

Senior Sequence, Urban Studies and Planning Program, UCSD

Grand Challenges and Student-Mentor Research Teams

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Who are the student researchers and do they get course credit?

The students are enrolled in UCSD's Senior Sequence, a 12-unit, fall-winter research methods/writing requirement for all undergraduate seniors majoring in Urban Studies and Planning (USP). In the USP Senior Sequence, students learn how to craft a research proposal, conduct original research, and write up the results in the form of a 25 page article suitable for publication in a scholarly journal. The students are also encouraged to generate a client-oriented product--and many do as part of the deliverable for their 100 hours of required service learning (in an internship placement of their choosing).

2. How do we share the student research once it is completed? (science communication)

There are four ways the output of each Research Team gets stored and disseminated.

- a) Each student enters an individual research profile into the class web site database. These profiles capture the highlights of the research findings and other important details (re: literature, experts, data, links and other resources), but they do not include the complete thesis. Likewise each Research Team enters a brief research profile (group level report) into the class website database.
- b) The students put their work on public display (using poster/story boards and other props, including multimedia) at our widely-attended annual Urban Expo. Their displays are organized thematically by Areas of Concentration (e.g., housing, environment, etc.) and Grand Challenges (e.g.,the greening of architecture). The Urban Expo gets good press coverage.
- c) Each Research Team will also publish their main findings and lessons learned in our annual reader: "Sustainable City-Regions Reader: San Diego-Tijuana Research in Critical Perspective." The Reader is made up of brief (2 page) narrative summaries of each Research Team's main findings/highlights. Mentors take responsibility for preparing the 2-page summary with input from the students, course professor and course TAs.
- d) Each Research Team will prepare a short 5 minute multimedia vignette that brings the 2-page RT narrative summary to life. The main idea here is to exploit video as an attractive tool for science communication, and to create a supplementary piece for the Reader (something students from future classes can refer to and build upon).

3. How tightly organized does a research team have to be?

Depending upon what the mentor proposes, prospective research teams may vary from being a tightly organized group of three to five students all pulling in the same direction on a rather specific topic with clear collective aims, to a team that is more of a loose collection of three to five individual topics that fit loosely under one broad conceptual umbrella.

Model 1: Tight pre-scripted approach

In this model students each do a piece of the puzzle scripted in advance with a clear division

of labor among the students. Each of their pieces fit into a larger whole that has well-defined conceptual integrity.

Model 2: Loose cluster approach

In this model, there is less effort to assemble all the students work into a pre-fabricated unified whole. Rather, each student hits on diverse themes in the broader range of scholarly discourse and practice in the targeted field of investigation. Of course, the intent is still one of empowering "birds of a feather flocking together." It is a matter of degree to which the division of labor and deliverables are worked out in advance.

4. What if I have a general idea of a topic for a research team, but not a specific hypothesis?

That's ok. Research team topics can be framed as exploratory or critically descriptive of some new trend, issue or problem. Other options are possible too. The objective is for each research team to be bounded by an identifiable set of scholarly conversations (i.e., the team can identify a common literature or discourses). Not having a hypothesis at the outset is ok because our main goal is to inspire students to think critically. Your role as a mentor can be one of getting the ball rolling. You can take a co-evolutionary and iterative approach. In other words, jump in to get the ball rolling by creating a think piece (narrative and one or more research team ideas) that students can react to. Based on student reaction, interest, skills, etc we can modify the topic and approach accordingly.

5. Are students told what teams to join?

No. We create a competitive market place of ideas –there are lots of great projects in the database created fresh every year and students are free to choose what they want to do.

6. What kind of logistical support can a mentor expect?

We have a well-developed course infrastructure to manage the students work flow/deliverables (proposal text, final reports, poster boards and multimedia) over the fall and winter quarters. The students also have access to a GIS lab, web development resources, and facilities for multimedia production database-building capacity through our Regional Workbench Consortium (RWBC). Two teaching assistants (TAs) and the course instructor are prepared to help at every step of the way.

7. Can students get paid for doing their research and/or service learning internship?

Yes. Some do get paid, but most don't. The main mission of the Senior Sequence is for students to do a scholarly research project while gaining some professional experience at the same time. In the process of meeting their internship requirement students are welcome to generate specific deliverables for a professional client. Each student must clock in 100 hours of "service learning" in an internship placement of their choosing. They do their internship sometime between Sept and March ---usually about 10 hours per week for ten weeks. Some students complete internships that are research-driven thereby enabling them to organize the tasks/output of their internship in ways that help meet their Senior Sequence research requirements. Some internships pay, many do not.

