

**INLS 781-003 Proposal Development (1.5 credit hours)**

Fall Semester 2015 (8/18-9/29), Tuesdays 2:00-4:45, Room 208 Manning Hall

Instructor: Mary Grace Flaherty

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Office hours: Room 204 Manning Hall, Thursday 10:15-11:45 a.m. or by appointment

**Course Description:**

During this course, each student will develop a proposal for the work to be completed during the following semester in the master's paper/project (INLS 992). Prerequisite: INLS 581.

**Textbook and readings**

The required text for the course is: Punch, K.F. (2007). *Developing Effective Research Proposals*. Sage. We will read the entirety of this book and use it to structure our work together.

In addition, we will read several chapters from: Wildemuth, B.M. (2009). *Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science*. Libraries Unlimited. It may be useful for you to have a copy of it available for your own use. It will also be available on reserve at the SILS Library.

Additional required readings are listed on the class schedule. In addition, class members will be reading independently in support of their proposal development. You will be expected to report on some of these readings during class discussion, as noted on the class schedule.

**Assignments and grading**

The course grade will be based on the completed proposal (85%, due October 20) plus class participation (15%).

**The Honor Code**

The UNC Honor Code, which prohibits giving or receiving unauthorized aid in the completion of assignments, is in effect in this class. The Instrument of Student Judicial Governance gives examples of actions that constitute [academic dishonesty](#).

There are some specific guidelines for this class.

- You are encouraged to discuss the issues raised in class or by the readings with each other. Class time will be used for this purpose, but feel free to have such discussions outside of class meetings as well.
- You may give and receive assistance regarding the use of hardware and software, including statistical analysis software.

- You will be expected to read and critique your classmates' work, as noted on the class schedule. While this activity may also give you ideas for your own work, each student's proposal is expected to be unique. If you have any questions about the influences of your classmates' thinking on your own work, please discuss them with me.

### Other course policies

- You are encouraged and expected to participate in discussions.
- Reading assignments should be completed before class so that you can ask questions and participate.
- All cell phones should be turned off during class; please, no texting during class.
- If there is something you don't understand, please ask a question. If you don't want to ask during class, visit me during office hours.
- Assignments must be turned in at the beginning of the class in which they are due. Peer review should be completed and returned by the Saturday following the assignment due date by 1:00PM.

### Class Schedule - Summary

| <b>Session Number<br/>Date</b>     | <b>Topic</b>  | <b>Readings</b>   | <b>Due Dates</b>   |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Session 1 –<br/>August 18</b>   | Course overview;<br>discussion of initial ideas<br>for papers; preliminary<br>research questions          | <b>Before 1<sup>st</sup> session,</b><br>please read<br>Punch - Chapters 1 & 2  |  |
| <b>Session 2 –<br/>August 25</b>   | Positioning your question<br>within a particular area<br><br>Review of literature<br>searching techniques | Punch - Chapter 3<br>Wildemuth - Chapter 2<br>& one additional chap.<br>One example of past<br>master's paper as<br>model | <b>Assignment 1</b><br><i>Preliminary question<br/>peer review during<br/>class</i><br><b>Bring model to class</b><br><b>Bring laptop to class</b> |
| <b>Session 3 –<br/>September 1</b> | Reviewing the literature<br>within the area<br><br>Selecting and working<br>with your research<br>advisor | Webster & Watson<br><br>Skim/read abstracts of<br>faculty   | <b>Assignment 1</b><br><i>Preliminary question<br/>instructor review</i><br><br><b>Assignment 2 Plan</b><br><i>peer review during<br/>class</i>    |
| <b>Session 4 –<br/>September 8</b> | Returning to the<br>literature<br>Finalizing the research<br>question                                     | Punch – Chapter 4   | <b>Assignment 2 Plan</b><br><i>instructor review</i>   |

|                                     |  |   |   |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| <b>Session 5 –<br/>September 15</b> | Selecting a method: data collection, ethical considerations                | Punch – Chapter 5<br>Wildemuth – One chapter from Part IV<br><br>Two readings on method of interest | <b><i>Introduction chapter draft - instructor review</i></b><br><br><b><i>Literature review draft - peer review</i></b>   |
| <b>Session 6 –<br/>September 22</b> | Selecting a method: data analysis<br><br>Defining & recruiting a sample    | Wildemuth – choose chapter according to method of interest;<br>Wildemuth – either Chapter 13 or 14  | <b><i>Literature review draft - instructor review</i></b><br><b><i>Methods chapter draft - peer review</i></b><br><b><i>Notify instructor of advisor acceptance</i></b> |
| <b>Session 7 –<br/>September 29</b> | Putting the plan together<br><br>Moving from the plan to the project/study | Punch – Chapters 6 & 7; appendix 2  | <b><i>Methods chapter draft - instructor review</i></b>   |
| <b>October 9</b>                    | <i>Now you're ready for 992</i>  |   | <b><i>Final proposal Due</i></b>  |

### **Master's Paper/Project Proposal (85%)**

The primary purpose for this course is for each class member to develop a strong and workable proposal for a research study or project to be completed during INLS 992. The finished proposal will consist of three chapters: an introduction, which provides a rationale for pursuing the research problem/question; a literature review, which synthesizes what we already know about the research problem/question; and a methods chapter, which describes the data collection and analysis methods to be used to address the research problem/question. These three chapters will be developed iteratively during the course, with peer and instructor review and feedback. They will be combined in the final proposal, due on October 20.

The specific due date for each chapter is listed on the class schedule. The chapters and their drafts or other intermediate deliverables are listed here:

- Assignment 1, Introduction chapter
  - Preliminary research question and glossary, for peer review
  - Preliminary research question and glossary, for instructor review
  - Introduction chapter draft, for instructor review
- Assignment 2, Literature review/background chapter
  - Literature review search plan, for peer review
  - Literature review search plan, for instructor review
  - Literature review chapter draft, for peer review
  - Literature review chapter draft, for instructor review
- Assignment 3, Methods chapter

- Methods chapter draft, for peer review
- Methods chapter draft, for instructor review
- Final proposal (Introduction chapter, Literature review/background chapter, Methods chapter)

**Peer review that happens outside of class sessions should be completed and returned by the Saturday following the assignment due date by 1:00PM.**

### **Pieces of the puzzle**

#### **Preliminary research question**

For the purposes of this assignment, the statement of your research question should consist of two paragraphs. The first paragraph should introduce the general area of your research and situate your question within that area. In other words, the purpose of the first paragraph is to provide a rationale for your research question (the rationale will be elaborated further as you develop the Introduction chapter). The second paragraph is the explication of the research question itself. The question should be stated (either as a question or formal hypothesis) and any additional information needed to provide context for the question should be provided.

Attach a glossary to your question definition. In the glossary, there should be an entry for each critical component of your question. For example, if your question were, "What are the effects of a person's domain knowledge on their formulation of Web search strategy?", you would have entries for at least the following terms: domain knowledge, formulation, Web search strategy. Each entry should define the term (including clarifying the scope of the term), and examples may be provided if appropriate.

#### **Introduction chapter**

Develop your research question into a brief chapter (usually 4-10 pages, double-spaced). Provide a strong rationale for pursuing your area of research. Explain the motivations behind the research you are proposing: *why is it important to pursue this research?*

At this point, you will drop the glossary, though those definitions will be incorporated into your proposal; they may be most appropriately provided and discussed in the Introduction chapter, as sections of the Literature review chapter, or as definitions of the variables provided in the Methods chapter.

#### **Literature review search plan**

The purpose of the literature review is to place your research questions/study in the context of what we already know about the research area. The Introduction chapter will have begun this process, but in the Literature review chapter, you will provide a much more detailed discussion of the intellectual context of your study. There are two primary steps: identifying relevant

literature and synthesizing that literature. The search plan will document the ways in which you will identify relevant literature.

Decide which databases/sources you will search and what search strategy(ies) you will use in each. Start with those articles that are most core to your interests (i.e., directly addressing some aspect of your research question) and work your way out from there. You will modify your specific research question(s) as you learn more about the research area and open questions within that area.

