COURSE OBJECTIVE
A Master’s Research paper is required for the MS-Demography degree. This course has been designed to guide you through the process of completing your Master’s research paper. Whether your paper is formatted like a journal article or a government report, it will need to answer all of the following questions:

1) What is your project’s purpose?
2) For whom is this purpose important and why?
3) What data and research methods will you use?
4) What do the results of the analyses reveal?
5) What are the implications or contribution of your findings?

This course will help you determine the answers to these questions and report those answers in an appropriate professional format.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Your primary academic responsibility this semester is to complete a Master’s paper that merits your committee members’ approval. The requirements of this course are designed to support you in meeting this responsibility:

- Complete all assignments—reading, writing, and other tasks, on time.
- Provide constructive feedback and support to your classmates
- Maintain regular contact with your Master’s paper advisor
- Complete a draft of your Master’s paper to submit to your advisor and reader in sufficient time for them to assess it and provide feedback before the semester’s end
- Revise your paper as many times as necessary to earn your committee members’ signatures

Important: Completing the assignments for this course is not a guarantee of graduation. Your advisor and reader must agree that your paper meets professional standards and indicate that agreement by signing the cover sheet. Without their signatures, you will not graduate.
**COURSE FORMAT**

To accommodate those students who are out-of-town or working full-time, most class business will be conducted through BlackBoard. Each week, you’ll complete the set of activities (reading, writing, and other tasks) described below.

In addition, you’ll help each other through the process of conducting an independent research project. Sharing your experiences, whether good or bad, with others engaged in similar work can help everyone overcome roadblocks more quickly. To enable this sharing, the BlackBoard site will have a virtual “help desk,” which I encourage you to check frequently. In addition, as the semester moves forward, I will set up a peer review system. You’ll receive feedback on your written work from your classmates and you’ll also give feedback to one or more classmates.

**COURSE GRADES**

This course is graded on an S/U basis. To obtain an S (i.e., satisfactory) grade in this course, you must turn in the paper with a cover sheet signed by your advisor and reader. **An S grade is necessary to graduate.**

**Note:** Incompletes will not be given except under unforeseeable, extenuating circumstances. FSU rules require that students requesting an “I” grade must be passing the course. In order to determine whether you are passing, I will use a point system. **Each week, if you complete all of the assigned activities on-time, you will earn two points.** At the time that you request an “I” grade, you must have earned 80% of the points possible at that time. For example, if you request an “I” during week 11 of the semester, you must have earned a minimum of 16 points (.8 × 20 points through week 10).

**COURSE CONDUCT**

Professional behavior is required. In the context of this course, professional behavior means:

- Timely submission of peer reviews and of written work that will be peer-reviewed.
- Discussions in the “virtual help desk” and written peer reviews should be scholarly and respectful of all members of the class.
- Adherence to federal and FSU regulations regarding research.

Failure to adhere to these standards constitutes grounds for a U grade or, in the case of research regulations, expulsion. An explanation of each standard follows.

**Timeliness:** You may be employed or taking other courses this summer and it will sometimes be very tempting to neglect your master’s project in favor of working on other things that have more immediate deadlines. **Do not allow yourself to do this!** You must keep up with the course schedule; not doing so means that you will inconvenience your peers and jeopardizes the likelihood that you will graduate on-time.

**Civility:** Use neutral language (e.g., “your rationale for this approach isn’t clear” rather than “this is a dumb way to do this”) and avoid sarcasm and put-downs when interacting you’re your classmates, whether you’re providing support via the virtual help desk or a written peer-review. Keep in mind that tone is difficult to ascertain in writing and what might sound funny in a face-to-face conversation can seem otherwise when expressed in writing.

**Research regulations:** All research universities have an Institutional Review Board (a.k.a., Human Subjects Committee) that oversees research involving human subjects. This oversight is intended to
protect the rights and well-being of persons who provide data for research, in accordance with federal regulations. Violating these regulations is a serious breach of professional conduct. Research using human subjects cannot proceed on the FSU campus without the explicit permission of and oversight by the FSU IRB. (For more information on this topic, go to https://www.research.fsu.edu/research-offices/human-subjects/.)

To avoid issues related to human subjects, you have two options: choose a topic that requires aggregated or ecological data or, if you plan to use individual-level data, check to be sure that it is classified as public-access and that the identification of individuals cannot be determined. If you want to use restricted-access data or data that is not anonymized, you must apply for IRB approval.

ASSISTANCE

You may find that you have a question or problem that can’t be addressed through BlackBoard. If this is the case, email me to set up a face-to-face meeting if you’re in Tallahassee this summer or to schedule a phone conversation if you’re not. Please note: On weekdays, you can expect a response within 24 hours; if you email me on Fridays or over the weekend, you may not hear back from me until Monday.

