



# Honors Thesis Boot Camp: A Workshop to Develop your Honors Thesis Prospectus

COLQ 4013-03 – Spring 2017

**Wednesday, 3:00-5:00 p.m., Science & Engineering Labs 206**

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**Office Hours: Tuesday 2:00-4:00 pm or by appointment**

**Office Location: Hebert 105**

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This workshop is designed to help honors students prepare for the thesis they will write during their senior year, and to take best advantage of the resources available at Tulane. The honors thesis is your opportunity to do original research on a topic of your choosing and to write an outstanding thesis that best displays your skills in investigation, critical thinking, and communication.

Original research is an exciting and scary prospect. It means standing out at the edge of a research field and asking a question that others have failed to ask or have failed to analyze to your satisfaction. But to do this effectively you need to know whether your question is truly new *and* whether you have the resources and training to answer it.

Contrary to the image of the solitary researcher grinding it out alone, an effective way both to work on your thesis prospectus and, later, your thesis, is to form a writing group—a group of fellow researchers confident enough to share, mutually critique, and improve their work. This mini-course should give you a sense of the advantages of this sort of group work. You are expected to make the commitment to come to class prepared not only to discuss your own work, but also to take an active interest in the research of others regardless of its relationship to your particular major or field of expertise.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING GOALS

Throughout this course, we will work together to:

- a) take your interest in a topic and forge it into a research question;
- b) develop techniques for evaluating the existing literature on your topic;
- c) evaluate appropriate secondary literature and develop a preliminary bibliography;
- d) evaluate and explore primary sources; and
- e) develop and critique a full-fledged proposal of research for your honors thesis

## REQUIRED MATERIALS FOR THE COURSE

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

## ASSIGNMENTS, GRADING and ATTENDANCE

These assignments are due in class on the corresponding date of discussion with your responses organized according to the order indicated in the syllabus. Please type all assignments. (It would be beneficial for you to keep all of these documents electronically as you will add to them this semester. Also, it will be helpful to keep this material organized when you write your prospectus and honors thesis.) Except for the first and the final drafts of the thesis prospectus, all weekly assignments are graded according to the weighted point value indicated in [ ] after each component of the weekly assignment. To pass this mini-course you must accumulate at least 30 points out of a possible 40 and turn in both a first draft (for discussion) and final draft version of your prospectus.

As discussion of weekly progress on your prospectus is the central to the course, ***assignments cannot be turned in late and perfect attendance is expected.*** No points will be awarded for late assignments and each unexcused absence will result in a 3 point deduction from your final grade.

The grading for this course is S/U.

## SCHEDULE

**Remember:** each week's assignment is due in class, printed to facilitate discussion.

**Jan. 18: Introduction, thinking about the issues, learning what we're going to accomplish, discussion of topic ideas**

**Jan. 25: Introduction to research and the people involved**

### *Reading*

- Read *Craft of Research*, chs. 1-2.

### *Assignments*

**1. Research Librarian and Research Guides [1]:** Go

to: <http://library.tulane.edu/about/directories/subject-librarians>. Identify and write down the name of the library's subject specialist in your field. Then go to <http://libguides.tulane.edu/researchguides> and note down at least two on-line research guides that could be useful to you as you prepare your prospectus

**2. Thesis Committee [1]:** For purposes of the honors thesis, these three full-time, permanent faculty members will serve as your closest and most important readers. Write a list of 3-4 professors who you believe could potentially serve as your primary advisor and second and third readers. After each person's name, write a sentence or two explaining what role each would play on your committee and how each would contribute to the intellectual structure and advising of your thesis.

**February 1: Library and Database Tour: Topics**

## Assignments

1. **Library Meeting [3]:** We will meet in the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, room 309 (third floor, in the ILC/CLUE suite, facing uptown from the elevators), for a session on databases and resources available at the library. These will be critical to the development of your prospectus and the completion of your thesis. The session will be led by one of the Howard Tilton Library's subject librarians. These professionals are extremely helpful in finding the resources you need to answer your research question. Following the session we will discuss the reading, your initial thoughts on your thesis projects, and the key advisors (librarians and potential thesis committee members) you have identified for this week.

***Important: You must arrive with at least a preliminary topic to explore in this session. Also, lap tops are available, but you are welcome to bring your own lap top.***

## February 8: From Questions to Problems

### Reading

- Read *Craft of Research*, chs. 3-4.

