

**SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL  
DISSERTATION PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT FELLOWSHIP  
SPRING 2009 WORKSHOP AGENDA**

**CRITICAL AGRARIAN STUDIES**

<https://workspace.ssrc.org/dpdf>

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**Astor Crowne Plaza, New Orleans, LA  
May 28- 31, 2009**

This is the first of two workshops designed to help students prepare cogent and fundable dissertation proposals in their chosen field. The two goals of the first workshop are 1) to map the research field with respect to contributing disciplines, methods, sources, and area knowledge; and 2) to help prepare fellows for their pre-dissertation summer research. (The goal of the second workshop will be to focus on the mechanics and methods of writing a dissertation proposal). The two goals stand in close relation to each other: through a sustained and structured discussion of student proposals and their component parts, we hope to contribute to the mapping of the research field itself. We emphasize at the outset that we do not see the field as neatly bounded or easily “map-able,” but rather as a protean category that we are all in the process of constructing.

Across different historical periods, world regions and disciplines, scholars working within the field of Critical Agrarian Studies (CAS) are broadly united by three primary analytical assumptions. First, lived experiences, structural configurations and representations of agrarian societies influence contention over and processes of modernization, development policy, democratization, globalization, and urbanization. Agrarian societies are not primitive, backward, or “other” to modern, urban societies; rather, both are mutually constituted, each necessitating and shaping the other in manifold ways. Second, work on agrarian societies and themes highlights the importance of the political and cultural economy of production, consumption, accumulation, distribution and governance and requires in-depth understandings of diverse kinds of relations between countryside and city, social classes, regions, economic sectors, and often ethnic and religious groups. Third, understanding the particular dynamics of rural society in any given place and time requires analysis of the experiences and political culture of agrarian classes and communities. At a general level, exciting contemporary and historical themes of CAS research include (but are not limited to):

- The constitution and meaning of power relations within and between agrarian classes local communities, and state bureaucracies;
- The organization of production, consumption, finance, and trade from localized livelihood concerns to regional, national and global networks;

- The discursive and material meaning of arrangements such as household divisions of labor, agrarian racializations, national identities, and ethnic stratification or conflicts;
- The production of forms of knowledge, popular beliefs, rituals, and norms;
- Informal and formal practices of collective action, within and across borders.

## **Workshop Readings and Resources**

Research Field resources will be placed on the relevant Workspace websites. Students will receive separate explanations and detailed instructions about the access and use of the DPDF digital platform.

## **Workshop Assignments**

In preparation for our first workshop, we would like all of you to complete a few quick assignments. We hope that doing this work in advance of the workshop will help us to make the most of our short time together in New Orleans as well as to build a framework for re-thinking the field - Critical Agrarian Studies - for the future.

**[May 15, 2009] Due on DPDF Workspace site:** The first assignment is to submit a two-page (single-spaced) version of your dissertation proposal/project to the group. This two-page mini proposal should contain all the components of a proper dissertation proposal and should be easily understood by people across academic fields. For the mini-proposal, please include: an introductory paragraph that draws the reader in to your work and explains the relevance or need for this project; a set of preliminary research questions and perhaps an even-more-preliminary set of hypotheses for each question (not all research has to be hypothesis-based, but all research does have to be question-based); a list of the data and sources you think would be necessary to research and “answer” each question; and, finally, an outline of the methods that you will use to access and analyze the data (i.e., to determine if the question is really “answered” and with what degree of assurance). This material will need to be laid out succinctly, of course, and in a language that is easily accessible to all of the other members of the group.

You should read the proposals submitted by the other fellows in order to familiarize yourself with the group’s body of work. In addition, we would like each of you to read (at least) two proposals in greater depth so that you will come to the workshop prepared to discuss those two proposals during the group sessions. We have assigned the proposals we would like you to focus on:

Aaron Jakes: read Sara Safransky and Zehra Yasin  
 Sara Safransky: read Mariya Radeva and Thomas Fleischman  
 Pablo Lapegna: read William Okie and Jennifer Baka  
 Elisa Da Via: read William Okie and Christina Campisi  
 Mariya Radeva: read Gabrielle Clark and Elisa da Via  
 William Okie: read Jennifer Baka and Pablo Lapegna  
 Zehra Yasin: read Sara Safransky and Thomas Fleischman  
 Jennifer Baka: read Greta Marchesi and Christina Campisi  
 Greta Marchesi: read Aaron Jakes and Pablo Lapegna

Gabrielle Clark: read Mariya Radeva and Elisa da Via  
Christina Campisi: read Aaron Jakes and Greta Marchesi  
Thomas Fleischman: read Elisa da Via and Zehra Yasin

The second assignment is theoretical: please read the pieces listed in the brief bibliography below and come prepared to discuss these readings in relation to the field as a whole and to your project in particular. If time permits, consult the larger “field bibliography” on the web site and read according to your specific needs and interests.

