INLS 781 – Proposal Development - Spring 2020 (1.5 credits)
Tuesday/Thursday, 2:00pm - 3:15pm
Manning Hall, Room 304
Class runs from January 9th – February 25th

Instructor Information

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

Required Text

Punch, K.F. (2016). Developing Effective Research Proposals. 3rd ed. Sage.

Additional Readings: (thanks for Dr. Barbara Wildemuth for this bibliography)

https://ils.unc.edu/courses/2020_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 *usually* 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 *usually* 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.

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. Research Ethics

Class Schedule

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

January 9th Proposal Framework

Topic: Purpose and organization of a research proposal; overview of "keyhole" model; overview of <u>faculty</u> <u>research</u>

Readings:

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

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'll talk about faculty research interests to begin your search for a paper/project advisor.
4. Finally, 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. Email these to the professor at the end of class for feedback.

January 14ᵗʰ Research Area/Introduction

Topic: Refining/selecting your topic from the myriad possibilities
Readings:

Punch, K.F. (2016).
- Chapter 4, Developing a general framework for proposals (the exercises at the end of the chapter should be particularly helpful)
- Chapter 8, Getting tactics right

In-class:
1. Please bring your revised ideas to class as we will share them in small groups and do a "Write Around" to elicit peer feedback. 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.
2. 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.

January 16ᵗʰ Research Questions

Topic: Research questions: identifying, formulating, and positioning the question in a particular area; BRING TO CLASS one example of a past master's paper that could serve as a model for your work, either in terms of content area or in terms of research methods employed (search for master's papers in the Carolina Digital Repository or on the SILS Library shelves.
Readings:

Wildemuth, B.M. (2009). *Applications of social research methods to questions in information & library science*. Westport, Conn: Libraries Unlimited. *SILS library reserve (Z669.7 .W55 2017)*.
- Chapter 2, Developing a research question
- Chapter 3, Questions originating in library and information practice

Also skim Chapters 4-6, if you feel they apply to your project.

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 any questions you currently have
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.). Look specifically at the research questions used and how they were worded. Also look for any glaring problems you see with that study.
5. Finally, we will take some time to write a draft research question for your own study that you will email to the professor at the end of class.

ASSIGNMENT 1: Draft Introduction (2-3 paragraphs)

January 21st Finding Pertinent Literature

In-class:
We will have a literature searching workshop. Please BRING YOUR LAPTOPS so you can search relevant databases

ASSIGNMENT 2: Draft Research Questions

January 23rd Creating the Literature Review

Topic: Organizing/presenting literature for reading ease: silos vs. funnels.
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.*
2. Ridley, D. (2012). *The literature review: a step-by-step guide for students* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage. [Chapter 3]. *SILS library reserve.*

In-class:

We will 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 everyone's projects; it's the "many hands make lighter work" approach.

January 28th Working with a Research Advisor

Readings:

Review the faculty and their research interests.

In Class:

Small group sharing of 2-3 faculty members you think might be willing/interested in working with you on your research. Share experiences you have had with those professors and discuss their relative merits for each project.

ASSIGNMENT 3: Draft Literature Review Search Plan

January 30th Research Methods and Data Collection

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: Research Methods: identifying an appropriate method and collecting your data

Readings:
1. Punch (2016), Chapter 6, Presenting Methods and Methodologies
2. An Overview of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Data Collection Methods (National Science Foundation)

3. If you are doing qualitative research, please 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*

4. If you are doing <u>quantitative</u> research, please 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:
https://ils.unc.edu/courses/2020_spring/inls781_002/INLS781additionalreadings.pdf

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 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.
3. Any leftover time can be used to work on writing your methods section.

February 4th Recruiting a Sample

Topic: How to define a pertinent sample, issues of recruitment
Readings:
Wildemuth, B.M. (2009). *Applications of social research methods to questions in information & library science.* Westport, Conn: Libraries Unlimited.
Read either:
Chapter 13, Sampling for extensive studies OR
Chapter 14, Sampling for intensive studies
In Class:

February 6th Data Analysis and Presentation

<mark>Notify professor of paper advisor acceptance</mark>

Topic: Research Methods: analyzing your data and organizing/presenting it for the proposal

Readings:

For those working with qualitative data:

Wildemuth, B.M. (2009). *Applications of social research methods to questions in information & library science.* Westport, Conn: Libraries Unlimited. [Chapter 30, Qualitative analysis of content]. *SILS library reserve*

See also:
https://ils.unc.edu/courses/2020_spring/inls781_002/INLS781additionalreadings.pdf

For those working with quantitative data, select most useful chapter from:

Wildemuth, B.M. (2009). *Applications of social research methods to questions in information & library science.* Westport, Conn: Libraries Unlimited.

Chapter 33, Descriptive statistics
Chapter 34, Frequencies, cross-tabulation, and the chi-square statistic
Chapter 36, Correlation
Chapter 37, Comparing means: *t* tests and analysis of variance *SILS library reserve*

See also:
https://ils.unc.edu/courses/2020_spring/inls781_001/INLS 781 additional readings.pdf

February 11th Research Ethics

Topic: Ethics and Morality in Research, IRB issues

Readings:
Punch (2016), Chapter 3, Including ethics in social science research
Select one or two of the readings most pertinent to you from those in the Sakai folder labeled "Ethics Readings," or find a more pertinent one of your own and bring it to class to share and discuss.

In-class:
1. We will begin with a review of the readings.
2. This should merge into a discussion of ethical considerations in data collection and in working with human subjects, and issues of transparency and dissenting opinions in presenting your work.
3. We will conduct an optional CITI training and Institutional Review Board (IRB) workshop for those who wish it; others not needing IRB can work independently.

ASSIGNMENT 4: Draft Methods

February 13th Synthesizing the Proposal

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

Readings: Punch (2016), 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 final difficulties.

February 18th

Individual writing time and consultations with the professor.

ASSIGNMENT 5: Draft Literature Review

February 20th

Individual writing time and consultations with the professor.

February 25th

Individual writing time and consultations with the professor.

March 17th Final Proposal Due

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

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 somewhat flexible. 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 by the deadline. If you need an extra day or two for a draft assignment, feel free to take it, but please let me know. I will acknowledge receipt of any assignment you email to me, so if you don't get an acknowledgement response within a day or two, please double-check with me.

Also, please send me Word files NOT pdf files, as commenting on/changing pdf files is really onerous.

This final product (Assignment #6) will consist of four sections:
1. Introduction (revised and expanded Assignment #1) that includes:
   a. a short background to your area of interest
   b. your conceptual framework and rationale for conducting this research (i.e., the need)
2. Literature Review (revised and expanded Assignment #5, building on Assignment #3, but DO NOT include your Search Plan in your final proposal)
3. Research Questions (revised Assignment #2)
4. Methods (revised and expanded Assignment #4)

Grading for this class will be as follows:
5. Master's Paper/Project Proposal (85%)
6. Class Participation (15%)

Assignment Descriptions:

1. Draft Introduction Section
   Research and project proposals (and their subsequent studies) begin by elaborating the broad context for the reader. This is usually a two-four 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. This section also points out the need for research/development in your area, and how you expect your study/project to fill that knowledge gap.

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), and what criteria and processes you will follow to generate/recruit your sample to study.
    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, and any potential problems with your method that might skew the results.
    4. A "Timeline" to show major 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 rather 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.

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. HOWEVER, a proposal is a work-in-progress, so expect it to be incomplete; you will continue to expand and refine it even after this class as you move toward your master's paper or project itself.