



SSCI 601b, Population, Health & Place Research Practicum

Units: 2

Term — Day — Time: Summer 2025 (Session 050) — Mondays and Wednesdays — 1:00-2:50pm

Location: TBD/TBA

Instructor: Robert O. Vos, Ph.D., GISP

Office: AHF B57G

Regular Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 9-10am. Also, available by appointment via email for in person or remote meetings.

Contact Info: vos@usc.edu, 213-821-1311, see contact page on Brightspace for Zoom Room

Library Help: Andy Rutkowski

Office: LIPA B40-A

Office Hours: Schedule via email

Contact Info: arutkows@usc.edu

IT Help: Spatial Support

Contact Info: spatial_support@usc.edu

Course Scope and Purpose

The overarching goal of this course is to prepare and support Ph.D. students in Population, Health and Place (PHP) in developing leadership skills for interdisciplinary research. The Research Practicum is taken over consecutive summers (i.e., this course follows SSCI 601a, taken in the preceding summer). In general, the practicum sequence targets the development of research skills via four pathways. First, by providing research experience through participation in one or more supervised research projects prior to the dissertation. Second, by involving students in conducting research early in their doctoral studies. Third, by increasing the students' research skills, and fourth, by developing skills in communicating with an interdisciplinary audience – via writing journal articles, conference papers, extended abstracts, dissertation proposals, grant proposals, and speaking at professional meetings.

The specific goal for this seven-week course is for students to make substantial progress on a dissertation proposal such that they will have produced a completed draft by August 15, 2024. The dissertation proposal is designed to lead to either a monograph of publishable quality (i.e., suitable as a basis on which to gain a book contract with a university press) or three manuscripts of publishable quality (i.e., suitable for publication as journal articles in peer reviewed journals or as refereed conference papers).

Students will meet with the instructor as a group and individually over the seven-week course, and they will coordinate with a guidance committee of their own choosing as they formulate and draft a dissertation proposal at the intersection of population, health, and place.

Learning Outcomes

On completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Develop one or more research questions or sub-questions as the basis for the dissertation;
- Identify and review relevant literature to support the dissertation proposal;
- Describe a methodology, including demonstration of data availability through detailed investigations of secondary data or collection methods for primary data;
- Write a dissertation proposal that succinctly yet fully communicates aims and methods according to the components itemized above

Prerequisite(s): SSCI 601a

Co-Requisite (s): None

Concurrent Enrollment: None

Recommended Preparation: Students must be enrolled in the USC Population, Health and Place PhD program and have identified co-advisors for a Population, Health and Place PhD guidance committee.

Class Conduct

Harassment, sexual misconduct, interpersonal violence, and stalking are not tolerated by the university. All faculty and most staff are considered Responsible Employees by the university and must forward all information they receive about these types of situations to the Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator is responsible for assisting students with supportive accommodations, including academic accommodations, as well as investigating these incidents if the reporting student wants an investigation. The Title IX office is also responsible for coordinating supportive measures for transgender and nonbinary students such as faculty notifications, and more. If you need supportive accommodations, you may contact the Title IX Coordinator directly (titleix@usc.edu or 213-821-8298) without sharing any personal information with me. If you would like to speak with a confidential counselor, Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) provides 24/7 confidential support for students (213-740-9355 (WELL); press 0 after hours).

Diversity and Inclusion – I intend that students from all backgrounds and perspectives will be well served by this course, that students’ learning needs will be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class will be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. I aim to present materials and activities that are respectful to everyone, and you are also expected to respect others regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender identity and expressions, cultural beliefs, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, age, abilities, ideas and perspectives, or socioeconomic status. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Feel free to let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for yourself or for other students.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Recording a university class is forbidden without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is prohibited. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which has been distributed to students or in any way has been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Course Structure

This course is intended to help students along their research trajectories, not primarily to add to the student's store of knowledge. Therefore, relative to other courses in the PHP program, there are almost no required reading assignments. Instead, the course will be devoted to the development of the student's dissertation proposal.

The student and the instructor will review the learning contract from SSCI 601a to see what may have changed in the intervening academic year. Students will develop an amended plan to guide their time through the summer and until the anticipated oral defense of the dissertation proposal in the upcoming fall semester.

