INLS 781: PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

FALL 2021
WEDNESDAYS, 10:10-11:25AM (SYNCHRONOUS ON ZOOM) AND 11:25AM-12:55PM (ASYNCHRONOUS ON SAKAI)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

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

INSTRUCTOR

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Office Hours: See course schedule
She / Her / Hers

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OVERVIEW

The final master's paper requirement at SILS gives you an opportunity to demonstrate that you are capable of:

- envisioning and carrying out a **sustained, coherent, and significant** process of work resulting in a tangible product;
- managing that process over several months; and
- presenting that work in written form.

There are two routes that you can take toward fulfilling this final requirement: you can focus on answering a question, or you can focus on solving a problem. (These are, of course, interrelated, but for the purpose of planning a master's paper this can be a useful distinction.) In either case, you will be required to present your work in the form of a substantial paper**.**

This course is designed to prepare you for your master's paper study or project by guiding you through the development of a **research proposal**. As part of that process, you will select and refine a question of study, conduct a literature review to determine what has already been done in your area of interest, secure a faculty advisor for your study, and determine and describe the methods you will use to conduct your study / answer your question. You should leave this course fully prepared to begin your study or project. You should also be able to repurpose components of the proposal you write here into the literature review and methods sections of your master's paper.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

The main text for this course will be the *SAGE Research Methods Project Planner*, available [online via the UNC Library](#) (you will need to sign in using your ONYEN to access this resource). We will all read the foundational topics of this planner, and you will also read the sections that are relevant to your chosen research methodology.

In addition, you will use the SAGE Research Methods database along with other UNC Library resources to find additional chapters and articles that relate to your chosen research or project methodology.

INCLUSION AND STUDENT SUPPORT

My teaching philosophy is grounded in relationships and shared meaning-making. This means that I believe people learn best when they are given the opportunity to construct their own understanding of content through authentic engagement with ideas and with each other. I strive to create learning environments that support and honor students' identities and prior knowledge. Who you are as a learner and as a person matters to me.

It is my intent that the diversity that you all bring to our class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. I have worked to include and develop course materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture. With that said, research in our field, like most others, has been largely built on a foundation of work from privileged voices (read: white, straight, cisgender, non-disabled, American, male), and I acknowledge that there may be both explicit and implicit biases in the selection of materials for this course. Suggestions for improvements are always encouraged and appreciated.

I understand that you have lives outside of this course, and that sometimes experiences outside of your control may interfere with your class performance (especially now, as we continue to deal with COVID-19). If this happens to you, please reach out. I will do my best to work with you to ensure that you can succeed in the course and that you are aware of SILS and university resources that might help you more generally. One place to find such resources is the Dean of Student's Student Support page: https://odos.unc.edu/student-support.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course, students will:

- Articulate the functions of a research proposal.
- Explain the general framework of a research proposal and describe its component parts.

- Formulate a concise and focused research question.
- Design and develop a literature review that supports and frames a research area.
- Select and justify the choice of research method(s)for a proposed study.

WHAT YOU SHOULD EXPECT

This course works a bit differently from others you have taken at SILS. While there is some new shared content (mostly focused on the purpose and structure of a research proposal document), the majority of the content you will explore in this course will be individualized to your specific project so that at the end of the eight weeks you have a well-planned proposal to guide your master's paper research or project. Therefore, I think about this course more as a "collective independent study" than as a traditional course. To that end, lectures in this class will be minimal, and most of your reading will be self-selected to support the development of your specific proposal. Most of your work will consist of:

- Small group or partner discussion aimed at sharing ideas and providing face-to-face feedback on the different sections of your proposal in progress (some of these will be done via Sakai forums, while others will be done during our synchronous weekly meetings);
- One-on-one, brief (10 minute) Zoom "mini conferences" with the instructor in weeks 3 and 8 of the course, where you will get a chance to ask individual questions and check in on your progress; and
- Individual tasks that are designed to help you to move forward with your proposal.

This course is not intended to re-teach content presented in INLS 581 (Research Methods Overview). Please keep in mind that everyone will be working with different methods and questions in this class, therefore collective instruction on topics such as interview methodology or how to conduct qualitative analysis would not be a productive use of our shared time and effort. You will most likely need to review some of this type of content on your own to successfully develop your proposal, however, and I have provided prompts for that within our course schedule. I will also share some resources with you on our course Sakai site that will give you some places to start when reviewing or diving deeper into methods-related content. Additionally, in your one-on-one conferences with the instructor you will be able to ask methods-related questions if you have them.

TIME COMMITMENT

One common question asked about both online and offline coursework is, how many hours per week should I plan to spend on this class? The answer can be calculated by using the UNC Registrar's definition of one "credit hour:" 15 hours of in-class instruction plus 30 hours of out-of-class work. Since this is a 1.5 credit hour course, that translates to approximately 67 hours of total work that you should expect to put into this class. On a weekly basis, that breaks down into:

- 1.25 hours per week of synchronous meetings,

- 1.25 hours per week of asynchronous activities and discussions (completed within Sakai immediately following each week's live meeting), and
- Approximately 4-5 hours of independent work on your proposal and other assignments.

