

**Department of Geography and the Environment**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**SYLLABUS Spring 2014**

**Research in Geography**

**GRG390L Unique #37905**

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Class Meeting Time: TH 5:00-8:00 PM  
Class Meeting Place: CLA 0.124  
Office Hours: TU 2:00-5:00 PM, CLA 3.426  
Professor: Dr. Rebecca Torres  
[rebecca.torres@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:rebecca.torres@austin.utexas.edu)

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

The research design and proposal writing process is among the most important, exciting, challenging, frustrating, alienating and rewarding endeavors for graduate students and faculty alike. This course seeks to demystify this process through a rigorous but supportive environment in which students are guided through the key stages of research design and proposal writing. This course is organized as an intensive collaborative workshop in which students bring individual components of their respective projects to class for constructive critical peer review for subsequent revision. The course objectives include: (1) to develop constructive peer reviewing skills; (2) to learn how to receive constructive criticism, rethink and revise; (3) to begin to cultivate a scholarly/academic identity; (4) to gain an in-depth understanding of the intellectual and practical dimensions of the proposal writing and review process; (5) to produce a polished, high quality and competitive research proposal modeled after the National Science Foundation (NSF) DDRIG (Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant).

**TENTATIVE COURSE TOPICS:**

- Academic writing and productivity
- Establishing regular writing goals, plans and habits
- NSF DDRIG Proposals
- Research proposal design and writing
- Writing journal articles, authorship and publishing
- Peer reviewing (conducting and receiving)
- Defining research topics and interests

- Seeking out mentoring and committees
- Writing literature reviews (and annotated bibliography)
- Finding the theoretical “light bulb”
- Designing research goals, objectives, questions, hypotheses
- Selecting methods and conceptualizing research methodology
- Problems statements, justification, contributions, relevance & wider impacts
- Budgets, justification, timelines
- Academic presentations
- Funding sources
- IRB, Ethics, Human subjects

### **COURSE SCHEDULING:**

Along with this syllabus I am distributing a tentative schedule for the entire semester, as well as listing all major deadlines below. However, I reserve the right to make changes in the schedule whenever necessary to provide flexibility for introducing new topics of special interest to students, relevant current events that may emerge, opportunities for guest speakers, etc. In some cases we may decide to dedicate more time to a particular topic, or perhaps substitute a topic for another that is of greater interest to the class. That said, I will not move up the date of scheduled hand-in assignments (though sometimes our change may give you an extension on a deadline). On occasion I will send you an updated “class schedule” as I make changes. I will also post the updated schedules under the course information rubric in Blackboard. Please **check your e-mail** and our **class Blackboard (Bb) site** regularly as I may inform you of modifications via e-mail or on the Bb web site. If you should miss a class meeting, it is your responsibility to find out any changes in scheduling from one of your classmates or me.

### **COURSE READINGS:**

The course readings consist of selected articles, book chapters, reports, policy papers, sample proposals, etc. In addition to the required readings, there are optional recommended readings on occasion for your reference. I will post readings in advance on our class Bb site but please make sure to check the current schedule before doing the weekly readings as I might drop or add a particular reading. Any changes to this schedule will be announced and posted online. The assigned readings are intentionally light as you are expected to do a significant amount of reading for your individual research proposals.

Please purchase the following required textbook:

#### *Required Textbook*

Silvia, P. 2007. *How to Write A Lot: A Practical Guide to Academic Writing*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

**\*\*THERE MAY BE READINGS POSTED ON THE SITE THAT WE DECIDE NOT TO COVER—SO CHECK THE LATEST SCHEDULE FOR WEEKLY READING ASSIGNMENTS.**

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING:**

<b>Evaluation</b>	
Assignments - Due according to schedule – 13 total	30% or 150 pts
Methodology Presentation	10% or 50 pts
Final NSF DDRIG Proposal	30% or 150 pts
Research Proposal Presentation (15-20 minutes)	10% or 50 pts
Participation (Attendance, In-Class Presentation of Assignments, Constructive Peer Reviewing & Response to Reviews, Contribution to In-Class Discussions & Activities)	20% or 100 pts
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100% = 500 pts</b>

\*\* Letter grades will be assigned based on the following criteria:

(A)	=	470 pts - 500 pts
(A-)	=	450 pts - 469 pts
(B+)	=	440 pts - 449 pts
(B)	=	420 pts - 439 pts
(B-)	=	400 pts - 419 pts
(C+)	=	390 pts – 399 pts
(C)	=	370 pts – 389 pts
(C-)	=	350 pts - 369 pts
(D+)	=	340 pts - 349 pts
(D)	=	320 pts - 339 pts
(D-)	=	300 pts - 319 pts
(F)	=	Below 300 pts

## **SEMINAR STRUCTURE**

Our seminar will be structured as a highly participatory intensive workshop where students will regularly present assignments; provide constructive peer reviews to each other; and rethink and revise their respective work according to the feedback they receive from class members, advisors and the instructor. At times our peer reviewing activities will be organized around breakouts or different in-class activities. While our primary focus is learning through doing, and many of our readings are references materials or “how to” suggestions – students are encouraged to read critically and come to class prepared to discuss readings. There is no one set “right” way to approach research proposal design, therefore I attempt to expose students to a variety of perspective and ideas to they may discover works best on an individual basis. As the instructor, I will on occasion provide framing for topics and share my approach as yet another perspective based on my experience. My principal role in the course is to facilitate discussion, peer review activities and interactions between students and advisors on research proposal

design. I will also provide feedback on all assignments and proposal iterations—however, your advisor will serve as the principal content expert. We will also gain perspective from other scholars through invited guest speakers, and faculty and student panels on key subjects.