Bernstein, Henry, and Terence J. Byres (2001). “From Peasant Studies to Agrarian Change.”  
*Journal of Agrarian Change* 1(1): 1-56.  
*Journal of Peasant Studies* (2009) Vol. 36, no. 1, a special issue on the contemporary relevance of classic agrarian studies theorists (selections will be placed on the web site shortly).

**[May 25, 2009] Due on DPDF Workspace site:** The third assignment is empirical. Please read through the New York Times from May 19, 2008 (we picked this date at random). List three or four stories that you think relate to the broad field of agrarian studies and briefly catalogue the way in which the issues, places, people and politics can be understood with the tools of the field.

**[May 25, 2009] Due on DPDF Workspace site:** The fourth assignment is a methodological exercise. In thinking about your research questions, focus on the most important methodological approach you will use. Prepare a short discussion (no more than one single-spaced page) of the genealogy of this method as well as the possibilities and limitations it poses for both research in general and your specific project.

For this assignment, please read the following two pieces (but you do not need to prepare anything in writing about these papers):

Edelman, Marc, and Mitchell A. Seligson (1994). "Land Inequality: A Comparison of Census Data and Property Records in Twentieth-Century Southern Costa Rica." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 74(3) (Aug.): 445-91.  
Wolford, Wendy (2006). A The Difference Ethnography Can Make: Understanding Social Mobilization and Development in the Brazilian Northeast. @ *Qualitative Sociology* 29(3): 335-352.

### **WORKSHOP SCHEDULE**

In this workshop, we will discuss some of the basic theoretical and practical tools for designing a research project within CAS. Although the immediate goal will be to write individual research proposals, the general goals are much broader. As students of any sub-disciplinary field, we should understand the nature, purpose and value of doing and communicating our research.

*General goals of the workshop:*

- 1) To discuss the theoretical, practical, and ethical implications of designing a research project;
- 2) To examine key perspectives developed within CAS and analyze their theoretical and methodological underpinnings;

- 3) To discuss the research questions relevant to each student's project and tie them to appropriate literature fields, methods and theoretical frameworks;
- 4) To understand how research proposals, as living documents, shape our work as we do research and analyze our results;
- 5) To learn the mechanics of writing research proposals that stand on their own, outside of (though not divorced from) narrow disciplinary containers;
- 6) Finally, to draft preliminary research proposals.

**NOTE:** To help the research directors engage directly with each student's project and proposal, we will set up individual meetings during breakfast and lunch.

***ARRIVAL, Wednesday, May 28: Reading handouts / packets will be distributed at registration along with other materials.***

**Wednesday Evening:** *Reception, 6-8 pm.*

### **Session 1: Introduction and Purpose of Workshops**

(Thursday, 9 AM – 12:00 PM)

Plenary Session: Presentations by Program Director Josh DeWind and the Research Directors

*Breakfast meetings with Marc and Wendy: 7:30 Aaron Jakes; 8:00 Sara Safransky*

### **Session 2: Mapping Fields, Asking Questions**

(Thursday, 2:00 PM – 5 PM)

*Lunch meetings with Marc and Wendy: 1:00 Christina Campisi; 1:30 Thomas Fleischman*

In this session we will begin with introductions – introductions to one another and to the field. Wendy and Marc will present their engagements with agrarian studies and, as a group, we will build a genealogy of the field. We will discuss key themes that have animated the field and situate the rise and fall of the themes within particular global and local contexts. Finally, we will examine the research questions that motivated individual works and attempt to travel backward and construct (or “reverse engineer”) research proposals for some of the most influential – or best – works in the field.

### **Session 3: Questions of Method**

(Friday, 9 AM – 12:00 PM)

*Breakfast meetings with Marc and Wendy: 7:30 Pablo Lapegna; 8:00 Greta Marchesi*

During this session we will discuss various methodological approaches to questions in agrarian studies. We will examine the dominant methodological approaches, reading through the one-page essays prepared by fellows. In the second half of the session, we will focus on two research

proposals, paying particular attention to the use of methods and the relationship between methods, data collection and questions.

#### **Session 4: Sources**

(Friday, 2:00 PM – 5 PM)

*Lunch meetings with Marc and Wendy: 1:00 Elisa da Via; 1:30 Mariya Radeva*

In the first hour of this session, we will discuss datasets and sources, focusing on the relations between sources, methods, and research questions. We will focus on two research proposals and address general questions of data availability, research ethics, and selection of sources. In the second part of this session, we will have a presentation from our guest scholar, Saturnino (Jun) Borrás Jr.

During dinner on Friday, we will hold an informal working dinner with Jun to discuss the politics of biofuels production. All fellows are welcome to attend.

