

**Florida State University Geography 5118c (Geographic Research)
Spring 2005 -- Bellamy 317 -- Wednesdays 2:30-5:00**

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The great tragedy of science: the slaying of a beautiful theory by an ugly fact.
-- *Thomas Huxley*

The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible.
-- *Albert Einstein*

Sure, he, that made us with such large discourse
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason,
To fust in us unused
-- *William Shakespeare (Hamlet)*

This here's a re-search laboratory. Re-search means look again, don't it? Means they're looking for something they found once and it got away somehow, and now they got to re-search for it? How come they got to build a building like this, with mayonnaise elevators and all, and fill it with all these crazy people? What is it they're trying to find again? Who lost what? Yes, Yes!
-- *Kurt Vonnegut (Cat's Cradle)*

"What is a geographer?" asked the little prince.
"A geographer is a scholar who knows the location of all the seas, rivers, towns, mountains, and deserts....It is not the geographer who goes out to count the towns, the rivers, the mountains, the seas, the oceans, and the deserts. The geographer is much too important to go loafing about. He does not leave his desk. But he receives the explorers in his study. He asks them questions, and he notes down what the recall of their travels. And if the recollections of any one among them seem interesting to him, the geographer orders an inquiry into that explorer's moral character....Then, when the moral character of the explorer is shown to be good, an inquiry is ordered into his discovery."
"One goes to see it?"
"No. That would be too complicated. But one requires the explorer to furnish proofs. For example, if the discovery in question is that of a large mountain, one requires that large stones be brought back from it."
-- *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (The Little Prince)*

Here I am, a victim of Geography
-- *Billy Bragg (The Only One)*

It's about time, it's about space
It's about strange people in the strangest place
-- *Theme Song from the TV Show "It's About Time"*

Overview

This course is designed to guide you through a transition in your FSU geography graduate (Master's or Doctoral) program. Before taking this course, you are expected to have successfully completed Geography 5058, Geographic Thought, in which you were exposed to a number of debates within geography, including those relating to the potential for explanation and prediction, the possibilities for identifying general laws that transcend individual spaces and times, and the capacity of any narrative to depict adequately the totality of processes and interactions that collectively constitute a place. Shortly after taking this course, you will be expected to demonstrate your proficiency in geography by completing a thesis or dissertation in which you identify a concise and approachable research question, develop a methodology for investigating this question, utilize a set of techniques for gathering and analyzing data, and make conclusions about how the study may advance geographic thought. (Even if you are pursuing the non-thesis master's options, you are expected to demonstrate these skills by the time you graduate; that's why this is a required course for all graduate students.) But the translation from the theoretical domain (embodied in Geographic Thought) to the empirical (embodied in most theses and dissertations) is often difficult to achieve. This course's objectives lie in the middle ground between the theoretical and the empirical. Its aim is to expose you to mid-level debates about what is possible and desirable in explanation and how it may be achieved, so that you may design and carry out research projects that further your development as a geographer.

To this end, this course consists of six units. The goal of the first unit is to train you in posing theoretically grounded and practicably approachable research questions. To define the parameters within which research questions may fall, a number of theoretical debates are engaged. These debates are primarily epistemological, meaning that they concern the position of the researcher relative to the research object and the nature of science, explanation, proof, and certainty. These questions overlap with a more practical issue: how can a research question be framed within the context of how others have approached similar questions for explaining related phenomena? As this unit proceeds, you should begin thinking of the impacts that these debates will have on the research question of your prospective thesis/dissertation proposal.

The second unit concerns the actual formulation of the research question. As this is generally derived primarily from existing literature on the topic, much of this unit centers on secondary-source research toward gathering a literature review that backs up the research question component of your proposal. Additionally, this unit covers issues concerning the ethics of conducting your research.

The third unit concerns methodological issues: i.e. now that a research question has been posed and its significance in the literature has been justified, how might you test or defend the propositions inherent in that question? To approach these issues, this unit exposes you to debates surrounding such topics as selecting a sample, selecting the appropriate scale of analysis, accounting for variance within data sets, etc. Specific attention is directed to issues of scale and empiricism, as these issues have been prominent in methodological debates within geography.

