

# **INLS 781-002 - Proposal Development**

## **- Spring 2019 (1.5 credits)**

**Thursday, 5:45pm – 8:30pm**  
**Manning Hall, Room 304**  
**Class runs from January 10<sup>th</sup> – February 28<sup>th</sup>**

## **Instructor Information**

Dr. Brian Sturm

Office: Manning Hall #111 (962-2460)

Office Hours: Drop-in or by appointment

Email: [sturm@ils.unc.edu](mailto:sturm@ils.unc.edu)

## **Course Description**

This class is a 1.5-credit hour course designed to help students develop a research or project proposal as the precursor to their master's paper or project. By design it is more of a collaborative mentorship between each student and the professor, but the class periods will include peer learning, small group work, and limited lecture and discussion. All work, both in-class and out-of-class, is geared to further each student's individual proposal. Each student, then, will be pursuing unique - though related - areas of interest, and the class period will serve as time to share questions, ideas, and problems. This is a "flipped" classroom approach, so please come to class each week prepared to work further on your own project and bounce ideas off your colleagues and professor.

## **Target Audience**

Graduate students in their third semester as full-time students or in the semester preceding the one in which they plan to write their master's paper.

# Course Prerequisites

INLS 581 - Research Methods Overview is a prerequisite for this course.

# Course Goals and Key Learning Objectives

By the end of the class, students should be able to:

1. Express the functions of a research proposal.
2. Understand the general framework of a research proposal and critique its component parts.
3. Design a literature review that supports and frames a research area.
4. Formulate a concise and focused research question.
5. Select and justify their choice of research method(s) for their proposed study.

# Required Text

Punch, K. F. (2016). *Developing effective research proposals* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London, England: Sage.

# Additional Readings:

[http://ils.unc.edu/courses/2019\\_spring/inls781\\_002/INLS781additionalreadings.pdf](http://ils.unc.edu/courses/2019_spring/inls781_002/INLS781additionalreadings.pdf)

# UNC Honor Code

It is your responsibility to read the Honor Code, which can be found online at: <http://instrument.unc.edu/instrument.text.html>. Here are a few pieces that are relevant to your course work and conduct:

A. General Responsibilities

It shall be the responsibility of every student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to:

1. Obey and support the enforcement of the Honor Code;
2. Refrain from lying, cheating, or stealing;
3. Conduct themselves so as not to impair significantly the welfare or the educational opportunities of others in the University community; and
4. Refrain from conduct that impairs or may impair the capacity of University and associated personnel to perform their duties, manage resources, protect the safety and welfare of members of the University community, and maintain the integrity of the University.

#### B. Academic Dishonesty

It shall be the responsibility of every student enrolled at the University of North Carolina to support the principles of academic integrity and to refrain from all forms of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Plagiarism in the form of deliberate or reckless representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise.
2. Falsification, fabrication, or misrepresentation of data, other information, or citations in connection with an academic assignment, whether graded or otherwise.
3. Unauthorized assistance or unauthorized collaboration in connection with academic work, whether graded or otherwise.
4. Cheating on examinations or other academic assignments, whether graded or otherwise, including but not limited to the following: (a) Using unauthorized materials and methods (notes, books, electronic information, telephonic or other forms of electronic communication, or other sources or methods), or (b) Representing another's work as one's own.
5. Violating procedures pertaining to the academic process, including but not limited to the following: (a) Violating or subverting requirements governing

administration of examinations or other academic assignments; (b)  
Compromising the security of examinations or academic assignments; or (c)  
Engaging in other actions that compromise the integrity of the grading or  
evaluation process.

## Professional Conduct

In addition to the UNC Honor Code, I expect that you will demonstrate integrity and professionalism in your participation in this course, and in the fulfillment of all of your course assignments. This includes completing the assigned readings on the dates they are due, attending class sessions, dedicating adequate time for your participation (both in-class and out-of-class), and putting forth effort, care and thought in preparing your written assignments. I also expect you to show respect for all members of this course and all comments and questions posed by them.