#### **Session 5: Strategies**

(Saturday, 9 AM – 12:00 PM)

*Breakfast meetings with Marc and Wendy: 7:30 William Okie; 8:00 Gabrielle Clark*

In this session, we will continue with presentations and commentaries of individual projects (four students will be asked to present their work), emphasizing strategies to survey sources framed by their methods and research questions.

#### **Session 6: From the Field to the Proposal**

(Saturday, 2:00 PM – 5 PM)

For this session, please skim the website: <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/DissPropWorkshop>, and read the short essay: Wolford, Wendy (2001). “Research as a Process” <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/DissPropWorkshop/examples/WolfordComment.html>

*Lunch meetings with Marc and Wendy: 1:00 Zehra Yasin; 1:30 Jennifer Baka*

In this session, we will continue with presentations and commentaries of individual projects (four students will be asked to present their work), focusing on the ways in which preliminary research can be incorporated back into a successful research proposal. We will discuss the component pieces of successful proposals and strategize plans for the summer.

#### **Session 7: Looking Forward**

(Sunday, 9 AM – 12:30 PM)

During this session, we will discuss summer research plans and establish goals for the Fall workshop. We will collectively determine the assignments for the Fall such that this second

workshop builds on the first, while preparing research proposals and an agenda that will bring us together around questions of “the field” in the future.

We are hoping to have students prepare short “field notes” articles— stories and research reports from the field that can serve as part of an ongoing methodological and empirical discussion and as the basis for publications in professional journals or other venues.

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**Hilton Garden Inn, Philadelphia City Center**  
Thursday, September 10 – Sunday, September 13

This is the second of two annual DPDF workshops designed to help graduate student fellows prepare cogent and fundable dissertation proposals in their chosen field. The two goals of the second workshop are 1) to help fellows synthesize their summer research; and 2) to draft proposals for dissertation funding. The fall workshop focuses on the mechanics and the philosophy of proposal writing. The workshop also aims to challenge fellows to reflect on their summer research in ways that link meaningfully to their research field. In this, the goals of the fall workshop are closely related to the project of mapping a research field that was started during the spring workshop in New Orleans.

We hope to accomplish these goals by concentrating – both collectively and individually - on the development of full-length research proposals. Each workshop session will provide time for the discussion of fellows' proposals as well as for intensive work in small groups and meetings with the research directors. We will also reserve time towards the end of the workshop for a conversation that brings back the field, situating the proposals within Critical Agrarian Studies as a whole, and looking towards the future.

Fellows will come out of the second workshop with supportive networks, consisting of both mentors and cohorts of new scholars carrying out research in their fields, as well as intellectually mature dissertation proposals.

### **Workshop Assignments**

- **[August 31, 2009 ] Due on DPDF Workspace site:** Please submit a revised draft of your dissertation proposal. *These proposals should be significantly updated and extended from the spring.* The proposal may be in whatever form is most helpful to you as long as it is a complete funding proposal or dissertation prospectus. In other words, if writing a funding proposal, we do not care if you gear it towards the NSF or the SSRC but it must contain all the components of a funding proposal – see the sample resources provided by the SSRC on the workspace (make use of these resources, read them as you prepare - they're excellent!).

- **[August 31, 2009] Due on DPDF Workspace site:** Please submit a brief (no more than one page) description of your research experiences this summer.
- **[September 10, 2009]** Please come to the workshop having read everyone's proposal and be prepared to discuss them. We will assign one person to be the primary discussant for each proposal as we did in May (see below for details) but we hope that everyone will have time to read all of the proposals.

## ***WORKSHOP SCHEDULE***

*ARRIVAL, Wednesday, September 9th: Registration packets will be distributed at check in.*

### **Thursday, September 10<sup>th</sup>**

Session 1: Panel – The Dissertation Proposal: Strategies and Funding Sources  
**(Thursday, 9 AM – 12:00 PM)**

- Welcome and Introductions
- Dissertation Funder Presentations

### **Sessions 2-7: Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday**

These sessions will focus on student proposals, which have been (roughly) grouped into the following four thematic clusters:

- Group #1: The ecology of Empire: Greta, Zehra, and Aaron
- Group #2: Remaking Food and Fuel: Biofuels and GM crops: Pablo, Sara, and Jennifer
- Group #3: Agriculture, Labor and Capital: Tom, Gabrielle, and Thomas
- Group #4: Social Mobilization and the Re-working of Nations and/through Nature: Mariya, Elisa, and Christina

These groups will present their proposals during the same workshop sessions and will also work together during the 'small group' breakout sessions each day.

Each proposal will have 40 minutes for discussion. This time period will be broken down as follows: 5 minutes for presentation by the author, in which the author will focus on how the proposal has changed since the spring; 5 to 10 minutes of commentary by the lead discussant; 15 minutes open discussion during which the author is relatively silent; and a final 10 minutes of interactive discussion with the author participating and responding to the main questions or concerns posed by the group.