ACADEMIC HONOR CODE

The Academic Honor System of The Florida State University is based on the premise that every student and faculty member has the responsibility to uphold high standards of academic integrity in their own work, repudiate violations of academic integrity by others, and encourage integrity and social responsibility in other members of the university community. All work done in this class must abide by the standards of the University Honor Code, which you will find at http://dof.fsu.edu/forms/honorpolicy.pdf.

Plagiarism caution: Plagiarism is a particularly egregious form of academic dishonesty. The Provost and legal counsel of Florida State University warn that any uses of others' copyrighted materials without proper acknowledgement is unlawful and may lead to criminal prosecution. Any confirmed instance of plagiarism will result in a U grade for this course and will also be reported to the University Judicial Office for official adjudication. You’ll submit your final paper through Turnitin for a plagiarism check.

Guidelines for avoiding plagiarism: Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person’s concepts, phrases, or ideas without giving them credit. To avoid plagiarism or the appearance of plagiarism, follow these guidelines:

1. Use great care when taking words and phrases from others. A string of three or more exact words taken from somewhere else can be flagged as potential plagiarism.

2. If you use a phrase or a concept that you have found in another source, follow it with an in-text citation. Sentences or phrases of four or more words should be placed in quotations and followed by an in-text citation with author’s name and page number. Your paper should include a reference section that lists all cited works and materials.

3. Be scrupulous in giving full credit to data sources and other materials that you use. As with written work, sources of data and materials must be acknowledged with in-text citations and inclusion in the list of references.
AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT STATEMENT

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center (see below); and (2) bring me a letter from them indicating the type of special accommodations needed. This should be done during the first week of class. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact: Student Disability Resource Center, Dean of Students, 08 Kellum Hall, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4400, (850) 644-9566 (voice), (850) 644-8504 (TDD), SDRC@admin.fsu.edu, http://www.fsu.edu/~staffair/dean/StudentDisability/

SCHEDULED TOPICS
This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

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COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

**Week 1: Course overview**  
5-12, 2:00 to 4:00 PM

**READING:**

2. A journal article of your choosing that addresses the area you intend to research

**TASKS:**

1. Read the White article and your chosen article **before** our first class meeting, and be ready to:
   a. identify what you believe is the most important “take away” message from the White reading,
b. explain how the article you chose illustrates White’s advice and why it might serve as a template for your MS research paper

c. discuss any issues concerning writing a research paper that you feel have been left unaddressed by either Dr. White or this syllabus.

**Week 2: Getting started 5-16 → 5-20**

**TASKS:**

1. In order to complete this week’s writing assignment, you’ll need to delve into the research literature on your area of interest in order to hone your topic. You should identify a minimum of ten articles before you attempt the written part of this week’s work.

2. Once you have finished the written assignment for this week, find an advisor. Be sure to solicit her/his advice regarding:
   - The feasibility of completing your research project in the required time frame
   - Your proposed data source and analytic approach
   - A reader (second committee member)

**READING:** In the Course Library (BlackBoard site), you’ll find a folder labelled “MS Paper Examples.” The examples are divided into three formats that reflect data and methodology. Read at least one paper in each format.

**WRITING:**

Please type your short answers to these questions into Word, and upload the document to the Assignments section of the BlackBoard web site by May 19th at midnight.

1. In no more than two sentences, identify your research question or the topic you plan to pursue.

2. How does your research project contribute to the extant research literature? To answer this question, identify either:
   - what is different about your project compared to other previous studies, or
   - how your project might be useful to a governmental organization, stakeholder or interest group, or potential employer?

3. Peruse the example papers in the Course Library on BlackBoard and then answer the following:
   - Which of the examples most closely resembles the type/format of paper that you intend to write for this course?
   - Why is this format appropriate for answering your research question?

4. What kind of data (e.g., data on geographic units, data from surveys of individuals) do you need to answer your research question or to study your topic of interest? Is the data that you need available to you? If so, identify the data set or data source and indicate how long it will take you to format the data for your project. If not, what steps have you taken to gain access to it?
Week 3: Building the foundation  5-23 \(\rightarrow\) 5-27

**READING:**
1. “Literature reviews,” on-line guide from the University of North Carolina designed to teach you how to conduct and write a review of the literature relevant to your topic.
2. “APA Style: how to format references and in-text citations.

**WRITING:**
Compile an annotated bibliography, ordered alphabetically, for a minimum of 15 articles that are relevant to your research paper. Your annotations should include *brief* discussions (no more than two sentences) of *each* of the following items:
   a. Research question or project scope
   b. Data & methods used
   c. Key finding(s)
   d. Article’s relevance to your project

Once you’ve typed your properly formatted bibliography into Word, upload it into the assignment portal on BlackBoard by **May 26th at midnight.**

**TASKS:**
1. Contact the reader suggested by your advisor. If s/he is unavailable, ask your advisor to suggest another person.
2. By the end of this week, you should have identified your data source and confirmed that it includes measures of your outcome (dependent variable) and predictors (independent variables).

