EDCI 790: Epistemological Bases of Educational Research

Spring Semester 2013, Tuesdays 4:15-7:00pm
2121 Benjamin Building

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Course Site: https://umd.instructure.com/login
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Course Description: This is a doctoral course on research theory, method, and design. It focuses on conceptual and theoretical understandings of methodology, the broad range of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and underlying epistemologies as they apply to the study of schools, curriculum, teaching, and teacher education. Each of these theories and methods makes fundamental assumptions about the nature of knowledge, viable research questions and the use of unique methodological tools. Throughout the course we will strive to understand these fundamental assumptions and determine their applicability to various research agendas in education. We will give special consideration to our own research questions and debate the merits of different approaches to study these questions. This course will prepare you to take more focused research methods classes and to make wise methodological choices.

The introductory core course, EDCI 780, acquainted you with broad traditions of research on teaching: what education scholars focus on as important aspects of teaching practice, teacher knowledge and learning, and the context of teaching. EDCI 790 is designed as a follow-up, as a research methods course that digs more deeply into the broad variety of theories and methods available to the educational researcher.

Learning Objectives: By the end of the course students will be able to:

• Distinguish between epistemology and methodology associated with the major theoretical traditions of social and educational research (e.g., post-positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, critical theory).
• Explain how epistemological and theoretical assumptions motivate specific research questions and different research methods.
• Analyze research literature to identify the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological assumptions that define a study.
• Describe a broad range of research methodologies: their purposes, characteristics, strengths and weaknesses
• Proficiently write synthetic and analytic pieces of scholarship.

Course Readings:


Additional readings are listed under the detailed schedule below and are accessible electronically through our ELMS site on McKeldin course reserves. Students are responsible for collecting...
additional articles as needed for project work. Students will have an opportunity to add to our list to address topics of personal interest.

**Course Schedule:** Below is the schedule of course topics and assignment due dates we will try to follow. Assignments are due through submissions on our Canvas site on the indicated day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignment Due Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/28/14</td>
<td>Epistemological &amp; Theoretical Foundations I – Objectivity, Paradigms, and Foundations of Educational Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/04/13</td>
<td>Foundations II – Objectivity, Positivism, and Behaviorism</td>
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<td>2/18/13</td>
<td>Foundations IV – Subjectivity, Social Constructionism, and Historical Methods (Victoria Maria McDonald)</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Response Paper Option</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/25/13</td>
<td>Foundations V – Critical Inquiry (Tara Brown)</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Response Paper Option</td>
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<td>3/04/13</td>
<td>Foundations VI – Pragmatism (Scot Danforth)</td>
<td>Project Idea</td>
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<td>3/18/13</td>
<td>SPRING BREAK-NO CLASS</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/25/13</td>
<td>Psychometrics &amp; Hypothesis Testing (Lawrence Clark)</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Response Paper Option</td>
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<td>4/01/13</td>
<td>Statistical Modeling (TBA)</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Response Paper Option</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/08/13</td>
<td>Grounded Theory; Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Response Paper Option</td>
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<td>4/15/13</td>
<td>Quasi-Experimental &amp; Experimental Designs (Janet Walkoe)</td>
<td>Project Draft (April 20)</td>
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<td>4/22/13</td>
<td>Survey Research (D. Chazan &amp; O. Buchbinder)</td>
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<td>4/29/13</td>
<td>Case Study &amp; Ethnographic Methods (Betty Malen)</td>
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<td>5/06/13</td>
<td>Narrative Inquiry &amp; Phenomenology (Francine Hultgren)</td>
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**Course Format:** Each class will focus on discussion of the weekly readings, with related activities, as a whole class and in small groups. Students are encouraged to write the topics or questions they would like to discuss as they come into the classroom. Guest speakers with expertise in particular methodologies will join us on designated dates, typically at the beginning of class. We generally will take 15 minutes at the beginning of class or after the guest speaker has left to debrief about the week’s readings. In the last hour of class, Dr. Brantlinger will present issues to debate and, depending on the topic, might do a short presentation.
PowerPoint presentations from past implementations of the course are available on Canvas. We occasionally will use them as resources. You are welcome to peruse them prior to class. However, because this is a relatively small class, we will try to maintain a more informal seminar style of interaction that PowerPoint presentations tend to inhibit.

