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Social Science Research Methodologies and Historic Preservation: Broadening the Possibilities for a Preservation Thesis

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Regardless of the type of major associated with a master's program, degree coursework typically terminates with some kind of capstone project or a thesis in order to demonstrate, in a holistic way, the mastery of particular subject matter.¹ Some programs require a thesis, project, or comprehensive exam, while others let students choose one of these options. Since the 1980s, there has been a trend in many academic degree programs to replace theses with capstone projects, due to problems with low completion rates for theses.² In general, however, there is a lack of research on the positive and negative aspects of the empirical research thesis, capstone project, or comprehensive examination in assessing student learning, and even less on how these activities relate to future professional endeavors. This chapter addresses the need for empirical theses in historic preservation degree programs and how a curriculum might accommodate this goal.

The thesis is nearly as old as the university itself, with origins in the medieval period as a requirement of graduate programs.³ Over the centuries it has evolved from an articulated debate to a document that contributes to a discipline's knowledge through a rigorous research program. As it is envisioned today, a thesis provides an opportunity for a student to understand the process of research and its importance in empirical decision making. In social work, for instance, there appears to be a correlation between students who complete a thesis and the increased use of research findings in professional decision-making processes.⁴ Conversely, students who do not undertake a rigorous research project in graduate school, such as a thesis, may therefore be unable to adequately understand research in general and therefore have limited abilities to interpret and understand original research as it applies to their professional work.

Theses have value that extend beyond the academic experience and enhance a discipline while providing experience applicable to a professional

setting. Programs that emphasize the empirical thesis do so based on the expectation that the student will advance knowledge in a particular field through original research that questions existing paradigms and theories. In nursing research, for instance, there is evidence that students who produce theses do in fact publish their research and make a measurable impact on advancing their discipline.⁵ John P. Carroll, Robert J. Cooper, and Karl V. Miller argue that contrary to the stereotype of the thesis as only being relevant in academic contexts, it instead presents "the most difficult task that [students] have ever undertaken, and following a difficult, challenging, and often tedious effort through to completion is an excellent way of learning perseverance. More than any other university educational experience, the thesis mimics the 'real world.'"⁶

Moreover, rather than being driven by relevance to professional practice, master's programs have dropped requirements for theses and substituted extra coursework in order to generate additional income, making a master's degree little more than an extended bachelor's program.⁷ If an assumption can be made, therefore, that there is a benefit to a student completing a master's thesis, then what form should it take to offer maximum benefit to the student, the discipline, and professional practice? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to differentiate the empirical thesis from other kinds of capstone projects.

The Empirical Thesis as Opposed to a Literature Review, Policy Analysis, or Project

In 1930, Ernest Earl Lindsay and Ernest Otto Holland described a research thesis as "an original study contributing something to the total of human knowledge" while emphasizing the application of a rigorous research methodology toward a particular research question.⁸ This essential definition remains unchanged today, but some master's programs allow a student to produce a "thesis" that is not empirically derived from research. These papers manifest instead as a literature review or policy analysis with limited capacity to contribute to human knowledge.⁹ While these works may undoubtedly be useful in some contexts, they lack methodological rigor employing the collection and/or analysis of data to produce empirical findings within the framework of "original research" and as such, have limited utility in advancing the epistemological boundaries of a particular field.

The essential difference between a thesis and a project is that the former emphasizes generalizability or transferability to similar situations in an attempt to make original contributions to a field while the latter focuses on the analysis of an existing situation in an effort to provide a

pragmatic solution.¹⁰ A project uses the format of a professional report provided for a client as the model, often with a decreased emphasis on “academic” language and the use of a more accessible format, while the thesis is a scholarly research document typically formatted in a five-part format of introduction, literature review, methods, analysis, and conclusion, depending on the discipline, and contains more technical or discipline-specific language.

Within historic preservation, projects utilize an existing theoretical frame in an uncritical way. For instance, there is significant agreement on how a historic structure report, condition survey, preservation plan, or cultural landscape study is conducted. Students who do these types of reports as their capstone project collect data on a specific case using previous reports as templates, thereby perpetuating the way in which these reports are prepared. There is therefore no overt attempt to advance practice or contribute to the intellectual boundaries of a discipline. Moreover, projects are not driven by a research question or a hypothesis. All of these characteristics of projects are not meant to deprecate their value, for indeed, in a professional setting these reports are consistently produced and do add to an existing body of knowledge and have practical implications for conserving historic buildings, structures, or landscapes. But they do not teach students how to conduct or understand original research.