8. Can a student's participation (time invested) as a member of a student-mentor research team be counted toward said student's 100 hours of required internship time? Yes, if certain conditions are met. The main thing is that the mentor files an internship contract with the USP office. For the hours to count as internship time, the mentor must agree to serve as an internship supervisor. The mentorship and the internship can be joined or separate. It makes life easier for the student and the mentorship more rewarding for the mentor if they are joined (as they have more regular contact), but this is not necessary. With some mentors, we've been able to craft mentorship/internships that essentially coincide: the data the organization wants would also happen to be a good basis for a senior research project. But that doesn't always happen. We have, for instance, students be interns at organizations who don't have anyone acting as a mentor. So it depends. During the fall, the students write a research proposal (modeled on what they would do if looking for grant money). In the winter, they do the research and write their senior research project (modeled on a journal article). The points of contact among mentors and students include: (1) when the students are formulating questions, mentors could provide direction, (2) at the stage of writing the proposal, mentors can comment on the viability of the project and (3) at the time of writing up the paper, mentors can comment on the draft.

9. Does each student have to do their own paper as part of the research team experience, or can two or more students turn in the same paper.

If the students get permission from the instructor at the outset, and give the instructor a plan including a clear division of labor, then, yes, two or more students can work on one paper. However, the favored model is for students to do their own stand alone project. We encourage the students to do individual work and to evaluate one another's efforts as part of a team process. The idea is to create a learning environment wherein birds of a feather can flock together. Students can help one another by sharing key definitions, literature, web sites, contacts, methods of investigation, cutting-edge problems/solutions, etc.

10. Who should students listen to if their mentor is asking them to do one thing and their TA is asking them to do something different?

Any conflicts of this sort will have to be worked out by the course professor. Generally speaking, we sought you out as mentor because we respect your insights, experience and wisdom. In a case where the advice given by mentors differs from that given by TAs –the instructor will be happy to play negotiator by turning the contest of ideas into a learning experience.

11. A Student Question: I was wondering if there was a place with a list of which mentors are also offering internships. I feel strongly that I will personally have a much better experience with this entire project if these two aspects of it are dovetailed together (the research and the internship). Is there such a list?

Answer: There is no such list since most, though not all, of our mentors may be in a position to offer you an acceptable internship placement (i.e., a placement that would meet USP's internship requirement including 100 hours of supervised service learning). Here is an example: Carl Nettleton is listed as a mentor for a prospective research team focused on *Coastal Zones and Ocean Management*. Carl did not submit a "placement listing" for inclusion in our book of

internship placements (available in the main USP Office, SSB 315). All he has done at this point is step up and offer his guidance as an expert (i.e., mentor) in the realm of coastal zone and ocean management –in case we have students who want do research in this field. You will not find a placement listing written by Carl in USP’s internship placement book. However, depending on student interest and skills, Carl says he could potentially create an internship based with his new not-for-profit group called Open Oceans. This is negotiable. Other mentors may also be able to help create new placements that we do not currently have on the books.

Two points of clarification:

1. Some of our mentors are with agencies (e.g., SANDAG, City of San Diego) that have formal procedures dictating how internship positions get created, filled and managed. Others are with organizations that are more flexible (i.e., they can easily and quickly create internships “on the fly”). Keep that in mind. Not all mentors are able to create new internships within a timeframe that can meet your needs.

2. In those cases where we have existing internships, some of the placements have specified duties that do not easily fit into a research project. These duties are clearly spelled out on the Internship Placement Form in our book of placements (in SSB 315). Others offer a placement opportunity that is mainly research driven –and they would like to see you make your time with them fit *hand-in-glove* with your research (SRP) process. We have a several internship opportunities on the books like this –where the internship supervisor is also listed as a research mentor:

The San Diego Foundation (Paula Stigler –tribal research)

San Diego River Park Foundation (Rob Hutsel –watershed and rivers)

Tijuana Estuary (Oscar Romo –border planning and human settlements)

Bottom line is this: we are prepared to work with you to make good things happen. Our aim is to create the best possible experience for all involved. While we have many excellent and long-standing internship opportunities on the books already, we recognize the need to be creative and flexible as student interests evolve over time.

12. A student question: I don't understand why there are so many questions listed in some of the Grand Challenge narratives. Are they just there to guide our thinking by listing a bunch of ideas, or do we have to pick one of them exactly? Also, can I do my own project or do I have to do a group project?

Answer: The GC narratives merely suggest possible topics. We are flexible. Some of GCs list many possible topics in the narrative. Other GCs are more specific and list just one or two topics. You are free to pick one of the GC's suggested topics or you can define one you like better. We

simplify this by pulling out of the GC narrative only one or two main ideas for research (we list these targeted topics as prospective "research teams"). Depending on student interest we can change the title of the suggested research teams, or add new ones. The bottom line is this: The Senior Sequence is designed to enable you to do an individual project of your own. You are not expected to do a group project. We create the groups (student-mentor research teams --i.e.: birds of a feather flocking together) simply as a support mechanism. The only written product the team does together is the contribution to the reader (see the examples on our class web site from last year: http://seniorsequence.net/?page_id=503). Our goal is to enable those of you with similar research interests to get together and help one another on your six-month journey. We want your group experience to be as rewarding and productive as possible. We've identified mentors who can help. All of this is negotiable. It's really up to you and your fellow students to get the most out of this. The professor and TAs are here to help.