

MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning
11.THG-HCED Thesis Prep Seminar¹
Fall 2009

Course Information and Syllabus²

Room and Time: 10-401
Required Class Time: Wednesdays, 10:00 AM to Noon
Web Site: <http://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/11/fa09/11.THG-HCED/>

Professor: Lorlene Hoyt
Office: 9-528
Phone Number: 617-452-2073
Email: lorlene@mit.edu
Office Hours: By appointment to accommodate your schedule

Course Description and Learning Objectives

This course is designed to guide and support second year MCP students in further developing their professional identity, shaping an intellectual inquiry, and crafting a formal thesis proposal. The objective of this course is to ensure that you have a thesis committee and an approved thesis proposal by the end of the term. Another and equally important objective is for students to think creatively and boldly about their thesis project and its contribution to your learning, specific audiences, and the broader field of planning.

This is a seminar course. Together, we will create a safe, respectful intellectual space where we will learn about ourselves and about each other to meet the course objectives. In my view, your thesis can and ought to be the most challenging and rewarding work that you complete during your time in the DUSP. This has been the case for many, but not all, students. For some, the thesis process is a burden. I expect that we will work together to ensure that each of you experience the former and not the latter. How seriously you take this class, how much you work to get your thesis proposal fleshed out in the fall term, how you take advantage of the opportunities for collegial feedback and support from your classmates, and how hard you work to get your thesis committee assembled and on the same page, will put your thesis on track as one you look back on with a profound sense of accomplishment. More importantly, such a process will put your thesis on track as one that may have an influence on the trajectory of planning scholarship and/or practice.

Format

Our approach to Thesis Prep will be a step-by-step process by which you reflect on your own experience and professional identity, investigate topics of interest to you, select and

¹I would like to rename the course “Mentorship and Scholarship.”

²Some of the syllabus content is borrowed from Professor Mark Schuster’s excellent and time-tested CDD thesis prep seminar, as adapted by Professor Langley Keyes in 2007 and Karl Seidman in 2008.

elaborate on one topic, and prepare several iterations of a thesis proposal that place your topic in relation to relevant planning ideas, issues and prior work, and craft appropriate methods to address your thesis' central questions or goals. This classroom is a space where your thesis – from the big idea to the details of the final proposal– will evolve as you receive support, feedback, and encouragement from your peers as well as M.I.T. faculty and staff.

The course requirements are:

- (1) your *presence and participation* in the weekly seminar discussions;
- (2) your timely completion of *all assignments*;
- (3) the preparation of several versions of your thesis proposal ranging from a brief initial exploration through to the *final proposal* itself; and
- (4) providing constructive feedback to your fellow seminar participants.

Required Textbooks

Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, second edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

There is no better book on the market for guiding the development of research papers, theses, and dissertations. It is full of good advice. Parts III and IV will be particularly useful through January and the spring as you enter the writing phase.

Optional Readings

A website with lots of useful information for thesis writers:
<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/ENVI/thesisgd.html>

On the process of writing and its interaction with the research process:

Howard S. Becker, *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

On social science research methods:

Robert R. Alford, *The Craft of Inquiry: Theories, Methods, Evidence* (New York: Oxford, 1998).

Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1967).

On mixed research methods:

John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (London: Sage Publications, 1994).

On case studies as a methodology:

Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (London: Sage Publications, 1984).

On interviewing:

Robert Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

A very useful website on interviewing posted by our colleagues at Cornell:

http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/practicestories/CP_I.htm

Units and Grades

Each student should sign up for 0-24-0 units for 11.ThG in the fall semester (and once again in the spring semester). This number of units, carried on your registration throughout the year, indicates that you will receive a total of 24 units of credit for the whole thesis experience. Because 11.ThG is a subject that continues into the spring semester with the writing of the actual thesis, no traditional letter grades will be given for the fall's work. Instead, students will receive either:

- A grade of “J,” which indicates that there has been successful progress with the course material—interpreted in this case to mean the submission of *all* of the exercises, submission of a proposal, successful completion of the COUHES³ training *and* COUHES approval of the research proposal, as well as a final thesis proposal that has been approved by *both* the advisor and by the professor of the Thesis Prep course—or
- A grade of “U,” which indicates unsatisfactory progress and which will be given if all of the exercises have not been completed, if COUHES training has not been completed, if COUHES approval has not been received, or if a final thesis proposal approved by both the advisor and the professor of the Thesis Prep course has not been submitted by the deadline. If a student receives a “U” grade, a satisfactory thesis proposal will have to be completed and any other outstanding requirements will have to be satisfied before the student will be allowed to register for the spring semester. It is important for each student to understand that the proposal has to be approved by *both the thesis advisor and by me*. If either of us feels that the proposal submitted at the end of the semester is insufficiently developed to signal that the student is ready to begin work on the thesis, you will be given a grade of “U” for the semester. In other words, either of us retains the right to assign a grade of “U.” (When you complete your thesis at the end of the second semester, your thesis advisor and reader will determine a letter grade, and you will then receive the 24 units of credit at that grade for Thesis Prep and the actual thesis together.

