CSUS 802
Survey of Research Methods

Fall 2015
Thursday 5:00-7:50 PM
225 Natural Resources Building

Instructor: Maria Claudia Lopez
Office location: 326 Natural Resources Building
Office Phone: 517-432-6143
Email: mlopez@msu.edu (best way to reach me)
Office hours: by appointment

Course description and background:
This course will provide an overview of the nature of interdisciplinary research. It will also assist in the
development of skills in critiquing, evaluating and interpreting published research, as well as conducting
research. The course is built on the idea that interdisciplinary research presents numerous challenges,
including the integration of multiple literatures derived from various research paradigms and disciplines.
Various methodological approaches and research techniques that are used in interdisciplinary studies in
the social sciences and in the Department of Community Sustainability will be explored. This course
provides students with the necessary skills to become competent consumers of published research. In
addition, it forms a foundation from which students may begin to conceptualize their own research
proposals, including a thesis or dissertation, and to choose which methods courses best suit their
purposes.

Course Objectives
This course has the following objectives

1. To introduce the basic nature, logic and processes of research.
2. Explore the ethical and practical dimensions of fieldwork.
3. To introduce some methods used in the department of Community Sustainability.
4. To understand and critique primary research literature.
5. To improve skills in thinking critically, and with reconciling disparate or conflicting
   information.
6. To develop a research proposal that coincides with the student’s interests. Preferably this is a
   potential topic for your thesis or dissertation.
   a. Formulate a research question
   b. Develop a literature review in the context of the research question.
   c. Select the methodology to answer that research question
   d. Describe the data collection procedures needed to address the research question
Student Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Understand why it is important to do research
- Formulate a research question
- Develop a literature review
- Get to know some methods used in sustainability research
- Be critical about the papers they read

Course Structure and Format

This course is an introduction to research and research methods for the first-year graduate students in the Department of Community Sustainability. The syllabus has been planned in a way that this class complements and is complemented by CSUS 800.

This course will include lectures, in-class activities, assignments, presentations and discussions. Typically, our class will start with a brief lecture, followed by a discussion of the course readings and student assignments. Assignments and other class activities will help you to think more about the research process and to illustrate concepts from the readings. Students should have completed the assigned readings before coming to class.

For some sessions, we will have guest speakers for the first half of the class. The guest speakers are professors from CSUS or other departments that will share their particular areas of expertise and the methods they use to answer their research questions. As you may have noticed some of the readings for the special guests are not listed yet. Additionally, each student is going to be in charge of selecting one reading on a method he will cover in class. The lecturer will post these readings (the ones from guest speakers and the ones on methods) in D2L at least one week before coming to class.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignments

Assignments are due on the Monday before class. That will permit the instructor to have time to read your assignment before class and to use them for the discussion, or for a class activity. These assignments are individually graded, and they represent 30 points of the final grade.

Presentations

Each student will make three presentations in class during the semester.

a) One presentation will take place after you submit assignment #6. The instructor will announce the exact day of that presentation at least one week before it. You are required to summarize your interview in 3 minutes, so that your classmates get to know something about the professor you interviewed. The presentation is part of the grade for assignment #6.
b) Each student will be in charge of presenting one method during the semester. Starting October 22 we will cover in class some methods to study the topics you are discussing in CSUS 800. Each student is responsible for presenting one method. Then, it is your responsibility to identify one topic you are interested in and then to find an article addressing that topic with a specific method (theory papers will not be allowed). You may need to look for more than one paper or more than one method since we are aiming to have as many methods presented in class as possible. You will send the article or the articles to the instructor and schedule a time to meet with her at least two weeks before the presentation. Together we will plan your presentation. The article will be distributed to all students to read before class. The day of the presentation you will present the method (not the article) in front of your classmates. The presentation will be timed and part of the grade is to keep the presentation between 13 and 15 minutes. Together with that presentation you will need to prepare a two-page summary of your method to hand out to your classmates (the instructor will make the copies for everybody).

The main purposes of this assignment are: 1) to introduce a method to your classmates, 2) to gain practice giving a good, short presentation, 3) to learn to summarize the main ideas of that method. That presentation together with the handout is worth 15 points of your final grade.

These presentations will not cover all the methods that can be used in the topics discussed in CSUS 800, but it will provide the students a good understanding of diversity of methods. To choose the article (and the method) you may use the class assignments (visit to the library, interview with professor, etc).

c) The last presentation takes places when presenting your research proposal.

