CSUS 802
Survey of Research Methods

Fall 2014
225 Natural Resources Building

Instructor: Maria Claudia Lopez
Office location: 326 Natural Resources Building
Email: mlopez@msu.edu
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. To introduce some methods used in the department of Community Sustainability.
3. To understand and critique primary research literature.
4. To improve skills in thinking critically, and with reconciling disparate or conflicting information.
5. Explore the ethical and practical dimensions of fieldwork.
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 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 the department that will share their particular areas of expertise and the methods they used to answer their research questions. As you may have noticed some of the readings for the special guests are not listed yet. The lecturer will send these readings at least one week before coming to class.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignments

By the end of the semester each student should have a research proposal that includes at least 15-20 articles in the bibliography. During the semester students will have some assignments associated with that research proposal. At the end of the semester, students may 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.

Assignments are due on the Tuesday 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 40 points of the final grade.

A research proposal

Each student will write a research proposal paper on a topic of their choice. This proposal is an exercise that need not be in the same topic of your master thesis, or dissertation. 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.
Presentations

Each student will have to present twice during the semester.

Once at the end of the semester to present his/her research proposal. That presentation is worth 5 points of your final grade.

Additionally, each student will be in charge of presenting one method over the semester. We will schedule those presentations during the semester (starting Sept. 25). Please see the instructor to discuss possible topics and to define the date of your presentation. It will be timed and part of the grade is to keep the presentation between 10 and 12 minutes. The main purposes of this assignment are: 1) to introduce a method to your classmates, 2) to practice giving a good, short presentation. 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 and will provide a template for this summary). That presentation together with the handout is worth 10 points of your final grade.

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.

Other

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

Overall grading for the class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Total point</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research proposal Part I</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research proposal Part II</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation and handout of a method</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Research proposal</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grading scale for the course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93 to 100%</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 69%</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 64%</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;60%</td>
<td>no credit</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Late Assignments
Late submissions of assignments will be discounted 10% 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 took 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 make the effort to contact me in advance.

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics and Readings</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 28</td>
<td>Course introduction.</td>
<td>Assignment #1 due on September 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Read The Murders in the Rue Morgue - by Edgar Allan Poe (An electronic version of the book is available in the library and I will post a pdf file as well).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept.4</td>
<td><strong>Class activity based on assignment#1</strong></td>
<td>Assignment #2 due on September 9.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction to research. Paradigms, Theory and Ethics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 18</td>
<td>Suzi Teghtmeyer. Library and article database</td>
<td>The class will be at the Tech Instruction Room in the library on 3 West. Bring your laptops. After the talk by Suzi Teghtmeyer stay in the library. Find a peer reviewed article related to one of your research questions from a database such as JSTOR. The article cannot be a literature review and it cannot exceed 10 pages. You will use that article for assignment #4. You may need to read more than one article to be able to find one that suits your research question.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Oct. 2  | Research Design                                                           | Chapter 4
| Oct. 9  | Measurement                                                               | Chapters 5 and 6
| Oct. 16 | Sampling                                                                  | Chapter 7
| Oct. 23 | Guest Speaker Phil Howard. Visualizing data                              | Qualitative Field Research
Chapters 10 and 11
| Oct. 30 | Qualitative Field Research                                               | Chapter 12 |
Course Assignments

September 2: Assignment# 1

Please read carefully the text 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 9: Assignment #2.

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 16: Assignment #3.


In two pages address the following questions:

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
http://library.usask.ca/howto/evaluate.php
http://www.lenmholmes.org.uk/students/how2read/how2read_a.htm

September 23: Assignment #4.

Read the article you found at the library and repeat all the steps you did for assignment number 3. Handle the assignment and a copy of the article.

October 7: 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 15 articles. The following link may be useful http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review. 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.

October 4: Assignment #5.

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). 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.

October 28: Assignment #6

Research proposal outline.

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1 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. For more information go to http://classes.lib.msu.edu/class_list.php

2 You will get notes about how to plan your interview ahead of time.
By now you should have a clear understanding of your research question and why and how you will develop it. In this outline you should have,

For the Introduction

a) Motivation
b) Research question
c) What the literature says about your research question (in two lines)
d) How you are planning to address your research question? What is the novelty of your research?

For the literature review

a) Finding from the literature review 1.
b) Finding from the literature review 2.
c) Finding from the literature review 3.

For the methods

a) Describe the data collection procedures needed to address the research question
b) Describe the analysis needed to address the research question

November 11: Assignment # 7
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.

November 20: Assignment # 8
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 4 and 8: Presentation of the research proposals

Follow the structure of your outline to design your presentation. 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 11: Final research proposals are due.