

NS 4081: Research Colloquium

Instructors:

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Homeland Security is in its formative period, still being defined and bound as a domain, a discipline, and an academic field of study. This process of development is accomplished through national dialogue to determine what the issues are, what methodological approaches and theoretical models are appropriate to exploring and assessing those issues, and what comprises the canon of literature that reflects our aggregate knowledge of the field. Your participation in this program will do much to further the national effort, especially through the Master's thesis, which is your first formal contribution to the Homeland Security literature and may also constitute the basis for policy change in your agency or in other agencies with a Homeland Security mission.

The purpose of the research sequence (NS 2013 and NS 4081) is to advance your critical thinking, research and inquiry skills; you will use these skills to produce a strong thesis proposal (in this course sequence), and then later for the final thesis. We will identify and practice the main steps and modalities of good research. This will include exposure to a variety of research methods from which you will choose at least one for your thesis project and develop with the help of your thesis committee.

The goal of the sequence is to support the degree objectives of the CHDS Master's program by preparing you to conduct graduate-level, policy-relevant research and deliver the results of this research in an academically rigorous thesis. The thesis is the student's capstone project and the primary deliverable of the Master's program. By the end of the NS 2013-NS 4081 sequence, you will have prepared a proposal for a thesis that is intellectually rigorous, feasible, and reflects the policy interests and needs of the sponsor and/or your home agency or command.

The **learning objectives** of the sequence are to help you:

- Learn the phases of the research process
- Describe a research problem
- Develop a compelling research question
- Assess and review literature

- Formulate and substantiate hypotheses
- Select and employ an appropriate research method
- Design a research plan
- Write and edit a research report (thesis)

During the third quarter in the program (NS 4081), you will develop your proposal in consultation with not only your instructors for this course, but also with an advisor and second reader (or two co-advisors), with whom you will work to complete a final thesis that meets the Naval Postgraduate School's academic, organizational, and stylistic standards.

STRUCTURE AND MATERIALS FOR NS 4081

NS 4081 picks up where NS 2013 ended, focusing primarily on the last three course objectives as students prepare their thesis proposal.

The main course content will be delivered in the distance mode; this is when you will listen to lectures and do most of your assignments. Each week you will log onto the NS 4081 site and download that week's core module, or lecture. This course is designed to be as streamlined, practical, and useful as possible. The core content of the course has been integrated into the lectures themselves and there are no additional required readings.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

This course is graded on a pass/no pass basis; in order to receive a passing grade, you must satisfy these requirements:

- Timely and satisfactory completion of every module and assignment.
- Full and appropriate participation in IR sessions, including IR assignments.
- All assignments should adhere to the stylistic and formatting requirements of the APA style, and include footnotes and bibliography or works cited pages where appropriate. In particular, please ensure that all citations, quotations, and footnotes are properly formatted and organized. Assignments lacking proper footnotes and formatting will be returned for editing.
- Completion and submission of a signed thesis proposal.

Final Assignment: Thesis Proposal

Complete a thesis proposal approved by your thesis advisor and co-advisor or second reader and (after possible further revision) for approval by the CHDS academic associate and the chair of the Department of National Security Affairs.

Your proposal must conform to the Thesis Proposal Template provided in the module on creating a proposal, and utilize proper APA citation format.

READINGS

You have no additional assigned texts for this course, beyond those you received for NS 2013.

SCHEDULE

Module 1: Introduction to Research Methods

Modules 2-5: Research Methods

Assignment #1: Choose one or more of the methods presented in the lecture modules over the next few weeks to use in your thesis research. Complete the assignment that corresponds to that method.

In general, this assignment should be a statement identifying the method you intend to use in your thesis research, why you chose it, and describing how you will implement it: for example, which evidence or data you will seek, the criteria or metrics by which you will measure the data, the steps you will follow to utilize that method and reach your conclusions, etc.

Length: variable

Policy Analysis and Policy Options Analysis: Prepare to conduct a policy analysis or policy options analysis relevant to your research by completing the following steps:

- Briefly define the problem;
- Identify a small number of alternative solutions (in the case of a policy options analysis);
- Select criteria by which to judge existing policies (policy analysis) or different policy outcomes (policy options analysis);
- Tentatively identify the solution you would recommend either in terms of improving an existing policy (policy analysis) or an alternative policy option (policy options analysis).