The second half of the summer will afford students concentrated time to focus on preparing the dissertation proposal. To aid in development of the dissertation proposal, the instructor will assist students as a sounding board in working with their guidance committees.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

The modeling software and geospatial data required for research projects will be accessed using computing resources provided by the Spatial Sciences Institute.

SSI Server and Tech Support – This course utilizes the SSI Server which is a virtual desktop giving access to many different professional software packages. If you are unable to connect to the server or experience any type of technical issues, send an email using your USC account to SSI Tech Support at spatial_support@usc.edu, making sure to copy (cc) me on the email.

Communications – All materials to be handed in will be submitted via Brightspace. It is each student's responsibility to stay informed about what is going on in our course. In addition to email about time-sensitive topics, any important announcements will be posted as an announcement and emailed out from Brightspace. Be sure to check these each time you log onto Brightspace. Please be sure that you read as soon as possible all email sent from Brightspace or from me. Also, double check to be sure that email sent from the USC Brightspace does not go into your junk mail!

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

The following book on leadership is required for this class; it is available from online outlets such as Amazon:

1. Hass, Marjorie. 2021. *A leadership guide for women in higher education*. Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press.
2. Sample, Steven B. 2003. *The contrarian's guide to leadership*. San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass.

Beyond this, each student will read what is required for development of their dissertation proposal.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Assignments are designed to move students efficiently through the planning and initial drafting of a dissertation proposal.

Learning Plan – 1 worth 10 points. Students will revisit the Learning Plans they drafted in SSCI 601a to assess how the prior months have matched the activities and goals they planned to achieve and to consider goals for the months ahead.

Review of Example Dissertation Proposals– 1 worth 10 points. Students will read and share their analyses of three previously completed dissertation proposals in the PHP program. This assignment reveals how previous students have effectively made interdisciplinary connections and used literature and advice from their committees to develop innovative dissertation projects.

Oral Review of Existing PHP Dissertation– 1 worth 5 points. Students will build a slide deck from an existing PHP dissertation from USC or a dissertation from another institution or program in the PHP frame. Students will give an oral presentation to explain what they might learn from it to guide their own work.

Guidance Committee Assignment – 1 worth 10 points. Students will draft a short report that lists their advisors and committee members, identifies knowledge bases and skill sets that each possesses that aligns with specific aspects of their project, and plans meetings with each.

Statement of Research Goal and Questions – 1 worth 10 points. Students will draft a 1-2 page document that states the goal of their research and the research question(s) they seek to answer with their dissertation project.

Annotated Bibliography – 1 worth 15 points. Students will create an annotated bibliography, based on their prior and ongoing review of relevant literature, to organize the literature as it relates to their project and assess the gaps in the research on this topic that exists today. This assignment helps the student situate their project within the universe of related literature and provides a foundation for the Related Work section of the dissertation proposal.

Methods Outline – 1 worth 15 points. Students will devise a workflow for answering their research question(s), supported by relevant literature. This assignment represents the core of what will become the Methods section of the dissertation proposal.

Proposal Introduction and Outline – 1 worth 15 points. Students will draft an introduction to their dissertation proposal and outline the sections and subsections of the remainder of the document.

Proposal Completion Plan – 1 worth 10 points. Students will draft a plan for discrete research and writing tasks to be met over the remainder of the summer such they can produce a draft of their dissertation proposal by the end of the summer term.

Dissertation Proposal (Draft) – 1 worth 0 pts. Students will provide a draft of their dissertation proposal to their guidance committee by August 15, 2025. Because this assignment is due at the end of the general Spatial Sciences Institute summer term, rather than the end of the course, it is ungraded. However, it is key for students to present this to ensure timely progress toward the qualifying exam, and the deadline is also in the PHP student handbook.

Grading Breakdown

The following table summarizes the SSCI 601b course assignments and their point distribution:

Assessment	Number	Points Each	Total Points
Learning Plan	1	10	10
Review of Example Proposals	1	10	10
Oral Review of Existing PHP Dissertation	1	5	5
Guidance Committee Assignment	1	10	10
Statement of Research Goal and Questions	1	10	10
Annotated Bibliography	1	15	15
Methods Outline	1	15	15
Proposal Introduction and Outline	1	15	15
Proposal Completion Plan	1	10	10
Dissertation Proposal	1	--	--
Total	10	--	100