³Only students who are doing purely theoretical, historical, or quantitative-data-driven theses are exempt from COUHES procedures. All other students, including those conducting any kind of interviews with people, are required to obtain permission from COUHES, and their advisors are required to have taken the online training course. You must complete the on-line COUHES training and you must also get COUHES approval for your proposal. Proposals are due on October 29th for consideration at the November 19th meeting of COUHES. Otherwise, proposals are due on November 24th for the December 17th meeting of COUHES. See also, Committee on the Use of Humans as Experimental Subjects, COUHES, <http://web.mit.edu/committees/couhes/>

The Final Thesis Proposal

In this course your written exercises will build toward the preparation of a final thesis proposal. Final proposals are typically 10-15 pages long and include the following information:

- Proposed thesis *title*. This is more than a trivial exercise. A good title can provide you guidance throughout the thesis process and keep you on track.
- An *abstract* that provides a brief, yet full description of the scope and the argument of the thesis.
- A discussion of the *research methods* that you intend to use, including data sources and types of analysis to be conducted, and a consideration of the advantages and limitations of your methods.
- An *annotated bibliography* of the sources (e.g., readings, documents, etc.) most important and relevant to your thesis. The notations, which summarize the relevance of each reading to your thesis project, are a critical part of your proposal.
- An elaboration of the *argument* that you expect to make in the thesis. This should take the form of an outline of chapter headings with a short description of the expected contents of each chapter.
- A description of the (a) *relevance and importance* of the subject, the (b) *form of the thesis* (e.g., research report, client report, design proposal, documentary, etc.) and (c) *plans for dissemination*.
- A detailed *schedule* for completing the research and writing the final thesis.
- The name and signature of the thesis *advisor* and the name of the *reader(s)*. Your advisor must be a DUSP faculty member. In addition to your thesis advisor, you are required to have at least one reader.

Academic Integrity

Students taking this course are expected to read the presentation on academic integrity available at: <http://web.mit.edu/academicintegrity> Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about this policy.

Disabilities

If you have a disability, or any other problem you think may affect your ability to perform the work outlined here, please see me early in the semester so that arrangements may be made to accommodate you. For more on M.I.T.'s policies for academic accommodation for students with disabilities, see: <http://studentlife.mit.edu/dso/students>

Class Schedule

The following is a detailed first approximation subject to change if we as a group decide we need to emphasize more or less of the elements presented below.

September 9 – Introduction: Purpose of Class, Requirements, Critical Dates, etc.

Introduction to Exercise One – Reflections on Identity and List of Potential Thesis Topics

Read and reflect on the statement of objectives that you submitted with your application to M.I.T. Which aspects of your professional identity and stated aspirations have remained the same? What has changed (attach your statement to the exercise)? Next, make a list of topic areas you might find interesting to explore in a thesis. Rank them in terms of your enthusiasm. For each area (if you have more than one) think of a couple of questions that you would have to deal with if focusing on the issue. Also identify the primary audience and list some of the pros and cons of the topic (e.g., how easy/difficult will it be to get access to information, interviews, etc.). If you are certain what area you want to write about, make that point as well.

Due September 15th at noon (hardcopy to 9-528 and electronic copy to lorlene@mit.edu)

September 16 – Discussion of the Nexus between Identity and Thesis

Introduction to Exercise Two – Comparing and Contrasting MCP Theses

Compare and contrast two MCP theses and come to the next class prepared to talk about them. Look for topics and titles of interest across program groups, select and read at least 5 abstracts, and choose two theses to read, compare, and contrast. (Theses are available on D-space through the Barton catalogue.)

Due September 22nd at noon (hardcopy to 9-528 and electronic copy to lorlene@mit.edu)

September 23 – Discussion of Thesis Types/Approaches

Required Readings

MIT Policy <http://web.mit.edu/odge/gpp/degrees/thesis.html>

DUSP Policy https://web.mit.edu/dusp/dusp_extension/handbook/handbook.pdf pp. 63-73

COUHES <http://web.mit.edu/committees/couhes/>

Introduction to Exercise Three – First Draft of Thesis Proposal and COUHES Training

Write a one-page description of your thesis reflecting your current thinking. Think creatively and boldly. Describe the audience and influence you imagine for your thesis. Specify your question clearly. If you have multiple questions, please identify the primary research question that you hope to answer. Outline proposed research methods to answer your research question. Include dilemmas, paradoxes, concerns with which you would like help. You must also complete the online COUHES training.