Case Study and Program Evaluation:

Prepare to conduct a case study relevant to your research by completing these steps:

- Identify the number of cases you want to look at.
- Discuss the relevance and importance of those cases; why you chose them, and how they will help you to answer your research question;
- Indicate whether the cases are similar or different in terms of:
 - a. their outcome (e.g., success vs. failure)
 - b. an independent variable (i.e., the cause of the outcome) or the policy tool of interest to you (e.g., a certain strategy was used or was not used)
 - c. patterns, variables, causes, and correlative factors

OR Conduct a Program Evaluation:

For a qualitative, formative evaluation, use the guidelines in the module to answer the following questions:

- a. What are the purpose, focus and desired results of the study?
- c. What are the boundaries of your study (location, length of study, context, people, etc)?
- d. What will be the sampling strategies (random, purposeful, both)?
- e. What types of *qualitative* data will be collected and how?

- OR -

For a quantitative, summative evaluation, use the guidelines in the module to answer the following questions:

- a. What is the purpose, focus and desired results of the study?
- b. What is your research question(s)?
- c. Describe the intervention you seek to evaluate.
- d. What are the goals of the intervention and how will the intended outcomes of the intervention be measured?
- e. What will be the sampling strategy?
- f. Identify and describe a realistic evaluation design using one or a combination of the following four alternatives:
 - Post Only
 - Pre-Post
 - Quasi-Experiment
 - True Experiment

Interviews, Surveys and Qualitative Data Analysis: Prepare to conduct interviews, surveys and/or qualitative data analysis in your research by completing these steps:

- a. What is the purpose of conducting interviews and/or surveys and how will they help you to answer your research question?

- b. Which types of respondents have you chosen to interview or survey and why have you chosen them?
- c. What questions do you plan to ask interviewees or survey respondents?
- d. If you plan to conduct a qualitative data analysis of the interview transcripts, describe what sorts of things you intend to code for in your analysis of the transcripts. Do the practice coding exercise in the module on qualitative data analysis.

Modeling:

Write up a description of the model you will build in your thesis. Are you modeling an existing process or concept, and if so, using what data or evidence? To what end? If you will propose a new model process or concept, what are the theories, ideas, or existing models on which it is based? What will it accomplish, and how will it be used by your consumer? Whatever kind of model you intend to build, explain the sources for its design or function, its uses, and its limits. Identify and describe the steps you will follow to build your model. Explain whether your model will be inductive or deductive, and how it answers one or more of these questions:

1. (For deductive models):

- How can we design a process to [enhance / leverage / etc.] _____ among _____ to better _____?
- What factors affect _____ during _____ when _____?
- How does _____ affect _____ during _____ when _____?

2. (For inductive models):

- How can we design a process to [enhance / leverage / etc.] _____ among _____ to better _____?
- What factors affect _____ during _____ when _____?
- How does _____ affect _____ during _____ when _____?

OTHER: If you know you will not be using any of the above methods in your thesis and have another one in mind, please write it up. Include the parameters of your study, how you will employ the method, any data sets, variables, or other details, and what you think you will be able to accomplish using this method.

Module 6: Designing a Research Plan

Assignment #2: Prepare a research plan for your thesis that includes all relevant deadlines, target dates, important benchmarks and milestones. Mark out time for research and writing, editing, and revising. We suggest using a format that will allow you to track your progress and keep notes, such as a spreadsheet or Excel.

Length: variable

Module 7: Creating the Thesis Proposal

Assignment #3: Using the proposal template as your guide, assemble your thesis proposal from previous assignments in NS 2013 and 4081, revised and edited to reflect the development of your thoughts and ideas since then.

Length: The total length of the body of the proposal (excluding research plan and bibliography) should be approximately 9-11 pages.

Module 8: Revising the Thesis Proposal

Assignment #4: Revise the proposal based on feedback from your instructor; we recommend that you submit the revised version to your thesis committee for comment. Begin the process of acquiring signatures on the thesis Signature Block.

In Residence Session: Peer Review

In the In-Residence session, in addition to meeting with your instructor and thesis advisor (if possible), you will present your thesis research to a small peer review group. You may give a handout if you wish, but you do not need to prepare a formal presentation or PowerPoint. The guidelines for peer review are listed in this week's items; please read these carefully and use them to prepare your presentation. Your peer review group assignments will be announced by email shortly before you arrive for the IR.