory ethics in the midst of institutional ethics”

- Bradley 2007: “Silenced for their own protection: How the IRB marginalizes those it feigns to protect”

Assignment:

Carefully read through the website researchintegrity.syr.edu/human-research/getting-started-human-research/, including the links: ‘Where to begin,’ ‘Preparing a new study: The review process,’ ‘Post-approval actions,’ and ‘Study conclusions.’

For students doing research involving human subjects: complete online CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) training, available here: researchintegrity.syr.edu/human-research/education-and-required-training/

(give yourself a couple hours to get through this)

Write a brief (750 word) reflection on the IRB and its relationship to the other ethical issues we have been reading, writing and talking about

Spring Break: March 12-16

Week 8:
March 19 Proposal element 1: Writing a research statement

Guest presenter: Matt Huber

Readings: Matt’s NSF proposal

Also, read the Introduction/research statement sections of six other proposals from the Proposals folder on Blackboard

Assignment: 1. For each introduction section you read, write down or diagram (a) how they structure research statement; (b) where in the introduction do they directly explain the research focus; (c) how do they set up their research statement; (d) how effective is this statement; and (e) what could the author have done better?
2. Write a research statement for your own research in the format and style of an NSF proposal, and drawing on what you learn from reading the proposals in the Proposals folder on Blackboard. Bring three hard copies of this to class for workshopping.

Week 9:
March 26  Proposal element 2: Writing research questions

Guest presenter:  Timur Hammond

Readings:  Timur’s Fulbright proposal

Required:  Hung and Popp: “How to frame a researchable question”
http://williamcronon.net/researching/questions.htm

Review Timur’s proposal writing notes

Read the research questions sections of six other proposals from the Proposals folder on Blackboard


Assignment:  1. For each introduction section you read, write down or diagram (a) how they structure the research questions; (b) where in the proposal do they place the research questions and why; (c) how do they set up their research questions; (d) how effective is the research questions; and (e) what could the author have done better?

2. Write a research questions for your own research in the format and style of an NSF proposal, and drawing on what you learn from reading the proposals in the Proposals folder on Blackboard. Bring three hard copies of this to class for workshopping.

Week 10:
April 2 Proposal element 3: Writing a theoretical framework

Guest presenter:  Jamie Winders

Readings:  Jamie’s NSF proposal
Also, read the research theory/literature review sections of three other proposals from the Proposals folder on Blackboard

Assignment:

1. For each theory section you read, write down or diagram (a) how they structure the theoretical overview; (b) where in the proposal do they place the theoretical section and why; (c) how do they set up the theoretical section; (d) how effective is the theoretical overview; and (e) what could the author have done better?

2. Draft a theoretical statement for your own research in the format and style of an NSF proposal, and drawing on what you learn from reading the proposals in the Proposals folder on Blackboard. Bring three hard copies of this to class for workshopping.

Week 11:
April 9 Proposal element 4: Writing the empirical context (AAG Week)

Guest presenter: Peng Gao

Readings: Peng’s XXX proposal

Also read the empirical sections of three other research proposals in the Proposals folder on Blackboard

Assignment:

1. For each empirical section you read, write down or diagram (a) how they structure the empirical overview; (b) where in the proposal do they place the empirical overview and why; (c) how do they set up their empirical section; (d) how effective is the empirical overview; and (e) what could the author have done better?

2. Write the empirical discussion of your own research in the format and style of an NSF proposal, and drawing on what you learn from reading the proposals in the Proposals folder on Blackboard. Bring three hard copies of this to class for workshopping.

Week 12:
April 16 Proposal element 5: Writing your research methods
Guest presenter: Natalie Koch

Readings: Natalie’s NSF DDRI proposal
Also read the empirical sections of six other research proposals in the Proposals folder on Blackboard

Assignment:
1. For each methods section you read, write down or diagram (a) how they structure the research methods discussion; (b) where in the proposal do they place the methods section and why; (c) how do they set up their methods section; (d) how effective is the discussion of research methods; and (e) what could the author have done better?

2. Write a research methods section for your own research in the format and style of an NSF proposal, and drawing on what you learn from reading the proposals in the Proposals folder on Blackboard. Bring three hard copies of this to class for workshopping.

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**Week 13:**

**April 23**  
Student-led topics and readings

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**Week 14:**

**April 30**  
Student-led topics and readings

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Final research proposal due Monday, May 7 by 12noon
Extended Bibliography


Hung, P.Y. and A. Popp, “How to frame a researchable question” [http://williamcronon.net/researching/questions.htm](http://williamcronon.net/researching/questions.htm)


Solis, P. “Preparing competitive research grant proposals,” chapter 11 in Solem, Foote & Monk.


Sui, D. and D. DeLyser 2012. Crossing the qualitative-quantitative chasm I: Hybrid geographies, the spatial turn and Volunteered Geographic Information (VGI), Progress in Human Geography, 36: 111-124.