[Bates \(1989, p.412\)](#) suggests a variety of ways to identify relevant literature; these can serve as a guide for your own literature searching. They of course include subject searches in relevant databases, but they also include footnote chasing and citation searching, author searching, and browsing journal tables of contents and bookshelves that might be particularly fruitful. You are expected to incorporate all or most of these methods in your own searching.

There will be a lot of variability in the number of articles and other materials you might include in your literature review, but here is a bit of guidance on scope/scale: the expectation is that you might identify hundreds of potentially useful documents through your literature search; I would expect that you would closely examine the abstracts of over 100 documents; I would expect that you examine the full text of 50-70 articles; I would expect that you identify and read/examine 30-50 articles to be cited in your literature review.

Deliverable: List each database searched. For **each** database/source, provide the details of the search terms/strategies used, the number of items retrieved with each strategy and the date the search was performed. This search plan should be a bulleted list or outline format, rather than narrative. There's no limit on its length, but it is likely to be 1-3 pages, single-spaced.

### **Literature review chapter**

As you identify and examine the relevant literature related to your research question(s), you will be developing your own knowledge about your research area. In your literature review chapter, you will summarize/synthesize this knowledge. What do we know in relation to your research question, generally, and in relation to specific aspects of it? In what ways are past findings linked to your research plans? What questions remain unanswered? Which of those is the most important to pursue next?

A brief article that will guide you through this process is: Webster, J., & Watson, R.T. (2002). Analyzing the past to prepare for the future: Writing a literature review. *MIS Quarterly*, 26(2), xiii-xxiii (available in [UNC libraries via JSTOR](#)). Webster and Watson's advice is particularly useful for helping you to structure your review.

The final version of the literature review chapter will likely be 12-30 pages, double-spaced, depending on how much relevant literature exists. At the end of the literature review, state your research questions very specifically and clearly.

## **Methods chapter**

In this chapter, you will describe your plans for how you will conduct your study. The plans should include descriptions of the way(s) in which you will collect the data needed to address your research question(s), the source(s) from which you will collect your data (including how you will identify and recruit/gather those sources), and the way(s) in which you will analyze the data. It should conclude with a paragraph or two related to the anticipated implications of your study; i.e., given the results that may come from your study, what impact might they have in the world? While speculative, this final section should tie back to the rationale for the study provided in the introduction.

While the methods chapter does not need to be long or excessively detailed, it does need to be clear and unambiguous. The reader of this chapter should be able to carry out your study in the way you would wish, without having to ask for clarification of any of the procedures.

## **Evaluation of the proposal**

Feedback will be provided on each intermediate deliverable; no grade will be assigned until the final proposal is read by the instructor.

The proposal will be evaluated in terms of the significance and potential impact of the proposal study (i.e., the research question/problem); the completeness of the literature review; the quality of the synthesis/integration evident in the literature review; the quality of the reasoning/logic connecting past studies to the proposed study; the validity and practicality of the data collection and analysis methods proposed for addressing the research question; and the clarity of the writing.

## **Class Participation (15%)**

There will be a variety of ways in which each class member can participate in this class, including participating in in-class discussions (general and team-based), and by providing comments and suggestions on drafts created by other class members.

Based on the UNC Registrar Policy for courses (<http://regweb.unc.edu/resources/rpm24.php>) semester grades will be H, P, L or F for graduate students. Grades for individual assignments will be based on points obtained on each assignment, weighted by percentages listed above, to calculate final grades. Numerical grades for the course as a whole will roughly translate into the following letter grades:

96.0-100% = H (High Pass)

80.0-95.9% = P (Pass)

65.0-79.9% = L (Low Pass)

< 64.9% = F (Fail)

If you have any concerns or questions about your grades (or any other issues) at any time, please feel free to discuss with me. If you feel you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, please contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Also, please contact UNC Disability Services at (919) 962-8300 or [disabilityservices@unc.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@unc.edu) at the Student and Academic Services Buildings, located in Suite 2126, 450 Ridge Road, to formally coordinate accommodations and services.

*Sincere thanks to Barbara Wildemuth for sharing previous syllabi and class resources.*

*August 11, 2015*