A research proposal

By the end of the semester each student should have a research proposal that includes at least 15 articles in the bibliography (1 inch margins, 12 Times Roman font, 1.5 spaced). During the semester students will have some assignments associated with that research proposal. At the end of the semester, students will be required to give comments on the proposal of one of their classmates and also to present their work to the rest of the class.

Each student will write a research proposal on a topic of their choice. This proposal is an exercise that need not be on the same topic of your master thesis, or dissertation, although it can be. This paper will be completed in two steps: (1) select a research question and situate it in the existing literature (Part I); (2) develop an appropriate research design to answer your question (Part II). Specific guidelines will be provided in class. The research proposal (approx. 10 pages) is due at the end of the semester. Part I of the research proposal is worth 15 points and Part II represents 20 points of your final grade.

The day of the final exam you will present the research proposal. That presentation is worth 5 points of your final grade.

The instructor will post in D2L the Master thesis research proposals of some students from the CSUS that may serve as a guide for this exercise. Please be aware that these proposals are for their Master’ thesis and not the research proposals that they did in this course. But those will give a clear idea of the type of proposals you should have to defend your Master’s proposal.
Participation

Class participation is worth 10 points toward your overall grade. There are many ways to participate and this is less a matter of speaking up all the time and more about being engaged and making a good effort to contribute to the class.

Other

I reserve the right to raise the overall grade a bit for students who have worked hard, demonstrated that they have learned and have made positive progress during the semester.

Overall grading for the class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total point</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignments</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Methods</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research proposal Part I</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research proposal Part II</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation Research proposal</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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Grading scale for the course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93 to 100%</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>87 to 93%</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>80 to 87%</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>75 to 79%</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>70 to 74%</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>65 to 69%</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>60 to 64%</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt;60%</td>
<td>no credit</td>
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Late Assignments

Late submission of assignments will be discounted 20% of the total possible points. This is only fair to those in the class who made every effort to meet deadlines; otherwise they would be disadvantaged relative to those who submitted late and had more time.

Unexpected events take place and factors out of our control can obstruct our plans. I will be highly sensitive to such things, and any students with personal circumstances that hamper their ability to carry out certain tasks on time are encouraged to contact me in advance. On the other hand, I will be much less flexible if students do not contact me in advance.

Grief Absence Policy

Michigan State University is committed to ensuring that the bereavement process of a student who loses a family member during a semester does not put the student at an academic disadvantage in their classes. If
you require a grief absence, you should complete the “Grief Absence Request” web form (https://www.reg.msu.edu/sitemap.aspx?Group=7) no later than one week after knowledge of the circumstance. I will work with you to make appropriate accommodations so that you are not penalized due to a verified grief absence.

**Attendance**

You are expected to attend all classes and you should plan to inform the instructor when you might be absent, and give valid reasons for your absence.

**Policy on Plagiarism:**
Plagiarism in written assignments (i.e. the copying of material without citation of the source) is unacceptable behavior. It will lead to a zero on the assignment.

**Topics and Reading Materials**

All the readings for this course will be available electronically on desire2learn a few weeks ahead of the assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics and Readings</th>
<th>Readings for following week</th>
<th>Assignment for following week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 3</td>
<td><strong>Course introduction.</strong></td>
<td>The Murders in the Rue Morgue - by Edgar Allan Poe.</td>
<td>Assignment #1 due on September 7.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability Research an Introduction. Pages 3-10 in Franklin, Alex, and Paul Blyton.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><em>Researching sustainability: a guide to social science methods, practice and engagement.</em></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Routledge, 2013.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Integrating social and natural science.</strong></td>
<td>Heemskerk, Marieke, Karen Wilson, and Mitchell Pavao-Zuckerman.</td>
<td>Assignment #2 due on September 14.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Reading/Notes</td>
<td>Assignment/Due Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 8</td>
<td>Class activity based on assignment#4</td>
<td>Reading by Kim Chung “Qualitative Data Collection Techniques”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 22</td>
<td>Methods to study Community engagement</td>
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<td>Assignment #6 due on October 26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 29</td>
<td>Methods to study Community development Guest Speaker Stephanie Rustem, former master’s student in the department.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Part I of the research proposal, the literature review due on Nov. 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Details</td>
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<td>Nov. 5</td>
<td>Methods to study Economic Sustainability/sustainable development</td>
<td>Guest Speaker Phil Howard</td>
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<td>Nov. 19</td>
<td>Methods to study Ecological Sustainability</td>
<td>Guest speaker Steven Gray</td>
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<td>Nov. 26</td>
<td>Thanksgiving break</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 3</td>
<td>Methods to study Social Sustainability</td>
<td>Research proposal draft due on November 30</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Guest Speaker Dan McCole</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 10</td>
<td>Methods to Study Human Behavior and Sustainability</td>
<td>Assignment 7 # due on December 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 16</td>
<td>Presentation of the research proposals to the class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 17</td>
<td>Final version of research proposals.</td>
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Very useful for all assignments in CSUS 802 and in your academic endeavor, the library offers free courses to learn how to use citation management software programs, such as EndNote, Mendeley and Zotero. I strongly recommend that you take one of those courses.