The fourth and fifth units concern specific techniques used for gathering and analyzing data. Although the boundary between "qualitative" and "quantitative" techniques is fuzzy, a somewhat

arbitrary line is drawn between "reliability-intensive" techniques (experiments, surveys, and close-ended interviews, the subject of Unit IV) and "validity-intensive" techniques (focus groups, open-ended interviews, participant observation, and archival/documentary research, the subject of Unit V). Although this course generally is concerned with techniques of data gathering, not data analysis, Unit V also includes a section on analyzing data that do not get quantified. No parallel section is included for data that gets quantified because the Geography Department requires an entire course in quantitative data analysis techniques (GEO 5165 -- Quantitative Geography) for both master's and doctoral students.

The sixth unit brings together issues from all of the units covered, and also includes ethical considerations regarding the use of your research findings.

A running theme throughout all six units is the proposal (sometimes called the prospectus) that you must produce as a precursor to your thesis or dissertation. At selected points throughout the term, you will be required to produce a component of your proposal, integrating your particular interests with course readings. By the end of the semester, you will have written a draft proposal which in many cases -- especially for thesis master's students -- serves as the proposal that you will defend before your supervisory committee.

Texts

The central textbook for the class is:

Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research, Tenth Ed.* (Wadsworth, 2004).

Other books that we will be reading most or all of are:

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Social Revolutions, 3rd Ed.* (U. of Chicago, 1996)

Bruno Latour & Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life* (Sage, 1979)

Robin Flowerdew & David Martin, *Methods in Human Geography* (Longman, 1997).

All four of these books have been used in previous years in this class, so you may be able to purchase or borrow copies from other graduate students. If you have a used copy of the 9th edition of Babbie, you may use it since most of the readings are substantively similar. There will, however, be a few readings from Babbie that appear only in the 10th ed.; if you use the 9th ed. you'll need to borrow someone else's copy for these readings. If you use the 9th edition of Babbie, use the following table to identify the appropriate readings:

| 10 th ed. chapter | 9 th ed. chapter(s) | 10 th ed. chapter | 9 th ed. chapter(s) |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | 1 | 9 | 9 |
| 2 | 2 | 10 | 10 |
| 3 | 18 | 11 | 11 |
| 4 | 4 + parts of 3 | 12 | 12 |
| 5 | 5 | 13 | 13 |
| 6 | 6 | 14 | 15 + parts of 14 |
| 7 | 7 | 15 | 16 |
| 8 | 8 | 16 | 17 |
| | | 17 | New |

In addition to these four texts, there will be other assigned readings, which will be made available via the class Blackboard site (either as scanned text or as links to journal articles to which FSU subscribes). A complete bibliography of readings for the class can be found at the end of this syllabus.

Class Outline (Readings and Assignments)

UNIT I

Science, Proof, and Paradigms:

The Possibilities for Research, the Position of the Researcher, and the Parameters of the Research Question

Class 1 (1/5): Introductory class. Discussion of students' research interests and presentation of class goals, structure, and expectations

Class 2 (1/12): Complexity, Inconclusiveness, and Theory-Making

- This syllabus
- Babbie: Chapter 1
- Pettigrew: Chapter 1.3
- Pulido article ("Rethinking Environmental Racism")
- Kuhn: Entire book
- Latour & Woolgar: Chapter 1

Class 3 (1/19): Positivism and Proof

- Babbie: Chapter 2; Chapter 4 to "Units of Analysis"
- Flowerdew & Martin: Chapter 2 (by Graham)
- Guba: Chapter 1 (by Guba)
- Popper: Chapters 1 & 4
- Goodman article ("Measuring Truth")
- Borges: "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"

UNIT II

Developing a Research Question: The Literature Review

Class 4 (1/26): The Research Proposal & Library Skills

- Babbie: Chapter 4 from "How to Design"; chapter 17
- Flowerdew & Martin: Chapters 3 (by Gatrell) & 4 (by Flowerdew)
- Assignment Sheet for Problem Statement/Literature Review of Thesis/Dissertation Proposal
- Assignment Sheet for Journal Review Assignment
- Geography Journals Guide
- Past Proposal Notebook