## Grading

[H] High Pass (95% - 100%)	Truly outstanding work that goes well-beyond the requirements specified in the assignment description. This is a mark of distinction. Very few papers will receive this grade.
[P] Pass (80% - 94%)	Papers that receive this grade will meet all or most of the requirements specified in the assignment description. Work that is quite good will receive this grade because of the large range. Most papers will receive a score in this grade range. All scores in this range are completely acceptable, although if you are towards the low end, you might want to speak with me about how to improve your work in the future.
[L] Low Pass (70% - 79%)	Papers that receive this grade are barely acceptable. I <i>usually</i> do not assign this grade. If your paper is a disorganized mess or if you have clearly missed the mark, then I will assign you a temporary grade and ask you to do it over. A 'do-over' at this level will not receive a grade higher than the lowest grade received by someone who did not have the do-over option.
[F] Fail (0% - 69%)	Papers that receive this grade are unacceptable and meet very few (if any) of the requirements specified in the assignment description. This is another grade that I <i>usually</i> do not assign. Instead, I will assign you a temporary grade and ask you to re-do the assignment. A 'do-over' at this level will not receive a

	grade higher than the lowest grade received by someone who did not have the do-over option.
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## Course Outline

1. Definitions, Functions, and Framework for Research Proposals
2. Writing Effective Research Questions
3. Designing a Literature Review
4. Selecting an Appropriate Research Method
5. Putting it All Together

## Class Schedule

Please bring your laptops/writing devices to class each day, as you will need them to work on your proposals.

### January 10<sup>th</sup> Proposal Frameworks

**Topic:** Purpose and organization of a research proposal; overview of “keyhole” model; theoretical frameworks for your research; overview of [faculty](#) and their [research](#).

**Readings:**

- Punch, K.F. (2016). *Developing Effective Research Proposals*. Sage.
- Chapter 1, Introduction
  - Chapter 2, Understanding readers, expectations and functions
  - Chapter 8, Getting tactics right

**In-class:**

1. We will begin with an overview of the readings and questions that they raised for you.
2. We will then move to a brief overview of a proposal’s purpose and organizational structure.
3. We will take some time to write a paragraph or two covering your initial ideas for your research: topic area(s), possible data sources, and questions that interest you.

4. We will then share these ideas in small groups and do a “Write Around” to elicit peer feedback.
5. You will have a bit more time to make changes to your ideas, and then you will email your ideas to the professor at the end of class.

If you plan to do a study involving human subjects, you **MUST** have completed the CITI Ethics training *BEFORE* submitting your IRB request. You should have completed that in INLS 581, but if not, please go [here](#) to register and log in with your UNC ONYEN.

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## January 17<sup>th</sup> Research Questions

**Topic:** Research questions: identifying, formulating, and positioning the question in relevant theory; **BRING TO CLASS** one example of a past master’s paper that could serve as a model for your work (search for master’s papers in the [Carolina Digital Repository](#) or in the SILS Library, first floor), either in terms of content area or in terms of research methods employed.

### Readings:

Punch, [Chapter 4, Developing a general framework for proposals]

Wildemuth, B.M. (2017). Applications of social research methods to questions in information & library science. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited. [Chapter 2, Developing a research question]. *SILS library reserve: Z669.7. W55 2017*

Agee, J. (2009). [Developing qualitative research questions: a reflective process](#). *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(4), 431–447.

### In-class:

1. We will begin with a review of your research ideas from last week
2. We will have a brief overview of the readings
3. We will discuss how to frame a research question
4. We will then form small groups based on related topic areas and share our chosen master’s papers. Explain its basic structure, its relation to your proposed research, and any other benefits you draw from it (style, clarity, length, etc.). Also look for any glaring

problems you see with that study. Then share your ideas for your own study. The point here is not only to get your ideas aired, but for everyone in the group to challenge each other with questions and concerns. You're trying to help each other avoid major pitfalls down the line.

5. Next we will do a "Roll Around" to expose you to other people who might be interested in related topics.
6. Then we will take some time to write a draft research question for your own study, and do a "Write Around" with your groups for feedback and exploration.

### **ASSIGNMENT 1: Draft Introduction** (see assignment descriptions below)

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## **January 24<sup>th</sup> The Literature Review**

**Topic:** Literature Reviews: identifying pertinent literature and organizing/presenting it for reading ease. Please **BRING YOUR LAPTOPS** so you can search relevant databases

### **Readings:**

1. Punch, Chapter 5, Using theory and dealing with the literature
2. Randolph, J. J. (2009). [A guide to writing the dissertation literature review](#). *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation*, 14(13).
3. Webster, J., & Watson, R.T. (2002). [Analyzing the past to prepare for the future: Writing a literature review](#). *MIS Quarterly*, 26(2), xiii-xxiii.

### **Further Readings if you wish [on reserve at SILS library]:**

1. Fink, A. (2010). *Conducting research literature reviews: from internet to paper*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage. [Chapter 1]. *SILS library reserve: Q180.55.M4 F56 2010*
2. Ridley, D. (2012). *The literature review: a step-by-step guide for students* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage. [Chapter 3]. *SILS library reserve: LB2369.R525 2012*

### **In-class:**

1. We will begin with a broad discussion of resources available for you to explore in building your literature review and quickly review the readings.

