Instructor: Jennifer (Jen) Schmidt, Ph.D.  
jaschmid@msu.edu  
517-353-9444  
513D Erickson Hall

Course Meetings: Tuesdays, 12:40 – 3:30 pm  
132 Erickson

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Overview

The purpose of CEP 930 Educational Inquiry is to introduce doctoral students to different ways of studying teaching, learning, human development, counseling, and the organization and administration of K-12 and postsecondary institutions. The course offers an introductory “how to” of educational research, while providing the opportunity to reflect on, discuss, and write about educational research.

The course has 3 primary goals:

1. Students will develop an understanding of a variety of educational inquiry methods, and of the fundamental issues involved in deciding among different kinds of methodological approaches.
2. Students will become critical consumers of published research while also developing an introductory knowledge of the options available to them in conducting their own research.
3. Students will develop a basic understanding of contemporary issues and problems in educational inquiry. These issues form the larger context in which research takes place and are influential in shaping the way research questions are generated, framed, and studied.

Required Texts


Additional readings are available on the course D2L site.
Course Expectations and Notices

- **Format.** Class sessions will be a mix of lecture and discussion. Because people learn best when actively contributing, each student is expected to participate and contribute to the learning of others in our class. It is important to come to class prepared.

- **Attendance.** Physical and psychological attendance is expected. Please notify me via email if you are unable to attend class, and give advance notice for planned absences.

- **Students with Disabilities.** If you have a documented physical or learning disability that requires accommodation in class, please notify me within the first two weeks of class so that we can make necessary arrangements.

- **Academic Dishonesty.** Academic dishonesty includes obvious offenses such as copying published materials or another students’ work, and less obvious offenses such as unauthorized collaboration on a paper or changing 1 or two words in a sentence that you have otherwise copied from another source. It is assumed that all students understand the consequences of academic dishonesty at MSU.

Course Assignments and Grading

- **Sample Article Reflection (n=4, 5 points each, 20 points total)** – Find empirical articles that contain examples of concepts we study in the literature related to “your” topic as assigned in the course schedule. Generally these are expected to be good examples that can serve as models. You must choose an empirical article (this means data were collected and/or analyzed) in an academic publication. Review articles and theory pieces are not appropriate for this particular assignment. Submit a 1-page (single spaced) reflection on what is requested of you for the particular assignment, following the format provided in D2L. Each time an article reflection is due, you will be expected to participate in a small group discussion in which you present and discuss your reflections. Written article reflections are to be submitted to D2L.

- **Research Proposal (sections due throughout the semester for review) (50 points total)** final due 12/5.
  - Statement of topic/Intro (5 points) due 9/19 (no grade); 10/17 (graded) To submit, create a google doc and share with me (9/19) and your small group members (10/17).
  - Research questions (5 points) due 10/3. To submit, share as a Google doc with small group members and with me.
  - Framing Study: theory and justification using literature (20 points) due 11/7. To submit, share a Google doc with small group members and with me.
  - Methods incl. sample, design, procedures & instruments (20 pts) due 12/5, and should be added to the revisions of the prior pieces of the proposal, and submitted as a “full” proposal.
Specific plans for data analysis are not necessary in this proposal, as they are beyond the scope of this course (though “real” proposals should have this element). You do not need to present the results of your pilot study in the proposal, though the data collection instrument/method should be included as an appendix to the proposal (e.g., attach the survey, interview questions observation protocol etc). Because this final version will not be reviewed by your group mates you can share it as a Google doc with me.

- **Feedback to Peers on Research Proposal** (n=3 at 5 points each, 15 points total). One week following initial due dates for intro, research questions and framing of study, submit comments to all group members using the comment and editing mode features of Google docs. Feedback should be substantive and constructive.

- **Presentation on small-scale pilot test of data collection methods.** (15 points). Students will select one small part of the data collection method specified in their research proposal, and attempt to collect some data using this method. Students will prepare a 10-15-minute presentation *(Due December 6 & 13)* for class members orienting the class to the particular method of data collection used, and then will present a reflection about lessons learned from using the method(s)/instruments that were chosen. You are not expected to present substantive “results” from your study, but rather reflect on what worked and didn’t work about the method. Human subjects concerns regarding this assignment will be discussed in class.

- **Participation.** Because active, relevant, and regular participation is part of the course format, participation points are not awarded. However, if a student regularly fails to meet this expectation, points will be deducted from the final grade. If I have concerns about your participation at any point in the semester, I will contact you to discuss.

