THE OBJECTIVES of this seminar include:

(1) Completing polished short and long versions of a research proposal for submission to funding agencies, as well as shorter writing and reviewing assignments detailed below;
(2) Deepening understanding of the research design, proposal writing, and review process;
(3) Learning about database tools for identifying potential funders;
(4) Understanding issues related to the protection of human subjects and the Institutional Review Board;
(5) Mastering other skills useful in proposal writing and related professional activities.

Please note that this is not a course on methods or data analysis. It is assumed that students already have some background in research design, research methods and data analysis and that they will deepen this knowledge on their own as part of the proposal writing process.

PRELIMINARIES: Before the semester begins you must:

(1) Draft a short list of your main research questions. This will probably consist of 3-6 questions, all of which should be “answerable” through specific research procedures (which you will describe later—for now just the questions). Identify several key words or indicators that could be used in a database search for possible sources of funding (e.g., gender relations, health, area studies, peace studies, single-parent households, deforestation, India, transportation, malaria, affordable housing, etc.).
(2) Familiarize yourself with one of the main bibliographical or reference management software programs, such as EndNote, RefWorks or Zotero. These will greatly facilitate the preparation of multiple versions of a proposal, as well as research papers, exam bibliographies and so on. If you are unsure of which program to use, the GC Library has a useful page (where you can also make an appointment with a librarian to discuss the options).
(3) Read this syllabus.
(4) Find a dissertation advisor, if you haven’t already.

Submissions of written work should be in the form of Word documents sent by email not later than 12:00 noon on the day before the relevant class. This will facilitate class discussions and commenting and editing with “track changes.” Please name your files as follows: LAST NAME first name description date in month-day-year format. If you are editing classmates’ documents, please leave their file name as is but append your initials to the edited version. For example: MENGANO Fulano research questions 1-22-16. If somebody with the initials AB edits the file, it would then become MENGANO Fulano research questions 1-22-16 AB. Please turn on “track changes” before you send me a file and set the “view” zoom to 88%. This will speed up my editing process.

Giving and receiving, and accepting and acting on criticism are essential in this course. Most of us have trouble with this. We have to not pull any punches, because that would be unfair to someone who needs help or who is having trouble hearing that she or he needs help. We may need to rethink our framing of our projects or our attachment to certain terminology and prose styles. We also have to be sensitive to people’s
deep identification with what they write and with their research projects and to tread softly around that sensitivity. The challenge is to become both tougher and more sensitive, to be able to dish it out and to take it, but always with the aim of being supportive and producing better and clearer writing. Here are helpful guidelines from Daniel Dennett (in practice I don’t always remember to use them — remind me if I don’t):

- Attempt to re-express your target’s position so clearly, vividly, and fairly that your target says, “Thanks, I wish I’d thought of putting it that way.”
- List points of agreement (especially if they are not matters of general or widespread agreement).
- You should mention anything you have learned from your target.
- Only then are you permitted to say so much as a word of rebuttal or criticism.

REQUIRED COURSE READINGS:

The required readings are about how to write (Belcher, Lanham, McGranahan, Zinsser), how to do research and report on it (Belcher, Corbin and Strauss, Kurzwelly, Perecman and Curran, Small) and how to write proposals (Kelsky, Przeworski and Solomon, Silverman). These are interrelated challenges, all of which need to be taken very seriously. Shakespeare’s (a brick-and-mortar bookstore, Lexington bet. 68th and 69th Sts.) has ordered the five books (which are asterisked in the list below):


Dunleavy, Patrick. 2014. “*Why Do Academics Choose Useless Titles for Articles and Chapters? Four Steps to Getting a Better Title.*” *LSE Impact Blog*. February 5.

Kelsky, Karen. *The Big Issue in Your Grant Proposal* and Dr. Karen’s Foolproof Grant Template


PROJECT-SPECIFIC (OPTIONAL) READINGS

Several academic publishers have useful series on social scientific and historical methods (e.g., Rowman & Littlefield, Left Coast Press, Sage and Wiley). It is essential that you read books and articles on the methods you intend to employ and which use those methods (not everybody will read the same material). For example, you may plan to use participant observation, focus groups, event analysis, time series data, cross-sectional data, sampling and surveys, narrative analysis, life histories, oral histories, video and/or audio recording, key informant interviews, documentary research or other method(s). Reading about methods will (a) deepen your understanding of each method’s possibilities and limitations; and (b) identify sources to cite in a proposal bibliography to better explain what you intend to do and to signal that you are knowledgeable about that method. Such reading will help you to think through not just how to gather data, but how to manage it, analyze it and present it in narrative, graphical, or tabular forms.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Thurs., Feb. 4

Course introduction: course overview and some elements of a good proposal (first paragraph, layout, bibliography, language issues, targets and deadlines)

Reading:

Kelsky, The Big Issue in Your Grant Proposal
Kelsky, Dr. Karen’s Foolproof Grant Template
McGranahan, “How a Professional Writer Improved My Academic Writing.”
Przeworksi and Solomon, On the Art of Writing Proposals
Perecman and Curran, Chapters 8-10 (Harrell, Schrank, Watts)
Silverman, Sydel. 1991. Writing Grant Proposals for Anthropological Research
Zinsser, On Writing Well, pp. 3-91.

Assignment: Complete tasks outlined in the “Preliminaries” section of the syllabus and on the “Preliminary Proposal Writing Exercise” sheet.

