English 20300/English 62500
Introduction to Research for Professional Writers (26139) &
Seminar on Empirical Research in Writing (31582)
Mondays, Wednesdays, Friday—2:30 p.m. to 3:20 p.m.
(625: Discussion Session TBA)

Contact Information

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Office hours: 12:30 to 2:00 pm, MWF, in person, on Teams, or Zoom if needed.

Description

What does it mean for the Purdue OWL to have 140 million views of its website? How might we understand users' mindsets as they navigate the site? What are the origins of the website and its connection to the history of mentoring writers and English studies at Purdue? How might the staff find evidence of the effectiveness of supporting writers in college? At the core of these questions are issues that researchers in profession writing explore as a discipline. Professional writing at Purdue is an exciting field with wide ranging interests in technical and professional communication, with subspecialities in the mentoring of writing, leadership around writing curriculum, rhetoric, and everyday editorial practices. Working from student-centered interests, this course will equip students with foundations of quantitative and qualitative research methods so that they approach questions of inquiry with a literacy of communities of practice that operate in the field. Students will explore common metrics in number crunching, approaches to observations, techniques around interviewing, and methods of archival study. Along the way, students will gain experience with common genres that guide empirical and social science research, and they will approach any research with an awareness of how ethics and responsible treatment of (potential) participants is always critical.

Objectives

- Complementing and growing exposure to research methodology issues, debates, and philosophy in professional, writing center, and wider English studies.
- Surveying modes of research that cut across interests and philosophical commitments in professional, writing center, and wider English studies. That is, we will explore the utility and practice of quantitative, empirical, experimental, naturalistic/qualitative, and unobtrusive research methods.
- Complicating the conventional wisdom that professional, writing center, and wider English studies scholarship and reflection on pedagogy are only rooted in rhetorical appeals to narrative or interpretive analysis. We will, nonetheless, consider how "grounded" research can hone or confound such arguments for larger institutional and collegial audiences as well as for ourselves.
- Creating occasions for students to survey published research on a self-selected topic,

to develop (based on this literature review) a proposal, to conduct an actual research project for a specified audience (conference presentation, publication, book proposal, dissertation prospectus, etc.), and to act on (if possible or appropriate) a first collection and analysis of data.

- Fostering a collaborative community of researchers with a commitment to supportive and critical feedback leading to tangible scholarship initiatives beyond this course and term.

Course Outcomes

Students will:

- Articulate a menu of research methods that may contribute to projects in professional, writing center, and wider English studies and other courses.
- Understand the ethical and professional considerations of doing research with/on human participants and be certified to conduct informed practice.
- Possess ways to research questions that arise from their inquiry, interests, mentoring or teaching, or to have means to problem pose their scholarship, teaching, experiential learning, or community-based mentoring. Students will develop empirical scholarship that is always aware of research techniques and attuned to their possibilities and limitations.
- Approach a scholarship situation and foreground the sorts of questions that foster multiple possibilities for exploring them, as an interpretive occasion, as moment to quantify, or as an opportunity to systematically study through observation, interviewing, or experimentation.
- Produce initial projects that can become fodder for presentation at professional conferences and lead to publication.
- Hone the techniques and values that produce effective professional conversations and intellectual community.

Reading materials

- All readings available through BrightSpace

Assignments/projects

Overview

Readings/Participation/Postings .... *30 points*
FERPA/IRB Certification .... *10 points*
Research Project Development .... *50 points*
- *Topic*
- *Research questions* .... *10 points*
- *Lit Review* .... *20 points*
- *Methods* .... *20 points*
- *Complete Proposal* .... *20 points*
Road Testing .... *40 points*
Poster/Slide Presentation .... *20 points*
Final Portfolio ....

Specifics
Readings/Participation/BrightSpace Postings – 30 points (roughly monthly)
- During the semester, we'll read a number of sample research articles reflecting exemplars in our general field of study. They will skew toward writing centers because that's the subspecialty with which I identify.
- On class days when we have a reading, I would like to see you post in your private journal, what you make of the empirical research with a particular focus on methods. For what it's worth, I always strive to understand what a researcher/s are attempting to do before leaping into criticism. Too often, we want to tear down before we build up or honor. Think about how you might, to channel Peter Elbow, how we believe before we doubt.