**Final Course Grades**
Final grades will be based on the total number of points you earn (out of a possible 100) and will be assigned as follows:

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Schmidt, CEP 930, Fall 2017
Course Schedule and Assigned Readings

*Please complete each week’s readings in the order in which they are listed*

September 5: Introductions, decisions, group formation

September 12: Foundations: Nature of Knowledge & Inquiry

Readings:
Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, Chapters 1, 2, 4

Guide for This Week's Reading and Discussion:
• Before coming to class, spend some time reflecting on the paradigms for research described in today's readings. Does one paradigm more than another align with your views? What from your own experience has led you to favor this paradigm? Are there aspects of each paradigm that appeal to you? Discuss your position in terms of the assumptions of each paradigm.
• What did you think about how causality was discussed in the readings? How can/should we think about causality in educational research and inquiry?

September 19: Ongoing Conversations about Educational Research

Readings:


You will read multiple short articles from a 2002 issue of *Educational Researcher* on scientific culture and education research in which the authors describe and react to an influential report released by the National Research Council. The articles in this issue are (read them in this order, available on D2L):
• Feuer, Towne & Shavelson (2002)
• Erickson & Gutierrez 2002 response
• Berliner 2002 response
• Pelligrino & Goldman 2002 response
• St. Pierre 2002 response (includes counter-response from Feuer et al)
Next read a similar set of short articles from a 2014 issue of *Educational Researcher* in which a number of scholars were asked to comment on “What counts as quality educational research.” Articles to read here include (in this order, available on D2L):

- Phillips (2014)
- Wieman (2014)
- Rudolph (2014)
- Gutierrez & Penuel (2014)

AERA (2008). Definition of Scientifically Based Research (see D2L).


**Due:**

- Statement of topic/interest area (this will be developed into proposal introduction). Identify an issue or topic about which you are passionate enough to conduct a study. This should be the general topic of your research proposal and does not yet have to be a formal research question. Why does it matter? Who cares? And, why should others care, too? Bring a short, 1 paragraph electronic statement about this to class. (not graded). Following any revision that happens in class, submit to professor by sharing as a google doc.

**Guide for This Week’s Reading and Discussion:**

- Almost 25 years after the Kaestle (1993) commentary was published, have the challenges of education research changed at all? Have discussions about “quality education research” (2002 and 2014 article sets) helped to address any of the challenges?
- What are the vision(s) expressed in today’s readings about what educational research should be? Do you agree with these vision(s)? How do these vision(s) fit within the paradigmatic frameworks discussed last week? How have they changed? What are the implications of the vision(s) for colleges of education, federal spending, educational policy, etc.?

**September 26 What to Study and How to Get Started**

**Readings:**

- Booth, Colomb, Williams, Bizup & Fitzgerald (2016) *Chapter 3 + 4*
- Shavelson & Towne, On Scientific Research in Education: Questions, Not Methods, Should Drive the Enterprise (see D2L)
- Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2011) *Chapter 6* (105-114)
Due:
Sample article #1 and Article Reflection. Locate and read a new (to you) and relatively recent research study related to your general topic. Prepare a Research Reflection in which you describe the purpose and/or research questions of the article and then reflect on the following:

- The paradigm the researcher(s) appear to be using. What evidence leads you to believe this?
- What is the research problem/question being addressed? How can you characterize this question using the framework articulated in today’s Shavelson & Towne article?
- To what extent do the methods used in this study “match” the research questions in the ways advocated by Shavelson & Towne?

General format for Article Reflection is provided in D2L. Submit to D2L. You will present your article reflection to your group mates in class.

Guide for This Week’s Reading & Discussion:
Start thinking about a specific research problem you’d like to address within the topic you identified, and if possible, try to hone it down to a manageable research question. Be prepared to discuss your thoughts in class.

October 3: Framing a Research Study

Readings:

Due:
- Proposed research questions for your study (Share in Google Docs with small group members and professor).
- Sample Article #2 and Article Reflection. Choose a sample research article from “your” literature that has an easy-to-identify “introduction” paragraph or paragraphs (not all articles do!). In your research reflection, critically analyze the introduction using the framework for writing introduction presented in Booth et al. Which of their strategies to you see being employed? (submit to D2L & present in class)

Guide for This Week’s Reading & Discussion:
Think about whether you are ready to write an Introduction and, if not, what you need to do to be able to do so: What is your research problem?; Is your study needed to respond to the problem (in what way)?; What are features of the context that you need to provide for your readers? Be ready to discuss what you learned about writing research reports from the readings. Reflect upon yourself as a writer and what you might need to do to be
successful at completing your research proposal. What do you need to look for in your reading of the literature in terms of building an argument for (theoretical) and a justification of (gaps in literature) your research questions.

