PLAN 650 Research Design Seminar
Fall 2014, Tuesday 1:30-4:15pm, Saunders 119
Instructor: Ashok Das (ashokdas@hawaii.edu)

Overview
This course is intended for MURP students to learn to design a research project and write a good research proposal for their capstone or thesis. It will impart the essential theoretical and methodological grounding to conduct graduate level research in urban and regional planning. It is ideal for a student in the third semester of the MURP program, aiming to complete the capstone/thesis in the following semester(s). It will allow a student to develop a proposal that she can present to her advisory committee. However, a student who might have begun writing the capstone/thesis will also likely find the course useful, and is therefore encouraged to enroll.

The course will largely follow the seminar format, supported by lectures, including some by guest speakers. During the semester, a student enrolled in PLAN 650 is strongly encouraged to work closely with her advisor in developing a substantive research topic and foci. Clarity about the area/topic of interest will yield a sound, full-fledged research proposal at the end of the semester, which, in turn, will see the student transition smoothly and expeditiously into the actual writing phase of the capstone/thesis document. Thus, a student who intends to take this course is also urged to utilize the summer prior to taking the course exploring possible research topics, and collecting relevant information and preliminary data.

Learning objectives
The course will introduce the students to and hone their skills in the various aspects of good research design in urban and regional planning and the social sciences. The skills acquired from this course will also enable students to write effective research proposals for fellowships, grants, etc. Specifically, a student will learn to do the following:

• write an appropriate literature review for framing one’s research
• understand what a good theoretical/conceptual framework is and produce one
• develop strong (clear, simple, feasible) research questions and formulate appropriate hypotheses (where applicable)
• learn about data collection and management, broadly  
• choose appropriate research methodologies (including mixed methods and case studies) to analyze data to accurately fulfill research objectives  
• write research findings in a professional way – knowing how to write about qualitative and quantitative analyses; proper citing and referencing for academic and professional writing in planning; and presenting tables, charts, graphs, images, etc.

Course texts

Course readings will be from a couple of prescribed books as well as scholarly articles, and other materials. Articles and some other readings will be available on Laulima. Students are highly recommended to purchase the following books, which will be used often for class readings:


And the following title too, if your research will rely on using inferential statistics:

These are some other references that MURP students (given the kinds of research done for capstones/theses) will likely find useful:


The following are excellent guides for improving one’s writing, in general:


The “Other resources” folder on Laulima’s course website will provide supplementary resources.

Assignments and assessment

While developing a full proposal over the course of the semester, students will submit short assignments – the deconstructed elements of a research proposal – that they will present to and discuss with their peers. They will also perform peer review and learn to offer constructive feedback to their classmates on the materials they will present in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment/criterion</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction/Problem statement/Abstract</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research questions</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Literature review and theoretical framework</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Data and methodology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proposal presentation</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final written proposal</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation and peer review</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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The instructor will provide more information later about individual assignments. Although attendance does not carry points, to pass the course a student must not miss more than 2 class sessions without the instructor's consent.

**Weekly schedule of classes and readings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date, Task</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 26</td>
<td><strong>Course introduction and the research process</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Readings</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Date, Task</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>September 2</td>
<td><strong>Identifying and stating the problem; the significance of the research project</strong></td>
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<td>What topic(s) would you like to explore?</td>
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<td>Why would it be a worthwhile planning problem to investigate?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How to assert the significance and relevance of the issue?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Draft of Introduction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Readings</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Booth, Colomb, and Williams. 2008. Chapters 1-2</td>
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<th>Date, Task</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>September 9</td>
<td><strong>Framing research questions and hypotheses</strong></td>
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<td>How to articulate research questions?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Practical problems and research problems</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The purpose of hypothesizing</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Draft of research questions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Readings</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Submit Introduction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Suggested reading</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Date, Task</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
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<tr>
<td>September 16</td>
<td><strong>Situating research within the literature</strong></td>
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<td>Why is a literature review important?</td>
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<td>What are the elements of a good literature review? Organization, logic, thoroughness, breadth, gaps, etc.</td>
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<td>The annotated bibliography</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>September 23</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>September 30</th>
<th><strong>Data: what, why, and how</strong></th>
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<td></td>
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<td>Understand what data are; common sources of data for urban planning research</td>
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<td>What data to find and where?</td>
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<td>How to use data for research?</td>
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<td><strong>Readings</strong></td>
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<th>Week 7</th>
<th>October 7</th>
<th><strong>Analyzing data and overview of research methodologies</strong></th>
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<td>Quantitative and qualitative data and methodologies</td>
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<td>Why do researchers integrate quantitative and qualitative data and/or methodologies? When and how?</td>
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Readings

Suggested reading

Week 8
October 14

The case study
The merits [and perils] of doing case study research, especially for urban planning
Doing case studies with resource and time limitations
Concluding accurately and properly using case study data

Readings

Suggested reference

Week 9
October 21

Mixed methods research
What is mixed methods research and how to do it well?
The whys and hows of mixed methods for urban planning research

Readings

Suggested readings

Week 10
October 28

Making and supporting knowledge claims
Submit data and methodology

Readings

Other readings

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Week 11
November 4  **Holiday: Election Day**

Week 12
November 11  **Holiday: Veterans’ Day**

Week 13
November 18  Research ethics; citations, formatting, and presenting visual/graphical data

Draft of list of references; citations of graphics

Readings

Week 14
November 25  Reporting and presenting research findings; issues of style

Readings

Suggested reading

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Week 15
December 2  **Student presentations**

Week 16
December 9  **Student presentations**

December 12  Final proposal due