DESIGN AND METHODS OF RESEARCH IN LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

LAS 6293, Fall Semester 2015, 3 credit hours
Class meets in Grinter Hall 376, Fridays from 8:30-11:30 (periods 2, 3, 4)

INSTRUCTOR
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OFFICE HOURS
Regular office hours are each Tuesday from 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. In addition, students are encouraged to write via email and to arrange meetings at other times.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

This course aims to motivate and empower students to develop greater understanding of Latin America through rigorous scientific inquiry and critical analysis of research findings. Participants gain knowledge and skills necessary to design and implement field and library research, which they demonstrate by developing a formal research proposal.

Course participants study some of the main paradigms and instruments applied by scholars and practitioners working in the interdisciplinary field of Latin American Studies. The term “paradigms” refers here to the philosophical/theoretical traditions that shape and support the whole process of research design, implementation and analysis. “Instruments” are tools used to gather, organize, and analyze information. Participants also develop strategies for interpreting and communicating research findings, strengthening their ability to make presentations, review literature, and produce graduate theses.

The course helps to launch an enduring intellectual community among a graduate student cohort by building on shared commitments and encouraging mutual learning across academic and life experiences.

Cycle of research design and method explored in this course:

- Research questions: how can we ask, what can we answer?
- Paradigms of knowledge production
- Strategies for seeking secondary literature and data bases
- Strategies for seeking primary sources
- Assessment of scholarly literature
- Field investigation methods
- Analytic frameworks
- Contextualizing research
- Critical epistemology
- Methods for writing

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Course-specific learning outcomes: Students who engage fully in this course will develop the ability to:

1. Formulate relevant and feasible questions for research on important issues in Latin America.
2. Apply an array of instruments to obtain original qualitative and quantitative findings.
3. Find and interpret relevant data and literature.
4. Triangulate complementary methods and findings (e.g., quantitative with qualitative, broad with deep, case studies with national and regional statistics, primary with secondary data, measurement of biophysical phenomena with subjective views of actors).
5. Contextualize studies in historical, cultural and comparative contexts.
6. Characterize several methodological paradigms (e.g., positivist scientific methods, participatory action research, holistic ethnography, postcolonial and de-colonizing approaches).
7. Reflect critically on knowledge and power in scientific research. (Identify influences of disciplinary paradigms, cultural and political stances, colonial and geopolitical positions, gender systems, and other factors in research methods and in published findings).
8. Design and write a research proposal that manifests the knowledge and skills described in preceding outcomes.

The course contributes to the following program objectives for a graduate degree in Latin American Studies:

- Evaluate the significance, perspective and quality of information obtained from published literature.
- Generate new knowledge about Latin America through research designed and implemented with an interdisciplinary perspective.
- Communicate this knowledge clearly and effectively in a thesis completed for their graduate degree as well as other spoken and written means.
- Gain experience of professional behavior in academic settings.

UF graduate training objectives are advanced in four interrelated areas:

- Epistemological awareness: thinking about knowledge, power, and research process.
- Practical skills: applying scientific research instruments.
- Strategic design: identifying phenomena to study, formulating questions, selecting methods.
- Communications: organizing findings and communicating results.

REQUIRED READINGS AND VIDEOS

Students are not required to buy any books for this course. Readings relevant for our work are organized in thematic folders under FILES on the course Canvas site. The schedule below indicates weekly required readings, together with videos, websites and other materials. Most readings are also available electronically through UF libraries. In addition to reading required literature, each student will find and work with current materials relevant to his or her unique interests.

WHAT RESEARCH METHODS WILL BE EXPLORED?

In the tradition of Latin American Studies, this course brings together methodological approaches that have been developed and applied in a number of conventional disciplines (e.g., anthropology, ecology, geography, history, economy, sociology), and from newer interdisciplinary fields (e.g., development studies, ethnoecology, gender studies, political ecology, environmental studies, peace and justice studies). As course participants experiment with ways of doing and assessing research, they practice applying instruments and also reflect critically on processes of knowledge production. Neither paradigms nor instruments are mutually exclusive. Many research projects draw from more than one paradigm and apply more than one kind of instrument.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some research instruments or techniques</th>
<th>Some paradigms of knowledge production</th>
<th>Some analytic frames</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Positivist scientific method</td>
<td>Case study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Household surveys</td>
<td>Participatory action research</td>
<td>Comparative study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statistical analysis of survey findings</td>
<td>Decolonial and postcolonial approaches</td>
<td>Value chain studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life histories/ testimonios</td>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>Holistic ethnography</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>Historicism</td>
<td>Ecosystems assessment</td>
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<td>Participant observation</td>
<td>Political ecology</td>
<td>Gender sensitive research</td>
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<td>Researcher as instrument</td>
<td>Feminist epistemology</td>
<td>Farm systems research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnoecology techniques</td>
<td>Quantitative analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participatory mapping</td>
<td>Comparative analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spatial measurement and mapping</td>
<td>Liberation pedagogy</td>
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<td>Resource access and control matrix</td>
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</table>
Time use diaries and calendars  
Ranking and sorting exercises  
GIS analysis  
Social network analysis/ Venn diagrams  
Archival search  
Interpretation of historical documents  
Discourse analysis  
Legislation and policy analysis  
Research diaries/field notes