**Expectations and Grades:** Students should expect to spend approximately 9 hours of work outside class for every 3-hour class session. Some of you will find that writing the final paper will be especially time consuming, so you should begin working on this early and often.

Each student will receive a letter grade on assignments. A final grade of “A” will require active and consistent involvement in each class discussion with comments, questions, and observations pertinent to the topic; evidence of close, critical reading of assignments; a critical perspective on the readings in the response papers; and a thorough analysis for the final project. Grading will follow the university’s policy of awarding minuses (-) and pluses (+). Grades below a B at the graduate level are considered unsatisfactory.

In the event that class is cancelled due to a snow or other emergency, we will try to hold class through Wimba during the regular class time. Please install Wimba on your home computer or laptop by going to our Canvas site Announcements and clicking on Wimba Classroom (video and audio capability helpful). For more information, go to: http://otal.umd.edu/wimba-live-classroom

**Course Assignments:** We will complete a variety of assignments during the semester to deepen our understanding of social and behavioral science research methods. A major focus of the course will be on the development of your writing skills, deeper understanding of research methodologies, and application of research methods. All written assignments should be Times New Roman, 12 pt font, double-spaced.

**Readings & Discussion:** (20%) We will read a variety of papers from diverse sources. Each week, you will be responsible for coming to class having carefully read and reflected on the assignments. You should be prepared to discuss your main insights on the readings as well as questions you have. If there is a burning issue you want to discuss, write it on the board so we’re more certain to address it. As noted above, students will take turns being discussion starters. You will have an opportunity to tell me your topic preferences within the two weeks.

In addition, students are asked to contribute 1-2 paragraphs to the Discussion Board at least 2 times during the semester—either before or after the class session. There are “discussion starter” questions posted, which you can use to guide your thinking or you can write directly about your own interactions with the texts. The purpose of this is to help you focus your thinking around the day’s topic and to share your thinking with one another. Feel free to contribute more than twice and to read/respond to other students’ posts. This requirement must be fulfilled for weeks in which you DO NOT submit a response paper.

**Leading a Discussion:** (10%) Working individually or in pairs, Each student will be asked to begin one class discussion of the week’s topic by sharing their overall understandings, focusing
on their key insights (or aha! moments), and/or indicating an overarching question that resulted from the readings. This should take no longer than five minutes. It is a discussion starter, not a presentation.

**Response Papers:** (15% each)
Each student will submit two response papers during the semester, with optional dates for submission listed in the chart above. The papers, however, must be in response to one of the questions posted on the Discussion Board. These are guided, focused response papers rather than general reaction papers (unlike EDCI 780). They will be due the Thursday after class so that you have time to refine your responses based on insights from the class discussion. Each paper should be in APA (or Chicago) style and approximately 3 double-spaced pages, excluding references, 12 pt Time-New-Roman font, 1” margins. Be sure your writing is clear, precise and directly answers the question you have chosen. This should be submitted through the Assignments function on our ELMS site, not on the Discussion Board.

**Final Project:** (40%)
The culmination of the course is the final project. For this project, you will select and analyze two scholarly papers in a particular research area. You should consult with faculty mentors to select papers for this project. Keep in mind that this final project is an opportunity for you to think through, with the support of ideas from others, the variety of research approaches in an area of concern to you. Moreover, it provides you with an opportunity to communicate those concerns effectively through written and oral venues. The following milestones characterize the project; more explicit details will be given in class.