Week 4: Paper skeletons  5-30 \(\rightarrow\) 6-3

**READING:** No assigned readings this week.

**WRITING:**
While your annotated bibliography is fresh in your head, **outline your paper.** This outline will provide the “skeleton” for your completed project, so logic and continuity are important. Your outline should:
   a. Identify the major sections of your paper, based on what you’ve learned from the Lynn White reading and relevant MS paper examples), and
   b. “map” the citations from your annotated bibliography to the appropriate sections of your paper
   c. State your hypotheses
   d. Identify your data source, variables, and analytic approach.

Submit your outline to the Assignments section of the web site by **June 2nd at midnight.**
TASKS:
Prepare your data!

a. Download it and be sure that it is readable by whatever statistical software (i.e., Stata, SAS, SPSS, ArcGIS) you’ll be using.

b. Prepare your data for analysis. For example, if you’re using survey data, you’ll need to determine who belongs in your sample and who should be excluded and code your variables.

c. **Strongly recommended:** Meet with your advisor to ensure that he or she approves of your analytic approach and that your data are coded correctly. *Improperly coded data and inappropriate methods can seriously jeopardize your progress.*

**Week 5: Describing your methods**  6-6→6-10

READING: “Five Principles of Readability.” PowerPoint show from Purdue’s On-Line Writing Lab. Use these principles in this week’s writing exercise.

WRITING:
Write a first version of what Lynn White refers to as the “Method” section. I recommend strongly that you review her advice on this section and use a published research article in your area of interest as an example. Things that your draft must do:

a. Identify the data set or data sources (along with appropriate attributions to the person, team, or organization that compiled or constructed the original files)

b. Identify the unit of analysis (i.e., what the records/observations in your data set represent)

c. Provide the sample size (or population size, if appropriate) and any exclusion or inclusion criteria you used in determining who is a member of the sample.

d. If your project tests hypotheses about a dependent variable(s), describe the measurement of your dependent (a.k.a., outcome) and independent variables (a.k.a., covariates, predictors)?

e. Describe the statistical methodology you are using in your research.

Submit your data section draft to BlackBoard by June 9th at midnight.

TASKS: You should now have all preliminary coding done and your advisor should have approved your analysis plan. It’s time to launch your analysis!

**Week 6: The “front end”**  6-13→6-17

READING: “Writing Opening and Closing Paragraphs.” (PowerPoint show from Walden University’s Writing Center). You might also revisit Lynn White’s wisdom with respect to the Introduction, Literature Review, and Statement of the Problem sections, as well as the APA Style link (Week 3 readings folder) to see how to format your in-text citations.
WRITING:
Drawing on your annotated bibliography, your outlined, and the feedback from your advisor and Dr. B~, draft your paper’s front end. The length of this draft will depend on the type of project you’ve undertaken, but is typically about 10 to 12 pages. The front end should include:
   a. Introduction to the topic: what is your project about and what is its importance?
   b. Background or literature review: what does a reader need to know about your topic that will put your research into context?
   c. Either a “statement of the problem,” as described by Lynn White, or a research question and hypotheses.
   d. A revised version of the method section that you turned in during Week 5.
Submit your draft to the Assignments section of the web site and email it to your peer reviewer by June 16th at midnight.

TASKS: No specific tasks other than to write, revise, repeat.

Weeks 7 and 8: Analysis! 6-20 → 7-1
WRITING: Provide written comments to the peer whose work you have read via email by June 23rd. Be sure to cc Dr. B~ so that you receive credit.

READING: “Creating tables and figures,” PDF document on how to use tabs to format tables.

TASKS: Over the next two weeks, your primary task is to complete your analysis. These tasks are intended to help you move forward. You are not alone here. Remember to consult your advisor if you run into problems, and your peers are just a post-to-the-virtual-help-desk away!

1. Finding your way through the analysis: One potential pitfall of data analysis is that it is easy to “get lost.” This is what happens when we run every possible combination of variables; we get so overwhelmed by results, that we forget the big picture. One way to avoid this pitfall is to have a roadmap of the analysis itself. I rely on mockups of the tables and graphics I expect to produce; that is, I set up the tables before I have any numbers to put in them! These mockups serve as my roadmap; they remind me what descriptive statistics I need to produce and what models I need to estimate.
   a. Use the templates to construct mockups for your own paper. Not only will this help you keep from getting lost in your data, but once you’re done with the analysis, you’ll just fill in your estimates or cut-and-paste the figures. These table mockups must be done in Word, following the instructions in the readings. Tables done in any other format will be returned, without credit.
   b. Submit these skeletons/descriptions to BlackBoard by June 23rd at midnight.

2. Record your thoughts: As you run your analyses, don’t simply look at the numbers your computer is spitting out—take notes! Then, when you’re ready for a break from the computer, print your
notes and take them to Starbucks, the Library or some other good work spot to review them. Is what you’re seeing in your data what you anticipated or are you finding the unexpected? Unexpected findings sometimes point to something that merits further exploration, but sometimes they’re signaling coding errors (e.g., coding a dummy variable “backwards”). These things are hard to see when you’re in front of the computer.

3. **How to tell when your analysis is “done”**: Remember, you have an analytic roadmap! You’re done (at least, until your advisor says otherwise) when your tables and figures are complete.

   a. When you’ve reached this point, create a list of bullet-pointed statements that describe the key finding(s) in each table or figure. Bullet-points will allow you to focus on the findings themselves without the pressure of organizing paragraphs.

   b. Submit the completed tables and the bullet-pointed conclusions to the Assignments section of the web site and email them to your advisor for feedback by **July 1st at midnight**.

**Week 9: The end is in sight!**

**READING:**

   a. “Writing your results section and planning your discussion.” PDF on BlackBoard.

   b. Review pp. 793-4 in the White article (Week 1)

**WRITING:**

   a. Organize your bullet-points from last week into sentences and paragraphs to create your results section. Remember, the job of this section is to simply report your findings, not to explain what you think they mean. You should discuss each table and/or figure, starting with the descriptive findings and moving through each stage of the analysis.

   b. Once you have completed a draft, you should bullet point your paper’s final section, called Discussion or Conclusions. This is where you address two important questions:

      i. What do these findings mean? Are they consistent or not consistent with your research hypotheses? and

      ii. What are the implications of your findings for future researchers for policymakers or stakeholders? Provide some thoughts as bullet points, following your findings in a new section called “Conclusions.”

   c. Submit the completed tables, the draft of your results section, and the bullet-pointed conclusions to the Assignments section of the web site and email to your peer reviewer and Dr. B~ by **July 10th at midnight**.

**Weeks 10 & 11: Pull it together!**

**TASKS:**

   1. **Peer review 2**: Email written feedback to your assigned peer (with a cc to Dr. B~) no later than **July 14th** (sooner is better!).

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2. Remember: your front end should introduce the research you did, not the research you were going to do. Revisit your “front end” and revise it, if you have not already done so, based on input from your peer reviewer, your advisor, and Dr. B~. Be sure that it meshes seamlessly with your findings section.

3. Revise your findings section, incorporating suggestions from your peer reviewer, your advisor, and Dr. B~.

4. Submit a completed first draft of your MS Research Paper to the Assignments section of the website and to your advisor no later than JULY 20\textsuperscript{th}. This draft should include the front end, results, discussion/conclusions, references, and all tables and figures. \textbf{Note that tables and figures should be placed at the end, after the references.}

5. Send a “heads up” email to your reader notifying her/him that (a) you have completed your first draft, (b) you anticipate getting a copy to him/her next week.

e. Prepare a \textbf{200 – 250 word} description of your research project. This description, called an \textbf{abstract}, should:
   a. Describe your project’s purpose (either the project goal or the research question)
   b. Justify the importance of your goal or research question or its relevance to the field,
   c. Identify the data you plan to use and your analytic approach.
   d. Summarize the primary finding(s).

   Be clear, succinct, and pay attention to your word count. Give it to your advisor once s/he has returned your completed draft, and add it to the paper before you give it to your reader.

\textbf{Weeks 12 & 13: Revision, review, repeat} $\quad 7\text{-}25 \rightarrow 8\text{-}4$

1. Work on revisions to your draft, based on your advisor’s feedback.
2. Repeat, until you have your advisor’s approval.
3. Get a “clean” version (i.e., no tracking, strikeouts, comments, etc.) of your paper to your reader no later than noon of July 29\textsuperscript{th} with a polite reminder that you need to know whether s/he will approve your paper by 8-4.
4. You have until 2:00 PM on 8-9 to make any revisions required by your reader and get a “clean” check from Turnitin (\textbf{required by the University}). You should also give Babs two copies of the final version: a hard copy, with the original signature page, and an electronic copy via email. If Babs does not have both copies \textbf{02:00 PM on 8-9}, she will not be able to approve your graduation and you will not receive your degree.

\textbf{Please note:}
   a. If you are not in Tallahassee when you finish your paper, please ask your advisor to be sure that Babs gets the signed cover sheet.
   b. CDPH maintains electronic and hard copies on file, both for our own reference and for our program review (every 7 years).