FERPA/IRB Certification (10 Points)
- While some of you may have no interest in educational research in particular, much of what we will wade into during this course reflects a bias of mine toward that sort of research. I value education research, but that's not the only kind of research that can happen across professional writing, rhetoric, and English studies. In order of us to be tangible in most cases, it means looking at student data potentially. To make that possible, everyone in class needs to understand federal legal privacy laws that cover student information (FERPA), so I'll be requiring each of you to get certified. If you've already been through the training, just upload proof.
  - [Follow this link to enroll the certification course.](#) Link is also on BrightSpace.
- Purdue, along with most research institutions, requires researchers to understand the need for ethical conduct of research. On the science side of campus, that may involve interactions with humans and animals that we typically don't do on the social science/humanities/arts side of campus. We still do research, and that research can often be fraught in any number of ways. In order to conduct any research involving humans, you need to certify you understand how to do it in appropriate and responsible ways.
  - [Follow this link to enroll in the certification process.](#) Link is also on BrightSpace.

Research Proposal (50 points)
- During the first half of the semester, we will walk through a conventional process of developing a research project. You will submit chunks of that project as planning draft documents that you can continue to revise (or ditch and start over). Some chunks will have lower stakes (Harry, peers, yourself responding and giving feedback), other higher (graded). We move from topic and research questions to literature review and methods proposal. During March and into April, you will test out your methods, in what will likely be highly individualized work. I'm not opposed to collaboration or group work, but I want to ensure you have individual ownership of a process. If you want to do group work, we can negotiate aspects of it.
- We'll start off getting you brainstorming and writing about topics you're interested in exploring, as well as your motivation for taking them up. You'll need to quickly narrow

and commit, because we'll covert those topics into research questions. Again, I'll ask you to think critically about them and imagine what audiences might be interested in hearing or reading about your proposed questions. You will once more narrow and defend your choices.

- Based on your research question(s), you will create an annotated bibliography of current research related to them, and you will produce a literature review. The "lit review" will need to cogently package "what others have to say on the topic" in an accessible way for your audience and that makes a case for the research you hope to conduct.
- From the lit review, you will propose methods for conducting this research, using the various approaches you will be exposed to this term as well as how people in the scholarship do it. The best proposals will make an argument for some sort of mixed methods approach to their research. Here you detail what methods you'll be using and why. The goal is to make a case for doing your research X way as opposed to Y way. Besides describing your approach well, you need to deploy your argumentation skills and strategies. What are the merits for your approach? As alluded to above and in class, be wary of suggesting just one way of gathering data.
- The proposal will culminate in a document that includes all the previous parts (an introduction to the topic, your research questions, a literature review that orients yourself to existing scholarly conversations, details your methods, and anticipates your findings (what do you expect to discover).
- The last part of most published research articles includes some sort of conclusion. Obviously, we don't have the time or resources to conduct a full-fledged study, so in your conclusion section, I'd like for you to write about where you'd like to go with the project (what conference(s) you'd like to present to, funding agencies, journals, etc.).
- For 625 graduate students, you will put into practice developing an IRB for your project, assuming it requires IRB approval.

Road Testing/Methods into Practice (40 points)
- Depending on your research proposal, you'll put into practice the method(s) you're proposing. You will set up, gain access, perform a practice run, and debrief the outcomes.
- If your project involves observation, you will select a site, think about gaining access, develop a plan for field notes, etc.
- If your project involves survey design, you will explore Qualtrics (or some similar app), imagine appropriate questions, user test with authentic audiences, and debrief.
- If your project involves interviewing, same set of questions.
- Whatever the method, I'll want you to experiment, try it ought on audiences, and figures out what works and doesn't.
- Each week during this section, you'll post an update memo to assignments.

Oral Presentation of Research Project (20 points)
- During the last two weeks of the semester, you will present your project in class, along with producing a one-pager handout to your classmates.

- I want you to imagine either a powerpoint or poster-session approach to your presentation. You'll have 10 minutes to present, and 5 minutes for questions.
- For the undergraduates, imagine a conference presentation or poster display. You have finite time with an audience generally interest in your work. How might you present?

