

# **Educational Studies 400: Senior Research Seminar**

Trinity College

Fall 2008

Mondays 1:15-3:55pm, MCEC 293

<http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/educ>

Visiting Assistant Professor Jen Sandler

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-3 pm and Wednesdays 10am-noon

Office: McCook 312

Phone: 297-5217

Email: [jen.sandler@trincoll.edu](mailto:jen.sandler@trincoll.edu)

The Senior Research Seminar is the capstone class of the Educational Studies major. The core of this class is an independent research project, on which students are expected to work throughout the semester. This class also provides an important opportunity to reflect upon and analyze different types of educational research. We have within our classroom diverse training, different kinds of questions, and different approaches to educational problems. We will use the resources and orientations students bring to the class, learning through readings and from one another's projects about the insights, shortcomings, and challenges of different types of educational research, as well as the tensions surrounding methodology that characterizes this interdisciplinary field.

## **Research Project Criteria**

1. Does the author pose a thought-provoking, researchable question (or hypothesis) and explain its significance to educational studies?
2. Does the author connect the question to the existing research literature (secondary sources) and move beyond into new territory?
3. Does the author identify the most appropriate primary sources and research methods for this study?
4. Does the author present a clear and insightful thesis that directly addresses the research question (or hypothesis)?
5. Is the author's thesis persuasive? Is it supported with convincing evidence and analysis?
6. Is the author's paper/presentation well-organized, and does it include sufficient background for audiences unfamiliar with the topic?
7. Does the author cite sources in an acceptable format so that future readers may easily locate them?
8. Does the author follow ethical guidelines for research?

## **Responsibilities and Assignments**

### *Independent Research Projects*

Your primary responsibilities in this class are to design, conduct, write up, and present your independent research project. Many assignments and activities along the way will help you to stay on track.

#### *1- Research Journal*

A successful project requires persistence, problem solving, support, and reflection. Your research journal will be a testament to your persistence in working on your project. It will serve as a tool for you to reflect on your project and your approach to it, will allow your peers and me to keep up with your research process, and will likely come in handy as you write up your results and prepare your presentation.

*You are required to post to your research journal at least once each week, by Sunday at noon so as to give your classmates time to read and comment before class on Monday.* Your research journal post should include an explanation of what you have been doing on your project that week and should also include any reflections or questions you might have. For example, if you made a major decision that affects your research design one week, presumably you would reflect upon that decision, why you had to make it, how you decided, and what you hope might happen. Feel free to ask for advice in your journal posts!

Research journal posts can be much less formal than papers. You should definitely not spend hours agonizing over the sentence structure, grammar, or organization of your posts.

#### *2- Literature Review*

For this assignment, you will produce a 3-5 page literature review on your research topic. This literature review should be structured in such a way that it can easily be adapted for inclusion in your final paper. It should be organized based on themes in the relevant literature, and should ultimately justify the relevance and importance of your topic for educational research.

#### *3- Data and Analysis Paper*

This is an exercise to help you to find the thesis of your project and get close to a first draft of your final paper. In the Data and Analysis Paper, you will *describe* the data you have (*what did you collect?*), describe and present an *analysis* of that data (*what does it mean, and how do you know?*), and discuss the significance of this analysis (*why does it matter?*). Your Data and Analysis Paper should be 7-10 pages long.

#### *4- Public Presentation*

You will deliver a 10-minute oral presentation of your research paper-in-progress and respond to questions by peers and professors. A guest faculty member, nominated by you, will conduct an evaluation based upon the criteria listed at the beginning of this syllabus. You should plan to use presentation technology (Power Point, etc.) as appropriate to convey your project and results effectively and efficiently.

### *5- Final Paper*

Your final paper is the most important product from your research. Your paper should take into account comments from peer reviewers, Professor Sandler, and outside faculty reviewers. All papers and presentations will be evaluated according to the “Research Project Criteria” listed above.

### *Participation*

Independent research is difficult. Your peers will serve as a source of support, guidance, and critical feedback throughout the semester. The two structured forms of peer support are the following:

#### *1- Comments on others’ research journals*

The research journals will allow us to stay in touch with one another’s independent work on a weekly basis, building the basis for a community of researchers who are familiar enough with one another’s projects and challenges to be supportive and helpful. In addition, the research journals will give you insight into the challenges of research methods with which you may not be familiar.

You are required to read your classmates’ journals and to post *at least one comment per week*. Your comment can be reflective, it can offer advice, or it can pose a question.

#### *2- Peer Reviews*

You will provide constructive criticism of *one* of your peers’ research projects throughout the semester. As this person’s peer reviewer, you will be responsible for getting to know her project and providing feedback at each step. You will also serve as her peer reviewer during the practice presentations on December 8.

## *Readings*

There are two purposes of our in-class readings. The first is for each of you to develop *reflexive expertise* related to your own disciplinary/methodological specialty within educational research. Trinity's Department of Educational Studies, like the professional field of educational research, is distinctively inter-disciplinary. As a new educational researcher you should be able to reflect upon and discuss your research methods with others. Two exercises are designed to help you critically reflect upon your research methods and to understand and analyze the research methods of others, as well as to characterize and locate yourself in relation to some of the debates over methodology in the field of educational research.

### *1- Facilitation of discussion on methods in your field*

The first type of reading we will do as a class will be those grounded in distinct research methods. You will choose one reading (in consultation with me) from your literature review that uses similar research methods as those you use in your research project. This article or chapter will be distributed to the class, and you will facilitate a discussion about the research methods in this article.

### *2- Response papers*

Much controversy in the field of educational research occurs in relation to policies, funding, and critiques surrounding issues of methodology. The purpose of critical reflection on your own research methods is for you to be able to engage with these important debates in the field. Thus, the second type of reading we will do in class is a series of readings on these debates in the field. These readings concern the politics of method, and range from journal articles to web sites of various education organizations.

Response papers (1-2 pgs, single-spaced) will be required for each of these two weeks on the politics of educational research. You will receive specific instructions for these response papers.

### *Note on methods training:*

To be clear, this is *not* a research methods training course; in-class readings for this course will *not* teach you how to do your independent project. You should already have received sufficient training in the research methods you are using for your project, and should be able to go back to readings from – or to the professor who taught – your research methods course(s) if you need assistance. *If you need further training or assistance in your research methods and are not sure what to do*, please let me know as early as possible. The earlier you seek help with methods, the more successful your project will be.

## **Course Policies**

Attendance: Your attendance in every class is expected. If you must miss class, you must inform me *in advance*. One excused absence will not adversely affect your grade so long as you keep up with your Research Journal and turn in on time anything that is due on the day you miss. More than one absence, excused or unexcused, **will** adversely affect your participation grade in addition to any other adverse affects it may have on your work for the class.

Late assignments: The late assignment penalty for all assignments is a 10% reduction for every 12-hour period beyond the deadline, with exceptions granted only for documented medical & family emergencies.

Academic Honesty: You are expected to engage in academic honesty in all work for this course. If this expectation is unclear to you, ask me for clarification.

References: You may use any major citation style (APA, Chicago, MLA) to cite sources and list references in your papers for this course.

Accommodations: If, due to a disability, you require any accommodations in order to participate fully in this course, please inform me during the first week of the semester.

### **Grades**

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Research Journals:</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Response papers:</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Literature review paper:</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Data and Analysis paper:</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Participation (including facilitation, peer review, and class participation):</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Final presentation:</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b><u>Final paper:</u></b>	<b><u>30%</u></b>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100%</b>

## **Course Schedule**

### **Week 1 – September 8**

Introduction  
Syllabus  
Research Design Lecture

*Discuss Research Proposals*

### **Week 2 – September 15**

(Bring revised/expanded research proposal to class)

Choose *one* student research project from a prior Educational Studies Senior Seminar that is on a topic similar to yours. Read the student's final paper as well as her or his PowerPoint Presentation. Write and bring to class an outline review of this project according to the "Research Project Criteria" above. Be prepared to explain and discuss the student's research project in class.

