GEOG 594a – Masters Project Preparation
Course Syllabus – Spring Semester 2012

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Office Hours: Mon-Fri, 8-9 am and Mon-Thu 8-9 pm (Pacific time), and by arrangement
>   I am always contactable asynchronously via e-mail. I am also available for synchronous chats in my Adobe Connect room during the above times, or via Skype or Mobile. Stay in touch!

Course Scope and Purpose

This course and its successor, GEOG594b, are required for the Master of Science degree programs; they are not applicable to the GIST Graduate Certificate program. The purpose of these courses is to accomplish a project demonstrating ability (PDA) in the Spatial Sciences, culminating the student's experience at USC/SSI and validating them as a master practitioner. The PDA can be a traditional thesis, a cartographic portfolio, a GIS implementation, or some other sizable, professional study based in the spatial sciences or their application to another field.

The course interweaves the following components throughout the semester:

Reading and Writing – We will read in their entirety Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style* along with Turabian & al.'s *A Manual for Writers*, along with texts of varying lengths and styles, from encyclopedia entries, to journal articles (of varying quality), to book chapters, also including two others' complete theses. We will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these texts in small group (2-3 person) teleconference sessions, using Adobe Connect a/or Skype.

Research Methods – We will read sections from Booth & al.'s *The Craft of Research,* Montello & Sutton's *An Introduction to Scientific Research Methods in Geography*, and Ruane's *Essentials of Research Methods*, and attend guest lectures (recorded) from experts on such topics as human subjects research, test instrument design, computer equipment (hardware and software) utilization, and the all-important literature review.

Technical Tools – We will learn/brush-up on modern technical tools for publication, including particularly the MS Office suite (Word, Excel, and PowerPoint), and its interfaces together with add-ins for bibliographies, equations, and illustrations; further, we will learn to manage all these research materials in a Web context using MS Sharepoint.

Professional Networking – We will network as a group with USC faculty, both within and beyond the Spatial Sciences Institute, as well as potential project reviewers and sponsors outside the University. Engaging with these people, and working one-on-one with the faculty of record for this course, each student is expected and, where necessary coached, to discover/refine their PDA topic and recruit a committee of supporters for it.

The "final" in this course is a well reasoned, well written *prospectus* document, similar to a grant proposal, which sketches the goal/problem/question motivating the student's PDA, supported by a literature review and a plan for completing the project within approximately six months.

Absent a prospectus and a supporting committee for it at the end of GEOG594a, the successor GEOG594b *must* be used to establish those prerequisites before proceeding with the PDA itself. In such cases GEOG594z extends the period of performance for the PDA.

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed this course, you will be able to:

- Distinguish different styles and qualities of writing, critically evaluate your own and others' writing, and write better yourself;
- Understand the research process, be aware of research obligations and pitfalls, and design a credible, meaningful research project for yourself;
- Utilize the Microsoft Office™ software suite competently and efficiently to produce documents that meet University requirements and show your work to advantage; and
- Describe your Masters PDA succinctly, in written and oral forms, to faculty, mentors, and potential sponsors.

Course Formats

This a graduate level course, so you should expect it to be both academically robust and intellectually challenging. As a graduate student you are expected to engage with the subject matter and to critically assess the ideas, opinions, and techniques presented in the readings and exercises. My role as instructor is that of a guide to help keep you and your fellow students on the path of discovery. The challenge for all of us is to replicate such an academic experience within the milieu of "online learning".

All course materials will be organized through Blackboard. The main theoretical concepts will be provided through course notes and assigned readings. The editing and writing exercises are designed to bring you face-to-face with practical problems. All software products required will be accessible over the Internet.

The pedagogical technologies that facilitate our coursework and interactions include:

Blackboard – If you are registered for this course, it will automatically show up on Blackboard, in your list of available classes, at noon (Pacific time) on the first day of the semester. Subsequently, all learning materials, including formal correspondence and assignments from me will be posted on Blackboard. You should submit your work products back to me via Blackboard, too.

Live & recorded meetings – Adobe Connect is a browser-based service that facilitates synchronous, interactive sessions with voice/video and shared desktop capabilities between two or more people; this is the primary forum for our group discussions and presentations.

Discussion boards – Also, Blackboard will host informal discussion boards relevant to various aspects of the course, particularly the exercises; these are other forum for "working together", sharing hints and help as in a traditional classroom setting.

Telecommunications – Mobile phones and voice-over-IP, e.g. Skype (http://www.skype.com), which also supports video, are the preferred technologies for individual chats with me.

Assessment

An In-Progess (IP) grade is automatically assigned for GEOG594a; this converts to Passing (P) when GEOG594b (and if necessary GEOG594z) is/are completed.