With the exception of the weekly meetings and one-on-one mini-conferences, you can schedule your work time for this course however you would like, as long as you are able to complete all of your work and keep up with the course schedule.

GRADING

For Fall 2021, SILS will return to the H/P/L/F grading system. **My focus will be on providing you with actionable, thoughtful, qualitative feedback on all your assignments, including the final proposal document**. With that said, I still need to assign grades. Scoring details for each assignment will be provided in Sakai. You can also find rubrics for the final proposal and class participation grades in Sakai. Generally speaking, grades in this course work as following:

- **H:** The "H" grade is reserved for students whose work consistently goes **above and beyond** the stated expectations for a course or individual assignment. In this course, that might mean that you engage frequently and deeply in the class discussion forums (beyond the required posts); you ask and/or answer questions in the general discussion forum or in our weekly meetings; your intermediate assignments are especially thorough; and your final proposal is exceptionally comprehensive and polished.
- **P:** This grade is earned for work which meets all established assignment and course requirements adequately. If you follow the guidelines for each assignment as they are shared with you on the syllabus and in class, you should expect to earn a P.
- **L:** This grade represents work that is substandard in at least one major way. If you are in danger of earning an L for the course, I will let you know as soon as possible so that you can improve your performance.
- **F:** Work that falls significantly short of expectations.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL (60% OF COURSE GRADE)

The final deliverable for this class is a **proposal for a research study or project**. In general, your proposal will include the following major sections:

1. Introduction - provides an overview of the problem that you've identified, a specific research question and motivation for pursuing your chosen research study or project
2. Literature Review - synthesizes sources that already exist that are relevant to your intended research and (very importantly) what gap there is in the literature that you'll be addressing with your research. For a project, this section will be titled "Related Work."
3. Research Design / Project Design - describes the data collection and analysis methods to be used to address the research problem/question.

Additional details about what should be included in your proposal can be found in the generic template documents provided in Sakai; I have also provided multiple student examples of completed, high quality proposals. The final proposal is due between **October 13 and October 20** (anytime in this window is fine; papers submitted earlier will receive faster feedback) and is worth 60% of your grade for the class. Most students find it easiest to follow APA (6th or 7th Ed.) style for citations and formatting. Another style is acceptable if you prefer, however if you plan to use another style, please let me know.

INTERMEDIATE ASSIGNMENTS (20% OF COURSE GRADE)

The assignments summarized below are designed to help you move towards the final proposal. For most of these assignments, you will receive feedback both from me and from your peer review partner. You will turn all assignments in via the Forum tool in Sakai. **Intermediate assignment due dates are listed on the course calendar (below).**

1. **Preliminary research topic:** a short document (maximum of one page), that elaborates your initial ideas about what you would like to pursue for your master's paper research or master's project. It should include topic area(s), questions that interest you and why you want to research this topic / pursue this project.
2. **Research question drafts:** The process of coming up with a research question is iterative. You will start your literature search based on your initial thoughts, but as you proceed you may find that you are not finding what you expected and have to shift course. This happens; it is expected. Before you leave this class, however, you will need to have your research question (or project goal statement) locked down. You will post at least two drafts of your research question / goal statement for peer and instructor feedback.
3. **Literature search strategy:** For the literature review, you will be searching for articles, chapters, proceedings, etc., that will "make your case." For this assignment, I would like you to post a description of what you will be looking for and where (database, discipline). In other words, what are the major topic areas you plan to include in your literature review, what search terms will you use to find relevant materials, and where do you think you might find these materials?
4. **Literature review outline:** This document should consist of a **detailed** outline of your literature review, including section headings, summary of the content of each section and references to articles used to support that section. Keep in mind that the literature review is designed to support why you are doing the research and why it has merit. As such, it includes an overview of the currently accepted understanding of a topic and why it is important, leading up to a 'gap', problem, or issue you have identified and want to study.
5. **Methods summary:** A template will be provided for you to fill out that will guide you through your choice of method(s), trustworthiness considerations, and justifications.

You will continue to refine each of these items throughout the course, and each will be incorporated into your final proposal in some form. **So, please consider all of these DRAFTS – they do not need to be perfect when you submit them.**

PEER SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION (20% OF COURSE GRADE)

During our first week of class, you will choose a peer review partner with whom you will work for the duration of the course. For each of the first four intermediate assignments described above, you will provide constructive feedback to your partner by posting a reply to your partner's forum post (reply due dates are listed in the course calendar). In addition to reviewing your partner's work, I also strongly encourage you to read your other classmates' posts and comment on those when you have something potentially helpful to add to their work (replies to other classmates may be less detailed than replies to your peer review partner – that's completely fine!). Reading other students' posts may give you valuable ideas for your own work.

