

Your Senior Research Project (SRP): What is it, who cares, why, how will you do it?

Urban and regional planning is an increasingly important field. It is a profession dedicated to involving our quality of life and place by linking knowledge to action. You've chosen to make planning the core of your education at UCSD. Through your course work you have been challenged to understand the myriad factors that make up our complex society, the built environment and the natural world. Now it's time for you to think systematically about your ideas for your SRP. Think about the 5 questions below, and sketch some notes. Consider starting a Journal (while we don't require you to keep a Journal –we strongly recommend that you do so).

1. **What:** What are you really interested in? What is the problem? What caused it? What has been done to solve it in other places? Are there different perspectives on it and if so, where do they come from (and put that in with the 'who' part!)? Is it physical, social, political or some combination of them? Are there patterns occurring and if so, what is causing those patterns? What is the relationship between the factors that are present in your issue? Did the problem/issue occur because it was near water, near roads, in a sunny place, in a desert, because of an election, because of money or lack thereof, because of the plant life, the topography of the land? Have things changed because the place has changed or because time has passed? What is the rate of change?

2. **Who:** Who are the players? What groups (community, political, special interest)? What ethnicities? Common characteristics? Who is affected by the problem, process, and/or outcome?

3. **When:** Is it recent? Historical? Caused by a certain event? Caused by external forces or internal? Political reasons? Happened over time or just once?

4. **Where:** Are you interested in San Diego? In the region? In California? In a particular neighborhood? Bounded by certain streets or landmarks? Inside a building? On a campus? Does it happen in more than one place or is the idea confined to a certain location (if so, why?)? Does your issue deal with things that are close together and thus impact each other, or far apart and thus impact each other? If you look at the issue from another angle, does it look different? Are there particular objects that are important to your topic, such as street lights, benches, parking spaces, buildings, sunshine, views, transit routes? Did your issue/topic happen because of where it is (i.e., how important is the place itself)?

5. **How:** Is it a physical process? Is it an engineering process? What does it take/what did it take to create the issue? (You can draw on all of the above to deduce the how – how did it happen? Why did it happen? What is it that is happening?) If you were think about and graphically represent your topic in terms of how it started and where it is now, either as a flow chart or a diagram that is a tree (or maybe a 2 forest!) with roots being the causes and the trunk and branches being the different parts of the topic, what would that look like? When you've completed this part of the assignment, you will have a greater understanding of what your potential project might entail, how extensive or narrow it is, and you'll be able to refine it appropriately with the help of your TA and the professor. You should keep this document and complete it at least two more times during the research process, so you can evaluate what is new to the project and to ensure that you are addressing the critical components of your topic.

The following resources on the class website can help get your creative intellectual juices flowing as you grapple with the above conceptual tasks. All the Items below all available at: <http://www.seniorsequence.net/index.php/186/handouts/>

- JPER Editors guide to writing a scholarly article ([jper-manuscript_tips.pdf](#))
- Four Traditions of Planning Theory (click here for pdf)
- Guide to Critical Thinking and Action for Urban-Regional Studies ([ho-principles-sustainable-cityregions.pdf](#))
- Narrative devices offer another useful way to think about organizing your thoughts/approach.
- See the writing tips page for more details: [Concepts_and_Theories.pdf](#)
- SRP Worksheet (story diagram) ([Click here for pdf](#))
- SRP Worksheet (examples of story diagrams) ([sample-story-diagrams.ppt](#))
- Research Design and Methods Worksheet ([click here for pdf](#))
- Evidence Worksheet ([click here for word doc](#))