

EDPA 895
Research Critique Seminar
Spring, 1999

Instructor: Betty Malen, 2110C Benjamin Building, Phone 301-405-3587

Time and Place: Wednesday, 4:15-7:00 PM, Education Bldg Room 2101

Office Hours: By appointment, call office or home or email lm125@umail.umd.edu

MAJOR OBJECTIVES: This seminar seeks to enhance students' understanding of the research process by assisting them in the preparation of their dissertation proposals. It is designed to help students (a) clarify the purpose of their dissertation research, (b) identify and review the pertinent literature, (c) develop an appropriate research design, and (d) articulate how their proposed research project is rooted in and holds promise for contributing to existing bodies of knowledge. This seminar is not an overview of various research methods or an in depth treatment of a particular method. Rather, this seminar concentrates on over-arching issues inherent in any research venture: how to focus one's interests, how to identify, review and utilize related literature to frame research questions and how to design a systematic, rigorous yet manageable study that builds on/adds to our understanding of important aspects of education.

CENTRAL ASSUMPTIONS: This seminar makes a number of assumptions.

(1) Dissertations must be rigorous yet manageable. Dissertations need to conform to the canons of quality research; they also need to be "doable."

(2) A thoughtfully developed research proposal can enhance both the quality and the manageability of the dissertation. Since a research proposal is a plan that specifies what you are going to do, how you are going to do it and why you are proceeding that way, it increases the likelihood that your study will be clearly focused, carefully conducted and ultimately completed.

(3) In order to develop a dissertation proposal, several fundamental questions must be continuously addressed: What do I want to know? What questions am I trying to answer? How have others tried to address these (or related) questions? How can I find out what I want to know? How can I acquire the data I need to answer the questions I am asking? Why do I want to answer these questions anyway? If I answer them, what have I contributed to existing knowledge? So what do I know when I know the answer to my research questions?

(4) A firm grasp of literature (empirical and theoretical) on the phenomenon of interest and a firm grasp of the literature on the methods that can be used to investigate it provide the foundation for addressing these fundamental questions, the basis for developing the dissertation proposal.

(5) Although the primary responsibility for developing the dissertation proposal resides with the student, committee chairs, committee members, faculty and students can provide direction, assistance and support.

(6) Although many individuals can assist, the dissertation chair is key. Hence, this course should be viewed as being taught "in tandem" with each student's dissertation chair.

(7) Because students in this course are likely to be at different stages of the dissertation process and because students in this course will be pursuing a variety of research interests through a variety of research methods, progress on the dissertation proposal will be enhanced through a course that combines class presentations with group sessions/individual conferences and tailors assignments to the backgrounds and interests of each student.

GENERAL STRUCTURE, CONTENTS AND APPROACH: The seminar is organized around three inter-related units. The first unit focuses on understanding the nature of the task at hand. Simply put, it seeks to "de-mystify" the dissertation process. The second unit provides opportunities for concentrated individual and group work on dissertation proposals. The third unit provides opportunities to practice presenting and defending dissertation proposals. Each section is more fully described on the proposed course calendar.

As the following portions of the syllabus illustrate, these units will incorporate a combination of instructional strategies such as readings, lectures, discussions, applications, presentations, critiques and written assignments. Students will be involved in activities such as (a) class presentations and discussions on issues inherent in any research venture, (b) individual and/or small group conferences to help students apply the information presented in class sessions to their research area and to identify literature bases that students need to review in order to frame, design and conduct their own research, (c) preparation of a series of "homework" assignments and briefs wherein students begin to work through the logic of a complete dissertation proposal (described on the Dissertation Proposal Work Sheet attachment), (d) preparation and presentation of "pieces" of a dissertation proposal, and (e) preparation of and presentation of a relatively complete draft of their dissertation proposal. The presentation will be in the form of a mock proposal hearing.

