

EDL 654: Foundations of Educational Research in Higher Education

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Monday, 4:00-6:40p
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*"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose."
Zora Neale Hurston*

*"If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?"
Albert Einstein*

Course Description

This course is designed to provide an introduction to the research process in higher education. The course will be framed by a discussion of how one's epistemological, axiological, metaphysical, and ethical assumptions inform the way research is done and, as a result, how one co-constructs the knowledge used to inform educational practice. In addition, the course will explore the politics of research as it relates to student affairs practice in higher education as well as the synergistic ways in which research and practice mutually inform each other. The course is designed as a seminar, which means the course will be highly reliant on active participation from all class participants, both students and instructor alike.

Learning Outcomes

By actively participating in this course, you will:

- Gain an understanding of postpositivist, constructivist, and transformative paradigms in educational research, as well as how one can use paradigms in conjunction with one another;
- Understand the differences between qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research;
- Understand the difference between research and evaluation;
- Increase your capacity to read, interpret, and critique research articles;
- Understand how research and practice mutually inform each other in the field of student affairs; and
- Explore the politics of inquiry, including how politics in the fields of student affairs and higher education mediate the creation, interpretation(s), and (non-)use of research to ground educational practice.

About Your Instructor

Because I ask you to bring yourself into this class, I feel like it is only fair I do the same. I am a current Doctoral Candidate in the SAHE program. I am a qualitative researcher, and have a critical paradigmatic orientation, which means I am interested in interrogating the ways power, privilege, and oppression are present among individuals, in institutions, and throughout cultures. In terms of my style of education, I seek to recognize and honor the knowledge each person brings into our learning community. I seek to be collaborative in my approach and truly believe we all have a responsibility in making the most of our time together. I work hard alongside students who take classes with me and attempt to offer new perspectives on what is being discussed. I also believe one's best thinking, research, and writing do not happen in isolation,

which means that I place a heavy emphasis on providing ample feedback in multiple formats (e.g., verbal, written) and make myself available for consultation and/or to workshop ideas.

Required Text

Mertens, D. M. (2010). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

****all other course readings will be available on our Niihka site****

Course Expectations

Participation (100 possible points; 10% of overall grade): This course is structured to be largely discussion based. Due to this, we all—instructor and students—share in the responsibility of engaging with assigned texts as well as each other. The learning community we create as a class is greatly enhanced by everyone's active participation. This means you are expected to come to class ready to engage with your peers as well as the texts, assignments, myself, and any guest presenters we may invite to join our group. You are not required, nor encouraged, to make final pronouncements about the readings and discussions we have, but rather to use class as a forum for asking questions and developing deeper understandings of the issues raised throughout our shared time. Dissent within discussion is a part of the learning process—and it is especially important in a civil society for us to develop the skills necessary to speak across our differences in ways that foster understanding, justice, and dignity. You will be expected to engage with the course materials and with each other in a respectful and intellectually serious manner. However, there is no expectation that we will all agree with each other perfectly by the end of the day, or for that matter, at the end of the semester. Please note that the quality of your contributions is much more important than the quantity of your words. Listening attentively and responding thoughtfully to your peers is an important part of your contribution to the class.

Appropriate Challenge: We all come to this class with varying levels of personal experience, awareness, and investment in the topics that will be covered this semester. Because of this, the course may at times feel basic, while at other times, it may feel highly advanced. For the times when you may feel unchallenged with the required readings and discussions, I encourage you to explore additional readings, which will be provided on our Niihka site for this course. I also encourage you to engage your peers in critical conversation and to ask 'big questions' that will stimulate further thought.

For the times when you may feel like the reading and conversations may be overwhelming, I encourage you to stick with it. Thinking about and doing research is tough stuff for all of us, regardless of our own perceived 'level of expertise.' However, the point is not to give up. Instead, I encourage you to be in communication with your peers and me about what you do not understand. Encourage people—including me as an instructor—to slow down, explain themselves, and break down the complexity of our conversation. Rather than being an impediment to learning, this will help everyone. Doing so will help you gain a footing about the ideas and concepts we are discussing. It will also require others to think deeper in order to clearly articulate the ideas and concepts they may have previously perceived to be unassailable.

You are also highly encouraged to speak with me if the course seems too advanced and/or not advanced enough for you. We can then make a plan for how you can get what you need from the class, keeping in mind the learning objectives for the course. If you are thinking of doing this, I strongly suggest you be proactive and do not wait too long. It is far easier for you and me to work alongside each other to create a positive learning experience when you talk with me early and are willing to be solutions-oriented.

Attendance: Because this class relies heavily on everyone's active participation in discussion, you are expected to attend all class sessions. However, I also understand certain circumstances may arise that preclude you from being in class. It is your responsibility to discuss any absences with me well ahead of time. In the case of an emergency, I ask that you talk about your absence as early as possible. Valid reasons for missing class include family emergencies, health emergencies, and religious observances, and excused absences will be negotiated on an individual basis. However, your grade will be dropped a full letter grade if you have two unexcused absences. If you have a third unexcused absence, your grade will be dropped another half letter grade. If you have more than three unexcused absences, you will be dropped from the course.

Late Assignments: This syllabus acts as a contract for our class and our learning community. Due to this, you are expected to follow all deadlines and turn in assignments on time. If, for some reason, you are unable to do this, you must meet with me to discuss why you did not turn in the assignment prior to the original deadline. Because every assignment is an important aspect of your learning in this class, we will discuss when you will turn in the assignment as well as decide upon an acceptable consequence for your turning it in late. If you neglect to meet with me to discuss your assignment being late and what you feel an acceptable consequence would be, your overall grade for the assignment will be reduced by a full letter grade for each day it is late. Please note that turning in late assignments will have a negative impact on not only your learning, but also our learning community and your overall grade for the course.

Use of Technology in the Classroom: Similar to when you are working with others on campus, it is painfully obvious to me as an instructor when someone is using their cell phone, laptop, tablet, or other technological gizmo for purposes unrelated to class. Not only does this negatively impact you and your learning, but it also has a negative impact on others in your learning community, who become distracted by what you are doing. As such, I encourage you to make wise choices about your (non-)use of technology during class. If it will be a distraction, and you know this, I encourage you to turn these devices off or not bring them to the classroom. However, if using these devices enhances your learning and the learning of others around you, then have at it. If I or others become concerned about what we perceive to be your misuse of technology in the classroom, I will have a conversation with you. If this becomes an ongoing event, you will be asked to leave class, with your leaving counting as an unexcused absence.

Respect for Diversity: Respect for diversity and the creation of inclusive learning environment is an important aspect of not only the Student Affairs in Higher Education program, but also Miami University. I take the commitment to creating inclusive and safer spaces seriously, and feel the Miami University Diversity Statement, which can be found at <http://miamioh.edu/about->

[miami/leadership/president/diversity-statement/](#) and is reprinted below in full, is a concise summation of how I envision our learning community operating. The statement reads as follows:

Miami University is a community dedicated to intellectual engagement. Our campuses consist of students, faculty, and staff from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. By living, working, studying, and teaching, we bring our unique viewpoints and life experiences together for the benefit of all. This inclusive learning environment, based upon an atmosphere of mutual respect and positive engagement, invites all campus citizens to explore how they think about knowledge, about themselves, and about how they see themselves in relation to others. Our intellectual and social development and daily educational interactions, whether co-curricular or classroom related, are greatly enriched by our acceptance of one another as members of the Miami University community. Through valuing our own diversity and the diversity of others, we seek to learn from one another, foster a sense of shared experience, and commit to making the University the intellectual home of us all.

We recognize that we must uphold and abide by University policies and procedures protecting individual rights and guiding democratic engagement. Any actions disregarding these policies and procedures, particularly those resulting in discrimination, harassment, or bigoted acts, will be challenged swiftly and collectively.

All who work, live, study, and teach in the Miami community must be committed to these principles of mutual respect and positive engagement, which are integral parts of Miami's focus, goals, and mission.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: In conjunction with creating an inclusive and safer learning community, creating an accessible classroom is important to me. There are services on campus that can assist in providing accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability and feel that you may need a reasonable accommodation to fulfill the essential functions of the course that are listed in this syllabus, please contact the appropriate office for documentation. Students with physical, medical and/or psychiatric disabilities are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Resources at 529-1541 (V/TTY), and students with AD(H)D and/or specific learning disabilities may contact the Office for Learning Disability Services located in the Rinella Learning Center at 529-8741. I treat all information of this nature confidentially.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: Academic integrity is central to our learning community. As such, it is an expectation that you will display the utmost integrity for your work as a learner and scholar throughout the semester. This includes, but is not limited to, not plagiarizing, or attempting to pass off someone else's work as your own original thinking. Miami University has a website discussing academic misconduct and plagiarism for graduate students, which you are strongly encouraged to review: <https://www.muohio.edu/integrity/graduate-students/index.html>

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic misconduct and plagiarism. Plagiarism, be it intentional or unintentional, carries consequences that it is best you try to avoid (e.g., failing an assignment, failing the course, and/or being referred on for disciplinary action by

the University). If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please read Part I, Section 5 of the Graduate Student Handbook (http://miamioh.edu/documents/graduate-studies/Graduate_Handbook.pdf). I am also available for consultation if you are unsure of how to cite or attribute credit in your written work and/or oral presentation(s).

Course Assignments

My Relationship to Research I (50 possible points; 5% of overall grade): Although you may not think of it often, chances are that you have a relationship to research. For example, even though you may not consider yourself a researcher, your relationship to research could be couched in how you use (or do not use) research as a way to guide your practice as a student affairs educator. