

RESEARCH PRACTICUM

Jeffrey J. Rosen, Ph.D.

Course Description

The course is designed to enable students to transform their interests in clinically-related issues into coherent and feasible dissertation proposals. It is especially intended for students who have completed their second doctoral examination and have yet to begin to work in a systematic fashion on a possible dissertation topic. Such students will have been identified and encouraged to enroll by their academic advisor. Finally, because the course makes use of small group processes and collaborative learning techniques, section size will be limited and enrollment will require the consent of the instructor.

Prerequisites

Students must have completed courses in Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis as well as two Semesters of graduate level statistics.

Specific Learning Objectives

Developing the structure of a Ph.D. dissertation proposal can seem like an overwhelming task, certainly at the outset, as well as at various points along the way. Therefore, a number of the learning objectives of the course focus on techniques that make the project manageable through the mastery of requisite skills. For example:

- 1) **Subtask analysis.** How to restructure a complex task, such as the creation of a dissertation, into a series of manageable subtasks.
- 2) **Reporting on subtask progress in oral and written form.** Each week, students submit written progress reports and make a 10 to 15-minute presentation of their achievements and concerns to the group, inviting group discussion. Here, students are encouraged to use writing and oral presentations and the feedback they receive as a means of a) refining their thinking, and b) communicating their ideas more clearly.
- 3) **Develop and conduct a limited pilot study.** Moving from idea to observation and beginning to systematize those observations in “units of analysis,” making use of observations to refine ideas.
- 4) **Final project.** Crafting the structure of a dissertation proposal. How to make an argument, support that argument and propose an adequate means of testing it.

Readings

Two kinds of materials constitute the set of required readings for the course.

- 1) Assigned Texts
 - a) Booth, W.C., Colomb, G.G., and Williams, J. *The Craft of Research* (2nd edition), 2003, U. Chicago Press. The text focuses on the use of written and oral communication in the process of transforming a nascent idea into a coherent research project.

- b) Crano, W.D. and Brewer, M.B. *Principles and Methods of Social Research* (2nd edition), 2005, Lawrence Erlbaum. The text provides an effective review of basic issues in research design and an in-depth examination of research methods from observational procedures to laboratory experiments.
- 2) Specific research articles will be selected through a process of consultation between the instructor and each student. These articles are intended to reflect the specific interest of each student enrolled that semester and will be subjected to critical examination. Approximately ten such articles will be assigned over the course of the semester.

Grading Criteria

The final grade for the course will be based on weekly writing assignments, oral presentations, class participation and the quality of the final project. The first three elements and the progress they reveal will count for 50% of the final grade.

Weekly Class Topic(s), Objectives and Assignments

Week 1.

Topic(s): Overview of semester and student presentations of areas of interest.

Objective: Orientation together with initial discussion of tasks analysis. Becoming familiar with each others' interests and beginning to search for commonalities among those interests.

Assignments:

Reading: *Craft of Research* (CR), pp 1-34. Thinking through writing.

Principles and Methods (PM), pp. 1-16. Review of basic research concepts

Writing: Why you are interested in your research idea (one page).

Week 2.

Topic: Translating interests into Questions

Objective: Beginning an analysis of transformation of interesting ideas into answerable set of questions.

Assignments:

Reading: CR, pp. 35-50. From topics to questions.

PM, pp. 17-35. The relation of research objective and research design.

Writing: The "what" question and the beginning of operationalization. "What" phenomenon best represents my interest?

Week 3.

Topic: Confronting Problems I. Problems that arise in finding answers to questions. Addressing the choice of subjects when the subject variable matters.

Objective: An examination of the role of the subject variable in clinical research. Whom do I suspect embodies the phenomenon I wish to study? Why do I believe this?

Assignments:

Reading. CR, pp. 56-89. The nature of research problems.
PM, pp. 36-75. Research tactics and strategies.
Writing. The “who” question. The prototypic/ideal subject who best embodies the phenomenon.

Week 4.

Topic: Confronting Problems II. The choice of tasks and measures.

Objective: How to capture the phenomenon I’m interested in, if it is present in my optimal subject. Revisiting the issues of reliability and validity.

Assignments:

Reading. CR, pp. 111-135. Making your argument using claims, reasons and evidence.

PM, pp. 197-223; 264-277. From systematic observations to scales.

Writing. My prototypic/optimal task characteristics and why.

Week 5.

Topic: Constructing a pilot study

Objective: Bringing together the issues considered thus far to create an opportunity to acquire some preliminary observations and data.

Assignments:

Reading. CR, pp. 183-219. Preparing a draft proposal.

PM, Selection of chapter from Part III. Data collection and method relevant for Individual student.

Writing. Two-page proposal stating research question, method of inquiry, and anticipated findings, with brief justification of each section.

Week 6.

Topic: Writing an IRB expedited proposal.

Objective: To revise draft proposal following IRB guidelines into a coherent submission for institution research review, an essential step in undertaking a research project.

Assignment:

Writing. Draft IRB proposal

Week 7.

Topic: Evaluation of IRB drafts.

Objective: Collective critical examination of each proposal in terms of clarity of written description, rigor of argument, and compliance with IRB guidelines for expedited review.

Assignment:

Submit proposal

Weeks 8-9.

Topic: “Gearing Up”: Preparing for the pilot study to begin.

Objectives:

- 1) Identifying sources of potential subjects
- 2) Identifying and acquiring necessary equipment and instruments
- 3) “Dry running” the protocol in class

Assignment:

Review two selected research articles and write critical reviews each week.

Weeks 10-13.

Topic: Results

Objective: Review of methods for examining qualitative and quantitative information produced by pilot studies and the effective communication of findings

Assignments:

Review two selected research articles each week and apply understanding to pilot study

results.

On Week 13, write up results and interpretations.

Week 14.

Topic: The iterative nature of scholarly research.

Objective: Using pilot study findings to refine and revise research thesis question.

Assignment:

Writing. Create draft of the structure of a dissertation proposal.

Week 15.

Presentation of proposals during an extended class period.