Workshop for Research Experiences (40 points)
- Graduate students will lead discussion of projects that they have conducted or are planning to conduct. Like other research presentations, day 1 will involve a collaborative discussion of the individuals research interests/questions and the choices of methods they settled on (or plan to use). Day 2 can be sharing and workshopping findings or a walk through of an IRB protocol.

Final Portfolio (30 points)
- Revisit your whole proposal, blend it with insight from your "road testing," and review it with a closing section reflecting on your process and experience and where you might take the show on the road.
- 625 students: Add where you plan to adapt this work for conference or publishing.

Grading
- Grades in the "B" range for the course represent "strong" performance, including substantive revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback), sound understanding and application of theories and methods, strong argument, and well-edited prose. Reading quizzes indicate mostly careful reading and understanding of assigned texts. Any meta-texts are also insightful for a writer's process and self-awareness. Presentations are strong, but slight important elements of the topic.
- Grades in the "A" range represent "outstanding" performance, including deep revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback that transforms drafts), clear understanding and application of theories and methods, cogent argumentation, and generally error-free prose. Reading quizzes suggest outstanding reading and understanding of assigned texts. Any meta-texts are sophisticated studies of a writer's process and self-awareness. Presentations are very effective and leave few if any gaps in the assigned topic.
- Grades at or below the "C" range represent inconsistent performance, including uneven revision (failure to incorporate or address instructor feedback), weak or inappropriate understanding and application of theories and methods, flawed argumentation, and weak control of editing. Quizzes are spotty or inconsistent evidence of reading and understanding of texts. The meta-text is missing or inadequate. Presentations verge on ineffective, incomplete, and leave the audience wondering about significant elements of the assigned topic.

Policies

Attendance & Deadlines

- Attendance is critical. Missing sessions undermines our sense of community that just can't be duplicated. Adhering to deadlines is also crucial. However, life intrudes from time to time, and I understand that reality.
- Please be aware that postings need to be done no later than the deadlines outlined above or in the schedule, so also factor access to technology into your schedule. Assume, as I always do, that when you most need technology, it will fail you. In other words, have a back-up plan to your internet access.
- If you cannot participate or meet a deadline because of a religious observation, please let me know, and we'll negotiate equitable due dates.

Disability and Special Circumstances

- If you have a learning disability, you are under no obligation to inform me, but knowing that information can help me make your learning experience better. If you suspect you may have undiagnosed issues and want help, I can provide appropriate, confidential contact information. If you've had an accommodation made with the DRC, they will reach out, but often their letters don't help me help you.

Academic Integrity

- Plagiarism and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. However, you'll be doing quite a bit of writing in class and individual enough in nature that such cheating will be difficult—I'll get very familiar with your voice and natural means of expression. Also, be aware that your prose needs to be in your voice—if someone else edits your work, in certain cases your writing no longer is "yours." Passing it off as yours is still plagiarism. In most cases, plagiarism is unintentional or happens because of anxiety. Rather than get yourself in trouble, talk to me, and we can work through the problems.
- ChatGPT, or artificial intelligence with large language models has created quite a bit of angst on campus, for your peers, for your professors, and maybe even for you. The technology has quite a bit of promise to help writers who get in a bind, so we'll talk about how to, when to, and whether to use the technology in your own learning process. I don't love that it flattens all voice and audiences, but that's my bias as a rhetoric/writing professor. I want you to learn to understand literacy, reading and writing, as a broad activity that represents innumerable genres and communities of practice, not just in English, not even considering the broader humanities, social sciences, arts, and STEM disciplines. This instructor cares about you as a writer and budding English major; I plan to be actively engaged in learning and studying with you, so I hope to help foster your personal relationship with knowledge and your representation of it. If you want to check out or use LLMs, let's do it as a class and see what it gets right, wrong, and how it goes afoul of teaching and learning in college.

- o ***A bit of a warning:*** Talk to your other professors about how they feel about the technology in their classes. Some faculty, some departments have very different relationships to the issue of LLMs than we will have in this course.
- Academic integrity is one of the highest values that Purdue University holds. Individuals are encouraged to alert university officials to potential breaches of this value by either emailing integrity@purdue.edu or by calling 765-494-8778. While information may be submitted anonymously, the more information is submitted the greater the opportunity for the university to investigate the concern. More details are available on our course Brightspace table of contents, under University Policies. Please note: If you get accused of an academic integrity violation and the judicial board finds that you just need to know more, guess where you wind up? With me and the Purdue OWL because we care about help writers get better.

