Course Objective:
Designed primarily for doctoral students who are nearing the dissertation proposal stage, this course introduces students to pertinent resources and provides the required skills that facilitate the development of a dissertation proposal. The course will help students to explore several research paradigms and approaches that are used in education as well as the social sciences. This course will also help students to evaluate the scholarly literature and carefully design research proposals.

Based on their individual research interests, students will write several papers that will facilitate the development of dissertation proposals. These papers will be written sequentially and culminate in the writing of an abridged version of a dissertation proposal. This dissertation proposal should reflect a strong rationale for the research, be well grounded in and informed by the scholarly literature, present a theoretical framework, and provide a research design. In this course, students will share drafts and the penultimate copy of an abridged version of the dissertation proposal with their instructor and classmates for review, discussion, and constructive criticism. This process will be used to help students strengthen their draft proposals and produce the final paper, in the form of the abridged dissertation proposal.
Course objectives:
1. Identify an important topic, research problems, and develop germane research questions;
2. Critically review and synthesize pertinent scholarly literature;
3. Identify or develop a conceptual framework or theoretical perspective
4. Understand various research paradigms used in educational as well as social science research
5. Identify and provide a critique of the strengths and limitations of scholarly studies found in the literature
6. Identify, interpret, and evaluate empirical studies;
7. Identify and consider ethical issues and dilemmas in educational research;
8. Develop the elements of a sound dissertation proposal, including an appropriate research design;
9. Identify, interpret, and evaluate empirical studies;
10. Serve as a support group for classmates in the development of a dissertation proposal; and

Suggested pattern of learning each unit:
1. Read the assigned readings. Note questions about what you do not understand for discussion in class. Focus on broad research design issues rather than details of statistics or other research tools.
2. Learn to recognize examples of research discussed in the text.
3. Write your own research problem statement, research design description, results, etc.
4. As needed, reinforce your understanding and increase your knowledge of foundation material (e.g., statistics, qualitative research procedures, etc.) by referring to other resources.
Role of the dissertation advisor:
It is the responsibility of students to meet with their dissertation advisor regarding the selection of the dissertation proposal topic. This course serves as a complement rather than a substitute consultation with the dissertation advisor. Students who are approaching or at the dissertation proposal stage should meet, on a regular basis, with their dissertation advisor.

Expectations:
1. Attendance and participation
   Each student is expected to come to class prepared, having read and contemplated the readings, and ready to share his or her perspectives, and questions. This course is conducted primarily as a seminar, with some lecturing on topics that are not addressed in the assigned readings. Students are expected to discuss and debate the issues posed in lectures and readings and participate in class exercises.

2. APA style
   All formal work should utilize APA style as described in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition. Please refer to the following website for information on the citation of electronic resources: www.apastyle.org/elecref.html.

3. Ethical practices
   All students are expected to abide by the Code of Academic Integrity throughout this course and all other courses offered at the University of Maryland. Academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism, and fabrication will not be tolerated. Additional information on the Code of Academic Integrity is available on the web at: http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii100a.html

4. Timeliness of work
   Because most assignments are sequential, keeping up with assigned deadlines is critical. Students are expected to complete all required readings and assignments as scheduled. Incompletes will be granted only for exceptional circumstances.

Students will not be penalized because of their religious beliefs and observances. Whenever possible, students will be given reasonable time to make up any academic assignment that is missed due to participation in a religious observance. Students should inform the instructor of any conflicts between the course schedule and religious observances as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements may be made.
Course assignments:

1. **Dissertation critique** - 10%
   Identify and critique a dissertation on a related research topic. Provide a four-page written paper to the instructor that: (1) summarizes the central components of the dissertation proposal design (usually chapters 1-3), including the significance of the topic, theoretical framework, research questions, and research methods, and (2) identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the design.

2. **Individual presentation on research methodology** – 15%
   Describe a problem, research question, and research design that illustrate how a particular research technique is used. Describe the strengths and weaknesses of the research technique with regard to the research problem. Provide a copy of an article using the technique and a short bibliography for each member of the class. Give a 10-15 minute presentation and provide a 6-8 page written paper to the instructor.

3. **Research proposal papers** – 65%
   The instructor and class members will review proposal drafts as specified on the class schedule. Students should be prepared to discuss proposal drafts in class on the date due. Always submit the most complete version of the proposal. All papers should be double-spaced with 12-point font and one inch margins.

   **Proposal papers:**
   - **#1 – Statement of the problem and research questions**
     Description of the proposed research topic or problem, the rationale for selecting the topic, and the significance/importance of the topic or problem for policy, practice, and/or theory. The paper should also briefly indicate the conceptual frameworks under consideration. The paper should demonstrate both the originality and manageability of the research. (3-4 pages, minimum)
   - **#2 – Literature review**
     The literature review should describe the purposes and organization of the literature reviewed, identify the major bodies of literature to be reviewed, and include between 15 and 20 citations. (8 – 12, pages, minimum)
   - **#3 – Research design and methodology**
     Description of how the study will be conducted, including specific research questions (and if appropriate, hypotheses), assumptions underlying the study, the theory or conceptual framework to be used, a rationale for study design (i.e., the fit between research questions and methods employed), the study population, research and data analysis methodologies, and definition of variables. The paper should also discuss the limitations of the research design. (5 – 7 pages, minimum)
# 4 – “First” complete draft of dissertation proposal: Introduction; Literature review; Research design and methodology
Revised draft of papers #1, #2, and #3. (15 – 20 pages minimum, plus references)

# 5 – “Second” complete draft of dissertation proposal
Revised version of paper #4. (20 – 25 pages minimum, plus references).

# 6 – Final complete draft of dissertation proposal (20 – 25 pages minimum, plus references) revised version of paper #5.

6. Dissertation proposal presentation – 10%
Mock oral “defense” of dissertation proposal. Students will provide a brief (10-12 minute) overview of their proposal and then respond to questions from the class “committee.”

Required texts:
ISBN: 978-1-41296557-6


ISBN: 978-1-4129-1679-0

Recommended texts:


Galvan, J. L. (1999). Writing literature reviews: A guide for students of the social and behavioral sciences. 3rd edition. Pyrczak Publications. [You may also want to check the most recent edition.]

Subject to change


[This is a great book on writing that I strongly recommend.]

**Suggested readings:**
Peruse and selectively read research from the top peer-reviewed journals in your field. In education, these journals include:
- *Review of Research in Education*
- *Review of Educational Research*
- *Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics*
- *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*
- *Education Finance and Policy*

For higher education these journals include:
- *Journal of Higher Education*
- *Review of Higher Education*
- *Research in Higher Education*
- *Journal of College Student Development*
- *Higher Education Abstracts*
- *NASPA Journal*

Some peer-reviewed journals in other disciplines that occasionally address topics in education include:
- *Economics of Education Review*
- *Sociology of Education*
- *Journal of Human Resources*

Some Book Volumes and Series on Higher Education include:
- *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*
- *ASHE Reader Series*
- *ASHE Higher Education Report*
- *New Directions for Higher Education*
- *New Directions for Community Colleges*
- *New Directions for Institutional Research*
- *Global Perspectives on Higher Education*
- *Higher Education Dynamics*
• Peruse and selectively read sections of the Chronicle of Higher Education to learn about the types of research that are funded by grants, foundations, and federal agencies.


Class Schedule and Assignments:
Week 1 Introductions and Overview of Research
Sept. 6 Discussion of student research interests

Your research topic
Discuss your planned dissertation proposal topic
Why do you think your topic is important?
What research method do you think you should use to address this topic?
How do you think your research will contribute to the
   1. the literature
   2. theory
   3. policy or practice?

Writing tips & using the APA manual
Recommended reading:

APA Publication Manual

Week 2 The Research Process
Sept. 13 Assignment due:
Identify a dissertation that is on a topic that is related to your dissertation proposal topic. Bring to class a hard copy of the abstract for each member of the class and the instructor.

Provide a written topic and problem statement for your research proposal.

Discussion - Your research proposal
Identify important questions that flow directly from the problem statement.
One of these questions should become the focus of your proposal.
Will the answer to the selected question contribute to what is known in the field?
How?

Required reading:
Creswell, Chapters 1, 4, 5, and 6
Rudestam & Newton, Chapters 1 & 2
Week 3  
Sept. 20  
**Theoretical and conceptual frameworks**

**Assignment due:**

**Paper # 1.** Description of the proposed research topic or problem, why the topic was selected, and the significance/importance of the topic or problem for theory, policy and/or practice. The paper (3 – 4 pages, minimum, double-spaced) should also briefly indicate the conceptual frameworks that you are considering. Bring five hard copies of the paper to class. Be prepared to discuss the theoretical and conceptual frameworks are considering for your planned dissertation proposal.

