**URP 801: RESEARCH DESIGN**

Winter 2024

Instructor: Professor Jonathan Levine (jnthnlvn@umich.edu)

Scholarly research in urban and regional planning comes in many forms, including qualitative, quantitative, causal, interpretative, deductive, inductive, positive, and normative. For all the differences in these approaches to research, they share a common underpinning: they all involve making claims and offering evidence to support those claims. Scholarly research brings to public discourse something that is often sorely lacking in other contexts: a logical linkage of claims and evidence.

Research design is the process of developing answers to two questions about one’s research:

Why should I believe you?

Why should I care?

Answers to these tough questions rest on the construction of useful and researchable claims together with the empirical (qualitative or quantitative) or theoretical evidence that can support or contradict them. It is a more fundamental activity than applied research methods, such as fitting specific statistical tests to the question at hand, or using appropriate informant-interview techniques. In our field, research design involves a process of theory building, identification of knowledge gaps, developing researchable questions, forming arguments, developing and evaluating evidence, and interpreting that evidence for theory and policy.

This course is designed for first-year Ph.D. students in Urban and Regional Planning but is open (with instructor permission) for Ph.D. students in other fields as well as MURP students interested in research.

**Learning Goals**:

By the end of the term, students will be able to:

* Develop researchable questions as distinct from broader descriptions of issues of urban-planning interest.
* Know how to look for research gaps.
* Purposively incorporate both positive and normative dimensions in their research, while distinguishing between the two.
* Apply logical tools to connect evidence and argument in qualitative, quantitative, causal, and interpretive research.
* Construct research arguments and distinguish arguments from non-arguments.
* Apply the tools described above to a range of urban-planning research approaches, including historical, case study, ethnographic, experimental, and quasi-experimental.

**Course Requirements**:

Course assignments include active class participation (20%), five written assignments (40%), and in-class presentations (40%).