REQUIREMENTS: There are five major course requirements:

1. Reading Assignments. A set of required readings is on reserve at the Curriculum Lab located in the Benjamin Building. This set contains (a) articles and excerpts from books that deal with issues inherent in any research endeavor and (b) excerpts from dissertation proposals or completed dissertations to illustrate how these issues have been attended by others. This set may be augmented by additional readings that may be more responsive to issues that arise as this seminar unfolds. An annotated bibliography of other potentially useful references is attached to this syllabus. Students are responsible for the contents of the readings placed on reserve and any others designated as "required" during the semester. A "menu" of introductory readings and references is used to provide a common information base and to accommodate student interests and different learning styles. In some readings, language

choices are gender-biased. Nonetheless, the writings have redeeming features and warrant consideration. The "bulk" of the course readings will be individually determined (e.g., the literatures you need to review, given your topic, design and methods). In consultation with the committee chair and the course instructor, students will identify the critical bodies of literature that need to be reviewed to conceptualize/conduct research in each student's area of interest.

2. Class Participation. Students are expected to participate in class discussions, to question and critique instructor and student presentations and to participate in scheduled individual or small group conferences with the instructor.

3. Advisor Consultations. Students are expected to meet with their dissertation committee chairs to elicit their views regarding the requirements of dissertations and dissertation proposals, discuss their dissertation topic, identify the major studies that have been conducted on the topic of interest, and identify the pertinent literature bases that need to be examined in order to conceptualize and conduct research on the subject of interest. This seminar instructor will alert your advisors to this requirement and discuss your progress in this course with them.

4. "Homework" and Brief Assignments. Throughout the semester, students will be asked to complete a number of short written assignments. These assignments are intended to help students articulate and inspect their thinking before they invest in more extensive and more refined forms of writing.

5. Seminar Paper and Presentation. Each student will prepare and present a draft of their dissertation proposal. Although the form may vary, each paper must include

- (a) a clear statement of the purpose of the proposed study along with the key questions to be addressed by the study,
- (b) a characterization of what we presently know and do not know about your topic,
- (c) a conceptual framework for conducting research on the phenomenon of study,
- (d) a description and justification of the methods to be used with particular attention given to how the method selected "fits" the questions being addressed, and
- (e) a statement of the significance of this study.

In short, this paper develops the ideas sketched in the homework assignments and briefs noted in activity 3 above. Having addressed these matters carefully, students should be able to transpose their thinking into whatever format seems most appropriate for their dissertation proposal. Traditionally, that format has been comprised of three chapters: **(see next page)**

Chapter 1 (a brief introduction to the proposed study)	
Chapter 2 (a review of the theoretical and empirical literatures	used to
frame the study and elaboration of conceptual	framework for the study) and
Chapter 3 (a description and justification of the research	design and
research methods)	

However, not all research proposals must adhere to this lay-out. While all research proposals must address key issues and provide well-developed lines of argument regarding the purpose of and approach to research, the treatment and placement of these matters may vary. Students may address the required components of their paper in the "first three chapters" format. Other formats will be accepted if the dissertation chair and course instructor concur that the alternative format is more appropriate for the proposed study.

GRADING: The course grade will be based on informed participation in class and small group/individual conference sessions (20%); homework and brief assignments (20%); seminar paper and presentation (60%). Participation grades will be based on the ability to make contributions to the issues being addressed. Homework and brief grades will be based on the ability to map the logic that links the major purpose or central questions of the study with the data to be collected, the methods to be incorporated and the conclusions to be drawn. Seminar paper/presentation grades will be based on the ability to clearly articulate the purpose of the study, effectively elaborate the logic of the study, and substantively develop the central ideas and related lines of argument required to describe and defend the proposed research. Students have the option of revising and reworking assignments. The instructor may also require revisions.

INVITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS:

(1) Conversations and conferences about the written assignments or other course-related matters can be initiated at any time throughout the semester, in class sessions or at other times.

