

GEOG 631: Methods of Geographical Research

Fall Semester 2022

Fridays 10:05 – 11:25 AM ET

The purpose of this course is to introduce graduate students to geographical research leading to the preparation of the thesis proposal and its presentation to the class in the winter term. During the fall term, there will be a series of seminars on research topics and seminars presented by Geography faculty on their research area. For some seminars, two to three articles or book chapters will be assigned, and students are expected to have read them *before* the seminar and to participate in discussion. Students will be evaluated on depth of their reading, breadth of participation in discussion and, ultimately, their ability to articulate their research project and its broader significance.

This course will take place in-person in Burnside Hall 308 unless otherwise noted

Instructors

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Course Requirements (Fall)

GEOG 631 is graded as “pass/fail”. Attendance is required. If you cannot make it to a class, please notify the instructors in advance to make arrangements. Students are asked to read all the required readings prior to each session. Reading materials for each session will be made available on MyCourses as PDF files or links at least one week in advance. Additionally, the following are required:

Requirement / Deliverable	Due Date
Research topic summary	October 28
Thesis topic presentation	December 6 & 7 (9am - 12pm)
Literature review summary	December 9
Attend Geospectives Lectures	Various dates
Prepare discussion questions	October 6 & December 1

An important note on course deliverables

The deliverables for Geography 631 stated above should be completed through discussion with your graduate supervisor. While the instructors for the course are able to provide general guidance and feedback, they are (likely) not experts in your area of research. It is essential that you discuss your research topic summary, literature review, and topic presentation with your supervisor. The level of involvement of your supervisor is to be determined through discussion with your supervisor. While most important for your final research proposal (due in Winter Semester), you should make your supervisor aware of all deadlines and the content you prepare during this course.

Research Topic Summary

The research topic summary is intended to provide an overview of your intended graduate research. Please prepare a document which includes a clear motivation and discussion of the broader impacts of your research. It should also include a short summary of key related works, and some ideas on methods, data, etc. We do realize that at this point in your degree you are still working out many of these details, but this document is meant to force you to think through many of these items. The summary should be roughly 400-500 words (including bibliography). It should be submitted on or before October 28th, in PDF format, through MyCourses.

Thesis Topic Presentation

At the end of the Fall semester, you will give a presentation to the class. The presentation will involve providing an overview of your research topic as well as a short summary of existing research on your topic (based on your literature review). Each presentation will be 10 minutes in length with an additional 5 minutes reserved for questions. The format and style of the presentation are up to you, but all presentations will take place in person on December 6 and 7, 2022 in the morning. Students are expected to provide feedback on a set number of presentation (to be assigned the week before) and be prepared to ask questions of each presenter.

Literature Review Summary

The final deliverable for the fall semester is a literature review summary. Further details on how to write a literature review will be provided during the semester. The final submission should be 1200-1500 words (excluding bibliography). It should be submitted on or before Friday, December 9th, in PDF format, through MyCourses.

Geospectives Lectures

The McGill Geography Department hosts a colloquia series where researchers from outside (and occasionally inside) McGill are invited to present their work. Talks take place throughout the semester on Fridays from 12-1pm in Burnside 426. A full list of lectures is on the [Geospectives website](#). All students registered in Geography 631 are expected to attend these lectures as part of the Geography 631 course requirements. A 'sign-in' sheet will be circulated during each talk.

Faculty Research Discussions

There are two Faculty Research Discussion classes that will be held in the fall semester. During these classes, two faculty members will join the class to discuss their research program or a specific project. 2-4 readings will be assigned the week prior to each of these classes. It is expected that students read the assigned papers and come to class prepared to discuss the research. **24 hours before each Faculty**

Research Discussion, students will upload a document (via MyCourses) containing 1-2 questions for each faculty member, based to the assigned readings.

McGill Geography Graduate Program Requirements

Coursework

MA/MSc students need to enroll in four graduate-level (-500 or -600 level) courses, plus 631 and 698 (thesis proposal): a total of 21 credits in the first year. The thesis course (GEOG-699) contributes a further 24 credits, in the second year. PhD students need to enroll in at least two graduate-level courses and 631. Enrolment in the Comprehensive Examination courses (GEOG700, -701 and -702) should take place before the examination.

Research Proposal

In the winter semester, the course continues with seminars on thesis writing, publication, and selected topics in geographic research. Your ***thesis/dissertation proposal*** is due at the end of winter semester (typically about 20 pages, double-spaced, plus bibliography and ancillary materials). Please note that all of these should be given to both your supervisor and to the instructors of GEOG 631. A second syllabus with more details will be shared at the beginning of the winter semester.

For MA/MSc students, the thesis proposal prepared for GEOG 631 becomes the written thesis proposal for GEOG 698, which is submitted to and marked with a letter grade by the supervisory committee in mid-April. For PhD students, the dissertation proposal is submitted as part of the Comprehensive Examination, usually taken at the end of the first year, or beginning of the second year. Doctoral students typically continue to revise their proposal until it is submitted for the Comprehensive Examination.

