

ED 739 – Introduction to Inquiry

Fall 2016

Mondays, 4-6:30PM

Furcolo N113

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As the core required introductory course for the Ph.D. program in Education Policy & Leadership, this seminar forms the basis for subsequent research and theory courses that are central to doctoral-level inquiry. In the course, we focus on the role that scholar-practitioners play in the production of new knowledge. We discuss the generation of knowledge through systematic inquiry, including processes, questions, and strategies used to conduct meaningful research in educational systems including US K-12 public schools, US higher education, and international education. We explore the intersection of theory and practice with emphasis on the epistemological assumptions and design of thoughtful, ethical inquiry about education. While the course is not a methods course, we focus on the role that scholar-practitioners play in shaping knowledge production through their methodological choices. We also emphasize sound academic writing principles and provide structured guidance in developing those skills.

OVERVIEW

Purposes

- To define and describe the foundations of systematic inquiry:
 - What is knowledge?
 - How is it produced?
 - How do people use knowledge?
- To build the skills to read and critique educational research;
- To introduce students to conceptualization, writing, and design strategies that help facilitate theoretically-grounded and practical inquiry that produces knowledge for the improvement of education;
- To lay a foundation for future coursework and experiences that allow Ph.D. students to design, propose, and conduct rigorous, theoretically-grounded, and practically meaningful research for dissertations;
- To provide models of and practice in academic writing; and
- To nurture a community of practice.

This course uses readings, cases from practice, group discussions, inquiry dyads or triads, group activities, lecture-discussions, and individual projects to examine research as a process of systematic inquiry and to develop skills that facilitate your abilities to make informed choices in research practice. We will consider

ways of knowing as the course introduces the ontological and epistemological foundations of inquiry and differentiates between various models and modes of inquiry: What is knowledge? How is knowledge generated? How does knowledge affect practice? We will ask you to understand and use the inquiry cycle to frame questions, to consider approaches for generating knowledge, to plan systematic inquiry yourselves, and to critique the research of others. Fundamental to the course is the recognition of the existence of multiple perspectives; we argue for the importance of all researchers – novices and veterans alike – to make explicit their conceptual frameworks and design logic. While we talk about the roles of data collection and analysis in the inquiry cycle, this course is not about research methodology *per se*. As well, we consider uses of knowledge. We encourage you to critically question any situation, theoretical or practical. Throughout the course, we ask you to write short memos and two longer papers; you will receive critical feedback on all written work. The two longer papers are: a mini-literature review and a draft proposal for scholarly research.

Assumptions

- The learner is central to their own learning and is responsible for it;
- Each learner constructs knowledge in their own way, according to individual experiences, gender, abilities, style, language, and preferences;
- The learner is the inquirer, continually and consciously making decisions that affect the questions pursued and the direction of the inquiry;
- Inquiry is undertaken to generate knowledge;
- Deep understanding of phenomena is fostered through interaction in *communities of discourse and practice*;
- Systematic inquiry is a process of conceptualizing, designing, conducting, documenting, reporting, and using what is learned;
- Critical feedback, reflection, and modification are essential to inquiry and knowledge generation; and
- The products of inquiry, in whatever form they take, should improve or be used to improve the human condition.

Course Objectives

- Question the nature of knowledge (What is knowledge? What does it mean to know?)
- Consider the origins of knowledge (How is knowledge generated?), ways of knowing (How do we come to know?), and different kinds of knowledge (e.g.: knowing how; knowing that)
- Understand the inquiry cycle (i.e.: from focusing to using)
- Articulate clear, grounded arguments
- Conceptualize the focus of inquiry (the “what”)
- Frame interesting, do-able research questions
- Review and critique relevant literature
- Understand that many modes of inquiry can inform research questions, their purposes, and their techniques for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the social world
- Consider the consequences for selecting various research design and methods (the “how”) to inform questions
- Recognize the considerations and choices that influence the ethics and trustworthiness of research processes and products
- Explore uses of knowledge
- Propose a preliminary research study—with attention to the location of the study within a discursive community, the conceptualization of a research problem, and potential design considerations
- Recognize and use the various styles of academic writing
- Operate as a *community of practice*.

Class Experience

For most of you, this seminar is the first in your doctoral experience; therefore assignments are organized to start you on the path toward the final product of your doctoral work (the dissertation) and future research agendas. You should use this course to explore some of the issues about educational policy and leadership that you are interested in and to frame them as questions for research.

Since this course is a seminar, the emphasis is on class interaction rather than lecture. The seminar meets weekly for 2 ½ hours throughout the semester. Because reflection is an important aspect of learning, at the start of the semester we ask you to write brief position papers in response to specific questions. You may add any insights or thoughts (either puzzling or clarifying) that go beyond the specific assignments. The cumulative memos comprise the beginning of a reflective journal for you. We expect you to come to class prepared to participate, having completed the assigned reading and writing.

