# INLS 781-003 - Proposal Development - Fall 2020 (1.5 credits)
## Tuesdays, 6:40pm – 9:25pm
## Remote/Synchronous
## Class runs from August 11th - September 29th

# Instructor Information

Dr. Brian Sturm
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Office Hours: By appointment

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# 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.

# Recommended Primary Texts

SAGE Project Planner: http://methods.sagepub.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/project-planner

USC Libraries LibGuide: https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/researchproposal

# Additional Readings:

http://ils.unc.edu/courses/2020_fall/inls781_003/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. At SILS, we strive to be an anti-racist organization, meaning we actively oppose racism in all its forms. To that end, we expect students, faculty, and staff to be compassionate of others, to help all of us see the implicit bias that exists in American society and in each of us, and to hold each other to high standards of cultural competence and inclusion.

# 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. |
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| [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 *usually* do not assign this grade. If your final paper deserves this grade, then I will assign you a temporary grade and ask you to do it over. |
| [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 *usually* do not assign. Instead, I will assign you a temporary grade and ask you to redo the assignment. |

# 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

## August 11th Proposal Frameworks

**Topic:** Technical issues; Purpose and organization of a research proposal; overview of "keyhole" model; theoretical frameworks for your research; overview of <u>faculty</u> and their <u>research</u>.

**Readings:** SAGE Project Planner: [Overview](), [Philosophy of Research](), [Defining a Topic]()

<span style="color:green">**In-class:**</span>
<span style="color:green">
1. Questions on the readings?
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 break-out groups for 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.
</span>

<span style="color:red">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. Also know, that, due to COVID-19, the UNC-IRB requires all human subject studies to be conducted virtually, if possible, so plan to do online surveys and virtual interviews. This may change how you recruit participants and how you capture and store your interviews, so think about this early and discuss it with me if you have questions.</span>

# August 18<sup>th</sup> Research Questions

**Topic:** Research questions: identifying, formulating, and positioning the question in relevant theory; <mark>BRING TO CLASS</mark> 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:** SAGE Project Planner: [Developing a Researchable Question](), [Research Design]()

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. Questions on the readings?
3. We will discuss how to frame a research question
4. We will then form break out 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. (40 minutes in breakout rooms, or about 10 minutes for each person to share your master's paper and your own ideas and get peer feedback)
5. Then we will take some time to write a draft research question for your own study, and we will share those as a whole group and offer feedback.

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

# August 25th The Literature Review

**Topic:** Literature Reviews: identifying pertinent literature and organizing/presenting it for reading ease. We will be searching relevant databases.

**Readings:**
1. SAGE Project Planner: [Reviewing the Literature](#)
2. Webster, J., & Watson, R.T. (2002). [Analyzing the past to prepare for the future: Writing a literature review.](#) *MIS Quarterly, 26*(2), xiii-xxiii.

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

# September 1<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. SAGE Project Planner: Planning and Practicalities, Data Collection, Data Analysis and Interpretation

2. An Overview of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Data Collection Methods (National Science Foundation)

3. 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]. *Sakai: Methods Readings folder*

4. If you are doing <u>quantitative</u> 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] *Sakai: Methods Readings folder*

   See also: <u>additional method readings</u>

**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 developing your methods section or finding articles to cite about your method.

# September 8<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:** SAGE Project Planner: <u>Writing Up</u>

**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 (in break out rooms). 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**

# September 15<sup>th</sup>

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

# September 22<sup>nd</sup>

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

# September 29<sup>th</sup> (last class)

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

**ASSIGNMENT 5: Draft Literature Review**

# October 20<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 September 29<sup>th</sup> and October 20<sup>th</sup>, please email me to set up a Zoom meeting.**

# 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 11-13 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 two, please double-check with me.

<span style="color:red">The final product (Assignment #6) will consist of four sections:</span>
1. <span style="color:red">Introduction (revised and expanded Assignment #1) that is: a short background to your area of interest</span>
2. <span style="color:red">Literature Review (revised and expanded Assignment #5)</span>
3. <span style="color:red">Research Questions (revised Assignment #2)</span>
4. <span style="color:red">Methods (revised and expanded Assignment #4)</span>

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 may 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 accomplish (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. [NOTE: this is excluded from the final proposal; it is just a planning document for you]

4. Draft Methods
   For a *master's paper* your methods chapter should consist of four-five 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. IF you are doing qualitative work: A "Positionality Statement" section in which you describe your own biases, possible blinders, background experiences, etc. that may impact how you collect and analyze your data. Include such things as whether you are an "insider" with the community under study, prior experiences with that community, possible impact of your race or gender or other personal attributes on your data collection and analysis.  The point here is to reveal any potential hidden biases that may influence your study/work.
   3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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

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 subheadings:

- 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.