(2) In preparing for class, students are encouraged to "map" the readings, to make notes regarding the purpose, thesis, central lines of argument and nature and quality of the evidence used to develop the ideas. Following each class, students are encouraged to re-read or review these materials to clarify ideas and "clinch" insights.

(3) In developing written assignments, consider keeping a "jot journal;" working from outlines; sharing ideas with others in order to clarify what you are trying to convey; drafting "analytic notes" to yourself; including [] information to let the reader know what you are thinking; inviting candid reactions; weighing the feedback received and rewriting/refining main ideas and supporting lines of argument.

(4) Any class member who has a documented disability and wishes to discuss academic accommodations should contact the instructor as soon as possible.

PROPOSED COURSE SCHEDULE

UNIT ONE

Understanding the Research Process: De-mystifying the Dissertation

This section of the course is designed to help students gain a clearer understanding of the task at hand, wrestle with the "logic" of research designs generally and articulate the logic of their

proposed study. This unit recognizes that conceptualizing and conducting dissertation research is hard work, but it can also be manageable, even enjoyable work, particularly if students understand what they are (and are not) trying to do, if they recognize that the challenges they face are endemic to the terrain, and, if they capitalize on the assistance that is available from colleagues who have written about these matters and colleagues we might talk to about these matters.

February 3 Introduction to Course

Overview of Dissertation Research

What's a dissertation?

What's a dissertation proposal?

What's required to get from where I am to where I need to be?

Should I be taking this course at this time?

February 10 "Unpacking" the Logic of Research: Identifying problems, Focusing interests, Clarifying purposes, Using literatures to frame research

Readings (continued on next page):

*R. Yin. Designing case study research, pp. 27-41. Although the title refers to a particular form of research, this section addresses issues inherent in any research design.

*D. Madsen. Successful Dissertations, chpts 1,3, and 4. Read for a general understanding of the "whole" dissertation venture.

*P. Leedy. What's research, the problem statement, checklist for assessing a problem statement. pp. 3-7; 50-62; 244-45. This piece is simplistic, but it does address important issues in a straightforward (not so esoteric) fashion.

J. Campbell, et.al., Antecedents and Characteristics of Significant and Not-So-Significant Organizational Research, pp. 91-114. Read for insights re: how interests and opportunities can converge to generate interesting and important research projects and for ideas about how to attend conceptual and theoretical matters.

E. Haller & T. Knapp. S. Problems ...in Ed. Admin. Read for "criteria" for determining worthy topics. Look for how this article relates to Campbell, et. al. article. (If you are more familiar with higher education settings, simply substitute the terms dean and department chair for superintendent and principal, because the same criticisms could be leveled at research done in the domain of higher education).

*H. Becker. Terrorized by the literature--pay particular attention to pp. 140-149. The illustrations are outside the field of education, but the feelings identified, metaphors employed and perspectives shared are, in my judgement, pertinent and helpful.

*M. Cohen. Sample literature review--pay particular attention to pp. 17-23. This piece illustrates how one might characterize (rather than simply summarize) the literature on a topic, use that characterization to identify gaps in the literature and ideas for research.

*S. Geary, J. Hernandez and/or C. Blanch. Sample dissertation proposals--read for the overall logic, not for understanding of specific topics. Pay special attention to how questions

are formulated, literature is used and "significance" is addressed. Note the care with which the relationship between questions asked and data sought is treated.

Homework: Bring your notes on readings above. In addition, bring a one page statement regarding your topic of interest. Note the topic, identify key questions that you think researchers ought to address and say why it may be important to address these questions. Bring enough copies of this "first cut" statement for everyone in class.

February 17 "Unpacking" the Logic of Research: Practice Session on Focusing interests, clarifying purposes, using literatures for refine questions and frame research

Students should review readings from previous session, review all "first cut" topic papers, and come prepared to discuss how proposed topics (their own and those of others) might be converted into researchable questions, what literature bases may be relevant, and how these literatures might help refine the questions and otherwise help frame the study.