The class will serve as a *community of practice*. Researchers and philosophers consider a crucial component of inquiry to be the practice of discussing, testing, and reflecting on your understandings and experiences with colleagues. The critique you receive from this community is essential for both deepening and refining your process of inquiry. Thoughtful, informed, and interested colleagues are invaluable to your development as an inquirer; time in each class will be devoted to this collegial and constructive interchange. Also, we encourage you to communicate with classmates via email, critiquing readings, sharing written assignments, and working on activities due for class. Discussion will be most useful to you and others if you can maintain a stance of openness and respect, whether the class is considering one of the readings, someone's viewpoint, a field experience, or a written assignment. The best time to question, paradoxically, may be when you think you know the most.

Required texts

The following books are required:

- Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. (2008). *The craft of research* (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rallis, S. F., & Rossman, G. B. (2012). *The research journey: Introduction to inquiry*. New York: Guilford Press. **Note:** Any royalties received from the sale of this book for EDUC 739 are donated to a charitable organization.

All additional readings will be available on MOODLE.

Please note about class readings

All readings are due for the class listed. You will notice that, for the first few classes, there are a number of readings assigned. We anticipate that you will find some readings more engaging than others. We do, however, expect you to critically analyze why readings are engaging for you and why they are not. The reading lightens in later classes because you will be reading works you select for your mini-literature review.

ASSIGNMENTS

Procedures

- Submit all papers electronically through email (**NOT Moodle**) to the instructors **PRIOR** to the start of the start of a class when the paper is due. (This does not apply to the first Position Paper, which we ask you to bring in hard copies to class. See below).
- If your triad partners or other critical friends agree, you can share papers with them before each due date for critical feedback.
- Please be sure to send your paper to your triad partners **BEFORE** they are due, so your partners can have the paper handy for class.

Required papers:

- Three position papers (2 pp.; guidelines on MOODLE) due **September 12, September 19, and October 3**
 - Position paper 1 – bring **4** hard copies to first class and email copies to the instructors prior to the start of the first class
 - Position papers 2 and 3 – send e-copies to both instructors and your triad partners in advance
- Draft mini-review of literature (8-12 pp.; guidelines on MOODLE) – due **October 24** – send e-copies to the instructors and to your triad partners in advance of due date.
- Revised mini-literature review (8-12 pp.; extensive feedback provided on draft) – due **November 7** – send e-copies to the instructors and to your triad partners in advance of due date.
- Preliminary research proposal – due **December 5** (10-15 pp.; guidelines on MOODLE) – send e-copies to the instructors and triad partners in advance, if possible.
- CITI certification in Ethical Practices – completed by **December 12** – send electronically to Professor Rallis

Grading

This class is graded only; you may not take the course on a pass/fail basis. **NOTE:** We do not offer the option of requesting an incomplete for this course.

Your final grade will be based on the following:

Class engagement (including position papers)	30%
Mini-lit review (final only)	40%
Preliminary proposal	30%

Class engagement includes submission of the three Position Papers and participation in triad discussions and whole group discussions. Regular absences may lower this portion of your grade (see Class Engagement).

Grade ranges for the mini-lit review:

- 31-40 – A-range
- 21-30 – B-range
- 11-20 – C-range
- 10 or below – not acceptable work at the graduate level

Grade ranges for the preliminary proposal:

- 21-30 – A-range
- 11-20 – B-range
- 10 or below – not acceptable work at the graduate level

Grading rubrics for all written work:

An **A-range** essay is both ambitious and successful. It demonstrates mastery of academic writing with grace and confidence. It includes:

- an interesting, arguable **thesis** that is sufficiently limited in scope, presented early and developed throughout the essay;
- a logical, progressive **structure** of key concepts, emerging from clear and identified currents of thought, that takes the reader on a journey, developing, complicating, and expanding the initial thesis by considering counter-arguments; strong and clear links between points, and well-organized paragraphs;
- sufficient, appropriate, and interesting **evidence**, presented in a readable and understandable way that demonstrates a deep and thoughtful engagement with **sources** that uses those sources in a range of ways, including to motivate and support the argument, provide key-terms, and so on; it integrates and cites sources correctly;

- a **style** that is both conversational and sophisticated; that uses diction appropriate to the subject matter and the audience; that engages and stimulates the reader; and
- mastery of the **mechanics** of writing in all aspects: grammar, punctuation, APA style.

A **B-range** essay is one that is ambitious but only partially successful, or one that achieves modest aims well. It exhibits one or more of the following features:

- a **thesis** that may be arguable but vague, uninteresting, or fragmentary; it may be implied rather than stated directly (or stated quite late); it may be dropped in places;
- a **structure** of key concepts that proceeds logically most of the time or in general, but is periodically confusing due to missing links or large intellectual leaps; it might be overly predictable and undeveloped, with few complications; it may include disorganized paragraphs;
- **evidence** that is generally solid but may be thin in places, or might be presented without analysis (as undigested quotation), drawn from **sources** that are quoted and cited correctly (for the most part) but are deployed in limited ways—as a straw person or as simple confirmation of the author’s viewpoint;
- a **style** that is clear but lacking in sophistication; or that is weighed down by inappropriately fancy diction; may demonstrate some errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, and format; and
- limited mastery of **mechanics** such that they interfere with the flow of the argument.