2. We will have a short searching workshop for some of the most pertinent databases you might find useful.
3. We will then break into groups based on topic areas and spend the rest of class working on our literature reviews, searching databases, and comparing notes with our groups. The idea, here, is not to work alone, but to help each other with search strategies, brainstorming search terms, sharing useful articles and/or bibliographies, and working collaboratively on your own and each other's projects; it's the "many hands make lighter work" approach.
4. Finally, we will take a few minutes at the end of class to create a Literature Review Search Plan to turn in for feedback.

**ASSIGNMENT 3: Draft Literature Review Search Plan (created in class and emailed to instructor; not to be included in final proposal)**

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## **January 31<sup>st</sup> Research Methods: Data Collection, Analysis, and Presentation**

**Topic:** Research Methods: identifying an appropriate method, collecting your data, analyzing your data, and organizing/presenting it for the proposal

### **Readings:**

1. Punch, Chapter 6, Presenting methods and methodologies
2. [An Overview of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Data Collection Methods](#) (National Science Foundation)
3. Wildemuth, B.M. (2017). Applications of social research methods to questions in information & library science. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited. *SILS library reserve: Z669.7. W55 2017*
  - Select the chapter most relevant to your work from **Part IV. Methods for Data Collection (chapters 17-30)**.
  - Select the chapter most relevant to your work from **Part V. Methods of Data Analysis (chapters 31-39)**.
4. If you are doing qualitative research, please also read;



Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research* (5th ed.). London, England: Sage. [Chapter 6, Primary Data Collection Methods]. *SILS library reserve* and *Sakai: Methods Readings folder*

5. If you are doing quantitative research, please also read:  
Maxim, P. S. (1999). *Quantitative research methods in the social sciences*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. [Chapter 12, Data Collection Methods and Measurement Errors] *SILS library reserve* and *Sakai: Methods Readings folder*

See also: [additional method readings](#)

#### **In-class:**

1. We will begin with a short overview of the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative methods and discuss the readings.
2. We will briefly discuss the organizational structure of the Methods section of your proposal.
3. We will break into small groups, this time based on method, to explore why you feel your chosen method is most appropriate and brainstorm other possibilities that might work as well (or better). Also discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of your chosen method of data collection.
4. Any leftover time can be used to work on writing your methods section.

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## **February 7<sup>th</sup> Synthesizing the Proposal**

Contact potential faculty advisors this week and get a commitment from one by next week, if at all possible, so you can begin working in tandem with that faculty member.

**Topic:** Putting together the pieces into a consistent and cohesive whole

**Readings:** Punch, Chapter 7, Writing the proposal

#### **In-class:**

1. Most of this class period we will use for you to work individually on your proposals and have one-on-one conversations with the professor. I will make sure to have time to chat with each of you to help you work out any difficulties.
2. We will also conduct an optional Institutional Review Board (IRB) workshop for those who wish it; others not needing IRB can work independently.

#### **ASSIGNMENT 4: Draft Methods**

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### **February 14<sup>th</sup>**

**In-class:** Individual work in class and one-on-one discussions with professor.

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### **February 21<sup>st</sup>**

**In-class:** Individual work in class and one-on-one discussions with professor.

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### **February 28<sup>th</sup> (last class)**

**In-class:** Individual work in class and one-on-one discussions with professor.

#### **ASSIGNMENT 5: Draft Literature Review**

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### **March 28<sup>th</sup>**

**ASSIGNMENT 6: Final Proposal (in Microsoft Word format, NOT as a .pdf) due to professor via email**

**If you need to meet between February 28<sup>th</sup> and March 28<sup>th</sup>, please email me to set up an office time.**

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# Assignments

The purpose of this course is to help you design and develop your research proposal or project for your master's capstone experience (INLS 992). As such, my feedback to you will include commentary on each of your draft sections, but the **grading will be on the finished product only**. You all work at different rates, and your proposals will develop at different speeds, so the DUE DATES of these drafts are for your information; they are NOT strict deadlines. The point of the draft assignments is to get you feedback as quickly as possible, and to keep you working at a pace that will enable you to complete the proposal in 9-11 weeks. If you need an extra day or two for a draft assignment, feel free to take it, but please let me know. I will read and respond to what you send me as quickly as I can. I will acknowledge receipt of any draft assignment you email to me, so if you don't get an email acknowledgement within a day or so, please double check with me.