February 24 "Unpacking" the Logic of Research: Matching research questions and research methods, Wrestling with the requirements of rigorous research, and Understanding the logic and limitations of research methods

Readings:

*L. Shulman. Disciplined inquiry in education.

*E. Bridges & M. Smith, Research in Administration and Policy

Analysis: Development of a Research Plan--pay particular attention to pp. 3-15

*M. Patton. Choice of methods

*R. Yin. Designing case study research

*D. Pounder. Compensation study

*J. Kingdon. Sample methodology section

*S. Geary, J. Hernandez, C. Blanch --Sample proposals -- re-read.

Brief Assignment: First cut at the Dissertation Proposal Work Sheet, # 1-5. **Other assignment described on next page.**

Homework Assignment: Bring notes on readings. In addition, bring a short (no more than two pages) purpose, approach and significance statement to distribute to class members. This statement should be drawn from items four and five of your brief assignment. **Crystalize what you want to study, how you want to study it and why such a study is potentially important.**

March 3 "Unpacking" the Logic of Research: Practice session on matching study purposes/questions and research methods

Students should review readings from previous week as well as all copies of student purpose and significance statements. They should come prepared to identify and discuss which research methods coincide with the purposes of the study and why some methods may be more appropriate than others.

March 11 "Unpacking" the Logic of Research: Communicating findings, Developing conclusions, and Holding to standards

Students will try to envision what their studies will look like when they are completed and how their studies, when discussed in light of relevant literatures, might be sources of important empirical and conceptual contributions that warrant publication/dissemination.

Readings:

*J. Murphy. Writing the research report.

B. Malen; T. Mazzone & B. Malen. How findings can merge with related literature to form conclusions/contributions

*LeCompte & Goetz. Evaluating research. (Although this chapter deals with qualitative research, the issues it addresses also apply to quantitative research.)

UNIT II

Developing the Dissertation Proposal

This portion of the course provides opportunities for students to concentrate on developing their dissertation proposals. Drawing on insights from the previous unit, students will work individually and collaboratively, to elaborate the major ideas and the major lines of argument required to describe and defend their proposed research. Throughout this portion of the course, students will develop and distribute drafts of portions of their research proposal. They will seek feedback from the students in this seminar, the chair of their dissertation committee and the instructor of this course.

March 17 Individual Conferences/Small-Group Sessions

March 24 No Class, Spring Break

March 31 - April 7 Individual Conferences/Small-Group Sessions

The specific schedule will be developed with students. Class will meet each week, but details about the composition of the work groups, the foci for these work sessions, and the drafts of work students should be submitting/reviewing will be distributed. Students should keep the following "benchmark dates" in mind: **(see next page)**

March 17 Brief Assignment: Dissertation Proposal Work Sheet. Respond to all items even if responses seem tentative and superficial.

March 31 Draft of Literature Review (Identification and characterization of major streams of relevant literature) and **Complete Seminar Paper Outline**

UNIT III

Presenting and Defending the Dissertation Proposal

Recognizing that proposals will not be in "final" form, this section of the course provides students an opportunity to engage in a trial run, a practice defense. The intent here is to help students describe, in a clear and cogent manner, the purpose and importance of the study, the

manner in which extant literatures help them frame the study, the methods that will be employed and the reasons why the methods selected are appropriate. The intent is also to give students a chance to raise and respond to questions and to identify issues that warrant further consideration. The precise schedule and format for these sessions will be developed with the students.

April 7 Student Presentations

April 14 Student Presentations

April 21 No Class, AERA

May 5 Student Presentations, Course Evaluations

The order of student presentations and the role of students as "committee member critics" will be discussed with students. The class sessions will be dedicated to helping students appraise their progress and identify areas where additional work is needed.

