

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Landscape Architecture **16:550:582**

Research Methods

Spring 2026 DRAFT

Wednesdays 12:10 – 3:10 pm
Room 148

Instructor: Anita Bakshi
222 Blake Hall
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Course Description

This course provides an overview of the role of research in landscape architecture, presents different strategies and approaches for answering research questions, and explores different types of research practices and methods. The course considers different perspectives on the definitions of research and scholarship in landscape architecture, focusing on these as paths to the generation of new knowledge essential to the progress of landscape architecture.

As a practicality, the class will focus on beginning to equip students for the thesis/project process in the MLA program. It will familiarize students with both processes to follow and tools to use within them. The class will also teach students about the larger need for research in landscape architecture and the ways that new knowledge can contribute to the growth of the profession.

Learning objectives:

- Understand the relationship between theory, research, and design
- Become familiar with multiple research methods appropriate to landscape architecture, including their appropriate application, opportunities, and limitations
- Gain awareness of ethical issues in research, particularly involving human subjects
- Develop the ability to analyze and critique research reports and publications
- Develop habits conducive to efficient research design, and writing
- Demonstrate independent approach to a research question, research design, and development of research proposal

Outcomes

1. Development of a research 'notebook' leading toward thesis topic
2. Working thesis/graduate project topic.
3. Presentation of thesis/project proposal to faculty
4. Completed draft thesis/project proposal that identifies topic, existing knowledge, procedures, and tentative schedule (typ. 8-12 pages)
5. Commitment of thesis/project committee chair and two other supporting members

Student Expectations

Student work for this course will include regularly assigned readings, in-class readings, and written assignments. Students are also expected to spend several hours per week on independent reading relevant to a possible thesis/project, and in discussion with potential committee members. A significant, recurring aspect of the course is student-led discussion about individual progress, concerns and next steps. In accordance with program policy, class attendance is mandatory and expected.

Throughout the semester, student will be reading about their proposed topics, meeting with faculty, and exploring different potential paths. Records, notes and information from these experiences should be collected digitally in a research “notebook” / folder.

Grading

Preparation for class (readings completed) and participation in discussion	15%
Assignments	30%
Research methods “notebook”	10%
Topic Poster	5%
Thesis Topic Presentation	20%
Final thesis/project proposal (on time and signed)	20%

Having a proposal signed by a committee is mandatory for completion of this class in most cases. Without a signed proposal submitted to the department, students will be given an incomplete grade.

RESEARCH METHODS Spring 2026

Instructor: Anita Bakshi

DRAFT Schedule

WEEK 1 January 21

Course Introduction

MLA Project or Thesis overview

Lecture : A Practical Introduction to Research Methodologies
Site observation / Mapping / User Surveys / Archival sources /
visual representation / exhibition / community intervention

In Class Exercise: Analysis of research methods presented in lecture |
alignment with student interests and possible research projects

WEEK 2 January 28

Research in Landscape Architecture / Designing Research

Lecture: Overview of Prevalent Research Themes

Readings & Discussion :
Themes in Landscape Architecture Publishing (2015) [\(quick skim\)](#)
Projective Ecologies (2014)
Thinking the Contemporary Landscape – Intro

Exercise Due: Express Ethnographic Sample
Student presentations on research done in design studios

WEEK 3 February 4

Visual Analysis / Research for Design

Lecture: Image Analysis & Visual Representations of Research

Readings & Discussion :
James Corner, *The Thick and Think of It*
Monya Baker *Is There a Reproducibility Crisis?*
Annette M. Kim, *Sidewalk City* [\(Critical Cartography Primer Section\)](#)

Exercise Due: Presentations on Research Design

WEEK 4**February 11****Visual Exploration Presentations & Discussion of Research Topics**

Exercise Due: Visual Exploration

WEEK 5**February 18****Building Arguments in Dialogue – What’s Next for Landscape Architecture? Why ?**

Readings & Discussion : *The New Landscape Declaration* (2017)

Exercise Due: In-class Debate

Lecture: Finding Literature Relevant to your Research Topic

WEEK 6**February 25****Research with Human Subjects****Community Based Participatory Research & Ethical implications**

Lecture: Navigating Human Subjects Research: Created by Michelle Watkinson for SEBS

Case studies: Akwesasne Health and Food Systems Study
Ringwood Mines Superfund Site Project discussion

Readings & Discussion : Bakshi & Dinzey-Flores, *Collaborations in Architecture & Sociology* “Methodological Primer
Elizabeth Hoover, *The River is in Us*

IN CLASS WRITING WORKSHOP : An introduction to writing to prompts

Optional Resource : Rowena Murray, Chapter #2: “Starting to Write.” In *How to Write a Thesis*.

WEEK 7**March 4****Practice-Based Session at the Zimmerli Museum - Brandon Truett & Christine Giviskos**

Visual analysis with representations of landscapes in the museum’s collection

WEEK 8**March 11****Consulting Primary & Secondary Sources | Establishing Your Thesis Committee**

Lecture: Finding Relevant Materials & Scholarship /
using Citation Management Tools (Zotero)

Guest lecture from Art Librarian Megan Lotts

Exercise Due: Annotated Bibliography

In Class Exercise: Faculty Grid

SPRING BREAK March 16 – 20

WEEK 9**March 25****Research Notebook Presentations**

Exercise Due: Research Notebooks

WEEK 10**April 1****Landscape Architecture Research at Rutgers**

Readings & Discussion : Selected excerpts from published RULA theses

Lecture: [possible guest lecture from RULA alumni thesis author]

In Class Exercise: Analysis of methods employed and research outcomes

WEEK 11**April 8****Closed Session – Discussion with 3rd year grads**

WEEK 12 April 15
Topic Poster Presentations
Writing Workshop: Preparing for the Proposal

Exercise Due: Thesis Poster

ROUGH DRAFT DUE on Friday 17 April

WEEK 13 April 22
Organizational Tools for Research
Create Work Charts & Timelines

Exercise Due: Grant Writing for the Fabos Award / Inclusive Design Award

WEEK 14 April 29
Thesis and Project Topic Presentations to Faculty

Final Proposal and signed committee forms due around May 11 (final date TBD)
