

## GEOG\*6090 GEOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH METHODS I COURSE DESCRIPTION (Provisional)

Fall 2026

### OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of the research methods courses (I and II) is to provide a forum for the first year Master's students to develop and present a context paper and a proposal for their thesis or research project. **Students are required to identify a research area, to present a context paper in the Fall semester (GEOG\*6090)**, and to present and defend, to the Department, a research proposal in the Winter semester (GEOG\*6091). In weekly seminars, the courses also aim to expose students to various approaches to research and to research methods in geography through presentations by faculty, guest speakers, technical staff, and senior graduate students.

### FORMAT

Seminars will be held on **Wednesday mornings (8:30-11:30 am)** in the Fall semester. **Attendance at the seminars is required** of all students registered in the courses and active participation is expected. Senior graduate students will be invited to participate in selected seminars through panel discussions. As a requirement, you must ensure that you register for GEOG\*6090 and GEOG\*6091 in the Fall and Winter semesters, respectively.

### REQUIREMENTS

(1) **Context Paper (Fall 2026, see separate guidelines):**

- Specification of a context paper topic by **September 30, Wednesday** (in class).
- Submission of a paper outline with title (similar to a table of content with brief descriptions) and annotated bibliography by **October 9, Friday** (via email).
- Submission of a draft of the context paper to advisor **one week prior** to presentation.
- **Presentation (to class) of the context paper (November 25 and December 2, Wednesdays).**
- Submission of presentation slides to course coordinator after the presentation session.
- Submission of the final context paper to advisor and course coordinator **one week after** the final class in the term (**December 9, Wednesday**).

(2) **Research Proposal (Winter 2027):**

- Submission of a draft of the written proposal to the student's advisory committee.
- Presentation and defense of the research proposal (to the Department).
- Submission of the final written proposal to course coordinator and advisory committee.

## EVALUATION

The context paper and presentation in Fall 2026 will be jointly evaluated by the course coordinator and the student's advisor/advisory committee. The final grade for the course is weighted based on **80% for the written context paper and 20% for the oral presentation**. The evaluation scheme for GEOG\*6091 will be determined in Winter 2027.

**GEOG\*6090 RESEARCH METHODS I (Provisional)**

**GUIDELINES FOR THE CONTEXT PAPER**

Fall 2026

Course Coordinator: Dr. Wanhong Yang

The context paper is the first of the two formal requirements for the research methods courses (I and II). It is essentially a critique of the literature in the chosen field that leads to the identified **aim of research and specific objectives**. Its primary purpose is to assist you in identifying a research problem and developing it in the context of previous research. The topic of the context paper should be determined through meetings with your advisor or, if established, your advisory committee. You will report (orally in class) progress toward establishing that topic on **September 30, Wednesday** and a **paper outline with title (one or two single-spaced pages, similar to a table of content with brief descriptions) and annotated bibliography (three or four single-spaced pages)** must be submitted to the course coordinator by **October 9, Friday** (via email). A draft of the context paper should be submitted to your **advisor/advisory committee one week prior to** your presentation. Presentations (to the class and your advisory committee) are scheduled on **November 25 and December 2 (Wednesdays)**. Please submit your presentation slides to course coordinator after your presentation session. Please submit the final context paper to your advisor and the course coordinator **one week after** the final class in the term (**December 9, Wednesday**).

## Topic Selection and Scope

The choice of topic for the context paper will be guided by the area in which you propose to carry out your thesis/project research, and by discussions with your advisor/advisory committee. The scope of the paper will depend to some extent on how clearly you have identified the problem area in which you wish to work, and on your background in that field. However, some general guidelines should be considered:

- The context paper represents a **critique** of the literature, designed to show where your research problem fits within the chosen field.
- The paper should provide a **structured summary** of the state of knowledge in the research area, noting the main contributors.
- It should identify the main developments in ideas, approaches, theory and methodology as evident from past and current research.
- It should indicate **gaps** in knowledge and understanding, and thus areas for further research. It should **identify the research problem and the aim of research**.
- It should not be so narrowly focused on your particular research problem that the scholarly context is obscured; nor should it be so general that it resembles an introductory text on the subject.
- The material in the context paper may become the basis for the introductory parts of your thesis/project, where the scholarly context, rationale, and broad approach to your research problem are outlined, and/or the literature review chapter.

## Structure

The title of the context paper should be determined in consultation with your advisor/advisory committee and should be similar to the final draft of the context paper. The outline of the context paper with title should be **one or two single-spaced pages**. The annotated bibliography should consist of at least five key references (typically 6-8 references) and should be **three or four single-spaced pages**.

The context paper will be first presented as a seminar and then submitted as a written paper. The seminar presentation should last **no more than 20 minutes** (additional 5 minutes for questions) and you may make use of appropriate visual aids. Because the audience will have a range of backgrounds, the seminar presentation should be at a more general level than the written submission, and emphasis should be placed on the *development of ideas, theory and research opportunities (e.g. knowledge gaps, research problems, and the aim of research)*. Because of the time constraint, you may wish to focus on a few items and leave detailed discussion of some topics to the paper.

The written paper should be in the order of **20 - 25 double-spaced pages** (5,000 – 6,000 words, not including tables, figures, and references), in a standard professional format, with a clear structure, section headings, references, tables and figures (as appropriate), and careful editing of grammar and spelling. One copy should be given to your advisor (and advisory committee member if identified) and one to the course coordinator.