

University of Toronto
School of the Environment
ENV 421H Environmental Research - Fall 2017 – Winter 2018

General Information

Time: Mondays 2-4pm (Only on the weeks indicated in the syllabus)

Location: SS2106 (Sidney Smith Hall, 100 St. George Street)

Instructor: Prof. Tanhum Yoreh

Email: tanhum.yoreh@utoronto.ca

Office: ES1048B (5 Bancroft Ave.)

Office hours: Thursdays, 10am-12pm or by appointment

Course Description

The focus of this course is learning qualitative research methods and applying them to a group research project over the course of two academic terms. The first semester will focus on improving research skills, group formation, work dynamics, choosing research topics conducting a preliminary literature review, submitting a research proposal and ethics review form. The second semester will focus on conducting fieldwork, report writing and presenting research findings. This half course is unique as it runs for a full academic year instead of just one semester. The impetus is that students have the opportunity to see a research project to fruition.

Group Project

Students in ENV421 will spend a full academic year carrying out a research project from start to finish. Depending on the availability of external partners, the research topics may be predetermined in order to enhance the course through collaborations with environmental organizations. This course focuses on qualitative research methods, but students may incorporate quantitative elements in their projects after approval by the course instructor. Conducting group research can be a rewarding process. You have the opportunity to learn from your colleagues, share challenges, and benefit from a variety of skillsets. Research groups are expected to meet regularly outside of class to advance their projects. Conducting good research is a skill that develops over time. Asking the right questions, conducting a thorough literature review, collecting raw data, analyzing data, drawing conclusions, writing a report and presenting your findings, will all be areas of focus in this course.

Course objectives

This course has two main objectives:

- 1) To help students improve their written, oral and research skills through an environmentally focused project.
- 2) To help students effectively contribute as members of a research team.

Group marks vs. individual marks

There is an equal grade breakdown in this course between group and individual assignments. It is expected that all group members contribute equally, and treat their group members with dignity, professionally, and respectfully. The course instructor has the option of changing the group/individual breakdown of any student who is deemed to have not contributed their fair share, or of students who do not conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times with their group members.

Assignment Submission Requirements

In order to save paper, all assignments must be submitted electronically. Two bound copies of the final assignment must also be submitted, one for the instructor and the other for the client. The bound copies should use double sided printing. If the assignment cannot be placed directly into the hands of the instructor, please submit a copy either to David Powell (ES1022, 33 Willcocks St.) or the ENV assignment drop box (ES1016V, 33 Willcocks St.).

Recommended Texts

On the library shelves of Robarts (and other U of T libraries) you will find a plethora of textbooks on the topic of research methods. Find one (or a handful!) that you find easy to follow and read the relevant sections. The required readings will be available on blackboard and the textbooks from which they are taken will be available at Robarts in the Course Reserves.

Time Commitment

This is a half course spread out over two semesters. Each student is expected to devote approximately 120 hours to the course.

Course Timetable

We will be meeting as a class 4 times in the Fall Semester and 3 times in the Spring Semester. Groups will also meet with the instructor outside the class on indicated weeks. Groups can schedule additional meetings with the instructor whenever needed.

- 1) September 11 – Introductory Class
 - a. Course overview
 - b. Social Science Research
 - c. Qualitative Research – history and methods
 - d. Research topics

- 2) September 25 – Research design and clients
 - a. Research proposal
 - b. Research design
 - c. Meeting the clients
 - d. Group formation

Readings: Ted Palys and Chris Atchison, “Constructing a Research Proposal,” in *Research Decisions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives*, 4th Edition. Toronto: Nelson Education, 2008, 136-152.

*Groups to meet with instructor on the week of September 25th to discuss research projects

- 3) October 16 – Research tools
 - a. Primary and secondary literature
 - b. Semi-structured interviews

Readings: Alan Bryman and James J. Teevan, “Interviewing in Qualitative Research,” in *Social Research Methods: Canadian Edition*, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 2005, 182-213.

- 4) November 13 – Research ethics – David Powell will present

Readings: Ted Palys and Chris Atchison, “Ethics in Social Research,” in *Research Decisions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives*, 4th Edition. Toronto: Nelson Education, 2008, 69-106.