**Course Assignments**

September 7: *Assignment #1*

After reading The Murders in the Rue Morgue - by Edgar Allan Poe.

Identifying aspects that are important when doing a research/investigation process. Write a one page essay describing those aspects.

September 14: *Assignment #2.*

Write a one page reflection on ethics working with communities.

September 21: *Assignment #3*

Based on the reading by Booth et al. (2009).

1. Describe your topic of interest
2. Narrow your topic of interest
3. Formulate a few research questions related to your topic of interest (use how and why)
4. Why is your question important (respond this for each one of your research questions)?

September 28: Review *Assignment #3 based on comments*

October 5: *Assignment #4.*


1. What is the research question motivating the paper?
2. What are the main findings
3. What are the strengths of the study?
4. What are 2 or 3 weaknesses of the study?
5. Do you think the methods used were the correct ones to address that question?
6. How could this study be improved?

You may need to learn more about the methodology and/or the theoretical assumptions employed by the researcher(s).

Useful websites to do this Assignment
October 19: Assignment #5
Provide an annotated bibliography of at least 5 articles that you are using in your literature review. The following link may be useful to understand what is an annotated bibliography http://guides.library.cornell.edu/annotatedbibliography. The goal of this assignment is two fold, first so that you understand what is the difference between an annotated bibliography and a literature review, and secon to make you work on your literature review in case you have not started yet.

October 26: Assignment #6.
Find a researcher related to your own area of interest (examples might include your advisor, another professor or specialist from the department or from another department, or a professional in an agency/non-profit/business). Arrange and conduct an interview (preferably for one hour) focused on the methods they typically use. In advance you need to decide what type of interview you want to do (interview to be structured, unstructured)¹. Take detailed notes, or (with permission) audio record the interview for analysis. Analyze the interview and write up a page or two on the themes that emerged, as well as your reflections on the process. You will handle this write up to all your classmates. The interview is individual (two students cannot interview the same person at the same time), ideally each of you should interview a different professor so as not to burden any of them too much. In order to organize this process, please let me know ahead of time who are you planning to interview.

November 2
Research question and situate it in the existing literature (Part I of the research proposal).

You should write a literature review that includes at least 12 articles. The following links may be useful to comprehend what is expected in a literature review http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review ands watch https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2d7y_r65HU. Be aware that while doing your literature review you may reframe or rethink your research question. You should also include the correct citations and the bibliography. If you want you can give the instructor a preliminary version of this literature review earlier in the semester. You may benefit from some comments before.

November 30.
Research proposal draft
You should have a first draft of your research proposal. This draft should be substantial enough so that one of your classmates could read it and comment it. Below are some if the sections that your draft should have.

For the Introduction:
Motivation and Research question
What the literature says about your research question (in two lines)
How you are planning to address your research question? What is the novelty of your research?

¹ You will get notes about how to plan your interview ahead of time.
For the literature review
Finding from the literature review 1.
Finding from the literature review 2.
Finding from the literature review 3.

For the methods
Describe the data collection procedures needed to address the research question
Describe the analysis needed to address the research question

If you want you can give the instructor a preliminary version of this research proposal draft earlier in the semester. You may benefit from getting comments earlier.

**December 7: Assignment # 7**
**Peer comments**
Comments on somebody else’s first draft. You will write two pages commenting the first draft that somebody else did. This kind of exercise is very common in academia when you are asked to review a paper from a journal.

The following question should guide your comments:

- What was the research about?
- Was the research question clear?
- Did the literature review justify that research question?
- Were the methods the correct ones to explain that research question?
- Do you have any recommendations so that the researcher could improve his proposal?
- Is there something that you particularly like about the proposal?

**December 16: Presentation of the research proposals**

By now you already will have received comments on your proposal by the lecturer and by one of your classmates. Those comments should be addressed in you presentation.
You will have 7 minutes for the presentation and 3 minutes to address questions from the audience.

**December 17: Final research proposals are due.**