ANG 6091/GEO 6113/SYA 6959 – U01

GRADUATE SEMINAR IN PROPOSAL WRITING

Spring 2012

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Course description: This course provides hands-on experience writing a research proposal. Because of the applied nature of the subject matter this course will be run in a workshop format whereby the majority of our time will be spent writing toward a deliverable (the proposal) as opposed to listening to professor-centered lectures. That said, there is a fair amount of guidance out there on proposal writing, so we will be doing some background reading as well from around the social sciences. Roughly half of our in-class time will entail discussion of a proposal-related topic, and half will entail peer workshops of ongoing proposal writing.

As you prepare to conduct your dissertation research, there are a variety of proposal types that you will be expected to produce: the internal ‘long form’ dissertation proposal for defense, the ‘short form’ that goes to the University Graduate School, and the external funding proposal to federal agencies and private foundations. Indeed, a PhD student can easily write all three of these (plus an IRB proposal if working with human subjects) in preparation for conducting dissertation research. Because the National Science Foundation (NSF) 1) funds so much research in the social sciences, 2) has a highly defined proposal format, and 3) is reviewed and funded widely from across the social sciences, it is considered the gold standard of proposals. Thus in this class you will produce a proposal suitable for submission to the NSF DDRI (Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement) program. This proposal will also be suitable for discussion and defense at the departmental level as the basis for your ‘proposal defense.’

As a graduate student I applied for and was awarded an NSF GRFP (Graduate Research Fellowship Program), which is three years of federal support at the pre-candidacy stage. When it came time to conduct field research, I was awarded funding through an NSF-DDRI and a Fulbright-Hays fellowship. As a faculty member, I have received support for my research from the NSF’s regular grant program, as well as the National Endowment for the Humanities. I have recently served two years as a senior panelist at the NSF in the Geography and Spatial Sciences program in Washington DC, and review proposals for many NSF programs on a regular basis as an ad hoc reviewer. My PhD students have been successful applicants for funding as well, receiving internal support (DEA and DYF awards from FIU) and external support from the NSF, AAUW, and Fulbright.

Bottom line: I’ve written a lot of research proposals, worked with students to write them, and reviewed many, many proposals from across the social sciences and humanities. I’ve come to the
conclusion that regardless of the substantive focus of the research, winning proposals have common elements to them, and that’s what we’ll concentrate on in this class.

**Learning goals:** At the conclusion of this seminar you will be familiar with the elements of a research proposal in the social sciences. You will have written a proposal based on your PhD research, that is suitable for external funding at the graduate level by the NSF, and that is additionally suitable for the ‘long form’ proposal required for the proposal defense in our department. You will be conversant with the range of funding sources in your field, the major differences amongst them, and how these differences translate into diverse proposal formats. The process of writing this proposal should, ideally, help you to refine your PhD research to the point of feasibility and external fund-ability.

The seminar should serve as a springboard for your scholarly development, both in providing the baseline knowledge expected of a graduate student in this field, and in stimulating or refining your particular graduate research project. Once you have completed this course you should be ready to commence the process of proposal defense in-house and submission of funding proposal(s) to external sources (in conjunction with University requirements and the counsel of your dissertation supervisor and committee).

**Responsibilities:** The following should go without saying at the graduate level, but just so we’re all on the same page:

- You are responsible for completing all assigned readings ahead of the class period for which they are assigned.
- You are responsible for purchasing, borrowing, or downloading all assigned reading in time to read it.
- You are responsible for attending each and every scheduled seminar meeting.
- You are responsible for meeting all deadlines. Given the workshop format of this course the writing deadlines throughout the semester are important and cumulative (i.e., if you fall behind the effects can be increasingly negative).
- You are responsible for contributing meaningfully to every seminar meeting.

In addition, this is graduate school, which means that you will be exposed to a wide range of perspectives, approaches, and practices – in assigned readings, as well as those held by your instructor and fellow classmates – with which you may not agree on a personal, religious, or scholarly level.

- You are responsible for respecting the views your classmates, your instructor, and the published scholars whose work you will read.
- If you wish to discuss perspectives, practices, and approaches with which you may not agree, you must do so in an informed fashion; avoiding provocation, belittling, or intimidation.
- You are responsible for completing all assigned readings, classroom activities, and projects whether or not they fit with your personal beliefs or lifestyle. If you have a serious conflict, please discuss beforehand with Prof. Price.

One final note: plagiarism and other instances of academic dishonesty simply will not be tolerated. Though most of you are here in the good spirit of growth, learning, and intellectual
curiosity, there are a surprising few who insist on representing the work of others as their own. This is particularly so with respect to material (reviews of books, data sets, term papers, sample proposals, etc.) available online. Under no circumstances will I accept work that has been produced without attribution from the work of others, or that is intended for (or has already been submitted to) another course. If I encounter academic misconduct I will immediately report it to the relevant Graduate Program Director and assign a failing grade for the course.

READING LIST

Books

Punch, Keith F. 2006, Developing effective research proposals (second edition), Sage.

Articles, Book Chapters, Online Materials

See week-by-week schedule, next page
SCHEDULE

≈ means the reading is available electronically through the FIU library system or online
§ means the reading is available from Prof. Price on Google documents

Week 1 (January 11): Course introduction

Week 2 (January 18): The good, the bad, and the ugly: elements of a research proposal
- Punch, Chapters 1-3, 6
- ≈ (Geography) DDRI specifics and exceptions to GPG: http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/bcs/grs/suppdiss.jsp
- ≈ (Cultural Anthropology) Dissertation panel advice to students: http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/bcs/anthro/suppdiss.jsp
- ≈ (Sociology) DDRI specifics; see especially their checklist and advice to dissertation students: http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/ses/soc/socckl1.jsp

Week 3 (January 25): Choosing a topic
- § Orcher, Chapter 1
- § Locke, Chapter 3
- What’s been funded in your field lately? Click the link near the bottom of the page, and read abstracts of projects similar to yours.
  o ≈ Geography: http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5410
  o ≈ Cultural Anthropology: http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5388
- Be ready to give an overview of what’s ‘fundable’ in your area now

Week 4 (February 1): Literature reviews
- Punch, Chapter 4
- § Orcher, Chapter 4
- ≈ Sample DDRI proposals: http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/bcs/grs/propsamples.jsp (4 total, focus on the literature reviews)
- Due: Topic statement (ballpark 300 words)

Week 5 (February 8): A tour of the NSF and other funding entities
• Due: write-up of your chosen funding source (ballpark 1000-1500 words)

**Week 6 (February 15): Research design: methodology, work plan, data management plan**
• Punch, Chapter 5
• Due: Literature review (ballpark 1200 – 1500 words)

**Week 7 (February 22): AAGs, no class**
• No assigned reading

**Week 8 (February 29): The peer review process**
• Due: Research design elements: Data Management Plan, Methodology, Work Plan

**Week 9 (March 7): Budgets**

**Week 10 (March 14): Spring break, no class**

**Week 11 (March 21): The details: cover sheet, intro, abstract, keywords, bibliography**
• Due: Budget and Justification

**Week 12 (March 28): Individual meetings with Prof. Price**

**Week 13 (April 4): Pilot research and letters of support**
• Due: The details: Cover Sheet, Introduction, Abstract, Keywords, Bibliography

**Week 14 (April 11): Internal processes: IRB, pre- and post-award, grant management**
• Guest: Arie Spirgel, Graduate Grants Coordinator, Division of Research
• Due: Human subjects training certificate

**Week 15 (April 18): AAHRPP, no class**
• § Locke, Chapter 7
• § Rubric
• Due: Complete proposal by midnight Friday April 20

**Week 16 (April 25): Final presentations**
• Due: Peer evaluation of proposals
Where your grade comes from and how to get there

Your grade is composed of the following:

- Proposal elements: 20
- Peer evaluation of final proposal: 20
- Panel evaluation of final proposal: 20
- Professor evaluation of final proposal: 20
- Participation (includes attendance): 20

Total: 100

Both the good and bad part of being a graduate student is that your final grade is pretty much up to you! Here are my thoughts on grading at the graduate level:

- **What is an “A” student?** We all know the answer to this oft-asked question, and you could easily tell me the answer yourself if pressed to do so. Here it is anyway: An “A” grade will be assigned to those students who meet with us for every session, who read in advance and contribute significantly to our discussions, who write in a thoughtful, grammatically- and factually-correct fashion, who conscientiously peer review the work of their fellow students and make substantive and constructive suggestions for improvement, who meet deadlines and specifications on assignments, and who are able to make connections between the weekly readings and the main themes of this class.

- **An “A-”** can arise from minor shortcomings in one of the areas mentioned above. For example, an “A” can turn into an “A-” through a few instances tardiness or absence, from failing to read in advance and contribute from time to time, from failing to meet deadlines, or from half-hearted or mean-spirited peer review.

- Grades in the B range (B+, B, B-) arise from magnified instances of the above (several unexplained absences, little class participation, major deadline failures), or a demonstrated inability to connect work and discussion to the themes of the course.

- Grades in the “C” range are rarely assigned at the graduate level. A very poor proposal (which shouldn’t happen if you turn in the elements on schedule and are receptive to peer critique), many absences, or utter lack of participation in class can lower your grade into the unhappy range.

What are Professor Price’s pet peeves? Along with the garden variety disruptive behavior (coming in late, coming up with implausible or multiple excuses for absences or missed deadlines, etc., etc., etc.,) she particularly dislikes it when students read online summaries or reviews instead of the assigned reading, reading only first & last chapter of assigned books (or the abstract of the article), lurking in the back of the class looking ‘smart’ but saying nothing, or provide highly vocal participation that paradoxically contributes little to the class.

Here is a discussion of the components of your final grade:

**Proposal elements**: This component is ‘contract grading’ if you will. The contract is as follows: turn in your proposal elements on time and to specifications and you will receive full credit.
Since there are five total proposal elements due over the course of the semester, each is worth four points maximum. The elements are: topic statement, lit review, research design, budget + justification, ‘the details.’

Peer evaluation of final proposals: Here is your chance to be a panelist! Since there are so few of you, you will review the work of all of your fellow students and assign a numerical score to each.

Panel evaluation of final proposal presentation: Because this course is used to measure ‘learning outcomes’ for our graduate program, a panel of faculty will observe and score your final proposal presentation.

Professor evaluation of final proposal: This is pretty straightforward … your final proposal will be given a numerical score out of 20 possible points, based on the final version of your proposal elements and how well they work together as a whole, finished proposal.

Participation: Also pretty straightforward: full credit to those who attend each and every scheduled class, read in advance, contribute meaningfully to discussions in class, and peer review responsibly.

Note: Peer critique is an invaluable tool used by academics at all levels. Peer critique decides who gets funded, who gets published, who gets promoted – basically, peer critique is the stuff of gatekeeping. That makes it an anxiety-ridden process. But peer critique along the way can also save you from mistakes and humiliation when you go live (trust me; it’s saved my neck many a time!). Responsible peer reviewing is one of the most valuable, and valued, skills you can develop as an academician.