You must work closely with your supervisor to establish mutual expectations for the thesis or dissertation proposal, including length and content. Proposals generally include a clear statement of your research question, the theoretical and empirical context of the research, the research design and methodology (including proposed data and analysis), the expected findings, and a demonstration of the originality and relevance of the research.

Schedule of Classes

Please, note that modifications may be introduced to the schedule as the semester progresses. Updated schedules will be made available to all students via myCourses as soon as possible.

Week	Class Date	Topic	Deadlines
1	Sept 2	Introduction	
2	Sept 9	Overview of resources available to you	
3	Sept 16	Retrospectives on graduate school	
4	Sept 23	Geography and Geographical Research I	
5	Sept 30	Geography and Geographical Research II	
6	Oct 7	Faculty Research Discussion I	Discussion questions due Oct 6
	Oct 14	<i>Fall Break (No Lecture)</i>	
7	Oct 21	How to do/write a literature review & topic summary	
8	Oct 28	Ethics and Positionality	Research Topic Summary Due (Friday, Oct 28)
9	Nov 04	Communicating Research	
10	Nov 11	Field & lab work in geography I	
11	Nov 18	Field & lab work in geography II	
12	Nov 25	Presentation & Lit Review Workshop	
13	Dec 2	Faculty Research Discussion II	Discussion questions due Dec 1
	Dec 6 & 7	Topic & literature review presentations	Literature Review Summary due (Friday, Dec 9)

General References

These are books and articles that you may find helpful in your first year (and afterwards). Some are available from McGill Libraries. You may wish to purchase copies of others.

Writing your thesis/dissertation:

- Allison, B. and Race, P. 2004. *The Student's Guide to Preparing Dissertations and Theses*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Miller, J. E. 2004. *The Chicago Guide to Writing About Numbers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Becker, H. S. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Creswell, J. W. 2003. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Hay, I. Eds.. 2000. *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Geography as a discipline:

- Gaile, G. L. and Willmott, C. J. 2003. *Geography in America at the dawn of the 21st century*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Haggett, P. 1990. *The Geographer's Art*. Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell.
- Harrison, S., et al. 2004. Thinking across the divide: Perspectives on the conversations between physical and human geography. *Area*, 36, 435-442.
- Johnston, R. J. and J.D. Sidaway. 2004. *Geography & geographers: Anglo-American human geography since 1945*. London; New York: Arnold; distributed in the U.S.A. by Oxford University Press.
- Livingston, D.N. 1992. *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers
- Tuan, Y. F. 1991. A view of geography. *The Geographical Review*, 81, 99-107.

“Class-by-Class” Outline

September 2: Introduction and Major Canadian Fellowships workshop: This week, we will welcome you to the course and discuss the way major grants and fellowships work. Although there is no formal set reading for this week, you should review the materials on myCourses after this class. They include the syllabus, class presentations about fellowships and the Department's Graduate Handbook.

September 9: Overview of resources: For students new to McGill, as well as ‘old hands’, it is important to know one's way around the McGill libraries, online portals, etc. The instructors will provide an overview of these resources and point you towards online tutorials that have been prepared as well as tips/hints on who to talk to when looking for certain research-related material.

September 16: *A retrospective on graduate school:* Several senior graduate students from the McGill Geography program will join us to discuss their experiences with graduate school, give advice, and answer questions. Instructors will lead the discussion initially and then offer an opportunity for students to chat without ‘professors’ present.

September 23: *Geography and geographical research (I):* This week, we will take a look at Geography as a discipline and discuss its main trends and developments over time. The history of Geography is rich and diverse, and doing it justice would require much more than one class. The goal of this session will be to sketch a broad panorama of the discipline so that students know how to situate their and other research within the field.

September 30: *Geography and geographical research (II):* This week we will discuss various methodological approaches in the domain of Geography. Given that this is such a broad discipline, there are numerous different approaches to discuss, many of which may be new to students coming from outside of the field. It is unlikely that everyone will apply all of these approaches to their own research, but it is important to be aware of the techniques and methods.

October 7: *Faculty research discussion I:* Two faculty members from our department will come talk about their research program and discuss a couple of papers that they will have assigned you. These will be posted to myCourses the week before this class. Read the papers and upload your questions to myCourses before this class.

October 14: *Fall Break* (No Class – this Friday will follow McGill’s Tuesday course schedule)

October 21: *How to write a Literature Review & Topic Summary:* As the process of writing a literature review may be new to many graduate students, we will provide an overview of the process as well as tips and tricks for finding relevant literature and appropriately summarizing the material. In addition, we will provide an overview of how to develop a research topic summary.

October 28: *Ethics and positionality in Geography:* This week we will be joined by Prof. Sarah Moser who will discuss ethics and positionality within geographical research. We will also discuss ethics considerations and review processes when doing research, including Research Ethics Board applications.

November 4: *Communicating Research:* This week, we will lead a workshop on the academic publication and review process, how to give an academic presentation, and how to engage with non-academic communities and policy makers.