Class 5 (2/2): Ethics in Data Gathering

- Babbie: Chapter 3 to “The Politics of Social Research”
- Fowler (Survey Research Methods): Chapter 9
- Nachmias & Nachmias: Chapter 4
- **Journal review assignment due**

UNIT III **Developing a Methodology**

Class 6 (2/9): Scale, Specificity, and Inference

- Babbie: Chapter 4 to "How to Design"; Chapter 5 from “Criteria of Measurement Quality”
- Tschinkel article (“School Plans”)
- Locality Studies Assignment Sheet
- Smith article ("Dangers of the Empirical Turn")
- Cooke article ("Clinical Inference")
- Duncan & Savage article ("Space, Scale, and Locality")
- Cox & Mair article ("Levels of Abstraction")
- Yeung article ("Critical Realism and Realist Research")
- **Draft literature review / problem statement due by Friday 2/11 (3 copies)**

Class 7 (2/16): Presentation and Critiques of Problem Statement/Literature Reviews

- **Localities debate assignment due**

UNIT IV **Reliability-Intensive Data Gathering Techniques**

Class 8 (2/23): Experiments, Indexes, and Scales

- Babbie: Chapters 6 & 8
- Latour & Woolgar: Chapter 2
- Olson & Brewer article ("An Evaluation of Color Schemes")

Class 9 (3/2): Surveys and Close-Ended Interviews

- Babbie: Chapter 9
- Hanson & Pratt: Chapter 3
- Feitelson article ("Potential of Mail Surveys")
- Fowler (Survey Research Methods): Chapter 7
- Flowerdew & Martin: Chapter 6 (by Parfitt)
- Fowler (Improving Survey Questions): Chapters 2-4

--- NO CLASS 3/9 (SPRING BREAK) ---

UNIT V

Validity-Intensive Data Gathering Techniques

Class 10 (3/16): Participant Observation, Focus Groups, Open-Ended Interviews, and Archival Work

- Babbie: Chapter 10 & 11
- Flowerdew & Martin: Chapters 7 (by Valentine), 8 (by Cook) & 12 (by Aitken)
- McLeod: Appendix
- Moffat: Preface, Chapter 1, & Appendix 1
- Stewart & Shamdasani: Chapter 1
- Goss & Leinbach article (“Focus Groups as Alternative Research Practice”)
- Schoenberger article (“The Corporate Interview”)

Class 11 (3/23): Analyzing Qualitative Data

- Babbie: Chapter 13; Chapter 14 to “Univariate Analysis”
- Flowerdew & Martin: Chapter 11 (by Crang)
- Latour & Woolgar: Chapter 6
- Denzin & Lincoln: Chapter 1 (by Denzin & Lincoln)
- Geertz: Chapter 3
- Data Gathering Technique Assignment Sheet

UNIT VI

Reflecting on Research and Use

Class 12 (3/30): Back from the Field: Ethics and Other Issues in Field Work and Reporting

- Babbie: Chapter 3 from "Politics of Social Research"
- Nast article ("Women in the Field")
- Gallaher: “A Note on Method”
- Lake article ("Planning and Applied Geography")
- *Geographical Review* Special Issue
- **Data gathering technique paper due**

--- NO CLASS 4/6 (AAG ANNUAL MEETING) ---

Class 13 (4/13): Presentations I

- Half of class presents proposals
- **Draft proposals due**

Class 14 (4/20): Presentations II

- Half of class presents proposals

Wednesday, 4/27 (finals week): **Final draft of proposal due (2 copies)**

Disclaimer: *The approval of a thesis/dissertation proposal in this class in no way should be taken as an indicator that it has met (or will meet) the approval of your thesis/dissertation committee, which is the ultimate authority on such matters. This class will aim to identify whether a proposal appears internally coherent and whether the research proposed is hypothetically practicable, but your committee remains specifically qualified to identify substantive gaps and other potential imperfections with your research proposal.*

Grade Calculation

Grades will be calculated according to the following formula:

Comparison of three journals (2/2): 5%

Draft of problem statement/lit. review

2/11 submission: 5%

2/16 presentation: 5%

2/16 discussanting: 5%

Localities debate essay (2/16): 10%

Data gathering technique essay (3/30): 10%

First draft of complete proposal

4/13 submission: 10%

4/13 or 4/20 presentation: 10%

Second draft of complete proposal (4/27): 40%

Class participation: plus or minus up to 10%

(this includes attendance, contribution to discussions, evidence of having done reading, etc.)