Essay style and conventions
- All class assignments and projects must be word-processed unless otherwise noted. Handwritten or informally produced documents will not be accepted. Please number your pages and follow MLA or Chicago citation and format guidelines as detailed on the Purdue OWL. If MLA or CMOS are styles that you'll never use in your professional life, talk to me and we'll figure out another that will help you down the road.

Conduct
- Students are expected to adhere to the university's code of conduct. While I will encourage wide diversity in opinions and talk, everyone must be allowed to have a voice. On the flipside, being a passive, withdrawn presence in our community is not appropriate. Though some courses on campus don't enable students to have much agency, this course will prize everyone's engagement and talk (whether face-to-face or online). Students should not expect me to just transmit what I want or impart knowledge; I'm here to get you to express and hone your thinking, writing, and speaking. Please don't assume everyone agrees with your or has your life experiences. We will frequently discuss how people opposed to ideas come to them, assuming some of "those people" likely are in class and just don't embody what they're thinking. Students who don't actively participate may pass, but they will likely get a low grade. If you're a quiet and shy person, use our activities on BrightSpace as an outlet.
- Purdue University is committed to maintaining a community which recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his, her, or their potential. In pursuit of its goal of academic excellence, the University seeks to develop and nurture diversity. The University believes that diversity among its many members strengthens the institution, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life. A hyperlink to Purdue's full Nondiscrimination Policy Statement is included in our course Brightspace under University Policies.

- Mental Health/Wellness: A link to CAPS is on the Brightspace listing of resources of Student Services and Resources section. Purdue University is committed to advancing the mental health and well-being of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of mental health support, services are available. For help, such individuals should contact [Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)](#) at 765-494-6995 during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or by going to the CAPS office on the second floor of the Purdue University Student Health Center (PUSH) during business hours.

Week	Mondays	Wednesdays	Fridays
1	January 13 • Introductions • Review syllabus, assignments • Assignment: Journal on what research means to you? What elements of research speak to you? What would you like to discover? Got any questions or concerns about the class?	January 15 • Round 2 Introductions • From critical-interpretive to empirical research: Introducing definitions of the empirical, research, quantitative, and qualitative. • Introducing the idea of research in writing centers. • Reading: Liggett, Jordan, & Price, "Mapping Knowledge-Making in Writing Center Research." Don't forget to journal about the reading (what do you notice about the methods?)	January 17 • Round 3 Introductions • Forms of quantitative inform in writing studies. • Walk through assignment for the weekend: FERPA & CITI Training. • Reading: Johanek, *Composing Research*, Chapter 3.

2	January 20
	No Class – MLK Jr. Day
		January 22
		• Discussion thread: What topics in writing center/professional writing/writing studies research interest you?
		• Workshop: 3-4 Topics of **empirical** writing/professional writing/writing center studies. Submit your final topics, rank ordered on BrightSpace assignments.
		• Reading: *Meaningful Writing Project*
			January 24
			• Forms of qualitative research:
			  ○ Ethnography/participant observation.
			  ○ Surveying.
			  ○ Interviewing.
			  ○ Archival research.
			• Reading: Meaningful Writing Project Appendixes

Week	Mondays	Wednesdays	Fridays
3	January 27 • Research ethics. o Reflecting on what the CITI training taught us, and making that insight local. • Reading: Babcock & Thonus, "Ethnography, More or Less"	January 29 • Journal assignment (all): What topics seemed to resonate in class last week? Which are you still committed to? • Turn these into potential research questions. Why are these questions important/important to you/us? • Copy your research questions and their motivations to a discussion thread. Respond to no less than four other peer's posting: What do you think of them (respectfully)? Which do you find most interesting? Why? • Workshop your **research questions** and submit your final versions on BrightSpace. • Post your final revised versions of research questions to BrightSpace assignments.	January 31 • Entering the (research) conversation. The literature review as genre and rhetoric. o What have other people said about your research questions and topics? o How to know you've got a sense of the conversation? • Reading: Denny, Nordlof, Salem, "'Tell me exactly what it was that I was doing that so bad': Understanding the Needs and Expectations of Working-Class Students in Writing Centers."
4	February 3 • Lit Review Crunching • Reading: Dan Melzer, "Assignments across the Curriculum"	February 5 • Lit Review Crunching (Continued) • Reading: Salem, "Decisions, Decisions"	February 7 • Lit Review Crunching (Continued) • Reading: Denny & Geller, "Of Ladybugs, Low Status, and Loving the Job." • Dr. Dilger's SlideDeck