You will choose your own peer review partner based on whatever criteria is important to you, however I would encourage you to choose someone who is interested in a similar topic or intends to use a similar method to yours, since that will make it a bit easier for you to evaluate each other's work. Reading over your classmates' Assignment #1 posts should allow you to identify possible partners. You can use the Messages tool in Sakai to contact potential peer partners. Once you have found a partner, please indicate that on the Google doc found on our course homepage. I will assign partners for anyone who has not chosen one on their own by the end of Week 1.

In addition, I will assign each of you to a small discussion group based on similarities in your research/project topics or intended methods. You will meet twice with your small group for approximately 45 minutes each time, in weeks 2 and 6 of the course (during our scheduled weekly Zoom meetings). These meetings are intended to help you talk through your ideas and questions in an informal and supportive environment; the exact "agenda" of each meeting will be up to you and your group members based on what you would find most helpful at that point in the course. During the meetings, one person from your group should take notes summarizing what is discussed and post those to Sakai at the end of that day's class session. If specific questions arise from your meeting, you can send those to me via email anytime or post them to the course Sakai forum.

You will also be expected to attend two brief (10 minute) mini-conferences with the instructor in weeks 3 and 7 of the course to check in on your progress and get answers to any questions you might have about your proposal. These are completely informal and casual, so please don't worry about preparing anything ahead of these meetings. I will offer several scheduling options during those weeks for you to sign up for a convenient time, and we will have shorter whole-class meetings those weeks.

Collectively, these activities will represent the "participation" part of your course grade.

See the next page for the course calendar. Consider printing this out and posting it in your workspace to help you keep track of upcoming due dates.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Course Calendar				
		8/18	**8/19**	**8/20**
		Course Begins; Meeting #1 at **10:10am** Introduction and preliminary research / project ideas posted to Sakai by 12:55pm		Choose peer review partners on our Sakai homepage by this date; Dr. Rawson will post peer group assignments.
8/23	**8/24**	**8/25**	**8/26**	**8/27**
Sometime this week: Sign up for a mini-conference with Dr. Rawson		Meeting #2 at **10:10am**; will include peer group discussion time Mentor master's paper padlet and partner feedback on preliminary ideas posted to Sakai by 12:55pm		
8/30	**8/31**	**9/1**	**9/2**	**9/3**
First draft research question posted to Sakai by 11:59pm *Sometime this week: Meet with Dr. Rawson for mini-conference #1*		Meeting #3 at **10:10am** Partner feedback on preliminary research question posted to Sakai by 12:55pm		Literature search strategy due by 11:59pm
9/6	**9/7**	**9/8**	**9/9**	**9/10**
		Meeting #4 at **10:10am** Peer feedback on literature search strategy posted to Sakai by 12:55pm		
9/13	**9/14**	**9/15**	**9/16**	**9/17**
Literature review outline posted to Sakai by 11:59pm		Meeting #5 at **10:10am** Finalized research question posted to Sakai by 12:55pm.		Partner feedback on literature review outline posted to Sakai by 11:59pm
9/20	**9/21**	**9/22**	**9/23**	**9/24**
Partner feedback on finalized research question due by 11:59pm		Meeting #6 at **10:10am**; will include peer group discussion time Post advisor to Sakai by 12:55pm.		
9/27	**9/28**	**9/29**	**9/30**	**10/1**
Research / project methods template completed and posted to Sakai by 11:59pm		Meeting #7 at **10:10am** Sign up for a mini-conference slot by 12:55pm		
10/4	**10/5**	**10/6**		**10/13-10/20**
		Mini-conferences during class time (no whole-group meeting today)		**Final Proposals Due (submit in Sakai)**

UNIVERSITY HONOR SYSTEM

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has had a student-administered honor system and judicial system for over 100 years. Because academic honesty and the development and nurturing of trust and trustworthiness are important to all of us as individuals, and are encouraged and promoted by the honor system, this is a most significant University tradition. More information is available at http://www.unc.edu/depts/honor/honor.html. The system is the responsibility of students and is regulated and governed by them, but faculty share the responsibility and readily commit to its ideals. If students in this class have questions about their responsibility under the honor code, please bring them to me or consult with the Office of the Dean of Students. The web site identified above contains all policies and procedures pertaining to the student honor system. We encourage your full participation and observance of this important aspect of the University.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. See the ARS Website for contact information: https://ars.unc.edu or email ars@unc.edu.

SILS DIVERSITY STATEMENT

In support of the University's diversity goals and the mission of the UNC School of Information and Library Science, SILS embraces diversity as an ethical and societal value. We broadly define diversity to include ability, age, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, immigration status, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. As an academic community committed to preparing our graduates to be leaders in an increasingly multicultural and global society we strive to:

- Ensure inclusive leadership, policies, and practices
- Integrate diversity into the curriculum and research
- Foster a mutually respectful intellectual environment in which diverse perspectives and experiences are valued
- Recruit and retain students, faculty, and staff from traditionally underrepresented groups
- Participate in outreach to underserved groups in North Carolina and beyond

The statement is our commitment to the ongoing cultivation of an academic environment that is open, representative, and reflective of the concepts of equity and fairness.

~The Faculty and Staff of the UNC School of Information and Library Science