EDUC 717 - Research in Higher Education  
College of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst  
Fall, 2014  
Thursdays, 4pm

Instructors
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Office Hours by appt.

Purpose & Objectives
The purpose of this course is primarily to allow advanced higher education graduate students to apply the research skills that they have acquired in previous methods courses to an actual research project. The course is designed for students to complete an entire research project in one semester. Students must come to the class with the methodological skills and knowledge necessary to conduct research. This course does not teach new methods, but extends students’ thinking about research design and execution and gives students an opportunity to apply the skills they have gained to a complete project concerning a topic of their choice related to higher education.

Students may use any method and any data, keeping in mind the constraints of a semester-long timeframe. Students who may have access to data from faculty or external sources may use it. Students may also collect their own data during the course. However, this approach must be coordinated closely with the instructor because it is challenging (though possible) to design the research project, collect data, analyze them and report results, in such a short time. Students may also use publicly available data, or data available through UMass, for secondary data analysis.

The objectives of the course are:
• To apply research skills to a higher education research project.
• To gain further understanding of the research process and research design in higher education.
• To think more critically and creatively about educational research.
• To become more familiar with all aspects of the research process, from research questions to the final written product.
• To be more thoroughly prepared for future research, including writing a dissertation and conducting research in a future career.

*Beginning this year, the course has been modified to serve additional possible purposes. The course may be taken multiple times, and may be taken for 1-3 credits. It may be a place to work on a dissertation proposal, an article for submission, or a professional research project, as a few examples. While the objectives of the course are similar in some ways across all participants, the specifics of what each student is doing may vary.
**Expectations**

- Students are expected to attend all classes, unless other arrangements have been made. If it is necessary to miss a class, please notify me as far in advance as possible and suggest a plan for making up the missed time.
- Students are expected to devote adequate time outside of class to complete readings, assignments, and projects on time. If it is necessary to be late on any course requirement, please notify me as far in advance as possible with a suggested timeline for getting the work completed, which I will consider.
- Written work for the course is expected in 12-point font, double-spaced, with 1 inch margins, and in correct APA format, unless otherwise noted.
- Assignments will be turned in electronically via Moodle, and should be in Word (or compatible) format. Filename should have your last name first, with an informative title following that. I will provide feedback via track changes, unless other arrangements are made.
- Students should expect that I will:
  - be prepared for class, read and return your work in a timely manner, and be interested and engaged in your work;
  - remember that each of you brings a different background, experience, and perspective to this course;
  - learn from you;
  - meet with you individually or in groups upon request and be available in person or via e-mail.

**Accommodations**
The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS), or Psychological Disabilities Services (PDS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements. Also, please inform me of any religious observances that will require you to miss class or require special accommodation.

**Academic Honesty**
The integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research. Academic honesty is therefore expected and required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty (cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, facilitating dishonesty) is prohibited in all programs of the University, and will not be accepted in my classroom.
Course Assignments:

*Note:* The assignments below are the expectations for higher education doctoral students taking the course for 3 credits, and planning to use the research paper for their comprehensive exam. Students that do not fit this description (e.g., those taking the course for one credit, Master’s students, etc.) should propose which assignments (and with what modifications) are appropriate for them. This should be submitted as a brief written proposal by the second class period, to be followed by a short meeting with the instructor to confirm the plan for the semester. It is suggested that all students complete the “research problem and questions” assignment as well as some sort of final paper, but all items are negotiable.

1. **Research problem and question(s) (10%) – Due 9/18**
   - Write a 2- to 3-page summary and justification/rationale for the research topic that you are choosing. This must include a clear concise statement of the research problem, as well as explicit, specific research questions. In the text accompanying these items, you may want to answer some of the following as appropriate: How does your topic fit within higher education? Why is this topic significant? How does it fit within the existing literature with which you are familiar? How will answering these questions contribute to higher education and/or society? What challenges do you anticipate by choosing this topic/question and how will you overcome them?
   - Prepare a second, unrelated set of research questions on a separate final page for this assignment (no written summary or rationale/justification needed for these questions). This extra requirement is to have a viable second research project as a Plan B, and also for the exercise of writing quality research questions on multiple topics.
   - Please also include a 1-2 page memo (ungraded) that is your personal reflection on the beginning of this research process, the questions you are developing, and the work that lies ahead.

2. **Research proposal (25%) – Due 10/2**
   Write a concise research proposal, with approximately one-and-a-half pages devoted to each of the following areas (approximately 6 pages [1500 words] total):
   - Research question(s), purpose, objectives, and/or hypotheses
   - Sample of relevant literature
   - Methods/procedures
   - Significance of the study

(*If you prefer to follow a format from Creswell (pp.74-76) instead you may do so, keeping within the 6-page limit.*)
3. **Pre-draft of design and methods (25%) – Due 10/16**
Submit a six- to seven-page paper, plus a brief memo. The paper should include the following:

- **Overview of design and method.** Provide a concise review of the design and method you will use in your research. You should draw on multiple academic resources to assist you with the specific methods or procedures you will use. These resources should be about the method/procedure itself – i.e., a “how to” for your selected method. The paper should review the design/method concisely but thoroughly, and discuss any debate, controversy, or contradictions in the literature about this approach (as appropriate).