For the project, you will conduct a critical analysis of two important, well-regarded studies from a field indicated on the list below. For each paper, you will detail the major thesis and findings, determine the epistemological and theoretical frameworks, critique the appropriateness of the methodology and methods used and their relationship to the framework. The analysis must compare and contrast the two papers. You must discuss the relevance of the two pieces to their field of study and interpret the methods using readings from the class. Finally, you should draw on course readings to consider how different epistemological and theoretical assumptions would change the types of results produced in the two papers.


**Due Dates:**
**Project Idea** (March 4, NOON). A 2-3 page overview of your idea that describes your topic, explains why it is an important topic in your field, indicates what three studies you have “initially” selected, and contrasts their methodologies. This will be 5% of your course grade.

**Rough Draft** (April 20, NOON). A rough draft of your paper in APA 6th Edition (or Chicago) format for review and revision. I will give this paper a “hypothetical” grade, so that you can see how close you are to submitting a high-quality final paper. However, I
will not factor this into your final grade for the semester. You are encouraged to submit before the deadline and to pair up with a classmate for an informal peer review. It would be helpful to use the rubric that I use to give feedback and grade. You will find it on our ELMS site under course documents.

Final Paper (May 12). A final 18-25 page double-spaced paper, excluding references, in APA format that includes your background literature, methods, analysis, and a discussion. Rubric and examples will be posted for further guidance. This will be 35% of your final grade.

University Honor Code: All students are expected to abide by the university’s code of academic integrity. You may review the code at http://www.shc.umd.edu/code.html.

Accommodations: Please notify me as soon as possible if you would like to discuss accommodations for a documented disability.

Attendance: All students are expected to attend and participate in each class. If, for some reason, you will not be able to attend a class meeting, please notify me in advance. A response paper will be required on that day’s readings for students striving for an A grade. (This cannot substitute for one of the 2 assigned papers).

Course Evaluation: As a member of our academic community, you as a student have a number of important responsibilities. One of these responsibilities is to submit your course evaluations each term though CourseEvalUM in order to help faculty and administrators improve teaching and learning at Maryland. Please make a note now of the dates for Spring 2013 and the link at which you can access the submission system (www.courseevalum.umd.edu). If you submitted all of your evaluations in the fall or are a new student, you can also access all posted results from Fall 2008 forward via Testudo under CourseEvalUM Reporting. To retain this access, you must submit all of your evaluations each semester. If you do not have access right now, you can gain it by submitting all of your Spring 2013 evaluations. More information is at:

WEEKLY TOPICS & READINGS
Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are supplemental readings. Although not required reading for the week, you might want to acquaint yourself with some of them since they are key pieces for that topic.


**Feb. 4: Epistemological Foundations II – Objectivity, Positivism, and Behaviorism**


Bacon, F. (1620). Novum Organum.


**Feb. 11. Wither Objectivity? Post-Positivism and Social Constructivism**


**Feb. 18. Subjectivity, Interpretivism and Historical Methods**


**Feb 25. Critical Theory and Critical Inquiry**

Marx, K. (1884). Estranged Labor (read this online section only). In *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.
http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/epm/1st.htm#s4


**March 4: Pragmatism**


**March 11: Strong Critiques of Objectivity in (Social) Science:**  
*Post-modernism, Post-structuralism, & Feminism*


**EITHER**


**OR**


**March 18: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS**

**March 25: Psychometrics & Hypothesis Testing**


**April 1: Statistical Modeling**


**April 8: Grounded Theory; Discourse Analysis**


**EITHER**


**OR**

April 15: Quasi-Experimental & Experimental Designs – Taking Control


April 22: Survey Research


Take ThEMaT survey prior to coming to class.

At least one of the following websites:
National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard
Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/
TIMMS http://timss.bc.edu/index.html
NELS http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/NELS88/

April 29: Case Study & Ethnographic Methods – Insider Perspective?


**May 6: Narrative Inquiry & Phenomenology**