References

Required Purchases

Babbie, Earl, *The Practice of Social Research, 9th Ed.* (Wadsworth, 2001)

Flowerdew, Robin and David Martin (eds.), *Methods in Human Geography* (Longman, 1997)

Kuhn, Thomas, *The Structure of Social Revolutions, 3rd Ed.* (U. of Chicago, 1996)

Latour, Bruno & Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life* (Sage, 1979)

Other Books

Borges, Jorge Luis, *Labyrinths* (Penguin, 1962)

Denzin, Norman & Yvonna Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Methods, 2nd Ed.* (Sage, 2000)

Fowler, Floyd Jr., *Improving Survey Questions* (Sage, 1995)

Fowler, Floyd Jr., *Survey Research Methods, 2nd Ed.* (Sage, 1993)

Gallaher, Carolyn, *On the Fault Line* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003)

Geertz, Clifford, *Local Knowledge* (Basic, 1983)

Guba, Egon (ed.), *The Paradigm Dialog* (Sage, 1990)
 Hanson, Susan & Geraldine Pratt, *Gender, Work, and Space* (Routledge, 1995)
 MacLeod, Jay, *Ain't No Makin' It* (Westview, 1987)
 Moffatt, Michael, *Coming of Age in New Jersey* (Rutgers, 1989)
 Nachmias, David & Chava Nachmias, *Research Methods in the Social Sciences, 3rd Ed.* (St. Martin's, 1987)
 Pettigrew, Thomas, *How to Think Like a Social Scientist* (HarperCollins, 1996)
 Popper, Karl, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (Hutchinson, 1959)
 Stewart, David & Prem Shamdasani, *Focus Groups* (Sage, 1990)

Journal Articles and Special Issues

Cooke, Philip, "Clinical Inference and Geographic Theory" in *Antipode*, Vol.19, pp. 69-78 (1987)
 Cox, Kevin & Andrew Mair, "Levels of Abstraction in Locality Studies" in *Antipode*, Vol. 21, pp. 121-132 (1989)
 Duncan, Simon & Mike Savage, "Space, Scale and Locality" in *Antipode*, Vol. 21, pp. 179-206 (1989)
 Feitelson, Eran, "The Potential of Mail Surveys in Geography" in *The Professional Geographer*, Vol. 43, pp. 190-205 (1991)
 Goss, Jon and Thomas Leinbach, "Focus Groups as Alternative Research Practice" in *Area*, Vol. 28, pp. 115-121
 Goodman, Steven, "Measuring Truth: Uncertainty in Florida and Beyond" in *The Baltimore Sun*, December 3, 2000
 Nast, Heidi, "Opening Remarks on 'Women in the Field'" in *The Professional Geographer*, Vol. 46, pp. 54-66 (1994)
 Lake, Robert, "Planning and Applied Geography: Positivism, Ethics, and GIS" in *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 17, pp. 404-413 (1993)
 Olson, Judy & Cynthia Brewer, "An Evaluation of Color Selections" in *Annals of the AAG*, Vol. 87, pp. 103-134 (1997)
 Pulido, Laura, "Rethinking Environmental Racism" in *Annals of the AAG*, Vol. 90, pp. 12-40 (2000)
 Schoenberger, Erica, "The Corporate Interview" in *The Professional Geographer*, Vol. 43, pp. 180-189 (1991)
 Smith, Neil, "Dangers of the Empirical Turn" in *Antipode*, Vol. 19, pp. 59-68 (1987)
 Tschinkel, Walter, "School Plans Ignore the 'Poor' Factor" in *The Tallahassee Democrat*, March 14, 1999, pp. 1E, 3E.
 Yeung, Henry, "Critical Realism and Realist Research" in *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 21, pp. 51-74 (1997)