Grading Scale

Assignments in this and other SSCI courses, are graded on a percentage of the total points available for a given assignment. The grading scaled corresponds to letter grades where A is exemplary, B is very good, C is satisfactory, D is unsatisfactory, and F is failing. Final letter grades are assigned according to the total points earned in the course using standard rounding rules. The grading scale is as follows:

A	> 93 points	B-	80-82 points	D+	67-69 points
A-	90-92 points	C+	77-79 points	D	63-66 points
B+	87-89 points	C	73-76 points	D-	60-62 points
B	83-86 points	C-	70-72 points	F	<60 points

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments will be submitted for grading via Brightspace using the dates specified in the Course Schedule below. Students are expected to attend and participate in each class session as indicated in the schedule below and to complete and upload all assignments before the deadlines detailed in the Course Schedule. Late work will be assessed a penalty of 10% per day and zero grades will be assigned for work that is more than one week late.

SSI Policy on the Creation of Original Work and Use of Generative AI

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of an assignment or reuse work prepare for courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Developing strong competencies in research, writing, and the technical execution of geospatial technologies are foundational to SSI academic programs that are designed to prepare you for success in the workplace. Therefore, using generative AI tools – unless explicitly specified otherwise – is strictly prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Grading Timeline

My goal is to provide grading and feedback on each course assignment in time for you to take my feedback into consideration as the course progresses. Generally, this means that you can expect feedback within 1 week after a given assignment's due date.

Learning Experience Evaluations

Please note Learning Experience Evaluations for the course take place at the end of the semester and are facilitated by the University. These evaluations provide an important review of student experiences in the course.

Schedule

Week	Topic	Readings and Assignments	Deliverables/Due Dates
Week 1 5/21	Introduction: Introduction to the course. Expectations for the dissertation proposal. Review and revision of students' Learning Plans.		Learning Plan– Friday 5/23
Week 2 5/28* *Monday, 5/26 is a university holiday	Leadership and Collaboration: Formation and management of the guidance committee. Learning from the committee and meeting demands of individual members while producing original, self-motivated work.	Shen Proposal (5/28)	Guidance Committee Assignment – Thursday 5/29
Week 3 6/2, 6/4	Research Questions and Goals: Formulation of research goals and research questions for students' projects.	Lerner Proposal (6/2) Kampfschulte Proposal (6/2) Discussion of Research Goals and Questions (6/4)	Statement of Research Goal and Questions (Draft for Discussion) - Thursday 6/4 (bring to class) Review of Example Proposals – Thursday 6/5
Week 4 6/9, 6/11	Related Work: Choice of literatures for students' academic audiences. Review of students' research of related literature to date.	Oral review of an existing PHP dissertation (6/9 and 6/11)	Statement of Research Goal and Questions (Polished Draft) – Thursday 6/12
Week 5 6/16, 6/18	Data and Methods: Assessment of data needs for dissertation projects. Review of related methodological work in students' fields. Design of project workflows.	Discussion of Methods Outline (6/16) Discussion of Proposal Introduction and Outline (6/18)	Annotated Bibliography – Monday 6/16 Methods Outline (Sketch for Discussion) – Monday 6/16 (bring to class) Proposal Introduction – Wednesday 6/18 (bring to class)
Week 6 6/23, 6/25	Leadership in Population Health and Place: A discussion of what it means to be a leader in population, health, and place built around two contrasting readings on leadership in higher education.	Sample (2003) & Hass (2021) (6/23) Individual meetings (6/25)	Methods Outline – Thursday 6/26

<p>Week 7 6/30, 7/2</p>	<p>Project Framing and Finishing the Proposal: Organization of the proposal for highlighting the importance of the project. Overview of project management for the dissertation. Schedule for remaining research and writing to complete the dissertation proposal document.</p>	<p>Discussion of proposal plan</p>	<p>Proposal Introduction and Outline – Monday 6/30</p> <p>Proposal Plan –Thursday 7/3</p> <p>Proposal – 8/15/25</p>
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Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, comprises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university’s mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others (including AI generated) or “recycle” work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see [the student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity’s website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#). Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

[*Counseling and Mental Health*](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[*988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline*](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)*](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[*Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)*](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment*](#) - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[*The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)*](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[*USC Campus Support and Intervention*](#) - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

[*Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*](#) - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

[USC Emergency](#) - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

[USC Department of Public Safety](#) - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.