

ARC6911: Research Design in Sustainability

Sections 15FC/15FD

2 Credits

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Research Topics in Sustainability is the first of two courses that help students in the Masters in Sustainable Design Degree Program develop the foundations for a research topic for their Thesis or Masters Research Project (MRP). This course provides a structured environment that encourages students to establish a line of research into topics that supports their particular interests in sustainability that can be successfully completed in the allotted time. It emphasizes the research thinking, a review of previously completed theses, and how to develop a research topic. Thus, the course focuses on understanding what is a thesis versus a project, defining planning problems and suitable research question, understanding the types of study designs and data collection methodologies that others have used, and overall strategies for the design and conduct of research.

Objectives of the Course

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand the research process
- Frame a research question
- Outline the parts to a typical thesis or research project
- Describe the research process
- Conduct a basic literature review

While this course will help develop the skills to design a research proposal, it is not a substitute for the simple decision making that is required in defining a thesis or research project. That is, the instructor can help you think about how to define the topic but ultimately each student will need to make some basic decision about what s/he wants to research and how to approach that research. The subject matter will be addressed through lectures, targeted readings, and discussion sessions. In addition, technical issues of producing a thesis or MRP are covered. By the end of the course, you will have prepared the first description of your research topic.

Structure of the Course

Students learn methods best by doing them. Therefore, the course will be taught in the context of developing your ideas for your Master's research project or thesis. The course will involve a series of assignment where students begin to understand what is a thesis or a project and they begin to focus on their literature review and their research question. In the second part of the course during the spring semester, they will prepare the first three chapters of the thesis or project. Instruction will use a combination of taped lectures, in-person discussions and written assignments.

Course Readings

The following book is required for all students.

Kumar, Ranjit. (2014). *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*. Fourth Edition. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

The following books are recommended for all students. I highly recommend the Hart book, which describes how to do a literature review, and is useful in organizing and expressing ideas, and mapping and analyzing ideas. The Booth book had been used as a primary text in the past. However, some of the best parts of it have been incorporated into the Turabian book. It remains among the best sources on making an argument and supporting it. The Creswell texts are an alternative to the Kumar text and explain the research concepts differently, so may be useful if you are having difficulty with the Kumar text. I have also placed a list of references to books and other research-related resources under the Resources tab on Canvas.

- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Sommer, Robert and Barbara Sommer. (2002). *A Practical Guide to Behavioral Research Tools and Techniques, Fifth Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Turabian, Kate L. (2013). *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Eighth Edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (available in e-book format)
- Hart, Chris. 1998. *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Imagination*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Booth, Wayne, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2008. *The Craft of Research: Second Edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (available in e-book format).
- Given the timeframe for our course, we will use the guidance provided by S. Joseph Levine at: <http://www.learnerassociates.net/dissthes/#8>.

All other reading materials are posted on Canvas or located on a public domain website.

1. **Overview of the Research Process – Understanding Your Interests (complete by October 9)**
 - a. Readings: Kumar, Chapters 1-2
 - b. Lectures
 - i. Overview of Research
 - c. Assignments (40% of your grade; equally divided as shown below)
 - i. Minor Assignment 1: Revising Your Statement of Purpose (20% of your course grade; due **September 11, at 5:00 pm**)

ii. Minor Assignment 2: Reviewing a Completed Master’s Thesis or Research Project (20% of the grade; due **October 9 at 5 pm**)

2. Literature Review (complete by November 13)

- a. Readings: Kumar, Chapters 3
- b. Lecture
 - i. Literature Review
- c. Assignments (30% of course grade)
Major Assignment 1 – Literature Review (due **November 13 at 5:00 pm**)

3. Formulating a Research Question (complete by December 7)

- a. Readings: Kumar, Chapter 4
- b. Lectures
 - i. Formulating a Research Question
- c. Assignments (30%)
Major Assignment 2 – Formulating a Research Question (due by **December 7 at 5:00 pm**)

4. Review the Rules and Thesis (ongoing)

- a. Visit the UF Graduate School’s website to review the rules for thesis/MRP construction and filing deadlines
- b. You should also familiarize yourself with the University of Florida’s thesis requirements and deadlines as set forth at: <http://graduateschool.ufl.edu/graduation/thesis-and-dissertation>

Grading

I expect that all graduate students should be able to accomplish the basic requirements for the course -- a “B” grade, but do not hesitate to mark lower when a student does not meet the expectation of adequately showing understanding of the material. “A” grades require performance beyond the minimum or average -- e.g., quality, depth, synthesis of ideas, originality or creativity. Meeting deadlines matters, too! The university allows me to give a grade of “A,” “A-,” “B+,” “B,” etc. An “A-” means that a student almost, but not quite, achieved “A” work.