Prior student research projects can be found at:

<http://www.trincoll.edu/Academics/Study/EducationalStudies/research.htm>

*Workshop Research Proposals*

### **Week 3 – September 22 – Literature Reviews**

(Final Proposals due in class. Also, attach your proposal to your Research Journal on Blackboard.)

*Read introduction and lit review within each of the following articles/chapters:*

Michael Olneck (2003). Immigrants and education in the United States. In James Banks (Ed.) *Handbook of research on multicultural education*. Jossey Bass, p. 381-403.

Stacey J. Lee (1994). Behind the Model-Minority Stereotype: Voices of High- and Low-Achieving Asian American Students. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 25(4), p. 413-429.

Alejandro Portes and Dag Macleod (1996). "Educational Progress of Children of Immigrants: The Roles of Class, Ethnicity, and School Context," *Sociology of Education*, 69(4). p. 255-75.

*Literature Search Session with Reference Librarian Katy Hart*

**Week 4 – September 29 – Ethics and Educational Research**

(IRB due, if applicable)

(Annotated Bibliography Due)

Lois Weis and Michelle Fine (2000). “Qualitative Research, Representations, and Social Responsibilities,” and “Ethics Committees: On the Dangers of ‘Protection’,” in *Speed Bumps: A Student-Friendly Guide to Qualitative Research*. New York: Teachers College Press, p. 33-66 and 80-83.

**Week 5 – October 6 - Trinity Days – No Class**

*It's Data Collection Month! Research journals should be hopping as you work on your projects this week.*

**Week 6 – October 13 - Forms of Evidence**

(Literature Review Due)

In-class exercise on data and evidence using student research proposals

*Data search and analysis workshop with Rachael Barlow, Social Science Data Coordinator*

**Week 7 – October 20 – Quantitative Approaches**

(Facilitated by quantitative student researchers)

*Quantitative Reading(s) – TBD (from student literature reviews)*

**Week 8 – October 27 – Qualitative Approaches**

(Facilitated by qualitative student researchers)

*Qualitative Reading(s) – TBD (from student literature reviews)*

**Week 9 – November 3 – Historical Approaches**

(Facilitated by historical student researchers)

*Historical Reading(s) – TBD (from student literature reviews)*

**Week 10 – November 10 – Critical-Theoretical Approaches**

(Nominations of external faculty/administrator reviewers due on Blackboard)  
(Facilitated by Professor Sandler)

*Critical/Theoretical Reading – TBD*

**Week 11 – November 17 - Politics of Educational Research**

(Response paper due on Blackboard by Sunday at noon)

Michael J Feuer, Lisa Towne, and Richard J Shavelson  
“Scientific Culture and Educational Research,” p. 4-14.

James W. Pellegrino and Susan R. Goldman. “Comment: Be Careful What You Wish For—You May Get It: Educational Research in the Spotlight,” p. 15-17.

David C. Berliner. “Comment: Educational Research: The Hardest Science of All,” p. 18-20.

Frederick Erickson and Kris Gutierrez. “Comment: Culture, Rigor, and Science in Educational Research,” p. 21-24.

Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre. “Comment: ‘Science’ Rejects Postmodernism,” p. 25-27.

Michael J. Feuer, Lisa Towne, and Richard J. Shavelson. “Reply to Commentators on ‘Scientific Culture and Educational Research’”, p. 28-29.

**Week 12 – November 24**

(Response paper due on Blackboard by Sunday at noon)

(Data and Analysis Papers due in class and as attachment to your Research Journal)

Web sites, blogs, and journalistic columns on the politics of educational research since 2002. (TBD)

**Week 13 – December 1**

(Peer commentary on Data and Analysis Papers due on Blackboard before class)

Practice Presentations and Peer Reviews

**Week 14 – December 8 (or other day this week, to be determined by instructor)**

*Final Public Presentations*

**December 16, 12 P.M.  
Final Research Papers Due in Paper and Electronic Form**