An empirical research thesis addresses a particular problem or issue in a discipline through theoretical and/or applied approaches, culminating in a unique contribution to a particular field area. A research question and/or a hypothesis are developed from this problem area. Unlike a project, there is an overt attempt to advance practice or contribute to the intellectual boundaries of a discipline.¹¹ While an empirical thesis can use a specific case or several cases in its research design, the overarching research question typically addresses a larger issue in the field that can be generalized or transferred to similar settings. Empirical theses utilize a well-defined research methodology and particular methods to collect and analyze data. In its most basic form, an empirical thesis asks a question and collects and analyzes data in order to provide an answer to that question.

Students who prepare an empirical thesis will learn how research is applied to a problem in a particular discipline in an effort to advance their profession. In architectural practice, for instance, there is a drive toward equipping students to understand “evidence-based design” through social science research, culminating in a research thesis applied to a particular design issue. Students who understand research in this way are more

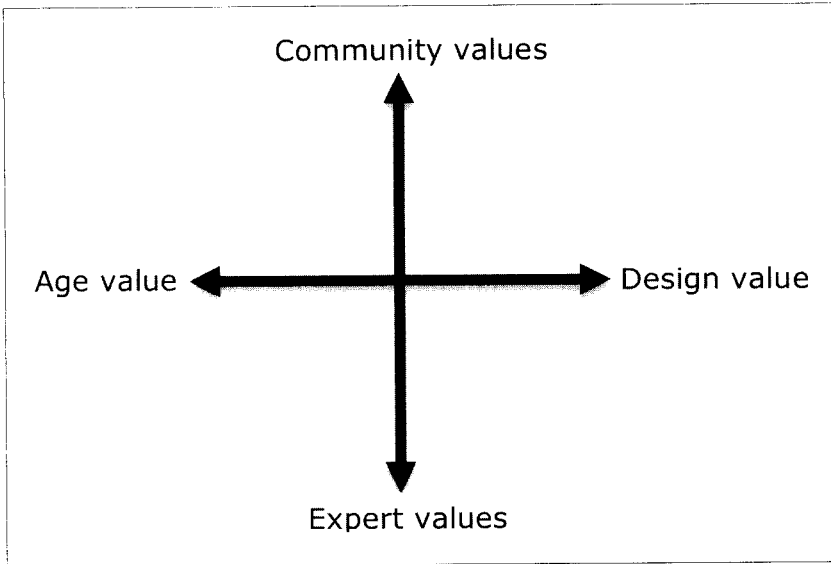
effective in designing places that are better for people when they begin their professional architectural practice.¹² In the field of psychology, students who understand research are able to apply their knowledge in professional careers in order to determine the quality of studies, to separate anecdotal from scientific information, to engage in critical thinking, and, in short, to “separate fact from fiction.”¹³

What Is a “Historic Preservation” Thesis?

What is the discipline of historic preservation? Moreover, what are its boundaries? In other words, one needs to understand the boundaries of the discipline before making a determination whether or not a particular thesis topic is indeed a “preservation” thesis when advising students. There is not, unfortunately, a consensus on the nature of historic preservation as a discipline; some authors even disagree that it is a singular discipline at all.¹⁴ Michael Tomlin, however, argues that historic preservation arose as a discrete discipline by the 1980s, representing “a full-time occupation that involved a commitment to a calling, formal organization, esoteric but useful knowledge acquired through intensive education and training, an orientation to service, and autonomy.”¹⁵ While preservation professionals employ a wide range of skills and expertise in areas such as materials conservation and preservation planning, most professionals specialize in a particular area of preservation practice, such as planning or historic site interpretation. Understanding the nature of these specializations is useful as an exercise for characterizing the field, but its primary value lies in helping students to understand potential topical areas for a thesis.

Historic preservation literature tends to segment preservation research and practice into existing disciplinary boundaries, such as the introductory texts that many students read by Norman Tyler, Ted Ligibel, and Ilene R. Tyler¹⁶ and William J. Murtagh,¹⁷ which define preservation through the activities of the architect, the planner, or the historian. There is evidence, however, to consider that the field has created its own, unique divisions as expressed through the actual jobs preservationists do. One way of categorizing these divisions is through an artificial device that articulates the inherent tension in historic preservation values as expressed through their theory and practice. In particular, there are two dichotomies that are most salient: a tension between community and expert values and a tension between age and design value. These values are graphically represented in Figure 16.1.

The dichotomy between community or sociocultural values and expert values is perhaps best represented through Laurajane Smith’s work



16.1 Defining the field through dichotomous values.

on the “Authorized Heritage Discourse” (AHD) in which “the proper care of heritage, and its associated values, lies with the experts, as it is only they who have the abilities, knowledge and understanding to identify the innate value and knowledge contained at and within historically important sites and places.”¹⁸ Other work by Randall Mason, Howard L. Green, and Emma Waterton, Laurajane Smith, and Gary Campbell¹⁹ reinforces the idea that what may be valuable to a community is not necessarily valuable to a preservation expert who, through preservation doctrine, is obligated to privilege objective art/historical values in the assessment of significance. The other dichotomy that contrasts age value with design value derives from the nineteenth-century arguments between preservation and restoration epitomized by John Ruskin and Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc that are still with us today.²⁰

Do these dichotomies work? A thought experiment is warranted to answer this question. In the former case, imagine a discussion on saving a historic building between a statewide preservation advocacy director and a preservation architect. Would they agree on all aspects of an intervention? Where would their values lie? Inevitably, the advocate would likely argue for greater retention of historic fabric while the architect would stress the programmatic requirements of the client in balance with preservation needs. Both perspectives have equal value, but the point is the difference in the perspectives. In the second case, imagine a discussion

between a city preservation planner and an architectural historian on the value of a proposed historic district. The historian would point out the high-style buildings and possibly certain vernacular features, while the planner would be likely to focus on why this place has value to a community for shopping, recreating, or living—that is, its sense of place. Again, there is no ethical position on whether or not one set of values is more important than another; it simply shows that there are often opposed values in preservation practice.

The proof as to whether this values framework is functional becomes evident when placing the various types of preservation professionals who are in the field in areas that consider the interaction of these four, individual values. For instance, an executive director at a statewide preservation trust is driven by the need to preserve the age value of places, but is much more likely to be influenced by community values than expert values. A Main Street manager is even more likely to be driven by community values. A cultural resource manager (CRM), specializing in environmental review, is more likely to acknowledge design and political value within a regulatory framework, moving this position closer to expert and design values. An architectural materials conservator will be more likely to recognize expert values than community values, to consider the role of design intent in interventions, and to seek a balance between interventions and the retention of age value. Last, a historic site administrator would be the least likely to alter the historic fabric of buildings in recognition of art/historical and informational values.

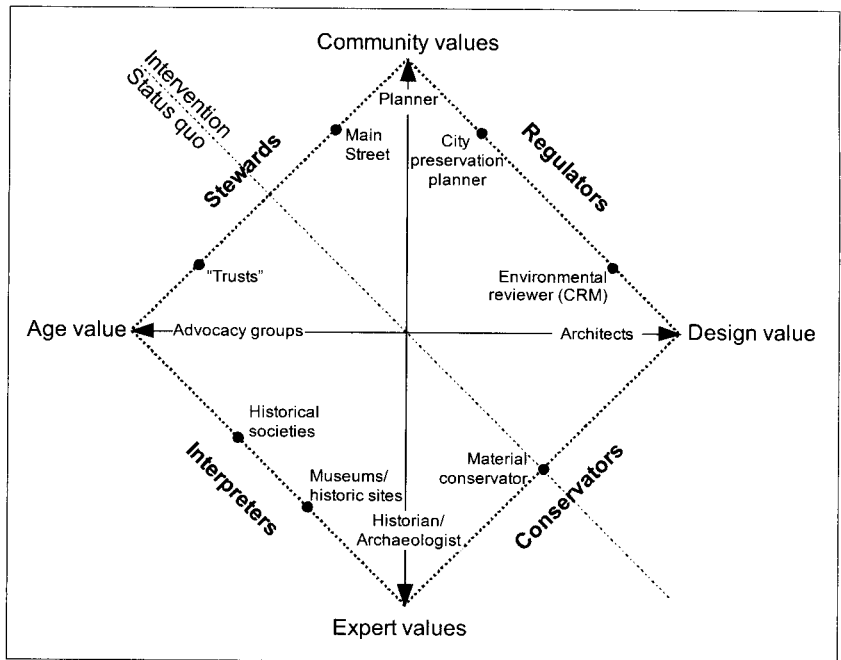
When plotting these jobs on the values framework, a pattern emerges where half of the positions are inclined to value interventions while the other half of the jobs would be more inclined to value the retention of historic fabric, or the status quo. When drawn across the values framework, a 45-degree bisection is created to represent this idea. In looking at the way the jobs are arrayed across the framework, the last pattern to emerge is that each side of the rotated square that is created begs a label to describe the jobs that fall along a particular side. From the northeast quadrant, these labels are regulators, conservators, interpreters, and stewards based on the nature of the work performed. A list of these job titles, which is not meant to be all-inclusive, organized by these four specializations, is depicted in Table 16.1. The final values framework, referred to by the acronym RCIS for specializations in historic preservation is illustrated in Figure 16.2.