**October 10: Planning a Study**

**Readings:**
Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011) chapters 7 & 8

**Due:**
Sample Article and Article Reflection #3. Bring a research article from “your” literature, and provide reflection on the following: Describe the sampling strategies and procedures used in the article and provide a critical discussion of the strengths and limitations of this approach drawing upon your growing knowledge of your field and the readings for this week.

Feedback for your group mates on their research questions submitted last week (submit comments in google docs shared with you).

**Guide for this week’s discussion:**
Make a plan using Box 7.3 in Cohen and any other organizational structures you think will be useful for you and come prepared to show your group. Focus especially on what type of data you would need to collect to answer your research question(s). Come prepared to discuss your options for your presentation on small scale pilot of study methods, to be given at the end of the semester.

**October 17: Qualitative Research #1**

**Readings:**
Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2011) Chapter 11 (Naturalistic, Qualitative & Ethnographic Research), Chapter 22 (observation, read only sections 23.6 – 23.7, pp. 464-468).

**Due:**
Introduction of the study (your developed statement of topic). Google Doc to be shared with professor and small group members.
Guide for This Week’s Reading & Discussion:
Think about your research topic. How might you conduct a qualitative study to explore this topic? What are the benefits and limitations to conducting such a study in this area?

October 24: Qualitative Research #2

Readings:
Creswell (2013). Select reading from Qualitative inquiry and design, choosing from five approaches.

Due:
Feedback for peers on study introduction submitted last week. To be included in Google Docs.

October 31: Research Designs – Correlational & Causal comparative) (Check group assignments for Nov. 14 activity)

Readings:
Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2011). Ex Post Facto (causal comparative/ correlational) Studies Chapter 15
Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2011). Surveys Chapter 13

Due:
Sample Article #4 and Article Reflection. Find a journal article on your topic that used a causal comparative, a correlational, or a survey design. Read it, think about it, and come to class prepared to discuss:

- a. what the research problem is
- b. what the independent/predictor and dependent/criterion variables are
- c. what the research design is (correlational, causal comparative, or some variation)
- d. critique the study in terms of design strengths and weaknesses using issues discussed in the text.

Submit a research report on this article.
Guide for Reading & Discussion:
Think about your research problem/questions. Can you use the correlational or causal comparative approach? Does this seem feasible? What are the benefits and limitations of conducting such a study in your area?

November 7: Research Designs – experimental & quasi-experimental
Remler & Van Ryzin (2011), chapter 12: Randomized Field Experiments (See D2L)

Due:
Framing (justification) of your study (also known as the lit. review). Share with professor and group in Google docs. Include introduction & research questions as essential background information, though feedback will only be provided on the justification part.

Guide for This Week’s Reading & Discussion:
• Do you think it is possible to conduct experimental or quasi-experimental research in educational settings that is meaningful for educational practice? How does one balance control over variables with studying “real-life” situations? What is the potential value of this type of research?
• Think about your research topic/problem. Could you conduct experimental or quasi-experimental research to explore this topic? What would be the benefits and limitations?
• Be prepared to check in about the status of your small scale pilot data collection effort

November 14: Mixed Methods

Readings:


On October 31 you were assigned an example of ONE kind of mixed method study. Read the one that you were assigned from the list below:


**Due:**
- Feedback to peers on framing (justification) of study submitted last week. Feedback to be provided in Google docs.

**Guide for This Week’s Reading & Discussion:**
- What is your view of the value and feasibility of conducting studies using mixed methods?

**November 21: NO FORMAL CLASS MEETING – WORK ON YOUR PROPOSALS**

**November 28: Ethics**

**Readings:**


Cohen et al, chapter 5: The ethics of educational and social research


Markham, A. & Buchanan, E. (2012). Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) Ethics Working Committee (Verion2.0).

**December 5: Strategies & Instruments for Data Collection**

Individual presentations TBA

**Due:** Final Revision of Proposal. Submit to Dropbox on D2L.

**THURSDAY December 14 12:45 – 2:45 (Finals Schedule): Strategies and Instruments for Data Collection**

Individual presentations TBA