### Assignments

1. **Statement of Research [3]:** Write up and submit your first statement of research, writing it as: "I am studying \_\_\_\_\_(topic)\_\_\_\_\_ because I want to find out \_\_\_\_\_(question) \_\_\_\_\_so that \_\_\_\_\_(significance)\_\_\_\_\_" as outlined in *The Craft of Research* (pp. 45-48; see also, 51-62).
2. **Start Your Working Bibliography [1]:** Begin a document titled "Working Bibliography," and with subheadings for "primary sources," "secondary sources" and "tertiary sources." (see page 69 for a quick definition of these) You will add to this list over the course of the workshop, and include it at the bottom of each week's assignment.
3. **Top Journals [1]:** Make a list of 5 top quality journals for your field of study. List them at the beginning of the "secondary sources" section of your working bibliography.
4. **Surveying the Field [3]:** Find and read at least one specialized encyclopedia article on your topic (or the next level of abstraction for your topic if it is highly specialized) and one review article of your topic from a top journal in your field. The encyclopedia article must have a bibliography of at least 8 works. Come to class prepared to discuss the general lines of research in your field as presented in these articles. Place the citations for the encyclopedia article and the review article into the appropriate sections of your working bibliography.

## February 15: The question of sources (I)

### Reading

- Read *Craft of Research*, chs. 5-6

### Assignment

1. **Statement of Research [3]:** Based on your consideration of the encyclopedia and review articles, revise your “I am studying...” statement/question into an: “I am studying \_\_\_\_\_(topic)\_\_\_\_\_ because I want to find out \_\_\_\_\_ (question) \_\_\_\_\_so that \_\_\_\_\_(significance)\_\_\_\_\_.” Review *The Craft of Research* (pp. 45-48 and 51-62) to make sure that you are moving forward—away from a topic and toward a problem—in your statement. Below the revised statement, write a brief explanation of how your reading of the encyclopedia entry and review article led you to revise your statement of research.
2. **Get In to the Library Stacks [3]:** Based on your reading of the review article, encyclopedia article, or other source, identify and locate in the library stacks three recent and important books on your topic (publication dates no earlier than 2003, if possible, but depending on your field of study, there may be a particular source that is critical to your question older than 2003). Write down each book’s full citation, and also the title of the books shelved to each side of it in the library (if you find this activity enjoyable, stay a while and peruse the shelves as far afield as you like!) Examine these works and note down whichever of these books (or chapters/parts of books) you find useful in your working bibliography .
3. **Index Keywords [1]:** These are words (names, places, events, theories, ideas, etc.) that are relevant to your topic of research. Over time this list will allow you to quickly scan book indexes in search of relevant materials. Start a list of index keywords based on materials you have added to your working bibliography—an easy way to do this is by perusing the index of your selected books, and also by noting any terms that generate productive results in search engines.
4. **Library of Congress Subject Headings [1]:** These are the formal Library of Congress or (LC) subject headings assigned to the books you begin to place in your working bibliography. It takes time to learn how relevant materials are given subject headings by library catalogers, and you will need to adjust these as you refine your research. Two good places to find subject headings are on the reverse of the title page of most recently published books below the ISBN numbers, and at the bottom of the complete listing of a book in the Howard Tilton Library catalogue. Start a list of LC subject headings based on the books you have located and added this week to your working bibliography.

## February 22: The question of sources (II)

## Reading

- Read *Craft of Research*, chs. 7-8

## Assignment

1. **Working Bibliography [4]:** In your working bibliography choose what you believe to be the 5 most relevant books and 5 most relevant articles to your research question (if your field is more article-oriented, like economics or sociology, your list can be 3 books and 7 articles).
  - Below each citation explain (1) why you believe this source is relevant to your question; and (2) why we should consider it a reliable source.
  - For ONE citation, write an annotated bibliography. Include a summary of the text or study, your evaluation/assessment of the text or study, and its relevance/applicability to your research question. For information about annotated bibliographies:  
<https://library.tulane.edu/services/research-instruction/tutorials/annotated-bibliography>
2. **Statement of Research [3]:** Bring in a revised version of your “I am studying \_\_\_\_\_(topic)\_\_\_\_\_ because I want to find out \_\_\_\_\_ (question) \_\_\_\_\_so that \_\_\_\_\_(significance)\_\_\_\_\_” problem statement (again, review *The Craft of Research*, pp. 45-48 and 51-62 to insure you’re moving forward). Below your statement offer a brief explanation of why you have revised your problem statement.
3. **Index Keywords [1]:** Add to/revise your list.
4. **Subject Headings [1]:** Add to/revise your list.
5. **Thesis Committee [1]:** By now you will have chosen your primary advisor and second reader. Submit this list and update, if necessary, the description of each person’s contribution to your committee and thesis. (While you will not need their signatures on your work until you submit your formal prospectus in September, you should begin collaborating with your advisors as soon as possible on your thesis prospectus.) Below this list, describe the qualities that you are thinking about for a third reader.