The assumption inherent in the RCIS model is that historic preservation *professions* in part define the *discipline*, but that they are not

Table 16.1 Preservation jobs by RCIS specialization category.

<i>Regulators</i>	<i>Conservators</i>
Environmental Planner	Preservation Architect
Cultural Resources Specialist	Landscape Architect
Compliance Manager	Historic Preservation Associate
Compliance Specialist	Historic Architect
NEPA and Historic Preservation Specialist	Architectural Materials Conservator
Architectural Historian	Exhibit Specialist
Historic Preservation Specialist	
Environmental Protection Specialist	<i>Stewards</i>
Historic Preservation Planner	Community Development Specialist
Cultural Resources Group Leader	Downtown Manager
Environmental Protection Specialist	Main Street Director/Manager
Environmental Resources Specialist	Executive Director (of nonprofit)
Senior Scientist	Program Manager
Historic Preservation Officer	Field Advocate
Tribal Historic Preservation Officer	Heritage Tourism Specialist
<i>Interpreters</i>	
Cultural Resources Program Manager	
Natural and Historical Resources Instructor	
History/Museum Program Coordinator	
Historic Site Director	
Project Director	
Tour Director	

equivalent. A discipline develops around a unique ontological and epistemological perspective on an object of study or practice, and uses existing or new methods in ways that are unique.²¹ One could argue that the historic environment is the object of attention, the ontological orientation is centered on authenticity, and there is a unique body of knowledge on the identification and treatment of historic resources. In addition, local history research, as applied to understanding the objective significance of buildings and landscapes, is unique to historic preservation when compared to the other built environment disciplines. There is also an academic or scholarly side to historic preservation, such as heritage studies, which helps to define and expand the discipline's boundaries.



16.2 The Regulators, Conservators, Interpreters, and Stewards (RCIS) diagram.

Toward Evidence-Based Historic Preservation with the Empirical Thesis

The rationale for and benefits of historic preservation practice, according to Erica Avrami, Randall Mason, and Marta de la Torre, are “taken as a matter of faith” and not based on empirical evidence as far as decisions are concerned related to significance, interventions, and planning.²² In the past fifteen years, there has been a remarkable critique against the rationalist/synoptic-based, doctrine-driven approach to historic preservation practice rooted in the values of nineteenth-century European, white aristocrats.²³ Whether this is called “values-based” conservation as opposed to “fabric-based conservation,” “common sense” conservation based on “adaptive ethics” and “gentle decisions,” or conservation where meaning is derived from contemporary “broad social processes,”²⁴ there is a consensus in moving away from traditional rationalist doctrine and basing more decisions on the values of stakeholders and empirical evidence obtained through the use of social science research methodologies in balance with expert/objective values.