At the last session, opportunities to "debrief" the class and to complete written course evaluations will be provided. If students wish, and if this option does not present a problem for students, the last session will be held at my home in Annapolis.

May 12 Seminar Papers Due

Students and their dissertation chairs will receive feedback on these papers.

Dissertation Proposal Work Sheet

Throughout the semester (on dates specified), students will submit, in outline form, responses to the following items:

I. My dissertation topic is ...

2. This phenomenon has been examined by the following scholars:

--in the field of education

--outside the field of education

3. Studies of this phenomenon have:

--employed the following theoretical perspectives

--incorporated the following data sources and methods

--reported the following central findings

--are characterized by the following strengths and limitations

4. The purpose of my study is to....more specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

5. This study is important because...it addresses the following gaps in the literature

6. A conceptual framework (analytic perspective, theoretical orientation) that might prove to be appropriate to this study is...the essential elements of this perspective are.....it is appropriate because

7. If I used the above perspective, it would lead me to ask the following research questions...lend itself to the following research methods....require the following types of data...and allow me to draw conclusions in the following areas...

8. If I used x approach (or approaches) to research (eg, historical, case study, survey, experimental, ethnographic) and relied on x types of data (eg, documents, interviews, observations, survey responses) I should consult the following sources to get a firm grasp of the procedures used to check for bias and error in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data, to be sure I understand how, within the logic and limits of this method, one reasons, draws inferences and develops explanations.

SELECT REFERENCES

This reference list is brief and incomplete. The general references may be useful as a starting point. The method-specific references will introduce you to issues and suggest additional sources that you may wish to consult if your research incorporates these methods. The self-help books offer moral support and technical tips and at times some substantive assistance with issues of conceptualization and design. The sample dissertations provide examples of various types of research. The materials/manuals that describe dissertation processes and requirements at the University of Maryland are a must. They give you a handle on expectations, logistics (forms that need to be filed) and style. See, for example, UMCP's graduate school publication entitled Thesis & Dissertation Manual.

General References

Mayer, R. & Greenwood, E. (1980). The Design of Social Policy Research. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall. The book is a clear description of the components of a research plan. The book includes a discussion of criteria for the selection of methods, given the different aims of research projects.

Kaplan, A. (1964). The Conduct of Inquiry. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company. A classic in the area of research design, this book is particularly helpful in developing an orientation toward research and a respect for the catholicity of methods available. It is also a great source for dealing with forms of bias and error.

Leedy, P. (1985 or 1989). Practical Research. New York: Macmillan. The book attempts to describe, step by step, the process of developing a research proposal. The book is considerably more helpful for experimental or quasi-experimental designs than for other types of research.

Kerlinger, F. N. (1973). Foundations of Behavioral Research: Educational, Psychological, Sociological Inquiry. Holt, Rhinehart. This is a frequently cited reference, more helpful for experimental designs than for other forms of research.

Borg, W. R. & Gall, M. D. (1983). Educational Research An Introduction. Fourth Edition. New York: Longman. This is a solid, readable basic text, especially relevant for hypothesis testing designs.

Stone, E. F. (1978). Research Methods in Organizational Behavior. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman & Company. Same comment as Borg & Gall above.

Jaeger, R. M. (Ed). (1988). Complementary Methods For Research in Education. American Educational Research Association. The introduction discusses issues embedded in research generally. Chapters overview and illustrate various methods. Sections on historical methods are especially well done.

Method Specific References

Gottschalk, L. R. (1969). Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Barzun, J. & Graff, H. (1985). The Modern Researcher. Fourth Edition. San Diego: Harcourt Brace. (Historical methods).

Degler, C. N. (1980). "Remaking American History," Journal of American History, 67, 7-25.

Lowe, R. & Kanter, H. (1989). "Considerations on Writing the History of Educational Reform of the 1960s," Educational Theory, 39, 1-9.