**Discussion: Your research proposal**

What theoretical perspectives should guide your study?  
What is the most appropriate conceptual model for addressing your research question(s)?  
Why are they the most appropriate?

**Required reading:**

Creswell, Chapter 7  
Rudestam & Newton, Chapter 4

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Week 4  
Sept. 27  
**Developing the literature review**

**Assignment due:**

**Paper #2** – Description of conceptual or theoretical framework appropriate for framing your research question, the purposes and organization of the literature reviewed, the major bodies of literature to be reviewed (8 – 10 pages, minimum, double spaced), and with 15 – 20 citations.

**Discussion: Your research proposal**

What content should be included in the literature review?  
What information about prior research should be included in the review?  
What is known and not known from prior research about your question?

**Required readings:**

Creswell, Chapter 2  
Marshall & Rossman, pp. 43-54 [On BlackBoard]

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Week 5  
Oct. 4  
**Populations and samples**

Be prepared to discuss the method section of your selected dissertation topic, particularly the operationalization of the variables and the methods used to measure them.

**Discussion: Your research proposal**

Identify population of interest and most appropriate type of sampling.  
Identify strengths and weaknesses of this sampling design.  
Identify any necessary definitions or limits on the sample.
Required reading:
Rudestam & Newton, Chapters 3 and 5

Recommended reading:
Marshall & Rossman, pp. 72-78 [on BlackBoard]

Week 6  Quantitative research designs
Oct. 11 Assignment due: Individual presentation on research methodology
Using a quantitative research study from a journal article, students who have selected a quantitative research technique, describe a problem, research question, and research design that illustrate how the technique is used. Describe the strengths and weaknesses of the technique with regard to this problem. Give a 10-15 minute presentation and provide a 6-8 page written paper to the instructor.

Selected student reports on specific quantitative research techniques:
Examples of possible topics:
- Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression
- Logit/Probit regression
- Instrumental variable (IV) regression
- Panel data regression techniques (e.g., fixed- and random-effects)
- Structural equation modeling (SEM)
- Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM)

Discussion: Quantitative methods
Quantitative research questions and hypotheses
Types of quantitative research designs
  - Experimental
  - Quasi-experimental

Discussion: Your research proposal
Can quantitative methods of data collection and analysis be used to address your research question?
Define the dependent, independent, and mediating variables.
Identify instruments, tests, and other data collection methods to address your research question. Are questionnaires and/or interviews necessary to address your research question? If so, how should they be constructed and pilot tested?

Remember, research should not be synonymous with questionnaires – carefully consider the benefits of other data collection methods.
Describe the validity and reliability of the data gathering methods.
What are the primary threats to internal validity?
What are the most essential data to collect?
Identify confounding variables for which you cannot control.
What are the strengths and limitations of a quantitative approach to your question?

**Required reading:**
Creswell, Chapter 6, 9, and pp.108-113

**Week 7  Qualitative research designs**
**Oct. 18  Guest speaker: TBA**

Assignment due: Individual presentation on research methodology
Using a qualitative research study from a journal article, students who have selected a qualitative research technique, describe a problem, research question, and research design that illustrate how the technique is used. Describe the strengths and weaknesses of the technique with regard to this problem. Give a 10-15 minute presentation and provide a 6-8 page written paper to the instructor.

Selected student reports on specific qualitative research “traditions”:
- Biography
- Case study
- Ethnography
- Phenomenology
- Grounded Theory

Selected student reports on specific qualitative research techniques:
- Historical research
- Narrative analysis
- Focus group research
- Case studies
- Observation/participant observation

**Discussion: Your research proposal**
What qualitative methods of data collection and analysis can be used to address your research question?
What are the strengths and limitations of the qualitative approach to your question?