But this change in value systems from experts to stakeholders is not a new idea: while historic preservation may be tardy in understanding

broader human values, other built environment disciplines have addressed, if not necessarily embraced, this idea for some time. For instance, architecture began this debate in the 1970s starting with social scientists who had the idea that design should be, in part, driven by empirical evidence of how design benefits people in terms of physical and mental health. A number of architects then joined the movement for what is known today as “evidence-based design,” which uses social science research methodologies to provide answers for design principles that are beneficial to human beings.²⁵ While it would be disingenuous to indicate the whole of architecture has accepted evidence-based design, it is ubiquitous in some areas, such as health care facilities, where the design of rooms has been correlated with reduced recuperation time for patients.²⁶ In a similar sense, these same kinds of social science research methodologies can provide empirical evidence to substantiate and adapt historic preservation practice to more effectively serve human needs.

With so much of historic preservation practice being based on doctrine, from the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards to the Venice Charter, there is a great potential in the use of social science research methodologies to provide the kind of empirical evidence for these taken-for-granted aspects of historic preservation practice. If we accept that the conservation of the historic environment is ultimately to benefit *people* through the identification, interpretation, and treatment of historic objects, then the natural conclusion is that existing conservation doctrine is woefully inadequate in providing a basis for practice.²⁷ Generally speaking, areas that lack this kind of empirical evidence are related to the person/environment interaction and the perception, valuation, changes to historic resources, and assessment of authenticity, which begs a number of questions, such as:

- How do everyday people perceive/value the historic environment?
- What defines an “authentic” historic environment for those who inhabit and use these places?
- What are acceptable and unacceptable interventions from the perspective of stakeholders?
- What is the process whereby historical objects acquire cultural and/or social value?
- What kinds of physical and mental health benefits does the historic environment provide?

Other areas of potential research can be categorized using the RCIS organizational scheme, described previously. The regulators, conservators, interpreters, and stewards are areas with slightly different foci, and as such, will engender research questions specific to these practitioners.

Research Area: The Regulators

Practice as it relates to regulating the historic environment is driven by a need to understand community values and a greater acceptance of design interventions over the retention of the patina of place, or age value. Regulators are interested in understanding the needs and values of stakeholders. Questions that would provide empirical evidence for this area of practice include:

- How can law respond better to community values?
- What are pragmatic, cost-effective, and resource-efficient ways to gather community values to influence planning practice?
- How can design guidelines be better understood by a lay audience?
- How can design guidelines be crafted to incorporate stakeholders' values?

Research Area: The Conservators

This area of practice is influenced by expert/objective values and a greater acceptance of design interventions over the retention of the patina of place, or age value. Conservators are interested in understanding how interventions in the fabric of buildings, places, and landscapes can be balanced with the retention of authenticity. Questions that would provide empirical evidence for this area of practice include:

- To what degree can historic fabric be removed from a building while still being perceived as "authentic" by its users?
- How do people perceive the difference between "old," or original, fabric and new fabric?
- What sorts of material conservation treatments are preferred by people while still retaining perceived authenticity?
- What kind of interventions can be made on "historic" plant material while still retaining perceived authenticity?

Research Area: The Interpreters

The interpretation of the historic environment privileges expert/objective values while emphasizing the retention of historic fabric, patina, and age value. The interpreters are concerned with the informational value of the historic environment and effective ways to communicate this information and engage the public. Questions that would provide empirical evidence for this area of practice include:

- How do people engage with and become emotionally connected to the historic environment?
- To what degree do people need to become “performers” in the past and experience it vicariously?
- Are there differences, based on age, on how children and adults experience the historic environment and understand the past?
- How can historic house museums become more relevant to the public, especially as it relates to repeat visitation?

Research Area: The Stewards

Stewardship of the historic environment is closely linked with advocacy and a need to understand community values while emphasizing the retention of historic fabric, patina, and age value. Stewards are motivated by advocacy and education in an effort to conserve the historic environment for the public benefit. Questions that would provide empirical evidence for this area of practice include:

- How can preservation arguments be made using the language of stakeholders instead of experts?
- How can historic preservation be linked to the broader “conservation” movement in the eyes of the public?
- What are reasons the layperson would want to engage in historic preservation?
- How do laypeople perceive and understand the professional practice of historic preservation?

While these research questions are not meant to encompass every possible scenario, they do present a range of possible avenues of inquiry, any of which could be applied by a student to a particular thesis topic.