- Note: For the proposal to which you are assigned as a "primary discussant," we would like you to prepare an alternative first paragraph for the proposal to be presented to the group with your comments. These 'alternative introductions' do not have to be polished or better than the original; we just want discussants to summarize what they think are the main points of the proposal and we want people to think creatively about how to present information. The first paragraph of your

proposal is arguably the most important, and we would like both the original (the author's) and the alternative to be written with an eye towards creating a 'hook,' drawing readers in, conveying sufficient information without overwhelming the audience, and posing the problematic as you understand it.

Session 2:

**(Thursday, 2:00 PM – 5 PM)**

We will begin this session with brief descriptions of the fellows' summers. We would like to hear the highlights of what people did over the summer, focusing on one or two 'ah-ha' moments that helped to define the direction of future research.

From 3:30 to 4:00, Wendy will make a short presentation on Critical Agrarian Studies

From 4:15 to 4:45, we will read (in session) a proposal written by one of Wendy's current students. Fellows will have a chance to read both the proposal and reviewers' comments from two rounds of the National Science Foundation DDRI competition (the proposal was submitted twice and was successful the second time). The research directors will briefly outline the expectations they have for proposals when they serve as reviewers for various funding agencies and organizations. \*\* We may spend less time on this exercise if we run out of time for the session – fellows can read the proposal and reviews outside of the workshop.

From 4:45 to 5:00, we will break into our small groups for initial discussion: fellows may organize the upcoming breakout sessions to best fit their own needs and preferences. These breakout sessions can take place wherever fellows choose and be organized creatively.

Session 3:

**(Friday, 9 AM – 12:30 PM)**

\*\* early morning run to Reading Terminal Market for those interested

From 9:00 to 11:00 we will have presentations and discussions of the proposals in Group #1: The ecology of Empire: Greta (primary discussant: Pablo); Zehra (primary discussant: Tom); and Aaron (primary discussant: Mariya).

At 11:15, Wendy and Marc will introduce the breakout session on "Questions and Hypotheses," and then we will break out into small groups for proposal workshopping.

11:30 individual meeting Marc/Wendy with Sara

12:00 individual meeting Marc/Wendy with Gabrielle

Session 4:

**(Friday, 2:00 PM – 5:30 PM)**

From 2:00 to 4:00 we will have presentations and discussions of the proposals in Group #2: Remaking Food and Fuel: Biofuels and GM crops: Pablo (primary discussant: Zehra), Sara (primary discussant: Gabrielle), and Jennifer (primary discussant: Elisa)

At 4:15, Wendy and Marc will introduce the breakout session on “Literature Reviews,” and then we will break out into small groups for proposal workshopping.

4:30 individual meeting Marc/Wendy with Elisa

5:00 individual meeting Marc/Wendy with Zehra

Moving to hotel bar:

5:45 individual meeting Marc/Wendy with Jennifer

6:15 individual meeting Marc/Wendy with Thomas

***FRIDAY DINNER 7:00, meet in lobby.*** we will eat as a group on Friday evening at a restaurant TBA (we don't know where yet but it will be better than the place we ate at in New Orleans...)

Session 5:

**(Saturday, 9 AM – 12:30 PM)**

From 9:00 to 11:00 we will have presentations and discussions of the proposals in Group #3: Agriculture, Labor and Capital: Tom (primary discussant: Aaron), Gabrielle (primary discussant: Jennifer), and Thomas (primary discussant: Christina)

At 11:15, Wendy and Marc will introduce the breakout session on “Methods,” and then we will break out into small groups for proposal workshopping.

11:30 individual meeting Marc/Wendy with Christina

12:00 individual meeting Marc/Wendy with Aaron

Session 6:

**(Saturday, 2:00 PM – 5:30 PM)**

From 2:00 to 4:00 we will have presentations and discussions of the proposals in Group #4: Social Mobilization and the Re-working of Nations and/through Nature: Mariya (primary discussant: Greta), Elisa (primary discussant: Sara), and Christina (primary discussant: Thomas)

At 4:15, Wendy and Marc will introduce the breakout session on “Data Collection,” and then we will break out into small groups for proposal workshopping.

4:30 individual meeting Marc/Wendy with Pablo

5:00 individual meeting Marc/Wendy with Tom

Moving to the hotel bar:

5:45 individual meeting Marc/Wendy with Mariya

6:15 individual meeting Marc/Wendy with Greta

Session 7:  
**(Sunday, 9 AM – 12:00 PM)**

We reserve this session for wrapping up and finishing up. We hope to leave a part of it for writing and then brainstorming for the future. Fellows will be asked to submit their newly revised proposals (reflecting the work done during the workshop) before leaving.