Nonetheless, students should treat GEOG594a as Pass/Fail, particularly in the first 9 weeks, according to the following work assignments. Overall, 75+pts is considered passing:

- Editing/Rewriting exercises, four in number – 5 pts each, 20 pts total
- Review of NSF grant proposal, by student pairs – 10 pts each
- Online group critiques/discussions of selected documents – 20 pts
- Preparation of written prospectus describing your PDA project – 40 pts
- Oral/online presentation of PDA prospectus to committee – 10 pts

Requirements

Textbooks – The following three textbooks are required for this class; these are available from the USC Bookstore or online outlets such as Amazon (http://www.amazon.com)

1. Strunk Jr W & White EB, 2000. (Referred to as "S&W" below.)
   The Elements of Style, 4rd edition (Allyn and Bacon) ~$7 paper; ISBN-10: 0205313426
2. Turabian KL, Booth WC, Colomb GG & Williams JM, 2007. (Referred to as "T&al." below.)
   A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 7th edition (Univ. of Chicago Press) ~$10 paper; ISBN-10: 0226823377
3. Montello DR & Sutton PC, 2006. (Referred to as "M&S" below.)
   An Introduction to Scientific Research Methods in Geography (Sage) ~$45 paper;
   ISBN-10: 1412902878

Readings – The above materials will be supplemented with readings from the following books, along with academic journals, professional reports, and authoritative websites; all will be posted on Blackboard.

- Booth WC, Colomb GG & Williams JM, 2008.
  The Craft of Research, 3rd edition (University of Chicago Press) ~$25 paper, avail. as eBook;
  ISBN-10: 0226065669
- Ruane JM, 2004.
  Essentials of Research Methods: A Guide to Social Research (Wiley-Blackwell) ~$35 paper;
  ISBN-10: 0631230491

Technology – There are several technology requirements:

- Every student must have a computer with a fast Internet connection (DSL at a minimum).
- Every student MUST have a functional webcam for use whenever a presentation or meeting is scheduled.

Communications – This is a distance learning course, but in a departure from other courses in GIST, most of our interactions will be *synchronous* (at the same time). However, all assignments given and all materials to be handed in will still be handled via Blackboard. I will also create and monitor Blackboard discussion forums through which we can discuss issues, assignments, and exercises as needed.

I will send via e-mail through Blackboard any notices that are time sensitive. Please be sure that you read as soon as possible all e-mail sent from Blackboard or from me. Also double check to be sure that mail sent from both the USC blackboard accounts and my University email (jthastin@usc.edu) does not go into your junk mail!

While I am usually on-line and will probably respond to e-mails from students relatively quickly, I will endeavor to respond to all e-mail within 24 hours of receipt, aiming for no more than 36 hours delay. In the rare case when I expect to be off-line for more than 24 hours, I will post an announcement on the Blackboard site.

Particularly because of the asynchronous nature of this course, it is each student's responsibility to stay informed and connected with others in our course. In addition to eMail, you are expected to login to Blackboard daily, check for Announcements there.

Workload – This is a two credit, one semester course. Students should expect to spend 5-6 hours per week, including 1-2 hours per week in teleconference, throughout this course.

Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to an instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/appendix_a.pdf . Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/.

Important Administrative Dates

1/9:   Spring semester classes begin
1/16:   Martin Luther King Day, university holiday
1/27:   Last day to register and add classes, or drop without "W" and get 100% refund
2/20:   Presidents' Day, university holiday
3/12-17: Spring recess
4/2:   Thesis/Dissertation upload date for Spring degree
4/6:   Last day to drop a class with a mark of W
4/27:   Spring semester classes end
5/9:   End of Semester
5/11:   Commencement

Tentative Schedule

Week #	Week Begins	Theme	Week's Readings and Practice		Assignments Due on Meeting Days	
			Main Readings	Supp. Readings	Writing Assignments	Interactive Meetings
1	1/09	Getting started	M&S Ch.1		Self-intro	M&S 1-on-1
2	1/16	Example writings	S&W -all-	Lit. #1	Precis #1	S&W Precis #1
3	1/23	…Cont'd	T&al. Ch.1-4	Lit. #2	Precis #2	T&al. Precis #2
4	1/30	First project foray	T&al. Ch.5	Booth&al. Part III	Interest Statement	Sponsors A, B, C, D
5	2/06	Example writings	T&al. Ch.6-9	Lit. #3	Precis #3	T&al. Precis #3
6	2/13	…Cont'd	T&al Ch.10-14	Lit. #4	Precis #4	T&al. Precis #4
7	2/20	Formal writing review	M&S Ch.13	NSF grant proposal	Review	Review
8	2/27	Example thesis	T&al. Ch. 15	Thesis A		Thesis A Sponsors E,F
9	3/05	Second project foray	M&S Ch.2-4		Topic Statement	As needed
*		*SPRING BREAK*				
10	3/19	Committee formation; begin literature review	M&S Ch.5-6			As needed
11	3/26	…Cont'd	M&S Ch.7-8			As needed
12	4/2	Example thesis	T&al. Ch.18-19	Thesis B		Thesis B
13	4/9	Background readings; more literature review	M&S Ch.9-10		Topic Presentation	Presos
14	4/16	Final project foray	M&S Ch.11			Presos
15	4/23	…Cont'd	M&S Ch.14			Presos
	4/30	End of semester (Exam week)			Topic Prospectus	← DUE 5/05

1. **Montello DR** (2001) Scale, in geography. *In* Smelser NJ & Baltes PB (Eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 13501-13504). Pergamon Press
2. **Goodchild MF** (1998) Uncertainty: The Achilles heel of GIS? *Geo Info Systems* (Nov'98) pp. 50–52.
3. **Lynch, K** (1960) *The Image of the City*. MIT Press [Chapter 1]
4. **Tolman, C** (1948) Cognitive maps in rats and men. *Psychological Review*, 55(4) pp.189-208.