Due September 29th at noon (hardcopy to 9-528 and electronic copy to lorlene@mit.edu)

September 30 – Discussion of Ethics and Emerging Thesis Topics

Required Readings

Booth et al., “The Ethics of Research,” pp. 273-276.

Booth et al., Chapter 3, “From Topics to Questions,” and Chapter 4, “From Questions to Problems.”

Introduction to Exercise Four – Connecting with Faculty

Make an appointment to talk with two M.I.T. faculty (non-HCED) about your thesis and his/her research, teaching, service, and/or practice. Search for an intellectual and/or personal connection. Ask questions about his/her management style and experience as a thesis advisor and reader. Which advisee produced, in his/her judgment, the best thesis and why? With which particular research methods is s/he expert (you should ask this question with an eye toward altering the list of methods from which to choose in exercise five)? How many students, on average, does s/he advise each year? What advice can s/he give you about the thesis as an intellectual journey and/or personal experience? Take notes and prepare to share what you learn with fellow classmates. If you have difficulty with scheduling a meeting or the meeting is postponed or cancelled, document and discuss that part of the process. You must talk to at least one potential committee member.

Due October 13th at noon (hardcopy to 9-528 and electronic copy to lorlene@mit.edu)

October 7 – Discussion of the Thesis Experience and Process

Potential Guests

Sandy Wellford, HCED Faculty, and DUSP Alumni

October 14 – Discussion about Potential Advisors and Reader(s)

Introduction to Exercise Five – Research Methods

Find a friend or two to work with and choose a research method to investigate together from the list below. You will present what you have learned about the method to classmates. Your findings should be in the form of a 1-2 page handout. Each team must present a different method. The topics from which you may choose are as follows: (1) case study design and analysis; (2) personal interviews; (3) survey design; (4) analysis of variance; (5) Chi Square test; and (6) methods of spatial analysis using GIS. I will approve all teams and topics; first come, first served. See also Optional Readings above.

Due October 27th at noon (hardcopy to 9-528 and electronic copy to lorlene@mit.edu)

October 21 – Library Tour

Required Readings

Booth et al., Chapter 5, “From Problems to Sources,” and Chapter 6, “Engaging Sources”

Library-Based Research: Information Search Tools, Secondary Data Sources and GIS
Peter Cohn: Associate Head, Rotch Library
Heather Mc Cann, Reference Coordinator and Public Services Librarian, Rotch Library

October 28 – Discussion of Research Methods

Proposals are due on **October 29th** for consideration at the November 19th meeting of COUHES. A few of you may be able to meet this deadline.

Students, according to DUSP policy, are expected to identify a thesis advisor by **November 2nd** (Be sure to confirm that s/he has completed COUHES training.)

Introduction to Exercise Six – Second Draft of Thesis Proposal with Emphasis on Research Methods

Prepare a 1-2 page updated version of your thesis proposal giving special attention to the methodology for your thesis topic. This should include a brief statement of the overall methodology, the types of data that will be used, the data sources and collection methods, and type of analysis that will be applied to address your thesis questions and objectives.

Due November 3rd at noon (hardcopy to 9-528 and electronic copy to lorlene@mit.edu)

November 4 – Discussion of Research Methods, continued

Introduction to Exercise Seven – An Annotated Bibliography

Continue your literature search identifying existing materials relevant to your evolving research question. Skim and summarize what you find in order to identify the most important material for your thesis and develop an *annotated* list of relevant articles, books, and documents.

Due November 10th at noon (hardcopy to 9-528 and electronic copy to lorlene@mit.edu)

November 18 – Discussion of Annotated Bibliographies/Endnote Demonstration

Potential Guest

Annis Sengupta of CoLab

Introduction to Exercise Eight – Third Draft of Thesis Proposal

Working with your advisor, prepare a first draft of your thesis proposal (≈ 10 pages). Include your title, abstract, research question(s), a summary of the relevant literature that you have identified, a discussion of the methodology that you will use to collect data/evidence, and a work schedule which details roles, responsibilities, deliverables, and deadlines.

Due November 24th at noon (hardcopy to 9-528 and electronic copy to lorlene@mit.edu)

Proposals are due on **November 24th** for consideration at the December 17th meeting of COUHES.

November 25 – Audience, Voice, and Dissemination

Potential Guest

Alexa Mills of CoLab

Required Readings

Booth et al., Chapter 7, “Making Good Arguments: An Overview”;
Chapter 8, “Making Claims”; Chapter 9, “Assembling Reasons and Evidence”

Students, according to DUSP policy, are expected to identify a thesis reader by **December 1st**

December 2 – Discussion of Thesis Proposals

December 9 – Putting the Final Touches on Your Proposal

Submit your thesis proposal, with signatures, to Sandy Wellford by **December 11th**