- **Critique of the methods in another article.** Embed a concise critique of an empirical study that has applied this method or procedure in a way that you may compare or contrast with your application of the method. Critique the article (pros and cons) and reflect on how your approach will be similar or different.

- **Details of your application of the design/method.** Conclude by presenting the design/method as specifically applied to your study, including issues such as sampling, measurement, participants, data collection, analysis, etc. You are not expected to give complete, thorough details of every aspect of your approach, but as a “pre-draft” this paper is meant to lay the groundwork for the more thorough methods section of your final paper.

- Please also include a 1-2 page memo (ungraded) that is your personal reflection on the research process thus far, the design and methods you have selected, and the work that lies ahead.

4. **Final Research Paper and Presentation (40%) – Due 12/8**
The final research paper should be of the style and form that would be appropriate to submit to an academic journal (or for the specific purpose you have identified for this research, with instructor approval). In addition to the written paper, you will present your research to the class, in a simulation of a conference paper presentation. Additional details about the written assignment and presentation will be given in class.

*Doctoral students who will be taking comprehensive exams, please note: A research paper is required to be submitted for comps, and this paper can be used for that purpose. For comps, the paper must include a 12-15 page lit review. The lit review portion of the paper for this course may be that long, or it may be shorter (with a plan to extend it prior to comps).*
Other course requirements (ungraded but required for course completion):

- **IRB** – Students must complete CITI certification and gain IRB approval.
- **Peer review** – Students will give thorough and insightful feedback to one peer in the class concerning a draft of their final research paper. (Pairs arranged in class.)
- **In-class workshops** – Students will sign up for two of the available days on the syllabus to have a 5- to 6-page sample of their paper workshopped by the class. The remainder of the class will provide written feedback (via email prior to class or hardcopy in class) and contribute with oral comments for a group discussion during class time. Copies of the writing sample must be emailed to the entire class no later than Monday night (allowing 2-3 days for peers to prepare comments).

**Strongly recommended! (though not required):**

- Meet with the education librarian Steve McGinty
- Utilize reference management software, such as RefWorks, Zotero, or EndNote
- Have your methodological approach reviewed by an outside expert (e.g., a faculty member). You may show them a draft of this methods summary, your proposal, or both, and it is advisable to meet with them face-to-face at least once.
- Keep a running *log* of your research activities, plans, reflections and progress. This can be an invaluable resource at various stages of the process.

**Grading**

The University of Massachusetts Amherst uses the following grading system for Graduate courses: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, F

Your final grade will be calculated using the following scale:

- 94—100.......................A
- 90—93.......................A-
- 87—89.......................B+
- 83—86.......................B
- 80—82.......................B-
- 77—79.......................C+
- 73—76.......................C
- 70—72.......................C-

**Required Course Materials**

Course Schedule

Session 1 (9/4): Introduction & Course Overview

Session 2 (9/11): Research problem and questions
*Come to class with draft versions of 2 or 3 sets of research questions.

- Booth, Colomb & Williams - Chapter 3 & 4
- Creswell – Chapter 7

Session 3 (9/18): Planning a research project
*Research problem and questions due

- Booth, Colomb & Williams – parts I & III
- Creswell – Chapters 5 & 6

Optional:
**Session 4 (9/25): Research Design**

*CITI certification and IRB submission preparation underway?*

- Creswell – Chapter 1; Chapter 8, 9 and 10 (read one, skim two)

Optional:

**Session 5 (10/2): Conceptual Frameworks**

*Research proposal due*

*IRB materials also due in class*


**Session 6 (10/9): Theory**

- Creswell – Chapter 3

Optional:
Session 7 (10/16): Ethics

*Pre-draft of design/method due


Optional:


Session 8 (10/23): Managing research projects

*Workshop I*

- Long, J.S. (2009). *The workflow of data analysis using Stata*. College Station, TX: Stata Press. – Chapters 1 (Introduction) and 2 (Planning, organizing, and documenting).

Session 9 (10/30): Writing

*Workshop II*

- Booth, Colomb, & Williams – part IV

Session 10 (11/6): Writing & Citing

*Workshop III*

- APA Publication Manual. Chapters 1-3 & 6


Optional:


Session 11 (11/13): Standards for high-quality manuscripts

Workshop IV


Optional:

Session 12 (11/20):

NO CLASS – Work week / Attend ASHE

Thanksgiving Break

Peer Review of a draft must be completed during this time period and returned by 11/29 at the latest—coordinate with peer review partner when to exchange drafts to ensure enough time to revise again for submission.

Session 13 (12/4): Presentations & Conclusion

* Presentations in class
* Final paper due on 12/8
* Peer Review comments also due to the instructor
Additional Resources


Long, J.S. (2009). *The workflow of data analysis using Stata*. College Station, TX: Stata Press.


