



SSCI 594A – Masters Project Preparation Course Syllabus – Spring 2013

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Office Hours: Monday's 11 a.m. -1 p.m. (PST)

I am generally most available via email. Also, available to schedule for chats via phone or we can meet in my Adobe Connect room. Just get in touch!

Course Scope and Purpose

This course and its successor, SSCI594B, 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, including encyclopedia entries, journal articles, book chapters, and also completed theses from our program. We will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these texts in small group (2-3 person) teleconference sessions, using Adobe Connect and/or Skype.

Research Methods – We will read sections from Montello & Sutton's *An Introduction to Scientific Research Methods in Geography* 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 with add-ins for bibliographies, equations, and illustrations.

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. By 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 *topic prospectus* document, similar to a grant proposal, which sketches the goal/problem/question motivating the student's PDA, supported by a literature review. It is the foundation for a plan for completing the project within approximately six months.



Absent a topic prospectus and a supporting committee for it at the end of SSCI594A, the successor SSCI594B *must* be used to establish those prerequisites before proceeding with the PDA itself. **In such cases, additional semesters (i.e., SSCI594Z) are often required to complete the PDA, delaying the ultimate goal of obtaining the master's degree.**

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”.

Course materials will be organized both through Blackboard and the College Wiki. Further details on the Wiki will be provided during the course. 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, we will use Blackboard to host informal discussion boards relevant to various aspects of the course, particularly the exercises; these are other forums for “working together”, sharing hints and help as in a traditional classroom setting. These threads are mainly meant as a forum for student-to-student discussion. I will not be monitoring these threads regularly, so please use e-mail to reach me if you have a question that needs an immediate answer.



Telecommunications – Mobile or landline phones, usually supplemented with video via Skype or Adobe Connect, are the preferred technologies for individual chats with me.

Assessment

An In-Progress (IP) grade is automatically assigned for SSCI594a; this converts to Passing (P) when SSCI594b (and if necessary SSCI594z) is/are completed. Nonetheless, students should treat SSCI594a as Pass/Fail. **Ultimately, a passing grade in 594(a) is obtained by the successful completion of the Topic Prospectus assignment.**

However, for the assignments leading up to the Topic Prospectus, points are assigned according to the following formula. Overall, 75+points out of 100 points is considered passing:

- Editing/Rewriting exercises:
 - Four Précis – 5 pts each, 20 pts total
 - Three Short Summaries 4 pts each, 12 pts total
- Online critiques/discussions (attendance at interactive sessions) – 18 pts
- Statement of Research Interest (StoRI) - 15 pts
- Expanded StoRI - 25 pts
- PowerPoint presentation of topic prospectus – 10 pts

Late assignments will be penalized ½ grade for each day they are late.

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, 4th 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.

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, many 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.



Please be sure that you read as soon as possible all e-mail sent from Blackboard or from me. Also, if you don't regularly use your USC e-mail account, please double check to be sure that mail sent from both the USC blackboard accounts and my USC account (vos@usc.edu) to your USC account is **forwarded to an address you use regularly and 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 generally endeavor to respond to all e-mail within 24 hours of receipt, aiming for no more than 48 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 regularly to check for Announcements there.

Workload – This is a two credit, one semester course. Students should expect to spend 5-6 hours per week. Students should expect to spend 1-2 hours per week in Adobe Connect sessions (teleconference) on weeks where interactive sessions are listed, especially as noted in the first six weeks of the course (see course schedule below). I will schedule several different times to help fit into your weekday, evening and weekend availability.

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

1/14	Spring semester classes begin
1/21	Martin Luther King Day, university holiday
2/1	Last day to register and add classes
2/1	Last day to drop class without a mark of "W" and get 100% refund
2/18	Presidents' Day, university holiday
3/18-23	Spring recess



4/12 Last day to drop class with a mark of W
5/3 Spring semester classes end

*Course Schedule (Subject to Change)*

Week #	Week Begins	Theme	Readings		Tutorials	Assignments due Sunday
			Text	Other		
1	14-Jan	Introduction to research	M&S Ch.1	Montello (2001)		Intro + Précis 1
2	21-Jan	Guidelines for writing well	S&W -all-	Goodchild (1993)	Tutorial 1	Précis 2
3	28-Jan	Thinking about research	T&aI. Ch.1-4		Tutorial 2	
4	4-Feb	Presenting a topic	T&aI. Ch.5			StoRI
5	11-Feb	How to write a good report	T&aI. Ch.6-9	Lynch (1960)	Discuss StoRI's	Précis 3
6	18-Feb	Improving a report	T&aI Ch.10-14	Tolman (1948)	Tutorial 3	Précis 4
7	25-Feb	Faculty Research Themes and Styles	M&S Ch.13	On-line Videos		Short Summary 1
8	4-Mar	Citations and References	T&aI. Ch. 15	Thesis 1 Review		Short Summary 2
9	11-Mar	Getting started with research	M&S Ch.2-4			Expanded StoRI
10	25-Mar	Research design	M&S Ch. 6-7		Discuss Expanded StoRI's	
11	1-Apr	Research design	M&S Ch. 7-8			
12	8-Apr	More on citations	T&aI. Ch.18-19	Thesis 2 Review		Short Summary 3
13	15-Apr	Analysis	M&S Ch.9-10			Topic Presentation
14	22-Apr	Validating research	M&S Ch.11		Student Present'ns	Written Prospectus
15	29-Apr	Prospectus submitted			App't of Comm't	

Note: All assignments are due by 11:59pm Pacific Time on the Sunday at the end of the week in which they are listed on the syllabus.

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.