Course description and objectives

This seminar is designed to facilitate proposal development for doctoral-level research in educational leadership and policy studies. The objective is to help students pin down their specific research interests for their dissertations and prepare a thorough literature review in order to contextualize their ideas and proposed contributions in the relevant body of research and practice. The seminar also aims to help students outline the proper methodological approach for their projects and plan out the associated analytical techniques in as much detail as possible.

To this end, the course is structured to address the following components of a successful dissertation project. Since the immediate focus of the seminar is proposal development, the emphasis will remain on the first three of these five components:

1. WHAT: specific research interest
2. WHY: Review of relevant literature(s)
3. HOW: Methodology; plans for analyzing data
4. ANALYSIS: Findings
5. MEANING: Interpretation

Course requirements

Participation. Active participation in class discussions is an essential requirement. As in any doctoral seminar, students are expected to share ownership of the class with the instructors, and assume part of the responsibility for the quality and scope of the learning process. It is important for all students to complete the readings to the best of their ability and be ready to critically discuss relevant ideas, insights, and questions. Be prepared to open yourself to challenge and also feel free to challenge others’ ideas in class. Please notify the instructors in advance if you are unable to attend any of the sessions.

Term paper. You are expected to complete a proposal draft for your dissertation research projects. This document is typically between 15 to 25 pages long. It is a draft that would be
finalized in the Spring semester with further work on your part and with participation from your committee members. It is intended to be the first formal step in starting your dissertation project. The draft for the proposal is to be completed in four parts: what, why, how, and expected analysis findings.

**Grading**

Class participation 20%
Term paper 80% (4x20%)

**Required texts**


Schedule

August 23: No class, Argun away at conference in Vegas!

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Module 1: WHAT?

A dissertation must begin with some discussion as to what you will do. This generally involves a central research question and some background information highlighting the need and importance/significance of the problem to be studied. The reader needs to be told right at the outset exactly what the problem is that will be addressed and the conceptual basis for this selection, as well as the fundamental argument you are making. For many dissertations, this discussion is the introductory chapter, although it is possible to combine the WHAT discussion with parts of other chapters.

August 30: Topic and specific area of interest  
Overview, goals, syllabus, expectations.

Krathwohl and Smith (2005), Chapters 1, 2.


September 6: Research question-1  
Krathwohl and Smith (2005), Chapters 3, 4.

September 13: Research question-2  


Due: 1. Draft of chapter one for the dissertation.
    2. A 2-3 page summary of chapter one.

Module 2: WHY?

In planning and carrying out a dissertation, certain choices must be made. Given the topic, one or more literatures may be relevant to contextualize your research interest, the question, and the basic argument. In addition, the variables to be studied and the methods and design must be determined. Such decisions should be grounded in the general literature in the particular field of
study. Thus, the WHY section develops the conceptual and theoretical support for the topic and the substantiation for the specific decisions concerning variables of interest, methods, etc. Commonly contained in a section of the dissertation called, “Review of Literature,” students must analytically review relevant sources in developing the defense of the study.

September 20: The search for literature and audience


Due: Identify the relevant literature in each article and discuss the ways in which these literatures are used to introduce and contextualize the central questions, ideas, and ideas in each article.

September 27: Strategic plan for literature review


Due: 1. Identify potential literatures pertaining to your work.
   2. What will you look for in each?
   3. How will you extend, contribute to knowledge? Are you … resolving a debate? starting a debate? answering a prevalent question? challenging existing views?...
   4. Is your contribution theoretical, data- or population-driven, methodological, …?

October 4: First draft of the literature review


Due: 1. Literature table—key studies and other work listed either chronologically or by other classifications; reference, central question and argument, key finding, data/sample, analysis methods, strengths, weaknesses. Prepare to discuss your tables in class, likely in small groups.
   2. Any changes to chapter one and to its summary version, as a result of new insights from the literature review.
October 11: Second draft of the literature review

Due: 1. Draft of chapter two for the dissertation.
   2. A 6-8 page summary of chapter two.
   3. A short P-Point presentation of chapters one and two.

Module 3: HOW?

The HOW section provides a roadmap for carrying out the study and analyzing the data collected. Commonly placed in a methodology chapter, this section explains what the researcher will do in order to conduct the research. As replicability is a canon of good science, this section must present enough detail so that another research could hypothetically replicate the entire study. Several broad features of this dissertation component should include attention to issues such as: explicitness, replicability, minimizing error, generalizability, validity, and reliability. However, some research studies will focus on other issues in this presentation. Nonetheless, the dissertation must include a clear discussion of how the study will be done, with the understanding that varying methodologies allow for the use of a number of different techniques in conducting the dissertation research.

October 18: Key issues in developing an effective research design

Babbie, Earl R. (2004), Chapters 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Due: 1. Where will the data come from? Units of analysis and observation?
   2. Timeline?
   3. Is the data large enough to examine the effects you are looking for?

October 25: Constructs, variables, and measures

Krathwohl and Smith (2005), Chapters 5, 6.

Due: 1. Construct table—list the label and description of each variable, with original references.
   2. If you are doing a qualitative design, then generate a table for elements of field
observation guidelines, interview protocols, etc.
3. Prepare to discuss in class, likely in a small group.

**November 1: Finalizing data/methods section**

Kratwohl and Smith (2005), Chapters 7, 8.

Sample proposals and dissertations.

**Due:** 1. Draft of chapter three for the dissertation.
2. A 3-4 page summary of chapter three.

**Module 4: ANALYSIS?**

**November 8: Examining completed dissertations from KU**

Sample proposals and dissertations.

**Due:** How and why would your expected findings answer the research question of your dissertation?

**November 15: Group discussions of chapters 1-3 of the dissertation and of the expected results**

**FINAL PRESENTATIONS:**

**November 29: Proposal presentation**

**Due:** A 10-15 minute P-Point presentation of the proposal draft

**December 6: Proposal presentations continued**

**Due:** 1. A 10-15 minute P-Point presentation of the proposal draft, for those who have not presented the previous week.
2. Final drafts of chapters 1-3 for the dissertation, for everyone.