

INLS 781-001 - Proposal Development

Spring 2022 (1.5 credits)

Mon/Wed, 12:20am - 1:35pm

(SILS Plan: Courses that are scheduled to meet on campus (in person) will be held remotely from January 10-28 and resume as in-person on-campus on January 31.)

Class runs from January 10th - March 7th

Instructor Information

Arcot Rajasekar

Office Hours: Email to set up appointment

Email: rajasekar at unc dot 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.

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:

See in sakai resources for this file.

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 by 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.

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

Accessibility Resources

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 barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu.

Title IX Resources

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Please contact the Director of Title IX Compliance (Adrienne Allison – Adrienne.allison@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at <http://safe.unc.edu>.

Grading

[P] Pass (70% - 100%)	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.
[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 have you continue to revise.

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 (by week)

January 10th & 12th Proposal Frameworks

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

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

In-class:

1. Questions on the readings?
2. 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 the question(s) that interests you.
4. We will then share these ideas in break-out rooms 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.

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.

January 19th Research Questions (no class on January 17th)

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 either in terms of content area or in terms of research methods employed. Search for master's papers in the [Carolina Digital Repository](#).

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. Review of your research ideas from last week
2. Questions on the readings?
3. 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. Be critical! 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 DUE : Draft Introduction (see assignment descriptions below) on paper

January 24th and 26th 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.

In-class:

1. 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 break-out room colleagues. 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 2 DUE: Draft Research Question(s) on paper

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

January 31st and February 2nd 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 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] *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 developing your methods section or finding articles to cite about your method.

February 7th and 9th 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: [Writing Up](#)

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.

February 14th and 16th

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

ASSIGNMENT 4 DUE: Draft Methods on paper

February 21st and 23rd

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

February 28th and March 2nd

March 7th

ASSIGNMENT 5 DUE: Draft Literature Review on paper

April 1st

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

If you need to meet between March 7th and April 1st, please email me to set up an individual 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.

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 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 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 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.