November 11: *Field & lab work in geography (I): Physical Geography:* Professor Mette Bendixen, who works in arctic landscape change, will discuss the experience and challenges of conducting field work as a physical geographer. Please read and be prepared to discuss the materials proposed in myCourses.

November 18: *Field & lab work in geography (II): Human Geography:* This week, Professor Oliver Coomes, an environment and development Geographer doing work in Latin America, will discuss his experiences with fieldwork. Please read and be prepared to discuss the materials proposed in myCourses.

November 25: *Presentation & Literature Review Workshop:* This week is dedicated to working on your final presentations and your literature reviews. Students are asked to prepare and bring an outline for their final presentation and their literature review. These will be discussed in small groups with opportunities to provide and receive feedback, ask questions, and generally discuss the process.

December 2: *Faculty Research Discussion II:* Two faculty members from our department will come talk about their research program and discuss a couple of papers that they will have assigned you. These will be

posted to myCourses the week before this class. Read the papers and upload your questions to myCourses before this class.

December 6&7: Student “Thesis Topic” presentations: (10+5mins). These are the final presentations for the semester. Please come prepared not only to present, but also to ask questions of your colleagues. These will take place from **9:00am – 12:00pm** in **BH426**.

Graduate Program Schedule of Progress and Requirements

Masters (MA/MSc)

2022	2023			2024			
Fall	Winter	April	Summer	Fall	Winter	Summer	August
≥ 2 graduate courses + GEOG 631 GEOG 698	≥ 2 graduate courses + GEOG 631 GEOG 698			GEOG 699	GEOG 699		
Read literature and formulate ideas. Research topic summary (2-3 pages)	Complete proposal		Gather data in fieldwork, lab work, archives, etc.	Review data, begin analysis, and writing	Complete analysis and writing of thesis draft	Revise thesis draft	Submit thesis by August 15
Form Supervisory Committee		Submit final proposal to supervisory committee (GEOG 698 grade)			Nominate thesis examiners		
Short Presentation (15 minutes) Literature summary (5-6 pages)		Long proposal presentation (30 minutes)					

Ph.D. (entering as PhD2)

2022	2023				2024	2024-2025
Fall	Winter	April	Summer	Fall	Winter	
≥ 1 graduate courses GEOG 631	≥ 1 graduate courses GEOG 631			GEOG 700, 701, and 702*	Begin doctoral research	Conduct research, complete analysis, draft dissertation Publications (in consultation with supervisor) Complete dissertation in 2023-2024
Read literature and formulate ideas.	Complete draft proposal	Submit draft proposal to supervisory committee (GEOG 631 grade)	Gather preliminary data in fieldwork, lab work, archives, etc.	Apply for fellowships and grants for research.		
Research topic summary (2-3 pages)			Revise proposal in preparation of comprehensive exams	Comp exams (pass/fail marks assigned for 700, 701, and 702)		
Form Supervisory Committee						
Short Presentation (15 minutes) Literature summary (5-6 pages)		Long proposal presentation (30 minutes)				

* These correspond to the comprehensive exam, which takes place at a time set with your committee, up to summer 2024 if you started in the Fall of 2022. You should only register to these once you know for certain when you will be doing the comps.

Important Matters

Statement on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: It is our intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is our intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, ability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let us know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups.

Academic integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information). Any case in which the instructor suspects plagiarism will be referred to the Dean of Students.

Absences: Each student is permitted one unexcused absence. Excused absences require advance approval and a letter of explanation. Students will be responsible for all work missed. Excessive unjustified absences can lead to a 'fail' grade for the course.

Announcements: Students are expected to log in to their myCourses page and check announcements regularly. It will be considered that the information posted on myCourses is known to all.

Changes to evaluation scheme: In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the evaluation scheme is subject to change, provided that there be timely

communications to the students regarding the change.

Copyright: Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

Dialogue: In a course involving discussions around present-day issues among people from multiple backgrounds, you may at some point be confronted with ideas, words or opinions that make you uncomfortable. If such a situation arises, please bring it up with the person at the origin of the discomfort or with the instructor, to the extent that you feel safe doing so. Opening dialogue can help clarify positions, dispel misunderstandings, and sometimes help the person at the origin of the discomfort see realities they weren't aware of. This helps foster a culture of respect and care in academia.

Etiquette and "netiquette": Please use appropriate and respectful language with each other and with the instructor, whether in person or online. Emails starting with "hey prof" and/or containing multiple grammatical errors will be ignored.

Format and style: All assignments are to be submitted through myCourses as PDF documents. Students are required to type their text in 12-point font with standard margins. References and citations must follow a standard academic format. In-text citations are preferred: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html.

Language: In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Mutual respect is expected at all times among instructors, teaching assistants, support staff and students at McGill University. Students are referred to the webpage of Student Rights and Responsibilities <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/>. Aggressive behavior will not be tolerated. This includes offensive or harmful language arising in contexts

such as usernames, visual backgrounds or chat boxes in the context of remote learning.

Special Needs: If you have a disability, you are welcome to contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your situation. Please also make contact with the Office for Students with Disabilities.