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THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
DEPARTMENT OF URBAN PLANNING & DESIGN (DUPAD)

UPAD7001 Research Design Seminar Series
M.phil. & Ph.D.
(2025/2026)

Course Outline

Course Code: UPAD7001
Course Title: Research Design Seminar Series
Instructors: Shenjing He, Chinmoy Sarkar, Qiong He and Weifeng Li
Coordinator: Weifeng Li
Time: Friday (10:00am – 12:30pm)*

* Subject to changes due to staff meeting in DUPAD or students' special request.

Date: 3 Oct 2025 to 24 Apr 2026
Venue: LE3 (Semester 1)
KK202 (Semester 2)

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce new research postgraduate (RPG) students and Year-two MUP students to the basic knowledge, principles and practices about research and research design, and to prepare them for dissertation proposal development and thesis writing. Each lecture is designed to cover a part of the social science research process, including research philosophy, problem statement and research question formulation, conceptual framework building, literature review, experimental and quasi-experimental research design, measurement and data collection, quantitative and qualitative analysis methods, and thesis writing techniques.

Each session has 2.5 hours. Typically, a session will include 1-hour lecture and 1.5-hour discussion, research experience sharing, and presentation. MUP students are only expected to attend the lecture sessions. For RPG students, in each session, they will bring in write-ups of their progress of research proposal (or different sections of this proposal) and discuss with instructors and classmates. Students and teachers will share research experience during the discussion and will critique one another's work as well. RPG students are expected to actively participate in class discussion, and at the end to come up with a research proposal for their individual topics.

It is advised that students work closely with the supervisor(s) on each task that related to their research paper or thesis. This course is not designed to help students with their respective research papers or theses or detailed technical questions therein; rather, it offers general guidelines and principles regarding what is good research (especially in the urban planning and design field), how to compete a good research design, how to choose the appropriate methods in research, and how to present research in the academic domain.

Assessment Tasks and Evaluation Plan

Student performance in this course is evaluated by (1) class participation and discussion, (2) lecture assignments, and (3) research proposal. Assessment components and their respective weightings are set out as follows.

- Class participation and discussion - 10%
- Research seminar attendance - 10%
- Lecture assignments - 20%
- Research proposal - 60%

Students need to pass all the components in order to pass the course.

- Class participation and discussion (level of engagement, interest in asking and answering questions or raising points for discussion) **(10%).**

- Research seminar attendance (RPG students are expected to attend all the research seminars organized by the Department) **(10%).**

- Lecture assignments (**20%)**
  Students are required to complete all assignments to each lecture.
- Research proposal **(60%)**

  Each student is required to develop a research proposal, which is not supposed to be directly related to his/her dissertation. The research project to be undertaken shall be narrowed down to fit in a research paper rather than a thesis. In each session, students will bring in write-ups of their progress and discuss with instructors and classmates. Deadline of full research proposal submission: **24 Apr 2026**.

General rules for Take-home Written Assignments, unless specified otherwise:

1. All submissions must be type-written on A-4 paper.
2. All submissions must have proper acknowledgements, references and citations whenever external materials are included. Plagiarized assignment might be awarded an "F" grade and the student may be subject to disciplinary action.
3. Softcopy of your submission must be uploaded to Moodle on or before the deadline.
4. Late submission without valid reasons will not be assessed and might result in an "F" grade.

Generative AI (GAI) –

1. Students are expected to do their assignments themselves and not asking someone else or Generative AI to do it for them.
2. The use of GAI needs to be properly declared. The declaration should include but not limited to which tool(s) and version are used at what stage and for what purposes as well as whether GAI generated texts have been further digested and rewritten by students in their assignments.
3. As an English medium university, we are expecting our students to be able to submit their assignments in their own written English and not translated by someone else, the computer, or Generative AI.
4. Assignments not done by the students themselves may result in grade penalties and constitute academic misconduct. Students are advised to consult and confirm with course teachers regarding permitted uses of GAI for individual courses and assignments.

Assessment Criteria

The grade descriptor for the generic assessment criteria of a written submission is appended to this course outline (Appendix I).

Textbook

Textbooks that will be heavily used are as follows.

- Rudestam & Newton. Surviving Your Dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process (2nd edition or 3rd edition). California: SAGE Publications. **(Rudestam)**
- Creswell. Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (2nd edition). California: SAGE Publications. 2003. **(Creswell)**
- Neuman. Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (2nd edition). Boston, MA: Pearson. 2004. **(Neuman)**
- Shadish, Cook & Campbell. Experimental and Quasi-experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin. 2002. **(Shadish)**

Course Contents

Session 1 3 Oct 2025
Topic: Opening Remarks and What is Research?
(Weifeng Li & Qiong He)

Readings

- Chapter 1 of **Rudestam**
- Hoeken H. (2001) Anecdotal, Statistical, and Causal Evidence: Their Perceived and Actual Persuasiveness. Argumentation, Volume 15, Number 4, November 2001 , pp. 425-437.
- Little, D. (1995) Objectivity, Truth, and Method: A Philosopher's Perspective on the Social Sciences Commentary.

