Fall 2016 Jean and John Comaroff
Anthro 2626

RESEARCH DESIGN/PROPOSAL WRITING

This course is part seminar, part practicum. Its purpose is to help students conceptualize and design a research project, to craft effective research and grant proposals, and to prepare for ethnographic and archival work. The first and longest part of the course will focus on formulating a researchable project, in all its various elements; how to write a statement of problem, to frame arguments/theses, to situate work in the appropriate anthropological literature/s, to develop a methodological approach, and techniques, commensurate with the objectives and claims of the study, to make a case for its significance and contribution to the discipline, and to prepare for an IRB sbmission. The second part will address the specific requirements of proposals directed to the National Science Foundation, Wenner-Gren,and similar funding agencies. To the extent time permits, the class will also pursue a secondary objective: imparting professional skills, primarily in the area of writing and publishing, but also in oral presentation, that will be useful to students throughout their professional lives.

The course is open to third year (or higher) social anthropology graduate students who have done most of the background reading for their doctoral projects and are actively working on their research proposals. With the permission of the instructors, it will also be open to students in African and African American Studies at a similar stage in their graduate training.

Copies of research proposals that have been successfully submitted to funding agencies in the past, and/or have laid the foundation of successful doctoral projects in different parts of the world, will be made available to participants in the course on its website. All inquiries concerning the website, and other issues related to the running of the course, should be addressed to Alma Medina (almamedina@fas.harvard.edu).

The class will meet on Wednesdays, 12.00-3.00, although sessions may be shorter in the event that the class is small. Office hours are by appointment; write to either jeancomaroff@fas.harvard.edu or jcomaroff@fas.harvard.edu to arrange times to meet.

During the semester, please read the relevant sections of the following texts for each of the exercises. Although we shall not discuss them directly, they will help you as you prepare your written sections, as outlined in the schedule below.

> H. Russell Bernard, 2011, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods*, 5th edition, pp.54-112..
>
> John W. Cresswell, 2008, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Approaches*, 3rd edition.

Michael Watts, 2001, "The Holy Grail: In Pursuit of the Dissertation Proposal." http://iis.berkeley.edu/content/process-parameters. [Click on "Nuts and Bolts," and then, in turn, all the tabs on the left of the page.]

L.F. Lock, W.W. Spirduso, and S.J. Silverman, 2007, *Proposals That Work: A Guide for Planning Dissertations and Grant Proposals*, 5th edition.

Sydel Silverman, 1991, "Writing Grant Proposals for Anthropological Research, *Current Anthropology* 32(4):485-489.

Deborah Winslow, 2007, "What Makes an NSF Proposal Successful," *Anthropology News*, October 2007, p.31.

National Science Foundation, 2004, "A Guide for Proposal Writing"; http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2004/nsf04016/start.htm.

For the session on preparing for your IRB (September 24), please consult the following in advance of the class meeting:

American Anthropological Association, Code of Ethics. In *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, [eds.] A.C.G.M. Robben and J.A. Sluka, 2nd edition, pp.359-364. (See also J.A, Sluka, "Fieldwork Ehnics: Introduction," in the same volume, pp.299-305.]

Lauren Clark and Ann Kingsolver, "Briefing Paper on Informed Consent," American Anthropological Association Committee on Ethics; http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/bp5.htm.

Elizabeth Smith Parrott, 2002, "Ethnographic Research." In *Institutional Review Board Management and Function*, [eds.] Robert A Amdur and Elizabeth A. Bankert, pp.407-414.

American Anthropological Association, 2004, "AAA Statement on Institutional Review Boards"; http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/irb.htm.

Also: please look at the website of the FAS Committee on Human Subjects; http://cuhs.harvard.edu/

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Note: fine-tuning the course schedule will depend on the number of students in the class; its size, obviously, will determine the time needed to discuss each person's work. As a result, we may have to make adjustments as we go along.

IMPORTANT: FOR EACH SESSION IN WHICH YOU ARE EXPECTED TO PREPARE WORK – WHICH IS FOR *MOST* SESSIONS – KINDLY EMAIL THAT WORK TO ALMA MEDINA (almamedina@fas.harvard.edu) AND TO US NO LATER THAN THE SATURDAY BEFORE THE CLASS SO THAT IT MAY BE POSTED ON THE COURSE WEBSITE AND CIRCULATED TO ALL PARTICIPANTS. EVERY CLASS MEMBER IS EXPECTED TO READ EVERYONE ELSE'S SUBMISSIONS FOR EACH SESSION.

9/07 Introduction

9/14 Prolegomenon: The Anatomy of a Proposal

In this class we shall analyze a few select examples of successful proposal, focusing on their form, content, and appropriate guidelines. Those samples are to be found on the course website; please read them carefully in preparation for this session.