## March 1: The question of sources (III)

### Reading

- Read *Craft of Research*, chs. 9-10

### Assignment

1. **Primary Sources [3]:** Explore the libraries and research centers of Tulane and elsewhere (through websites, visiting locations in New Orleans and/or through WorldCat and/or the Center for Research Libraries) and find at least 3 potentially useful sets of primary sources and/or sources of primary data you will collect. For each source, list it (including location) and explain (1) the type(s) of materials (is it a survey you will conduct or an established survey data set you will analyze, letters, newspapers, census materials, personal writings, photographs, audio/video recordings, etc?); (2) why you believe this source is relevant to your question in terms of scope (sufficient geographic, historical, sociological range?); and (3) why you believe the sources provide enough depth (enough materials to analyze?) for your research question. If interviews, ethnography, oral histories, and/or surveys will be one of your most important primary sources, you must (1) explain in detail the nature of these sources (how many people?; what kind of details?; qualitative, quantitative or mixed?; how will you find subjects?); and (2) present a brief statement on the kind of IRB requirements you will have to fulfill (you must work on this in consultation with your advisor).
2. **Presentation:** Each student will present a brief discussion of the key secondary sources as they relate to your research question. Address the importance of these sources and research and how your research question will contribute to the field of study. This presentation will be 5 minutes (maximum —you will be timed).
3. **Ideal Citation Analysis [2]:** Keeping in mind the top journals and books you have identified in your field, and the primary source materials you have in mind, select and cite a single article/book chapter/book that would best serve as a model for the kind of thesis you would like to produce. Remember that an ideal piece of research may not necessarily address your same topic (and hopefully not your same question), but may employ a promising method or question to ask of the different topic you have chosen to explore. Below the citation write a few sentences that describe in detail the kinds of primary sources and/or methods the author(s) used (look particularly at the footnotes/citations). Will you have or be able to get access these kinds of primary sources or employ a similar method for your thesis? If so, explain from where from and/or how.

**During the remainder of the month of March:** It is highly recommended that you schedule a meeting with a subject librarian to review your research question and preliminary bibliography, as well as me to go over any questions you may have about your prospectus, committee, etc. Also, spend this month reading/reviewing/adding to the literature you have gathered in preparation for writing the first draft of your prospectus.

**April 12: First draft of proposals (a due date, not an actual meeting)**

### *Assignment*

1. **First Draft of Thesis Prospectus:** Based on your readings of secondary sources and exploration of primary sources, you will turn your work to date into a full-blown thesis prospectus. Following the guidelines that are provided in the “Course Documents” section on Canvas, and using your course assignments to date as working notes, write your 2-3 page prospectus (longer is acceptable). At the end, include a preliminary bibliography of high quality secondary sources that you have evaluated as relevant to your proposal.
2. If your readers are in place, a copy of your proposal should be provided to your thesis advisor and second reader.

### **April 19: Discussion of proposals**

#### *Reading*

- Read *Craft of Research*, chs. 11-12

#### *Assignment*

1. **Presentation:** Each student will present their proposal in 5 -7 minutes (maximum — you will be timed). There will be time for questions/comments after each presentation.
2. **Peer Review [4]:** You will have received the names of one other student whose proposal you will read and comment on in writing. Your written comments are to answer three questions: 1) what are the greatest strengths of the proposal?; 2) what are, at this time, the greatest weaknesses of the proposal?; and 3) what questions were your left with after reading the proposal? Your peer review is to be submitted via Canvas, but you should also bring a printed copy to class.

### **April 26: Final, revised proposals (a due date, not an actual meeting)**

#### *Assignment*

1. **Thesis Prospectus Assignment:** Submit your revised prospectus. This will be the final draft you submit for purposes of the workshop, and it will be returned to you with suggestions for further improvements as you prepare to submit your formal thesis prospectus to the Honors Program in September. You should also discuss this version of the prospectus with your first and second readers, to go in to the summer with a common agenda for any further work that needs to be done prior to final submission. Remember: this document is only a draft, and even if you only need to make minor changes, you must still submit a formal Honors Thesis Prospectus, signed by your first and second readers, to the Honors Program office by the September deadline.