The RCIS categories offer a helpful way of describing practice so that a student can consider options for research that would have a larger and more relevant impact on the professional world. Students who approach research in this way are likely to transfer this expertise to their own professional practice. At a minimum, it would encourage empirically based problem solving by enabling burgeoning historic preservation professionals to be able to reference and understand existing research; ideally, such a professional would continue to engage in this kind of research for the benefit of the discipline and his or her clients.

Pragmatic Social Science Research Methodologies for the Empirical Thesis

In a typical historic preservation program in the United States that is a member of the National Council for Preservation Education (NCPE),²⁸ the only required research methodology that students must learn is the historical or interpretive methodology as applied to the documentation and recording of buildings. This methodology was borrowed from the discipline of history, especially as it applies to local history or public history research. Unless a student enters a program with a social science background or seeks courses outside of the normal curriculum, it is a fair assumption that a student will need to be taught how to conduct social science research before he or she is able to undertake an empirical thesis.

This requirement is a daunting challenge, as the potential number of social science research methodologies is large, ranging from ethnography and grounded theory to phenomenology and action research. In the social sciences, each discipline is normally expected to learn only one or two of these methodologies. For instance, anthropologists learn ethnography while sociologists learn grounded theory and survey research. Is it even possible to entertain the requirement that historic preservation students could learn the methodologies of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and humanistic geography? Realistically, the answer is no, this is simply not feasible. In addition, many quantitative social science research methodologies require a student to have a background in inferential, multivariate statistics, while many qualitative methodologies are time consuming in the data-gathering phase. The limitations of these methodologies are presented in Table 16.2.

What is possible, however, is that historic preservation students can be taught a range of *pragmatic* research methodologies. A pragmatic social science research methodology meets the following four requirements:

Table 16.2 Limitations of social science research methodologies.

Methodology	Limitations
Ethnography (incl. participant observation)	Time-consuming data gathering due to need to gain an <i>emic</i> perspective; difficult to collect sufficient data in a single semester.
Grounded theory	Time-consuming data gathering due to need to define a theory from the data; difficult to collect sufficient data in a single semester.
Phenomenology	Difficult for students to apply in a single semester because of the need to understand the structuralist philosophical basis for the lifeworld.
Ethnomethodology	Difficult to apply without a sociology background.
Action research	Too much time needed; difficult to complete in a single semester.
Experimental research	Difficult to apply without a science and statistics background.

1. It must be usable by a graduate student who may not have a significant social science background.
2. Data can be collected and analyzed in a single semester.
3. The methodology is able to answer a specific research question.
4. Reliability and validity are important, but “perfection” is not appropriate in this context.

A few social science research methodologies meet these requirements, including qualitative case studies using interview methods, survey (correlational) research, content analysis, photo sort operations commonly used in environmental behavior research, non-participant observation, and the rapid ethnographic assessment procedure.

The qualitative case study using interviews as a method is a well-established technique with a robust following. Robert Yin's *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* is perhaps one of the better guides for this methodology.²⁹ Guidance on effective interviewing is increasingly detailed and theoretical to the extent that interviewing is developing its own methodological approach. Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin's *Qualitative Interviewing* epitomizes this perspective, in which the authors position qualitative interviewing within its own ontological orientation and a “responsive interviewing model.”³⁰ During a qualitative interview, a student asks open-ended questions of an informant and then codes the resulting data into a thematic structure for analysis of meanings. The advantage to qualitative interviewing is that achieving the *emic* (internal) perspective of ethnography is not assumed, thereby reducing the amount

of time required to gather the data. The downside to this approach, of course, is that significant meanings may be lost and the depth of understanding from the informant's perspective is compromised. If, however, the goal is to gather and analyze data in a single semester, these limitations can be accepted as long as the student acknowledges them.

Survey or correlational research has a long history in sociology. Usually associated with quantitative research, data are gathered via a survey instrument or questionnaire taken by the respondent or administered by the researcher. Responses consist of numerical variables that are conducive to statistical analysis. While multivariate inferential statistics are often employed, such as ANOVA, regression, and factor analysis, many research questions can be answered using simple descriptive statistics. Students, through the use of free and commercial software, can be taught how to utilize simple analyses, such as the t-test and chi-square, in describing the statistical relevance of their data. The major advantage to survey research is that the data can be gathered and analyzed fairly quickly within a single semester.