## **ASSIGNMENTS AND PROPOSAL COMPONENTS**

The majority of activities in this course are leading up to the final product—a high quality, competitive DDRIG proposal. Ideally doctoral students will be able to continue revising this proposal for submission next fall. As for masters students, this approach provides a template for a rigorous and thorough research proposal that will enable them to “hit the ground running” for summer fieldwork. In the case of all students, this proposal will provide a blue print for revising the proposal to submit for funding sources other than the NSF. While the DDRIG is more rigorous than many, by focusing on the “gold standard” we establish a base proposal from which others can be derived with greater ease and potential success. For both masters and Ph.D. students, some of you will inevitably change topics and possibly set aside the entire proposal you develop in this course. However, the process that we are collectively undergoing is far more important than our end products. After this course, you will know the steps to carry an idea through to a well-conceived, funded project, and hopefully into theses, dissertations and other publications. We will breakdown and demystify the process together so that when you face this task in the future you will feel confidence, passion and ambition—rather than overwhelmed, anxiety ridden or fearful. You will understand that this process is doable if broken down and continually revisited, rethought, revised and improved.

With this in mind the course is structured around several exercises (13 total) designed to prepare you to conceive and write different components of a research proposal including elements such as: writing goals and plans, research interest statements, peer reviewing, research questions, literature reviews, theoretical framing, methods and methodology, proposal outlines, annotated bibliographies, introductions, problem statements, justifications/relevance, budgets and timelines. Detailed instructions for each assignment are posted on our Blackboard course site, and deadlines are listed on the course schedule throughout the semester. In many cases you will be expected to provide a copy to your advisor with enough time for them to provide feedback and to incorporate their comments in your submission. In most cases, assignments will be submitted electronically via Blackboard prior to our class meeting (you must check the specific assignment instructions for each week to verify). In some cases you will be asked to bring hard copies as well for the class and/or me. Please name your file with the assignment name followed by your last name and first name, i.e. “Assignment 1\_Torres Rebecca” and upload under the appropriate sub-folder under “Assignments.” Papers will not be accepted late.

Individual assignments will be assigned a check, check (-) and in rare instances check (+) according to quality. If you receive a check this means that you met course expectations. If you complete all with a grade of check, you can expect to receive an “A” on this component of your final grade. Grades of check (-) will lower the “assignments” component of your grade while check (+) will strengthen your grade. Missing assignments will be recorded as a “0” and they will significantly lower your grade. You

should keep all of your assignments and bring them to all class meetings in the event we have additional time to discuss previous readings. Also, always bring the books and articles we are reading to the class discussions. Together assignments will comprise 30% of your final grade.

In addition to assignments, you will develop a Power Point presentation to share with the class two methodologies you are considering using for your research. You will also post your presentation on a discussion board on Blackboard to serve as a resource for class members as they research different methods and design methodologies. Students will give a 15-minute presentation on **March 20th**. This will be worth 10% of your final grade. Please see the assignment sheet on Blackboard for details.

The major component of the course is the development of an NSF DDRIG proposal, including all components as indicated by NSF (i.e. forms, timelines, budgets, justification, references, bio-sketches, broader impact statements, data management plans, etc.). A complete draft for peer review is due on **April 21<sup>st</sup>** at 11:30 PM for a peer review activity on **April 24th**. You will have the opportunity to revise the proposal before final submission on **May 1<sup>st</sup>** at 11:30 PM. The proposal will be worth 30% of your final course grade. You will also give a professional presentation of your proposal to the class, your advisors, committee members, etc. on **May 1<sup>st</sup>**. This will be worth 10% of your final grade. Please see Blackboard for further details on the proposal components and presentation expectations.

**ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION:**

Given that this class follows a workshop/seminar-format – participation is very important (20% or 100 points of your final grade). It is imperative that you attend all classes and come prepared to present your assignments, provide thoughtful peer reviews to others and discuss all the assigned readings. I will take formal attendance every day and incorporate that into your final participation grade. You must notify me in advance of any intended absence due to illness or other reasons. If you have an unexpected absence due to illness you must provide documentation to receive credit for a late assignment.

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**Note on Academic Integrity:** Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information please visit the Student Judicial Services Web site: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs>. Refer to the Dean of Students Student Judicial Services website or call 471-2841 for the official university policies and procedures on scholastic dishonesty.