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments contributing to grade</th>
<th>Maximum points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation and contribution</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of a book based on research in Latin America</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated bibliography for research proposal</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of a completed thesis</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer review of two classmate’s research proposals</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proposal for field research in Latin America</td>
<td>30</td>
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Training activities carried out in groups (pure learning, no grades assigned)
Survey design  
Archival hunt for primary sources  
Ethnographic observation  
Focus group facilitation

Letter grades will be implemented using the following scale

- 78-79.99C+  
- 60-62.99D-  
- 95-100 A  
- 73-77.99C  
- 60-59.99F  
- 90-94.99A-  
- 70-72.99C-  
- 88-89.99B+  
- 68-69.99D+  
- 83-87.99B  
- 63-67.99D  
- 80-82.99B-  

LEARNING ACTIVITIES, GUIDELINES FOR ASSIGNMENTS

Student work should be submitted electronically on CANVAS, unless otherwise indicated.

Review of a book based on research in Latin America
Select and read a book that describes research carried out on Latin America issues, and that presents and interprets research findings. Find three different scholarly reviews about the book. Write a paper that totals 3000-4000 words and is comprised of two sections:

(1) Compare and contrast three published book reviews  
- What does each reviewer say about research methods?  
- How do their methodological assessments and interests differ?  
- What disciplinary position is expressed by each reviewer (and/or journal in which review appears)?

(2) Write an original review of the book addressing the following questions:  
- What paradigm(s) guides the study?  
- What specific instruments are used to gather data?  
- A doubt about or critique of the design and/or methods.  
- An element that you could adapt and apply in own research.
Annotated bibliography for a research proposal

Meet with UF libraries staff to learn about using historical materials, electronic sources, journals, etc. Participate in training of Refworks, a program that allows you to store and organize resources, and to produce reference lists. Build on both experiences to compile an annotated bibliography for your research proposal according to the following instructions:

- Seek out an array of at least 20 sources that may be useful for proposed research project.
- The set should include literature on the topic of study, on the theoretical and methodological approaches to be applied, and on the research location (ecozone, nation, region).
- Balance different types of sources. A good balance could be 5 peer review journal articles, 5 books, 5 websites, and additional sources relevant to topic, such as popular media, historical archives, legislation, videos, statistical databases.
- Include perspectives/voices of relevant groups, such as publications written by people based in Latin America and others, men and women authors, scholarly and practical work, materials expressing different sides of a conflict.
- For this assignment, it is not necessary to read each book or article. After reviewing each source briefly, students may simply copy journal abstracts, editorial summaries, or advertising blurbs about each source.

Following links are helpful:
How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography
Cómo Preparar una Bibliografía Anotada
http://guides.library.cornell.edu/bibliografia_anotada

Critically assess a completed Master’s thesis

Browse through completed theses posted on library or department websites of universities (check out strong Latin American Studies graduate programs such as UF, U Texas, U Chicago, Tulane, Vanderbilt, UNC, etc.). Make a bibliography identifying ten Masters or Doctoral Theses that interest you. Select one thesis to study that looks similar in some ways to the thesis you would like to produce. Use supplied guidelines to describe and critically assess the paradigm, instruments, and analysis used in that thesis.

Peer review research proposals drafted by classmates

After course participants develop draft research proposals, teams work to peer-review each other’s proposals according to criteria provided.

Design a proposal for an original research project

Develop a proposal following guidelines provided. Most fruitful paths to proposal development involve exploring various research options and methods, and adapting and changing plans during the semester. Participants are encouraged to use this opportunity to build a base for their Masters or Doctoral thesis research projects. Proposals prepared for class may be adapted for grant applications, including the Center for Latin American Study’s Summer Field Research Competition. Activities and readings throughout the semester support each step of proposal building.

Methods training activities carried out in groups

Survey design

Explore materials on questionnaire and survey design and application posted under FILES, pay particular attention warnings about common problems. Design a short written survey with 6 to 8 questions. Clearly indicate the purpose of the survey and the population to be represented by survey respondents. Bring copies of your survey to class to apply to colleagues.

Archival hunt for primary sources

Select a Latin American event or issue of interest to you (e.g., Bay of Pigs invasion, Amazon Dams, opening of Panama Canal). With the support of Latin American librarians, find primary materials related to that topic. Identify materials representing 3 different kinds of sources (e.g. microfilm, pamphlets, historical books, artwork, films, posters, folios). Take a photograph of each of the 3 sources and
prepare a 2 minute presentation on those sources for class. Extra credit is awarded to the team whose set of materials is voted the most fascinating, original and intriguing.