Thurs., Feb. 11
Expert advice and institutional resources for grant writers
Guest speaker: Edith González, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, CUNY Graduate Center

Thurs., Feb. 18
Identifying potential funding agencies: the COS Pivot, Grant Advisor Plus and other databases
Guest speakers: Shawnta Smith and Michael Handis, Mina Rees Library, CUNY Graduate Center
PLEASE BRING A LAPTOP TO THIS SESSION!

Doctoral students frequently seek funding only from “the usual suspects” (Wenner-Gren, SSRC, Fulbright,
NSF, etc.). These grant programs are all highly competitive and often have success rates of less than 10 percent. This means that (a) these grants are hard to get and (b) everybody is competing with everybody else in the same competitions. It is important not to put all your eggs in one basket. Many smaller, less well-known funders might be interested in supporting your dissertation project. This is why it is important to do an exhaustive search in the COS and other databases and to identify and to apply to at least one or two potential funders that aren’t also on everybody else’s list.

**Assignment**: (1) Bring the list of your main research questions and the list of key words or indicators described above under “Preliminaries.” You will use these to get some hands-on experience in searching the grant databases; (2) consult the “Dissertation Funding Opportunities Summer 2014” Excel sheet (prepared by the SSRC and distributed by email).

**Thurs., Feb. 25**

**Research questions or problem**

**Reading**: Skim week one reading again and begin reading on research methods relevant to your project (as indicated on page 3 of this syllabus).

**Assignment**: The task this week is to use whatever you might have learned from the previous weeks’ sessions to improve your statement about research questions or objectives. Write a problem statement of no more than two double-spaced pages that introduces your research topic and describes your research objectives. Remember that it is not enough to say that this research has not been done before. You must not only introduce a research problem. You must also make clear why it is significant. Include in your statement a list of specific questions that can be answered by the research you are proposing. If the questions seem obvious, uninspired, already answered or impossible to answer based on empirical evidence, you may need to rethink the problem from the ground up.

**Thurs., March 3**

**A view from the Social Science Research Council**

**Guest speaker**: Josh DeWind, Director, Dissertation Proposal Development Fellowship (DPDF) Program, Social Science Research Council

**Thurs., March 10**

**Research methods and sources**

**Reading**: Read whatever you need to write a convincing methods and sources section. This could mean works that are about the methods you intend to employ or works that employ these methods in an exemplary way.

**Assignment**: Redraft a two-page section on “methods and sources” for your proposal. Each submission will be assigned two or more reader-evaluators from among the seminar participants. Each reader-evaluator will be expected to read the drafts she or he is assigned and to fill in the “Research Methods and Sources Review Form.”

**Thurs., March 17**

**A view from the National Science Foundation**

**Guest speaker**: Deborah Winslow, Program Officer, Cultural Anthropology Program, National Science Foundation
Writing a “killer” first paragraph

Reading: Closely read examples of successful first paragraphs in the document posted on the web. Reread Zinsser chapter on “leads.” This is also an opportunity to think about the best title for your proposal. See: Dunleavy, “Why Do Academics Choose Useless Titles for Articles and Chapters? Four Steps to Getting a Better Title.”

Writing assignment: Draft an incredibly fascinating, stylistically riveting first sentence and first paragraph for your proposal. If you can’t make the project sound interesting, think again about why you want to spend more than a year of your life doing it. Please bring enough paper copies for every member of the seminar.

There is no single strategy that makes a good lead paragraph (or “lede,” as some journalists like to say). Some proposals start with a question (“How do international human rights norms evolve?”). Others with an anecdote derived from fieldwork or archival research (“In a packed auditorium in Rome last October hundreds of people rose to their feet and applauded for five long minutes. While such an ovation would not be unusual at the finale of an Italian opera, on this occasion it marked the closing plenary of the staid and heretofore unremarkable Committee on World Food Security [CFS] of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO].”). Still others open with a framing statement (“The United Nations—which approved a landmark Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People in 2007—is now moving to strengthen human rights protections for the upwards of one-third of the global population that consists of peasants, small farmers, and landless laborers.”).

Research plan and budget

Assignment: Think through the practical aspects of your research plan. Where do you have to go and for how long? Will you need a vehicle? What kinds of equipment will you need for the research? Will you need special medical equipment? Are there fees connected to visas, immigration or residency? Will you hire research assistants and at what cost? Do you require preliminary training (e.g., survey research methods, foreign language, paleography)? Draft a budget and a chronological outline of the stages of your research.

Protecting human subjects and navigating the Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Guest speaker: Marianna Azar, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, The Graduate Center

Reading: Kurzwelly, “Encrypting Ethnography: Digital Security for Researchers.”

Theoretical contributions, to anthropology and beyond

Reading: start with the worksheet on the theory statement section. Then read whatever else you need to write a convincing theoretical justification for your research.

Assignment: Read the statements from fellow students that are assigned to you. Fill in a Theoretical Significance Section Review Form for each.
Thurs., May 5
Review panel

Thurs., May 12
Review panel

May 19 NO CLASS, BUT FINAL ASSIGNMENT IS DUE VIA EMAIL BY 12 NOON.

**Final assignment:** Write a long (NSF-style) and short (Wenner-Gren or SSRC style) versions of your proposal. When you submit these by email, I will want to see that you have cc’d your dissertation advisor.