A **C-range** essay typically has significant problems in articulating and presenting its argument, or seems to lack a central argument entirely. Its features include one or more of the following:

- a **thesis** that is either vague and descriptive, or is a buried unifying concept that is implied rather than stated directly;
- a **structure** that is imposed externally (by the requirement of the assignment, or by the ideas and structure of its sources) or is confusing (showing signs of movement toward a logical progression of ideas but still making huge, unmotivated intellectual leaps); that includes few complications or counter-arguments; that exhibits disorganized, often overly descriptive, paragraphs;
- insufficient **evidence**, often presented without analysis as undigested quotations; may be taken out of context and draw from **sources** that are not adequately situated or explained; that may be quoted and cited incorrectly; that are used simply as filler or as affirmation of the author’s viewpoint;
- a **style** that is both unclear and overly simplistic; and
- substantial difficulty with **mechanics**.

The general grading criteria include the ability to: 1) articulate clearly your position or argument; 2) cogently frame that argument in a body of knowledge; 3) appropriately argue for a particular research design and methods; 4) demonstrate mastery of academic writing skills; and 5) engage in thoughtful, respectful critique.

Class engagement

Because of the dialogic nature of the learning in class, you are expected to attend every session. However, we do understand that at times circumstances may make this difficult. Please let us know in advance if you **must** miss a class, and we expect that you will talk with classmates to gather their understanding of what they learned in class; you may find it helpful to talk with more than one person. Your triad partners will be asked to evaluate the extent to which you provided in-class feedback on a regular basis that was constructive and helped result in improved thinking / writing. This feedback will be reflected as 25% of your Class Engagement grade.

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), 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.

Academic honesty

Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent (http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/).

We will review the principles of academic honesty in class and provide specific examples of when using the words of another author is suspect.

CLASS SCHEDULE

CLUSTER I – WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

Week 1 – September 12 – Foundations: How do I know *what* I know? How do I know *that* I know?

Due in class: Position paper #1

Week 2 – September 19 – Paradigms and ways of knowing: So what's a paradigm, anyway? Which comes first – thinking or doing?

Read for today:

TEXTS: Rallis & Rossman, Prologue, Chs 1 & 2; Booth et al., Chs 1 & 2

MOODLE: Kirszner & Mandell; Schon, Chs 1 & 2

Due by class time: Position paper #2

CLUSTER II – HOW IS KNOWLEDGE GENERATED? – Part I Conceptualizing, Framing & Using the Literature

Week 3 – September 26 – The inquiry cycle: What's the process to move through? Do I begin with a question or a problem?

Read for today:

TEXTS: Rallis & Rossman, Ch 3; Booth et al., Chs 3, 4, & 5

MOODLE: Militello, Rallis & Goldring, Ch 2; Weick; Knight, Chs 1 & 2

Week 4 – October 3 – Building a conceptual framework: Where do I situate myself in that conversation?

Read for today:

TEXTS: Rallis & Rossman, Ch 5; Booth et al., Chs 7-11

MOODLE: Schram, Ch 4; Ravitch & Riggin, Chs 1 & 2

Due by class time: Position paper #3

Monday, October 10 – no classes – Columbus Day

Week 5 – Tuesday, October 11 – Reading the literature: What’s already out there about this issue?

Read for today:

TEXTS: Rallis & Rossman, Ch 7; Booth et al., Chs 6?, 12-17

MOODLE: Militello, Rallis & Goldring, Ch 1; George Mwangi

Week 6 – October 17 – Trustworthiness: Rigor & ethics; Connecting with your audience

Read for today:

TEXTS: Rallis & Rossman, Ch 4

MOODLE: Hostetler; Hemmings; Rossman, Rallis & Kuntz; Opsal et al.

Week 7 – October 24 – Reading and being critical friends: Helping each other build and support logical arguments; Doctoral Panel on Research Process

MOODLE: Boote & Biele

Due by class time: Draft mini-literature review

CLUSTER III – HOW IS KNOWLEDGE GENERATED? – Part II Designing & Critiquing Inquiry

Week 8 – October 31 – Connecting the ‘what’ and the ‘how’: What are the questions raised by or unanswered by the literature? Where’s the gap?

Read for today:

TEXTS: Rallis & Rossman, Ch 6

MOODLE: Shavelson & Towne; Rallis

Week 9 – November 7 – Focusing on the ‘how’: What are typical formats? What methods are out there to inform the research questions?

Read for today:

TEXTS: Rallis & Rossman, Ch 6

MOODLE: Knight, Chs 3 & 4

Due by class time: Revised mini-literature review

Week 10 – November 14 – Being critical friends: Helping each other build a preliminary design

Read for today:

TEXTS: Rallis & Rossman, Ch 8

MOODLE: Creswell, Chs 9, 10 & 11

CLUSTER IV – HOW IS KNOWLEDGE USED?

Monday, November 21 – no class – Thanksgiving Week Recess

Week 11 – November 28 – Purpose, use, and audience: Revisiting the logic of inquiry;
Faculty Panel on Research Decision-making

Week 12 – December 5 – From research project to research agenda: Where have we been
and where do we go from here?

Due by class time: Preliminary research proposal

Week 13 – December 12 – Proposal mock-defense

Due by class time: CITI certification