

Planning Research Design

URP 6203 – Spring 2026
 Mondays 3:00-3:50pm &
 Wednesdays 1:55-3:50pm
 Rinker 230



Dr. Kathryn Frank

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Office hours: Wednesdays 4:00-5:00pm or by appointment

Course Description

This course covers how to do research in planning practice and academia. It focuses on defining planning problems and suitable research questions, conducting literature reviews, developing conceptual frameworks, and selecting types of study designs and data collection methodologies. It includes writing skills and templates for research proposals, IRB protocols, and theses.

The course is a core requirement for the Master of Urban and Regional Planning and Master of Historic Preservation degrees. There are no course pre-requisites, however you should be ready to develop your master's thesis proposal.

At the conclusion of this course, you should be able to

- Frame research questions.
- Identify steps in the research process.
- Select research designs appropriate to the questions, information availability, and researcher strengths.
- Select suitable methods of information gathering and analysis, and uphold the ethics regarding human subjects.
- Write research proposals, including for your master's thesis.

The course is organized as 7 modules that follow standard research steps:

1. Entering the research world
2. Identifying a research problem
3. Selecting a research design
4. Collecting data
5. Analyzing data
6. Presentations for peer feedback
7. Writing a research report/thesis

The required textbook is *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project, 4th Edition (or later)* (2021) by Zina O'Leary, Sage Publications. Supplemental readings will also be provided in the course's Canvas site at least two weeks prior to when they are

due. Readings for each module should be completed prior to the class day they are assigned in the schedule at the end of the syllabus.

This syllabus is subject to minor change with advance notice to students.

Classes and Communications

Classes. All classes will be held in person. Classes will include instructor, guest, and student presentations, discussions of the required readings, and small group exercises.

Canvas. The course Canvas site will contain all class materials, assignments, and grades.

Instructor assistance. Instructor office hours will be Wednesdays 4-5pm, or other times by appointment. Email through Canvas is the best initial contact to ask questions or arrange an appointment. You can also reach Dr. Frank at kifrank@ufl.edu. You will receive a reply within 24 hours during the workweek and within 48 hours on weekends.

Assignments and Grading

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Instructions (also see Canvas)</i>	<i>% of Grade</i>
<i>Attendance</i>	Attend class, be prepared (do the assigned readings in advance), and participate in class activities. Attendance will be taken each week.	20%
<i>Research journal</i>	In five assignments, apply modules to thesis examples and your chosen research topic, consult experts for guidance, and practice writing.	35%
<i>Human subjects compliance training</i>	Conduct the IRB-02 training and pass the exam. This may require a VPN connection.	5%
<i>Class presentation</i>	Present your draft thesis pre-proposal for peer feedback.	10%
<i>Peer feedback and response</i>	Provide written peer feedback for one classmate's presentation and respond to the feedback you receive.	5%
<i>Thesis proposal</i>	Write a 20-page thesis pre-proposal.	25%

Each assignment has a grading rubric with points based on the instructions. Check the rubric before starting the assignment to ensure you put forth effort for each part proportional to the points assigned. And after receiving an assignment grade, check the rubric for grading comments.

Full credit ("A" grade) requires following the instructions, demonstrating a solid understanding of the course topics, effort for research and analysis, organized and

sufficient writing and presentation, proper source attribution, and timely submittal. A “B” grade is basically sound, but the submission has a deficiency in one of the areas above. A “C” or lower grade has significant deficiencies.

The relationship between letter grades and numeric grades is: A (≥ 94.0), A- (≥ 90.0), B+ (≥ 87.0), B (≥ 83.0), B- (≥ 80.0), C+ (≥ 77.0), C (≥ 73.0), C- (≥ 70.0), D+ (≥ 67.0), D (≥ 63.0), D- (≥ 60.0), and E (<60.0). Where A=4.0, A-=3.67, B+=3.33, B=3.0, B-=2.67, C+=2.33, C=2.0, C-=1.67, D+=1.33, D=1.0, D-=0.67, E=0.0.

Attendance and Late Policies

Class attendance is required, although one absence is automatically excused. If you miss a class, check Canvas for materials, inquire with classmates, and attend office hours if needed. Absence beyond one day can be excused for UF-allowed reasons with prompt communication to the instructor via Canvas email, in advance when possible; see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>. If you have more than three excused absences, see the instructor for a possible make-up assignments.

Late assignments will be marked down 10% of the total grade if they are not turned in by the deadline, and an additional 10% for each week they are late. Late submission may be allowed without penalty with acceptable, documented, and prompt reasons, such as illness, with communication with the instructor as early as possible. The terms of making up missed work will be determined by the instructor in discussion with you.

UF Policies & Resources

<https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolicies>

About Professor Frank

Dr. Kathryn Frank specializes in environmental, coastal, rural, and participatory planning for sustainability and resilience. At the University of Florida, she has led \$1 million in funded research projects. Recent publications have appeared in the *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, the *Journal of the American Planning Association*, and *Planning Theory and Practice*. She previously worked as a planning consultant and environmental engineer. Dr. Frank received a doctorate in City and Regional Planning from Georgia Tech. Her doctoral dissertation examined the impacts of collaborative planning processes for the Everglades ecosystem. Her master’s degree is in Community and Regional Planning from the University of Oregon, with a thesis about the impacts of a project-based, volunteer wildlife monitoring program on its youth participants. Her undergraduate majors were chemical engineering and mathematics.

URP 6203 Spring 2024 Schedule

Class Date	Topics	Textbook Chapters	Assignment Due Sunday 11:59pm
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Entering the research world

Week 1 Course overview and class introductions
1/12, 1/14 Begin introduction to research

Week 2 *No Monday class due to holiday* 1-2
1/19, 1/21 What is research and why do it?
 Navigating the process

Identifying a research problem

Week 3 Developing your research question(s) 3-4 Journal 1
1/26, 1/28 Research ethics

Week 4 Crafting a research proposal 5-6
2/2, 2/4 Reviewing the literature
 Creating a conceptual framework

Selecting a research design

Week 5 Designing a research plan 7-8 Journal 2
2/9, 2/11 Quantitative and qualitative approaches

Week 6 Mixed, evaluative, and other approaches 9-10
2/16, 2/9

Collecting data

Week 7 Selecting samples, informants, and cases 11-12 Journal 3
2/23, 2/25 Primary data: surveys, interviews, and observation

Week 8 3/2, 3/4	Secondary and online data IRB protocols	13-14	IRB-02 training
Week 9 3/9, 3/11	Spatial data (GIS), modeling, and additional ways to collect data		Journal 4
Week 10 3/16, 3/18	<i>No class - Spring Break</i>		

Analyzing data

Week 11 3/23, 3/25	Analyzing quantitative data	15	
Week 12 3/30, 4/1	Analyzing qualitative data	16	Journal 5

Presentations for peer feedback

Week 13 4/6, 4/8	Begin student presentations	17-18	Presentation slides
Week 14 4/13, 4/15	Continue student presentations Writing a research report		

Writing a research report/thesis

Week 15 4/20, 4/22	Disseminating your research Course conclusion	17-18	Peer feedback
Week 16	Finals week		Thesis pre-proposal