**Ethnographic observation**
Start by studying **detailed guidelines for this assignment** and materials about ethnographic observation posted under FILES on CANVAS. Groups will identify and research a phenomenon in one scene in Gainesville. Each student will carry out at least two hours of observation in a selected location where manifestations of or practices related to the select phenomenon can be observed. Observers should **DESCRIBE** exactly what they SEE, HEAR, FEEL, TOUCH, TASTE, COUNT. Work hard to refrain from interpreting or imposing one’s own ethnocentric and subjective judgments. Each group will discuss their observations with the class. Multi-materials (maps, photos, drawings, lists) and acting out aspects of what was observed can be good ways to communicate complex scenes.

**Focus group facilitation**
Start by studying materials on focus groups posted under FILES on CANVAS. Select a fascinating topic to be explored via focus group discussion. Design a set of questions, prompts or scenarios that can be used to provoke conversation among focus group participants. Gather a group of at least 5 friends, and facilitate a practice focus group discussion with them. This may last from 20 minutes to 2 hours, depending on how relevant and exciting the topic, and how motivating and provocative the prompts. Assess your practice experience and adapt an improved strategy to facilitate a focus group conversation in class among classmates.

**COURSE POLICIES**

**Attendance**
Class meetings are a vital part of this course. All students are expected to complete readings and assignments before class, to attend each class, and to participate actively in classroom learning. The class will involve a great deal of interaction and discussion, and students will be rewarded for efforts to learn collaboratively with respect, enthusiasm and open minds.

**Personal Technology in the Classroom**
During most class time students will not need to use personal technology devices (laptops, mobile email devices, smartphones, mobile phones, iPODs, iPads, and similar technologies). The instructor will indicate when devices may be used for select class activities. Exceptions will be made in the case of students who use personal technology devices due to documented disabilities, or students who need to leave a phone on in anticipation of emergency calls.

**UF POLICIES**

**UNIVERSITY POLICY ON ACCOMMODATING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office (http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. You must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking the quizzes or exams. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

**UNIVERSITY POLICY ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:** Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Student Honor Code at http://www.dso.ufl.edu/students.php.

**NETIQUETTE: COMMUNICATION COURTESY:** All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions and chats. http://teach.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/NetiquetteGuideforOnlineCourses.pdf

**GETTING HELP**

For issues with technical difficulties for E-learning in Sakai, please contact the UF Help Desk at:
● Learning-support@ufl.edu
This syllabus and schedule represent current plans. During the semester, those plans may change to respond to class needs and to enhance learning opportunities. Such changes will be communicated in writing and posted on the course site.

LAS 6293 DESIGN AND METHODS OF RESEARCH IN LATIN AMERICA, FALL 2015 SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>date</th>
<th>topic</th>
<th>readings and videos required before class</th>
<th>activities</th>
<th>assignment due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 8/28 | Introduction | Suggested basics to watch:  
What is research? [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Og4BGyZr_Nk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Og4BGyZr_Nk)  
Qualitative vs. Quantitative [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X-zQU6-hPU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X-zQU6-hPU)  
Telling a Complete Story with Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research - Dr. John W. Creswell [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l5e7kVzMIfs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l5e7kVzMIfs) | LAS research questions  
Take 2 surveys  
Questionnaire/survey  
PPT  
Groups for survey design | |
| 9/4  | Paradigms & perspectives  
7 tips for good survey questions [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq_fbTuY1hw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq_fbTuY1hw) | Maps/sunrise pictures  
Introduce paradigms  
Apply surveys to colleagues | Bring printed copies of surveys to apply to classmates |
| 9/11 | UF libraries resources  
Literature review: overview for grad students [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2d7y_r65HU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2d7y_r65HU)  
Intro to Focus Groups, NOAA 2009  
Hautzinger, Sarah, 2012. Depending on Context: Counterintuitive Uses of Focus Groups in Mixed-Method Ethnographic Research. Human Organization | Form groups to carry out ethnographic observation, focus groups  
Visit Library East (Smathers Library) to explore online, digital and material resources  
Hunt for primary sources | Post improved surveys on Canvas by 9/8 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date TBA</td>
<td>Dinner and workshop</td>
<td>Present ethnographic portfolios &amp; focus group plans/notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/25</td>
<td>RefWorks Training w Neelam Bharti</td>
<td>Thesis guidelines MALAS How to write a research proposal and a thesis Training in Refworks Marston Science Library 10:00-11:30 #308. How to write a research proposal and a thesis Post ethnographic portfolios &amp; focus group plans/notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/16</td>
<td>History/Humanities</td>
<td>Loewen, James. Lies my Teacher Told Me, chapter 1 McAdams, Dan. Life Story Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Guest/Source</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/30</td>
<td>Ethics/IRB compliance</td>
<td>Zerby, Nancy. 2014. The Islanders and the Scientists: Post-tsunami Aid in the Nicobars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/6</td>
<td>No Class</td>
<td>UF Homecoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/20</td>
<td>Research proposal writing</td>
<td>Read and think about the comments that peer reviewers made on your draft. Bring questions to prompt collaborative strategizing on your project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/27</td>
<td>No Class</td>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/11</td>
<td>No Class</td>
<td>Exam week/Final research proposals due</td>
</tr>
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