

Course Brief

URP 801: Research Design

Winter 2026, Fri., 1-4 PM (3 CR) - Prof. Robert Goodspeed

Scholarly research is an activity that aims to generate generalizable knowledge about a topic of interest.

Research design describes the many choices involved in crafting a research project: identifying a knowledge gap, crafting an answerable research question, determining how information will be collected, and deciding on appropriate analysis.

The focus of this class is on research design in the urban and regional planning field, which concerns topics with an urban context, and describes scholarship in urban planning, geography, urban studies, and is

also represented in social science disciplines such as sociology, economics, and anthropology. Given the diversity within this field of inquiry, there are multiple perspectives about the nature of knowledge, and also therefore the nature of valid research methods.



The goal of the class is to build students' understanding of the complex landscape of research design, and gain practice in creating novel research designs to investigate topics of interest. Although researchers inevitably specialize in certain traditions, this course will deliberately ask all students to frame several types of research designs on a single phenomenon, in order to gain familiarity with—and even perhaps an appreciation for—the unique strengths of various research traditions. These include:

- Developing insights through interpretive, often qualitative research
- Building explanatory through deductive, often quantitative research
- Improve tools and technologies through design science

The course will also discuss case studies, participatory research, and mixed-methods research. Anchored in the social sciences, the course does not emphasize historical research or spatial analysis, both sometimes practiced in the urban fields.

For Winter 2026, the course has been designed for the following audiences: PhD students in any field, MURP students considering a thesis or interested in research-focused careers, and upper-level students in the B.S. in Urban Technology interested in scholarly research.

Books

- Singleton, Royce A. Jr. and Bruce C. Straits. (2017) *Approaches to Social Research. 6th Edition.* New York: Oxford.
- Maxwell, Joseph A. (2012) *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach.* Third Edition. SAGE.
- Graff, Gerald, Cathy Birkenstein, and Russel Durst. "They say, I say." *The Moves That Matters in Academic Writing.* New York : W.W. Norton, 2006.