While content analysis does not directly involve human subject research, it uses written materials (e.g., books, newspapers), music, pictures, advertising, speeches, or artifacts as a proxy for human perception, values, and processes. The methodology can be quantitative, qualitative, or both. For instance, word frequency analysis indicates how often certain phrases appear in media to understand communicative values while this same media can also be analyzed in terms of patterns or themes, much as ethnography would do with a transcribed interview. As long as the analyzed media is reasonably comprehensive, a student should be able to gather and analyze data in a single semester.

Observation within an ethnographic context is the process whereby the researcher gathers data on the behavior of people that consists of a wide variety of verbal and nonverbal actions and phenomena. Participant observation requires that the student first immerse himself or herself in the cultural group under study by becoming an active, accepted, and contributing member of the group, thereby gaining an internal, or *emic*, perspective, which can be very time consuming. Nonparticipant observation gathers the same kind of data, but from the more detached frame of a covert observer where the people under study may not be aware of the researcher's presence. Non-participant observations can either be "structured" or "unstructured" in regard to how data are collected. With structured nonparticipant observation, the student creates a meaning framework prior to collecting the data and then develops a behavior schema to collect quantitative information about this behavior. A student using un-

structured nonparticipant observation collects data first and then applies a behavior schema to it afterward.

To date, I have located only one social science research approach that has been specifically designed for assessing heritage values. In the 1990s, Setha Low adapted existing ethnographic methods for the purpose of assessing heritage values. Her "Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedure" (REAP) "help[s] conservation professionals and managers understand the complexity of social relations and cultural dynamics at play in the conservation planning and development of heritage sites."³¹ While framed in ethnographic traditions, the REAP approach also includes other methodologies, including historical/interpretive ones. The methods utilized include physical traces mapping, behavioral mapping, transect walks, individual interviews, expert interviews, impromptu group interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and the use of historical and archival documents.

Helping Students with the Empirical Thesis Process

In order to encourage students to pursue empirical theses using social science research methodologies, more attention should be paid to giving students the skills to successfully complete the process. Oftentimes students are essentially left to their own devices when working on a thesis or choosing an advisor and a reader or readers, or perhaps they receive advice from a faculty member. Unless there is a specific research methods course or a seminar preparing students to work on a thesis,³² students may have little or no idea how to structure a research proposal, conduct a literature review, and what the overall structure for a social science-based thesis is. While there are many useful books on preparing research proposals and a social science thesis, none focus on built environment research, much less the historic environment.³³ This leaves faculty as the sole source of information and guidance for this process.

Architecture and landscape architecture programs that emphasize environmental design and behavior research may offer a useful model in that many of these programs either provide the option for or require students to learn how to conduct social science research in preparation for the thesis. European heritage studies programs, because they are often affiliated with archaeology and anthropology programs, typically provide a research methods course in preparation for the thesis. These and other models from built environment programs may prove useful in informing curricular options for historic preservation programs.

At Roger Williams University, I teach a thesis preparatory seminar in the fall in order to ready students for their thesis in the spring. Students

are encouraged to begin to think about a thesis topic and to investigate literature a year before their thesis is due. By the time they arrive in class for the fall semester, many students have settled on a broad topic area, which I help them refine throughout the course. The first focus is on completing a literature review. Using this foundation, my students then use Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Columb, and Joseph M. Williams's "three-step formula" for developing a research statement based on a topic, research question, and significance statement grounded in a problem area.³⁴ Typically, it takes students several weeks to work through various iterations of their research statement before they are ready to start preparing a research proposal.

The course also covers basic quantitative and qualitative research paradigms followed by specific research methodologies, including survey/correlational research, qualitative case study research, historical/interpretive research, content analysis, nonparticipant observation, and rapid ethnographic assessment procedures. Students have an opportunity in class to develop sample research designs based on different methodologies and to explore which methodologies may be a better fit given a particular research question. Throughout the entire class the need to develop a consistent research question that is narrow enough to be addressed in a single semester is emphasized; I present the thesis, therefore, as an answer to this question.