Campbell, D. T. & Stanley, J. C. (1963). Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Yin, R. (1984 or 1989). Case Study Research Design and Methods. Beverley Hills: Sage.

Ogawa, R. T., & Malen, B. (1991). "Towards rigor in reviews of multivocal literatures: Applying the exploratory case study method," Review of Educational Research, 61, 265-286.

Ogawa, R. T., & Malen, B. (1991). "A response to commentaries on `Towards rigor in reviews of multivocal literatures...'" Review of Educational Research, 61, 307-314.

Patton, M. Q. (1980). Qualitative Evaluation Methods. Beverley Hills: Sage.

Murphy, J. (1980). Getting the Facts. Santa Monica: Goodyear.

Burlingame, M. & Geske, T. (1979). "An Examination of Selected Multiple-State Case Studies," Educational Administration Quarterly, 15, 50-75.

Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. (1967). The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. New York: Aldine Publishing Co.

LaCompte, M. D. & Goetz, J. P. (1982). "Problems of Reliability and validity in Ethnographic Research," Educational Researcher, 52, 31-60.

_____. (1984). Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research. San Diego: Academic Press, Inc.

Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, Y. S. (1987). Effective Evaluation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Spradley, J. P. (1980). Participant Observation. New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston.

Bradburn, N.M. & Sudman, S. (1980). Improving Interview Method and Questionnaire Design: Response Effects to Threatening Questions in Survey Research. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miskel, C. & Sandlin, T. (1981). "Survey Research in Educational Administration," Educational Administration Quarterly, 17, 1-20.

Owens, R. G. (1982). "Methodological Rigor in Naturalistic Inquiry," Educational Administration Quarterly, XVIII, 1-21.

Self-Help References

Becker, H. S. (1986). Writing for Social Scientists How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book or Article. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Davis, G. B. & Parker, C. A. (1979). Writing the Doctoral Dissertation: A Systematic Approach. Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series.

Locke, L. F., Spirduso, W. W. & Silverman, S. J. (1987). Proposals That Work: A Guide for Planning Dissertations and Grant Proposals. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Rudestam, K. D. & Newton, R. R. (1992). Surviving your Dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Sample Dissertations - Betty's Shelf

Blanch, M. C. (1989). Culture as a Control Mechanism in Schools. An example of a theoretically driven, single case study.

Geary, S. (1992). The Policymaking Process Resulting in Fiscal Policy for Education in Utah. A SUPER (triple crown award winner) dissertation. Excellent example of a theoretically driven comparative case study.

Kim, H. (1993). The Impact of Salary on the Attraction and Retention of Teachers. An excellent example of economic concepts and survey methods.

Robins, H. (1988). Value emphasis and fiscal equity effects of reform in education: An examination of linkages. An example of an attempt to use content analysis and time series analysis to provide empirical data re: a fundamental issue often discussed but rarely evidenced.

Other examples can be acquired from faculty, the UMCP library and Dissertation Abstracts, an index of dissertation research that includes directions for ordering copies of complete dissertations. Be careful here, however, because the quality of dissertations varies greatly. You can end up spending a good bit of money for a very weak example!

**Information for EDPA 895 Instructor (Malen)
Spring, 1999**

In order to have a clearer sense of where you are in the dissertation process, I'd like you to complete, as thoroughly and candidly as you can, the following questionnaire. This information will be used to plan class sessions and individual/group conferences.

Name:

Dissertation Committee Chair _____ Members:

Area(s) of Special Interest _____

Probable Dissertation Topic(s)

Progress on Dissertation to Date:

___ talked to chair about topic
received the following advice:

___ identified some key studies in area of interest

___ reviewed the following literature on topic

___ other, please describe

Background in Research Methods (include courses or portions of courses, experience on research projects, independent readings):

Tentative Time Line for Dissertation:

Proposal ready by

Dissertation defense by

Reasons for taking this course at this time/Best estimate of what you can accomplish in this course this semester:

