



THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA  
**GREENSBORO**

## **PCS 607: Professional Research Seminar Spring 2015**

Instructor:  
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Credits: 1.5; Prerequisites: CPS 602  
Time: M (select dates): 6:00-9:00pm  
Office: 211 McIver Building  
Office Hours: By appointment

### **1 Catalog Description**

Introductory research seminar. Within the context of the theory underlying peace and conflict studies, students are exposed to research design, interviewing skills, and data analysis methods.

### **2 Course Overview**

PCS 607 (Professional Research Seminar) is an introductory research seminar that prepares students to pursue advanced studies in research and evaluation. In this class, students are exposed to the principles of research design, to the strategies and constraints involved in the data collection process, and to the main methods for analyzing data. The course offers an overview of diverse theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches. Strong emphasis is placed on understanding how research has been used to perpetuate oppression and unequal access. Institutional racism, sexism, homophobia/heterosexism, poverty, alienation, and other oppressive conditions play an important role in shaping lives of participants and conflict professionals.

The course is organized around theoretical exploration, lectures, class discussions, experiential activities, films/videos, and individual and group assignments. At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Discuss basic theories of knowledge building in the field

- Explore and analyze the effect of theory on the design and implementation of research
- Evaluate the full range of empowering theories and develop methodologies for engaged scholarship
- Identify and critique the ethical and cultural issues related to the conduct of inquiry and knowledge building

## 3 Requirements

### 3.1 Required Readings

Textbooks:

- Belenky, M. F. et al. (1997). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*. New York: Basic Books.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (4th ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Smith, L.T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. New York: Zed Books.

In addition to the textbooks, we will read several articles and book chapters which can be accessed on Blackboard.

### 3.2 Attendance

Students are expected to attend all class sessions. Each absence will severely affect the participation grade. Students will lose 2 points with the first absence, 5 points with the second one, and 8 points with the third one. If a student misses a fourth class, (s)he will not be able to pass the class.

### 3.3 Participation

Your engagement with the readings and class discussions is crucial to a successful seminar. Class participation is a strong indication of your intellectual engagement with the course. Participation presupposes active involvement in class discussions. Read critically and be prepared to ask questions and make germane comments on the materials. For this component of the final grade, you will be assessed on the quality of your answers, questions, opinions, and contribution to group work.

### **3.4 Discussion Thread**

Each member of the class will be assigned to a group. The groups will contribute to discussion threads with commentaries on the readings/movies and with progress reports on the assignments. Each student needs to post her/his commentary on the group discussion thread at least twice every week. Students will be assessed individually based on their contribution. An effective commentary is one that demonstrates an excellent understanding of the materials, an in-depth engagement with the texts, and an ability to apply the claims of the readings to examples beyond those mentioned by the authors. A less effective commentary is one that misses to engage with the readings, misreads the major claims, is confusing/vague, overgeneralizes, or provides off-examples. Besides the analysis of the readings/videos, students are also required to regularly post reports on their progress with the assignments.

### **3.5 Research in Context (Due February 23)**

For this assignment, students are asked to write a 5-page paper (Times New Roman, double-spaced) discussing the challenges of conducting research. Based on the readings, students may focus on aspects such as the ethics of scientific inquiry, the challenges of working in violent and oppressive environments, the difficulty of gaining access to interviewees and primary sources, the political constraints to carrying out a research plan, the obstacles to a fair representation of disadvantaged groups, the maintenance of standards of interviewee protection during the write-up and publication stage etc. This assignment can be approached in two ways: (1) students rely on their own experience to discuss in detail some of challenges they encountered while embarking on their own projects; or (2) students think of their current (or future) research plan and try to anticipate challenges that need to be overcome. For this assignment, I recommend that, in addition to class readings, you browse through at least one chapter in the following book:

Sriram, C. L. et al. (2009). *Surviving field research: Working in violent and difficult situations*. New York: Routledge.

### **3.6 Methodology Assessment (Due March 25)**

This assignment asks students to write a 5-page paper (Times New Roman, double-spaced) assessing the strengths and limitations of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Building on the chapters from Creswell (2014), students may reflect on their own research projects to discuss the pros and cons of adopting one method over another. Alternatively, students may choose an article in the larger peace and conflict literature and offer a critical analysis of the methodological approach adopted by the author(s).

### **3.7 Group Research Proposal (Due March 30)**

Students are expected to work collaboratively and write a research proposal (Times New Roman, double-spaced, 8-10 pages, excluding references).<sup>1</sup> Specifically, each group will select a topic or question of interest and, based on the class materials, will develop a research plan for investigating it. Even if a topic relates primarily to a theoretical issue (e.g., how certain individuals deal with post-conflict trauma) rather than to a clear hypothesis to be tested, the group members must specify appropriate methods for investigating the issue in a manner that they could actually execute if they chose to do so. Each group needs to consult with the instructor before selecting the topic. During the final session, the groups will present an overview of the research proposal to the entire class. Additionally, each member of the group will report on their contribution to this assignment on a weekly basis (5 points of the grade for this assignment will be based on these individual reports).

## **4 Course policies**

### **4.1 Laptops, tablets, and smartphones**

Please refrain from using a laptop, tablet, or smartphone at any time during class. Not only is this a source of distraction for your peers, it is also detrimental to your own learning experience. For example, research (see here, here and here) has consistently shown that the use of laptops hinders learning. If you have a documented disability, you may of course use any electronic device that is necessary.

### **4.2 Grade assignment**

Grades are assigned on the following point scale: A=94-100; A-=90-93; B+=87-89; B=83-86; B-=80-82; C+=77-79; C=73-76; F=72 and below. Grades in the "A" range indicate very satisfactory achievement of the learning outcomes. Grades in the "B" range indicate satisfactory achievement. Grades in the "C" range indicate marginally satisfactory achievement. "I" (incomplete) grades will be considered only in cases of emergency and hardship. A request for such a grade option must be discussed with the instructor prior to the final week of class. Following that discussion, the student and the instructor will establish a time for completion of the incomplete work. You are entitled to an explanation of your grades. If you wish to challenge your grade, you must write a detailed memo explaining why you think you deserved a better grade. Once the memo has been received, an appointment will be scheduled to discuss the matter in detail.

Your final grade will comprise of the following:

- I. Attendance and Participation—15%
- II. Discussion Threads—15%

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<sup>1</sup>Please use the American Psychological Association citation style for all assignments.

- III. Research in Context—20%
- IV. Methodology Assessment—25%
- V. Group Research Proposal—25%

### 4.3 Academic Integrity

Each student is required to abide by the Academic Integrity Policy, which can be found in the Student Policy Handbook.

### 4.4 Late Assignments

Late assignments will be graded down by at least one grade point. Exceptions will be made only for documented emergencies, in which case the instructor must be notified before the due date.

### 4.5 Weather Policy

When the Chancellor decides to close the campus due to emergency conditions, the local media will be requested to broadcast the campus closure as a public service message. In addition, the University's adverse weather number (336-334-4400) or website may be accessed for up-to-date campus closure information. In case of inclement weather, class might be rescheduled even though the University is officially open. When class is cancelled due to weather, we will cover the material through Blackboard Collaborate.

## 5 Schedule

### 5.1 January 26

**Main topics:** concept development; writing strategies; research and ethics; protection of human subjects

**Readings:**

- Chapter 5 in Gerring, J. (2012). *Social science methodology: A unified framework*. (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Chapter 4 in Creswell (2014)
- The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment (video)
- Campbell, S. P. (2010). *Ethics of research in conflict and post-conflict environments*. CUNY: Program on States and Security.

- Chapter 4 in Kapiszewski, D. et al. (2015). *Field research in political science: Practices and principles*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

**Main discussion questions:** What is a “good” concept? How do you approach the research and writing process? What are some ethical issues involved in conducting research? What are the ethical challenges and dilemmas facing research in conflict and post-conflict environments?

## 5.2 February 9

**Main topics:** knowing self; listening to others; gender issues in field research; conducting interviews

### Readings:

- Belenky et al. (1997)
- Chapter 6 in Kapiszewski, D. et al. (2015). *Field research in political science: Practices and principles*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- The Institutional Review Board at UNCG (Human Subjects Training)

**Main discussion questions:** What role does the researcher play in framing the project? What did you learn from Belenky et al. about the impact of the interaction between the researcher and the participants? How might gender issues impact field research? What are the best strategies for conducting interviews?

## 5.3 February 16

**Main topics:** methodology, decolonization, and consciousness; oppression and social construction; ethnographic methods; conducting research in dangerous places (video conference with Hicham Bou-Nassif)

### Readings:

- Smith (2012)
- Chapter 7 in Kapiszewski, D. et al. (2015). *Field research in political science: Practices and principles*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Goldstein, D. M. (2014). *Qualitative research in dangerous places: Becoming an “ethnographer” of violence and personal safety*. Social Science Research Council: Working Paper on Research Security.

**Main discussion questions:** What does it mean to decolonize methodologies? What forms of investigation respect culture and context? What are the main considerations in working cross-culturally and globally? What methods might be appropriate for evaluating community projects? How do language, culture, and gender influence worldviews? What are the virtues and limitations of the ethnographic method? What are the challenges of conducting research in dangerous places?

## 5.4 March 2

**Main topics:** choosing a research question; the fundamentals of research design; internal and external validity

### Readings:

- Chapters 1, 2, and 3 in Creswell (2014)
- Chapter 4 in Gerring, J. (2012). *Social science methodology: A unified framework*. (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Human Subjects Training

**Main discussion questions:** How does one find a “good” research question? How does the investigator select the appropriate research approach? How does theory inform methodology? What is the difference between internal and external validity?

## 5.5 March 16

**Main topics:** designing research; case studies; mechanisms

### Readings:

- Chapters 5, 6, and 7 in Creswell (2014)
- Gerring, J. (2004). What is a case study and what is it good for? *American Political Science Review* 98(2), 341-354.
- Gerring, J. (2010). Causal mechanisms: Yes, but...*Comparative Political Studies* 43(11): 1499-1526.

**Main discussion questions:** How does one go about to design a research project? What exactly is a “case study”? What are “causal mechanisms” and why are they important?

## 5.6 March 25

**Main topics:** qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches

### Readings:

- Chapters 8, 9, and 10 in Creswell (2014)
- Chapter 13 in Gerring, J. (2012). *Social science methodology: A unified framework*. (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press (*Blackboard*).

**Main discussion questions:** What are the strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative methods? Is the mixed methods approach the best way to investigate a phenomenon of interest?

## 5.7 March 30

### Group presentations

*Disclaimer:* I reserve the right to amend the schedule to better accommodate the course needs. All modifications will be communicated in class and via email.