**Required reading:**
Creswell, Chapter 10

**Recommended reading:**
Marshall & Rossman, Chapter 7
Week 8  Research Design: Qualitative or Quantitative

Oct. 25  Assignment due:
Paper #3 - Description of how the study will be conducted, including specific research questions (and if appropriate, hypotheses), assumptions underlying the study, a rationale for study design (i.e., the fit between research questions and methods employed), the study population, research and data analysis methodologies, and definition of variables. The paper should also address the limitation of the research design. (5-7 pages, minimum)

Discussion: Your research proposal
Think about how you will analyze the data collected and present the results. This process may help identify potential flaws in your research design.
Does your audience require you to provide specific type of presentation?

Definitions, limitations, and significance

Required reading:
Creswell, Chapter 8

Validity and reliability

Required reading:
Fraenkel & Wallen, Chapters 8 and 9 [on BlackBoard]

Week 9  Funding opportunities
Nov. 1  Guest: TBA
Assignment due: Dissertation critique
Identify and critique a dissertation on a related research topic. Provide a four-page written paper to the instructor that: (1) summarizes the central components of the dissertation proposal design (usually chapters 1 -3), including the significance of the topic, theoretical framework, research questions, and research methods, and (2) identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the design.

Ethics in research and the use of human subjects

Required readings:
Creswell, pp. 62 - 69
Rudestam & Newton, Chapter 13

Discussion: Your research proposal
What ethical issues arise from your research proposal?
How will you protect the confidentiality of participants?
Week 10  Presenting the results and discussing the findings
Nov. 8  Assignment due
Paper #4 – Complete first draft of dissertation proposal. This draft should consist of revised drafts of papers #1, #2, and #3. Bring or email copies of proposal to class. Be prepared to discuss the how you would present the findings and conclusions in your selected dissertation proposals. (15 – 20 pages minimum, plus references)

Discussion: Your research proposal
Provide constructive feedback on the draft dissertation proposals

Required reading:
Rudestam & Newton, Chapters 6, 7, & 11

Week 11  Travel to ASHE Conference – no class
Nov. 15

Week 12  Overcoming barriers
Nov. 22  Guest speaker: TBA
Discuss how you would present the implications of your selected dissertation proposal for theory, policy, and methods.

Discussion: Your research proposal
Provide constructive feedback on the draft dissertation proposals

Week 13  Assignment due
Nov. 29  Paper #5 – Complete second draft of dissertation proposal. This draft should consist of revised drafts of papers #1, #2, and #3. Bring or email copies of proposal to class.

Be prepared to discuss the how you would present the findings, conclusions, and recommendations in your selected dissertation proposals. (20 – 25 pages minimum, plus references)

Discussion: Your research proposal
Provide constructive feedback on the draft dissertation proposals
Week 14  Student proposal “defense”
Dec. 6  Assignment due: Mock oral “defense” of dissertation proposal
Students will provide a brief (10-12 minute) overview of their proposal and then respond to questions from the class “committee.” There will be 15 minutes for questions and answers.

Week 15
Dec. 13  Assignment due: Complete final draft of dissertation proposal due!

Class evaluations
If you have not completed the course evaluation, please remember do so at: www.courseevalum.umd.edu.

Farewells

Grading
This course will follow a plus/minus grading scheme as follows:

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>100-97</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>96-93</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>92-90</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-87</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>B-</td>
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Instructor responsibilities:
Students should expect that the instructor for this course will:
- Be prepared for class, read and return students’ work in a timely manner, and be interested and engaged in students’ projects;
Subject to change

- Remember that each student brings a different research background, experience, and perspective to this course;
- Learn from the students;
- Help students identify sources of additional substantive and methodological expertise, as needed;
- Meet with students upon request and be available in person, by telephone, and by e-mail; and
- Work hard and empower students to plan and engage in high quality research.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All students are expected to abide by the code of academic integrity throughout this course and all other courses offered at the University of Maryland. Academic dishonesty, including cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism will not be tolerated and will be reported to the Dean of the Graduate School (or designee). For specific definitions or examples of academic dishonesty and nonacademic misconduct with possible sanctions, see the University of Maryland Honor and Honor Pledge on the web at: www.jpo.umd.edu/aca/honorpledge.html. Students who have questions about the code, or their obligations under the code, should contact the Honor Council at 301.314.8450.

ACCOMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

A student with a documented disability or any other special need who wishes to discuss academic accommodations should contact the instructor as soon as possible. The instructor will then consult with the Department Chair and Dr. Jo Ann Hutchinson, at Disability Support Services (301.314.7681), who will make arrangements with the student to determine and implement appropriate academic accommodations.