Overall, this process has worked well, but I have continually been unhappy with the research methodology texts that are available as most assume a specific disciplinary background of the student, such as anthropology, sociology, or psychology, or are written at too difficult a level to serve as introductory texts. Other issues include too much emphasis on quantitative or qualitative research rather than a balance between the two (again, issues rooted in particular disciplines for which the texts are targeted) and a lack of coverage of relevant, pragmatic research methodologies. John W. Creswell's *The Craft of Research* is perhaps the most useful, but its coverage of specific research methodologies is too brief and therefore needs to be supplemented with other sources.³⁵ Earl Babbie's *The Basics of Social Research* is written at a very accessible level, but overemphasizes quantitative research and is targeted at sociology students.³⁶

Conclusion

As the conservation of the historic environment makes the kind of cultural turn that other disciplines have already taken, we need to recognize that students are the forefront of this shift in emphasis from expert val-

ues to social and cultural values. It therefore becomes increasingly important that students understand the empirical research process and the application of pragmatic quantitative and qualitative research methodologies if they are to be more effective professionals. While the immediate impact is the ability of students to contribute novel research to the discipline through thesis work, the skills that they learn are likely to be employed in professional contexts that will lead to better decision-making processes based on evidence rather than the doctrines that drive so much of contemporary preservation practice.

Although my own experience is anecdotal, I have found that my historic preservation students have the capacity to learn how to use pragmatic research methodologies to create empirical theses that address important questions in the field. The larger question is to what extent this should be encouraged in other programs that address the historic environment. If we, as a discipline, believe that historic preservation practice needs a stronger empirical basis for its actions and that better tools are needed to assess and understand stakeholder values, then we owe it to our students to equip them with the skills necessary to address this deficit.

Notes

1. This chapter uses the common terminology used in the United States for master's degree programs as well as professional practice.
2. Michael W. Singletary and James A. Crook, "Projects Replace Theses in Many Master's Programs," *Journalism Educator*, 40 (1986), 4–6.
3. See Arturo Arlo Norton, *Readings in the History of Education: Medieval Universities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1909).
4. Kevin J. Corcoran, "Is There Educational Value in the Master's Thesis?" *Journal of Education for Social Work*, 20:3 (1984), 31.
5. Georgia Whitley, Lorys Oddi, and Deborah Terrell, "Factors Influencing the Publishing Efforts of Graduate Students in Nursing," *Journal of Nursing Education*, 37:4 (1998), 182–85.
6. John P. Carroll, Robert J. Cooper, and Karl V. Miller, "Non-thesis Master's Degree: Is It Good for the Student or the Profession?" *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, 26:4 (1998), 962.
7. Carroll, Cooper, and Miller, "Non-thesis Master's Degree," 961–63.
8. Ernest Earl Lindsay and Ernest Otto Holland, *College and University Administration* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1930), 221.
9. Corcoran, "Is There Educational Value?" 31.
10. William Gerald Webster, *Developing and Writing Your Thesis, Dissertation or Project: A Manual of Sound Advice about Conceptualizing, Organizing, Developing and Finalizing Your Terminal Graduate Research* (San Ramon, CA: Academic Scholarwrite, 1998), 41.
11. Yvonne N. Bui, *How to Write a Master's Thesis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009); Frederick C. Lunenburg and Beverly J. Irby, *Writing a Successful Thesis or Dissertation: Tips and Strategies for Students in the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Thousand Oaks,

CA: Corwin Press, 2008); R. Murray Thomas and Dale L. Brubaker, *Theses and Dissertations: A Guide to Planning, Research, and Writing* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2000).

12. D. Kirk Hamilton, "Design Based on Evidence," in *The Architecture Student's Handbook of Professional Practice* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), 281–92.

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University Press of New England

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Designed by Christopher Kuntze

Typeset in Warnock Pro, Myriad Pro, Grotesque Condensed, and Empire Display by Westchester Publishing Service

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Preservation education : sharing best practices and finding common ground /
edited by Barry L. Stiefel and Jeremy C. Wells.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-61168-595-4 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-61168-596-1 (pbk. : alk. paper) —

ISBN 978-1-61168-597-8 (ebook)

1. Historic preservation—Study and teaching. I. Stiefel, Barry, editor. II. Wells,

Jeremy C., editor.

CC135.P715 2014

363.6'907—dc23

2014004398

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