Assignments

- Before-class: Pick one of your favorite social science research articles, summarize this article, and explain why this is good research to you. Submit the sheet to Moodle and discuss in class.
- After-class: Each of you will be assigned a recent paper by the instructor. Please read the assigned article and summarize the following in one page: 1) problem statements; 2) research questions; 3) theoretical or conceptual framework (either in diagram or concise paragraphs); and 4) hypotheses.

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Session 2 24 October 2025
Topic: Formulating "Good" Research Questions and Framework
(Chinmoy Sarkar)

Readings

- Chapter 2 of **Rudestam**
- Chapter 4-6 of **Creswell**
- Four articles as examples of different types of research

Assignments

- Before-class: Bring in and discuss in class: problem statements, and research questions on your chosen topic. (1-2 pages)

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Session 3 **7 Nov 2025**
Topic: Literature Review
(Qiong He)

Readings

- Chapter 4 of **Rudestam**
- Chapter 2 of **Creswell**

Assignments

- Before-class: Bring in and discuss in class: your chosen research topic and the conceptual frame (that is, theories and theoretical bases) you are or will be using.

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Session 4 **21 Nov 2025**
Topic: Research Design
(Chinmoy Sarkar)

Readings

- Chapter 1-4 of **Shadish**
- **What is Research Design?**
  http://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/methods/005847ch1.pdf
- Four articles as examples of research design

Assignments

- Before-class: Bring in and discuss in class: literature and conceptual framework

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During winter break, students will prepare introduction, literature review & framework of the proposal (4-8 pages).

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Session 5 **6 Feb 2026**
Topic: Measurement and Data
(Qiong He)

Readings

- Chapter 5-7 of **Neuman** (measurement and data collection)
- Chapter 4 of **Designing Qualitative Research 5th Edition** by Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman
- Five papers as examples of measurements

Assignments

- Before-class: Bring in and discuss in class: research design plan

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Session 6 6 Mar 2026
Topic: Qualitative Methods
(Shenjing He)

Readings

- Chapter 13 of **Neuman**
- Chapter 2: Doing Urban Studies: Navigating the Methodological Terrain. *In* Leitner, H., Peck, J., & Sheppard, E. (Eds.). (2019). Urban Studies Inside/out: Theory, Method, Practice. SAGE Publications Limited.

Assignments

- Before-class: Bring in and discuss in class: plan of measurement & data collection

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Session 7 20 Mar 2026
Topic: Quantitative Methods
(Weifeng Li)

Readings

- Chapter 10 of **Neuman**
- Chapter 2 and 3 of **A Concise Introduction to Econometrics: An Intuitive Guide** by Philip Hans Franses
- **What is Special about Spatial Data** by Luc Anselin
- **Travel and the Built Environment: A meta-analysis** by Reid Ewing and Robert Cervero
- two links about choosing the right statistical test
    - http://www.graphpad.com/www/book/choose.htm
    - http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/mult_pkg/whatstat/default.htm

Assignments

- Before-class: Pick one recent quantitative research paper in planning field and critically discuss about its analytical methods.
- Discuss: plan of analysis of your own topic.

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Session 8 10 Apr 2026 - Presentation of Research Proposal (All the instructors, available supervisors of students, & other doctoral students)

Appendix I: Grade Descriptor of the Assessment Criteria

Grade	Grade Descriptors
A+, A, A-	Demonstrate evidence of original thought, strong analyses, critical applications and innovative problem-solving abilities as well as an in-depth knowledge and thorough mastery of the subject with excellent organizational, communication, presentational and professional skills.
B+, B, B-	Demonstrate evidence of imaginative applications, sound analyses and good problem-solving abilities but not entirely critical and original in their thinking. Show comprehensive knowledge and mastery of the subject with strong organizational, communication, presentational and professional skills.
C+, C, C-	Demonstrate evidence of a reasonable understanding and adequate knowledge of the subject with rather little evidence of original thought, critical thinking, adequate analysis and creative applications, and has average organizational, communication, presentational and professional skills.
D+, D	Demonstrate evidence of a bare minimum grasp of knowledge and understanding of the subject which is not well digested and has no evidence of critical thinking, adequate analysis and creative problem-solving. Organizational, communication, presentation and professional skills are below-average.
Fail	Demonstrate evidence of poor knowledge and inadequate understanding of the subject, lack of analysis and a failure to solve problems. Organizational, communication, presentation and professional skills are unsatisfactory.