*Groups to meet with instructor on the week of November 13 to discuss research proposals

- 5) January 8 – Implementing research
 - a. Filling the gaps
 - b. Plans in place to conduct interviews, collect data

*Groups to meet with instructor on the week of January 15 to discuss carrying out research

*Groups to meet with instructor on the week of February 12 to discuss progress of research

- 6) March 19 – Group presentations
- 7) March 26 – Group presentations and course wrap-up

Evaluation

You are playing the role of environmental consultants in a professional setting. All deadlines should be strictly adhered to.

Literature Review (15%) Description: This assignment is meant to give you a jumpstart into researching your topic. You are expected to research approximately 10 articles/books/book chapters/websites/reports and write a report on your findings. The individuals of each group should ensure that there is no overlap between their lists. You are expected to circulate your literature reviews among the members of your research team after they are complete so that the entire group benefits from your efforts. Your review should demonstrate an understanding of your subject matter and should be written formally with citations. ***Individual Mark* Due November 13**

Research Proposal and Ethics Form (15%) Description: The research proposal should be approximately 8 pages in length, double spaced. The proposal should include your research question, incorporate your literature reviews, indicate how you’ll carry out your fieldwork, what you’ve so far, and what you still need to accomplish in order to complete your project. Your research must include semi-structured interview involving human subjects and will require an ethics review. In order for your fieldwork to begin in a timely manner the ethics form must be submitted together with the proposal. ***Group Mark* Due December 4**

Journal (5%) Description: You will be keeping a journal logging all the time you spend on this course. This isn't a "Dear Diary" type of journal. Think of it more as an annotated timesheet. All the time you spend on group meetings, doing fieldwork, reading relevant literature, preparing for your presentation, should be logged in your journal. The journal is meant to help you (and the course instructor) keep tabs on your progress and figure out if you're spending your time well. You are expected to bring a copy of your journal to each group meeting you have with the course instructor and submit a final copy at the end of the course. The entries should be annotated. Write down what you've read, what type of research you've been engaged in, etc. ***Individual Mark* Due November 13, December 4, April 2, and on days with group meetings with the instructor**

Oral Presentation (15%) Description: Not long before the final report is due, your group will give an oral presentation on their project. Each member of the group will participate in the presentation, not only on putting it together, but in delivering the presentation. You will be graded on the content of your presentation, the mechanics of your delivery, your ability to respond to questions and critiques effectively, and the overall cohesiveness of your presentation. ***Group Mark = 5%, Individual Mark = 10%* In class, March 22/29**

Peer Review (5%) Description: At the end of the course you will submit a peer review on the performance of your group members. Your mark will be based on the thoughtfulness of your remarks and the review should demonstrate that you've taken the time to think about the group dynamics. What worked well? What didn't work well? Did group members contribute equally? What effort did the group make to address outstanding issues? ***Individual Mark* - Due April 2**

Final Report (30%) Description: The final report is the culmination of your research efforts throughout the year. Each student should contribute approximately 8 pages (double spaced) to the report. A group with 5 students will be expected to produce a report that is approximately 40 pages in length. We will discuss the exact format of the report in our meetings. ***Group Mark* Due April 2**

Attendance and Participation (15%) Description: This mark will be based on regular attendance in class and group meetings. You are expected to be active participants in class and in the group meetings with the instructor. You should come to class prepared, having done the readings and ready to discuss your work. ***Individual Mark* Based on performance throughout the year**

Academic Integrity

At this point in your studies you are well aware of the guidelines regarding academic integrity. Nevertheless, I urge you to review the contents of the University of Toronto's *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*, as you are responsible for upholding the contents therein.

See: <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>

Seek further guidance on academic integrity at: <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/students>

See also: <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize/>

Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

In papers and assignments:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement
- Copying material word-for-word from a source (including lecture and study group notes) and not placing the words within quotation marks
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor
- Making up sources or facts
- Including references to sources that you did not use
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment including:
 - o working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work
 - o having someone rewrite or add material to your work while "editing"
- Lending your work to a classmate who submits it as his/her own without your permission

Accessibility Needs: The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible:
<https://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>

Writing Assistance: If you find that you need some additional assistance with your writing, see this excellent resource that offers advice on academic writing: <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/>