I use the following grading scale:

Grade	Percentage or Points Earned on Assignments	Grade Points
A+	97.5-100	4.0
A	93.5-97.4	4.0
A-	90.0-93.4	3.67
B+	87.5-89.9	3.33
B	83.5-87.4	3.00
B-	80.0-83.4	2.67
C+	77.5-79.9	2.33
C	73.5-77.4	2.00
C-	70.0-73.4	1.67
D+	67.5-69.9	1.33
D	63.5-67.4	1.00
D-	60.0-63.4	0.67
E	<59.9	0.00

WF		0.00
I		0.00
NG		0.00
S-U		0.00

For greater detail, see the Graduate School Grade Policy regulations at <http://gradschool.ufl.edu/archived-files/policy-manual-archived-copy.html#3.1.0.0>

Every effort will be made to provide timely and appropriate feedback for your performance. If you have questions about your grade, you may schedule a conference to review your scores, attendance, and performance. Final grades will reflect the University of Florida policies for assigning grade points, which can be found at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>. An incomplete grade may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor as an interim grade only in cases of extreme extenuating circumstances. Note that as this is a required course, you will not be allowed to graduate without completing the course with a passing grade. Please also note that the Graduate School states that a passing grade is a C or better. Graduate students must maintain a B or better cumulative grade point average in order to graduate.

Use of Reference Material

All references should follow the format used by the American Psychological Association (APA). Citations should appear in the text as follows: (Meyer & Miller, 2014) when using an idea from the text; or (Meyer and Miller, 2014, p. 2-33) when using a specific quote on the indicated page (in this case, page 2-33). A good source of information on the APA format can be found from the Purdue Online Writing Lab: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>. Students from other departments may use a commonly accepted format for citations from their own field; please discuss this option with the instructor before you complete the outline of the paper.

Assistance for Writing Papers

The online resources to assist you in writing are extensive. The Dial Center for Written and Oral Communication (<http://cwoc.ufl.edu/>) and the Writing Program (<http://writing.ufl.edu>) at the University of Florida can assist you in several different aspects of writing. You can use the writing lab to get one-on-one help on every area of composition from basic grammar and mechanics to topics like essay organization, style, and argument.

Many other universities offer online handbooks on writing. I have found the following three particularly useful: the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/>), the University of Wisconsin (<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/>), and Purdue University (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>). I found the following handouts particularly helpful while editing papers; <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/CommonErrors.html> and <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/ClearConciseSentences.html>. The online handbooks described above discuss many aspects of writing papers. Students at the graduate level should be prepared to write a critical argument rather than simply describe relationships. If you have any questions about what is expected at the graduate level, please see the instructor.

Academic Honesty

Students MUST follow the University's policy regarding cheating and the use of copyrighted materials. Students are responsible for reading and abiding by the University's Student Code of Conduct and Conflict Resolution (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/conductcode.php>) and the University

Honor Code. Under the Student Honor Code, “on all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: ‘On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment’” (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/conductcode.php>). In particular, there are rules governing plagiarism and the unauthorized use of materials and resources (“cheating”). If you directly quote someone or use an idea from another source, you must attribute that idea or those words (this includes providing a complete citation to the author(s) in a List of References at the end of the document). If you submit “substantially the same paper or project to satisfy another academic requirement and do not receive express authorization to resubmit or simultaneously submit the paper or project” you will be considered to be “cheating” (see <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/conductcode.php>). Failure to follow the rules in the Student Honor Code will result in failure on that paper and consequently may result in a failure in this course. In addition, possible disciplinary action may be brought under the Judicial Process for Academic Honesty Violations. You can also consult the above website and the graduate catalog for further information. In the context of this course, if you directly quote someone or use an idea from another source, you **must** attribute that idea or words. Failure to follow the rules regarding Integrity in Graduate School may result in a failure in this course and possible disciplinary action under the Judicial Process for Academic Honesty Violations. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism or other aspects of academic honesty, please make an appointment with the instructor.

Help for Student/Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The instructor will respect the needs for accommodations for students with disabilities consistent with the University’s policy on such accommodations. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter that must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester. I am happy to provide reasonable accommodations for students who register with the DRC, and ask that students inform me of any request no later than the end of the second week of the course.

At times students may experience periods of increased stress when challenges related to decisions, goals and relationships arise. Often these experiences are accompanied by thoughts and emotions that produce sadness, anxiety, frustration, anger and confusion. If you are experiencing excessive stress in your life that are affecting your ability to meet the deadlines for this course, please speak to the instructor or contact the Counseling and Wellness Center (<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>; (352) 392-1575) to make an appointment or contact the University Police Department at 352-392-1111 or 911 for emergencies.. If you observe or know of anyone in distress, please reach out to U Matter, We Care (www.umatter.ufl.edu), 352-294-CARE (2273) or #UMatterUF

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two to three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

Information on this syllabus may change. The instructor will notify the class if there are any changes.