

Final Project: A (Very) Speculative Research Plan

DUE: May 6

As we move closer to the start of your summer research period, now is a good time to begin to formulate for yourself a plan for engaging in substantive research that is both useful to your community partner and elucidating for you. When our semester began, we discussed the ways in which research plans are always speculative: research questions change, circumstances change, and even you change. Our current moment calls for us to be even more speculative as our community partners battle to stay in operation and provide much-needed resources to their own constituents. As an Urban Practice Fellow, you should approach your work this summer as the ideal participant observer of the entire experience. That is, you will be a nominal employee of your organization, pitching in when necessary and producing research that is of immediate relevance. But you will also observe how that organization functions in a crisis and how the limitations placed on it and ourselves as researchers hinder action and open up possibilities for new imaginaries.

This assignment will be 8-10pp in length and include the following:

A speculative research question: In a perfect world and in the context of both what your organization does and what your own academic areas of interest are, what would you most like to learn this summer? What do you *hope* this experience will tell you about “urban practice,” the “urban,” and/or what “urban social justice” means?

A theory or theories that may inform your research: You need not identify a particular theory or theorist, though you may. Instead, I’m asking you to frame your research in a way that reaches something broader than your specific case study. So, for example, you may want to test Harvey’s concept of a right to the city, or Sassen’s concept of a “global city,” or Benner & Pastor’s concept of “epistemic communities.” Or, instead, you might hypothesize that historical memory is central to the current activities of your community, and seek to test that. There are endless possibilities! (Feel free to use different theorists than discussed in our course.)

Methodologies: Engaged research (and murder investigation!) assumes that you will use more than one method. Of the methods we have discussed this semester, which do you think will be most useful to you and why?

Project Narrative: This is the meat of your speculative research plan. Now that you have a research question, a theory to test, and methodologies to employ, what will you

be researching and how? In this section, tell us about your community partner, the work they do, the projects they tend to undertake, the communities with which they work, and the ways you expect your research might contribute to their mission. You will build off the research you have already done on your community partner (i.e. it's okay to copy from your previous assignment on this topic). Specify your "terrain", clarify your sample set, and determine what preparatory work you'll need to do *before* you begin your "on-site" research. Do you need to know more about the demographics of the community with which you will be working? Would it be helpful to read newspaper articles or reports related to your community partner so that you're aware of the challenges they face now? Should you subscribe to their mailing list, if they have one? This should all inform your project narrative and help you explain how you will go about answering your speculative research question. End this section with a short description of what you expect the results of your research to be. (You are not required to write a paper or produce an extra project, but if you think your research might lead to that, say so!)

Notes to Self: We have spent quite a bit of time talking about "positionality," avoiding "damage-centered research," honoring the "shared authority" of our collaborators, and being careful about identifying and working with people who may be "vulnerable." With all of that in mind -- and considering your research questions, methodologies, and plan -- what "notes to self" do *you personally* want to rely upon to ensure (as best as possible) that you are an ethical researcher?

Semi-Annotated Bibliography: Please list 10-15 works (books, articles, pamphlets, websites, whatever) that you will consult for your research. You can use any bibliographic format you like, as long as you remain consistent. For each work, please add a sentence about why you imagine this text will be useful to you.

A final note on your speculative research plan: Do not think it is lost on me how truly speculative this is. It may be that all of you will be working remotely doing content analysis-type research with little contact with your organization's staff for the whole summer. I hope that is not the case -- and strive for it not to be the case -- but we need to be as flexible as possible. I also realize that interviews, participant observation, and evidence collection are all difficult to do from inside your home in front of a computer screen. We also will need to be creative. One thing I can say is that research of the kind we have studied this semester is *still being done*, even if in modified form. So there are models to follow and we will figure it out together. Thank you for sticking with me!