9/21 Beginnings: Introducing a Project, synoptically : What, Where, How, Why (i)

For this and the next meeting, everyone in the class is expected to prepare the introduction to their proposal, its first page. Note: strictly one page (no more), single spaced, 12 point font. This page should cover, synoptically:

(a) to *what* question (or set of questions) will it be an answer (a.k.a your statement of problem),
(bi) *where*, geographically-speaking you plan to work;
(bii) *what* the broad topical focus is of your project,
(biii) and *what* is its (general) guiding hypo/thesis and/or argument;
(c) *how* you intend to accomplish your research objectives, a.k.a. a broad idea of research method/s;
(d) *why*, in other words, the significance of your study, its anthropologically value-added "news."

All of these things will, of course, be elaborated further in subsequent sections of your proposal and, hence, in later sessions of the course. REMEMBER: this is a *proposal*; it ought not to suggest that you already know what it is you plan to investigate; nor will you be held accountable for a thesis/argument that has later to be amended or reframed if your data so demand. The object of framing a thesis is to have a point of analytical and

theoretical reference for your data collection.

10/4 Beginnings: Introducing a Project, synoptically : What, Where, How, Why (ii)

Continuation from 9/21. **NOTE THE IRREGULAR DATE, TUES 4.00-6.00**

10/12 Middle Movements (1) : Composing a Literature Review

NOTE: Date to be re-arranged as this is Yom Kippur; this may also have to be a divided session due to class size.

Write a 2-3 page literature review, making plain what anthropological (and/or broader social science) fields of discourse/inquiry/theory frame your project, your statement of problem, and your proposed argument/s. Pay attention to the question of what your work is expected to bring to these discursive fields.

10/19 Middle Movements (2a): Writing a Project Statement

Write a 6-7 page statement of what you intend to research in order to address the problem/s at the heart of your project – and where. (In doing so, you may wish to refer back, albeit briefly, to your statements of problem and argument earlier, thus to tie this part of the proposal to what has come before.) Obviously, demonstrating knowledge of your fieldsite/s is crucial here. Avoid generalities or vagueness of any sort; the more detail the better – but do not hold back from saying what you already know, and how it relates to your empirical objectives.

10/26 Middle Movements (2b): Writing a Project Statement, continued

11/2 Back Ends (1): Attending to Methods

Write a 2-3 page statement of the methods you intend to use. In short, the question that you are answering here is “how?’ By what means are you going to accomplish the objectives detailed in your project statement? What techniques of data collection are commensurate to the analytical claims you hope to make. In preparing this section, please consult the model proposals available to you for guidance. For many anthropologists this is the most difficult part to write, especially since granting agencies are rarely satisfied with platitudes like “participant observation,” unless it is carefully qualified, its content spelled out.

NOTE: There will either have to be an additional date, possibly Tues 11/8, 4.00-6.00, or a divided session, in order to cover this section in

everyone's proposal

11/9 Back Ends (2): Assaying Significance/Contribution

Write a one or two paragraph statement – which should build carefully on (and may repeat briefly) what has come before in the proposal – to make plain what you hold to be the significance of your work, and its contribution to existing scholarship. In so doing, remember that most people who will read this proposal are unlikely to share knowledge or (or particular interest in) your regional focus, and may even have limited interest in the topical foci of your work; assume that it is incumbent on you to persuade them why it is worth reading/funding that work.

11/16 Interregnum: Preparing for an IRB Application

This class will be led by a guest speaker. In preparation for it, you are expected to read the texts listed in the readings on IRB on p.2 above.

11/23 THANKSGIVING BREAK (No class)

11/30 The End: Presenting a Complete Proposal

NOTE: There will have to be at least one additional session to deal with all complete proposals, date to be arranged, possibly Thursday 11/31 or 12/1; also, we will most likely have to divide one or both of these sessions into two sections. But please keep yourself free on 11/30 for an extended class.

By now, you should be in a position to complete a full draft proposal, and are expected to do so for this class – in which it will be discussed. Please circulate your draft, through Alma, by midnight on 11/26. Everyone is required to read ALL the proposals in their session/section in preparation for the meeting/s on 11/30 (and the one yet to be arranged). Please note that these sessions could run on. Please ensure that you clear your calendar for the afternoon.

* Because time does not permit a session dedicated to writing budgets, we offer the following suggestion: that you prepare a mock itemized budget, using the model cases discussed earlier in the semester – but adjusting them for the particular cost-of-living requirements of your region, length of time in the field, cheapest quoted airfares, equipment needs, etc. In so doing, you may wish to check online the current budgetary limits and templates set by the NSF, Wenner-Gren, and SSRC; these change over time, and need to be taken carefully into consideration.