

**Guidelines for Preliminary Research Design**

20 February 2002

The purpose of this project is to gain skills in articulating your research approach. At this point, you should adopt a 'meso-level' focus, which is more detailed than your problem statement, but not as detailed as will be needed for a methodology section.

Your problem statement outlined a research focus, and set it in the context of broad concerns of the discipline of geography, societal change, or public policy. A certain amount of effort may have been required to justify your chosen research topic as an important question deserving of scrutiny. Here, your research design is more specific, and needs to explain the broad outlines of your research approach. The kinds of questions you need to consider are:

1. What theoretical problems, empirical events, or processes will you examine? How are these phenomena central to the goals outlined in your problem statement?
2. What kinds of explanations are you evaluating or proposing? Do you have specific hypotheses?
3. What kinds of data, evidence, or observations will you use to describe events and outcomes?
4. What is your unit of analysis and why have you chosen it? Why have you chosen a particular region, city, or neighborhood, for instance? What is the rationale behind your choice of a particular scale of analysis?
5. Will your approach involve implicit or explicit comparisons of different cases or contexts? How are the cases chosen, and what differences do they illustrate?
6. What kinds of logic, reasoning, and inference will you use to draw your conclusions?

Not all of these questions are relevant for every single proposal, and you do not need to give full-fledged answers to every single question. Save some detail for your methodology statement. At this point you want to give the reader a general flavor for the broad-brush kind of research you plan -- i.e., is this a critical, qualitative history of regional environmental change? Or a quantitative evaluation of the forces of industrial restructuring? Or a synthesis of field- and remote-sensing evidence of coastal change?

*Specifics:* keep your first-cut research design to no more than three pages, double-spaced. Bring eleven copies to class on March 6.