The final product (Assignment #6) will consist of four sections:

1. Introduction (revised and expanded Assignment #1) that is: a short background to your area of interest
2. Literature Review (revised and expanded Assignment #5)
3. Research Questions (revised Assignment #2)
4. Methods (revised and expanded Assignment #4)

Grading for this class will be as follows:

Master's Paper/Project Proposal (100%)

## Assignment Descriptions:

### 1. Draft Introduction Chapter

Research and project proposals (and their subsequent studies) begin by elaborating the broad context for the reader. This is usually a two-three paragraph overview of the general topic area to "set the stage" for understanding the research or project. It helps the reader see the big picture of your topic, and it should include a very brief discussion of one or two relevant theories to help "situate" your study in its broader theoretical context. Often it is written AFTER the literature review (which helps identify the "gap"), but I want you doing a draft of it BEFORE the literature review so that you know the broad area in which your work will develop. Expect to revise it after you've assembled the entire proposal.

## 2. Draft Research Question(s)/Project Concept

This should be an initial attempt to frame your research as a question that you want to try to answer. Make sure it is a question! Make sure you can answer that question in a semester (keep it focused). Think about what kind of data you will need to answer that question, and ensure that you phrase the question such that your proposed data source(s) can answer it.

For those of you working on a master's *project*, this section is an initial attempt to explain your product or design. What do you want to do (not the steps to complete it, but the end result)?

## 3. Literature Review Search Plan

This is an outline of: 1) the sources (print, databases, etc.) you plan to use to search for your background literature, and 2) the keywords you are planning to use or are currently using in your search. Your *keywords* are important for me to know, as you may need to find synonyms or use database thesauri to search effectively.

## 4. Draft Methods

For a master's paper your methods chapter should consist of four parts:

1. A short overview of your chosen method including citations to 2-3 general methodology texts (perhaps discussing the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative methods), and 2-3 background readings about your specific, chosen method (surveys, interviews, document analysis, transaction logs, etc.). This introduction shows that you have done enough background reading to understand the major issues and challenges related to your research method.
2. A "Data Collection" section in which you describe how you will define the population you wish to address, how you will determine your sample (a subset of that population), what criteria and processes you will follow to generate your sample to study, and, for human subject studies, how you will actually collect your data, including recruiting people to your study, a step-by-step overview of the interactions you will have with

them (where, when, how), and any questions you will ask them in an interview and/or survey.

3. A “Data Analysis” section in which you describe how you intend to analyze the data you gather, what “lenses” you will use to examine your data, how you will code it, and any potential problems with your method that might skew the results.
4. A “Timeline” to show minor deliverables and when they are expected. Develop this in collaboration with your advisor, but include at least a rudimentary one in your proposal.

For a *master’s project* your methods chapter will look a bit different. Since you are creating a product of some sort other than a research paper, you don’t necessarily have “data collection and analysis” components to your methods, but you DO have a process that you need to explain. Your methods section should:

1. Explain in step-by-step fashion the process you intend to follow to develop your project
2. Propose a timeline for deliverables at various stages of completion
3. Propose a strategy for evaluating your product once it is complete

## 5. Draft Literature Review

Your draft of the literature review, for a master’s paper or project, should be a 4-6-page overview of background literature that pertains to your study. This is not just a listing and overview of these background readings, but a *synthesis* of them into a coherent essay (often divided into increasingly specific subheadings). This *structured approach* creates a literature review that leads the reader from the broad introduction of the topic to the focused research question(s) that follows. The literature review is perhaps the most time-consuming part of the proposal. *For your draft, I would prefer to see a fleshed-out prose review, but in the short time we have, I will accept a more outline format that resembles a synthesized, integrated annotated bibliography.*

Example 1: Let’s say you were doing research on public librarians’ perceptions of “floating collection” practices in North Carolina. You

might organize your literature review with the following sub-headings:

- Circulation practices/collection development in public libraries (general)
- “Floating collections” in public libraries (more specific)
- “Floating collections” in North Carolina (most specific)

OR

You may have three different areas that need to be addressed that don’t move from the general to the specific, but all are needed to understand your study (a “silo” approach):

- Community needs reflected in library collections (general)
- “Floating collections” in public libraries (general)
- Librarian satisfaction studies (general)
- Synthesis of these previous “silos” into a unified construct

Example 2: Let’s say you were doing research on the credibility of crowd-sourced, metadata tags in health information. You might organize your literature review with the following subheadings:

- Overview of ways to organize digital information (general)
- Meta-data, benefits and drawbacks (more specific)
- Professional metadata vs. user tagging (more specific)
- User tagging in health information (most specific)

## 6. Final Proposal

This is the culmination of your work this semester. It should take into account what you discuss with your colleagues in class, the feedback I give you on your draft assignments, discussions you have with your advisor, and ongoing reading you are doing. I want to see that you are actively thinking and revising your work, so incorporate my feedback, but don’t stop there. The more work you do now, the greater start you will have on your actual master’s paper, so do yourself a favor and produce the best product you can in the time provided.