Week	Mondays	Wednesdays	Fridays
5	February 10 Lit Review Elevator Pitches • 5 minutes. Share how you might characterize your literature to your peers. You can't read off your bibliography because you have too little time. What topics, trends, or patterns are you noticing? Seeing gaps you might want to address?	February 12 • Lit Review Elevator Pitches.	February 14 • Lit Review Elevator Pitches.
6	February 17 • Reading: Zolo, Fieldwork sample of I-80 truckstop. • Assignment: Post a journal response to reading before class.	February 19 •	February 21 • Literature Review Section due in Assignments on BrightSpace
7	February 24 • From Lit Review to Methods • Developing a proposal (putting all the pieces together and towards your niche) • Reading: Olson, Student-Centered Assessment in Writing Centers • Assignment: Post a journal response to reading before class.	February 26 • From Lit Review to Methods (Continued) • Developing a proposal (putting all the pieces together and towards your niche) • Reading: Lerner, "Bean-Counting" & Lerner, "Insider as Outsider." • Assignment: Post a journal response to reading before class.	February 28 • From Lit Review to Methods (Continued) • Developing a proposal (putting all the pieces together and towards your niche) • Methods Section due in Assignments on BrightSpace • Completed proposal due in Assignments on BrightSpace.

Week	Mondays	Wednesdays	Fridays
8	March 3 • Developing a proposal (putting all the pieces together and towards your niche) • Road testing the research design • Reading: LeFrance, Intro on Institutional Ethnography. • Assignment: Post a journal response to reading and road testing before class.	March 5 • Developing a proposal (putting all the pieces together and towards your niche) • Road testing the research design • Reading: Black's Intro for *Between Talk and Teaching*. • Assignment: Post a journal response to reading and road testing before class.	March 7 • Developing a proposal (putting all the pieces together and towards your niche) • Road testing the research design • Updating & post on road testing to journals. • Completed proposal due in Assignments on BrightSpace.
9	March 10 • Road testing the research design • Big 10 AI & Writing Centers Project (With Brent Cameron & Harry) • Survey data into Interviews	March 12 • Road testing the research design • Big 10 AI & Writing Centers Project • From Interviews to Patterns (With Brent Cameron and Harry)	March 14 (asynchronous class) • Road testing the research design • Harry at ECWCA Conference at Eastern Michigan • Updating & post on road testing to journals.
10	March 24 • Mark Griffin workingshopping his methods •	March 26 • Mark Griffin workshopping his IRB practice.	March 28 • Updating & post on road testing to journals.
11	March 31 • Eric Joseph on Methods	April 2 • Eric Joseph on Methods into Practice	April 4 • Juan Carlos Montoya on Methods • Updating & post on road testing to journals.
12	April 7 • Juan Carlos Montoya on Methods into Practice.	April 9 • Ghada Seifeddine on Methods • Harry at CCCC Conference at Baltimore • Zoom class session (not in person in Stone)	April 11 • Ghada Seifeddine on Methods into Practice. • Harry at CCCC Conference at Baltimore • Zoom class session (not in person in Stone) • Updating & post on road testing to journals.

Week	Mondays	Wednesdays	Fridays
13	April 14 • Poster design • Dr. Dilger's SlideDeck on One-Pagers (start on slide 46) • Him on research posters.	April 16 • Poster Design • Hannah's Presentation	April 18 • Poster Design • Document due on BrightSpace.
14	April 21 • Final Presentations • Emma • Danny	April 23 • Final Presentations • Cody • Ethan • Citlalli	April 25 • Final Presentations • Hannah • Gabrielle
15	April 28 • Final Presentations • Joanna • Conner	April 30 • Final Presentations • Ryan • Allie • Brendan (maybe)	May 2 • Final Presentations • Brendan (if necessary)
16	Finals • Final Portfolio & Process Memo Due in BrightSpace (Monday, May 5, 2025, noon)		