Course Description: Most of you are about to embark on your first major research project. This will be a time consuming, exhilarating, frustrating, and ultimately highly memorable experience. For many students, the thesis is the highlight of the college experience. Part of the purpose of this class is to make that true for you.

The class does not follow a standard format with significant readings and assignments. There will be some reading, but the bulk of the work will be on the thesis itself. The aims of the first semester are: to move from an area/topic to a research question and a design that matches it, to secure an adviser, to get approval for your project from the IRB, to begin data collection/analysis this semester, to have you read in the literature and situate yourself within a theoretical framework, and to help you with the mechanics of writing. At the end of the semester, you should be well into the process of researching your thesis.

We will use the first part of each week to learn about and discuss a topic. In the second part of the session, you will be presenting work. Having a weekly deadline will help keep you on track throughout the 3+ months, and help you avoid long periods in which you do not make progress on your thesis. In this sense, the class serves in part as a research and writing support group.

Requirement: The course website is available at: cms.bc.edu. There are specific weekly assignments included in the reading list below, as well as some required readings. In the second half of the class each of you will be sharing your progress. Given the size of the group, you can expect to be presenting every other week. You will also be handing in a major piece of writing at the end of the semester. Exactly what this is may vary, depending on the type of research you are doing for your thesis. It may be your literature review, or theory chapter, or it may be one chapter of the analysis, depending on how much data collection/analysis you have gotten to.

Sharing Work: We will be sharing work with each other throughout the semester. We'll start by posting written work on the class website. (Maybe sure to “publish” when you post and you must also post on time.) If this software is cumbersome, we can move to googledocs.

Grading: The grade for the semester is made up of three components. Written assignments during the semester account for 40%. Reading others’ work and assigned texts before class and discussing them accounts for 20%. Your final, written assignment accounts for 40%.

Readings: The books listed below are available at the BC Bookstore. I have also asked to have them put on reserve at O’Neill Library. Articles not included in the required texts will
be posted on the course website or emailed to you. Depending on our needs, I may assign some additional readings. However, the vast bulk of the coursework will be actual work on your thesis, rather than reading about how to do that work.

**Texts:** I have ordered two texts for the course:

You may also find this book useful: Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research, third edition* (Chicago 2008). I have placed these three, plus William Zinsser’s *On Writing Well* on reserve at O’Neill. Lipson’s book also has a short bibliography of useful sources.

**Weekly Schedule with topics and assignments**

**September 13. Getting acquainted, introduction to what a thesis should be.**
Please be prepared to give a short presentation (3 minutes) on your thesis topic.

**Assignment:** Please bring a one page description of your thesis topic to class.

**Assignment:** Lipson, chs 1, 2, 15, 16.

**September 20. Introduction to the library and digital resources.**
The second half of the class will be a meeting with Sarah Hogan, sociologist librarian, at O’Neill Library.

**Assignment:** Lipson, 66-70.

**Assignment:** Work on expanding your one page description to three pages. Provide as much detail as you can on what you are thinking for research design. Make sure to include your research question/s.

**Assignment:** Schedule an appointment with a prospective adviser, if you do not already have one.

**Assignment:** Find and read/skim at least one, and preferably two undergraduate theses from previous years. We will discuss these in class. (How to find a thesis: There are 4-5 shelved in McGuinn 410, the graduate student lounge. Faculty members usually have copies of theses they have supervised. Feel free to ask them. In addition, here are two that happen to be posted on-line at BC, but I advise reading in the area you are already working in:

[http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/sociology/meta-elements/pdf/OrgAnarc.pdf](http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/sociology/meta-elements/pdf/OrgAnarc.pdf)

**September 27. Institutional Review Board and ethics for research with human subjects.** This class will cover the basics of being an ethical researcher and applying for permission to conduct research with human subjects.

**Assignment:** Take one of the IRB tutorials and achieve certification. The IRB website is here, with links to the tutorials on the right hand side (CITI and NIH tutorials).

[http://www.bc.edu/research/oric/human.html](http://www.bc.edu/research/oric/human.html)

October 4. Research Design I
How to connect a research question to a research design. Discussion of options for types of primary research.

Assignment: Lipson, pp. 71-86, chs 5, 7.
Assignment: First draft of description of your research methods. Make sure to discuss the fit between research questions and research methods.

October 18. Research Design II

Assignment: Rewrite description of research methods. (expected length: 3 pages)
Assignment: You will need to have secured an adviser for the IRB application. Make sure you have one by today.

October 25. Review of IRB applications.

Assignment: Hand in first draft of IRB application.

November 1. Theory.
Situating your topic/question within a theoretical framework. The role and importance of theory.

Assignment: Revise and submit your IRB application by today at the latest.
Assignment: Construct your first extended bibliography, in preparation for next week’s unit on the literature review. (review Lipson on reading lists if you need to)

November 8. The Literature Review.
Discussion of how to do literature searches, what to read, what to include in a literature review, and how to write one.

Assignment: Find 3 literature reviews that are related to your topic, one from a journal article, one from a PhD dissertation, and one from a format of your choice. Analyze them. Write a five page first draft of a literature review for your thesis.

November 15. Into the Field.
Getting going on doing your actual research. Discussion of logistics, ethics, complexities, frustrations, joys, etc.

Assignment: Write a two-page memo on your first experience of interviewing, ethnographic participation, online surveying, etc. (Alternate assignment will be provided for quantitative researchers.)
November 22. From data collection to analysis and writing.
Discussion of the process by which you go from transcriptions, field notes, content and other types of qualitative data to actually analyzing and writing about what you have found.

**Assignment:** Write a 3-5 page memo based on your first experiences doing research. What did you find?

November 29. Working on writing and re-writing I.
The final two classes will be workshop style, going over drafts and perfecting the arts of writing and re-writing.

**Assignment:** Lipson, chs 8-11.
**Assignment:** Produce 10 pages of what will be your final paper.

December 6. Working on writing and re-writing II.

**Assignment:** Produce 10 more pages.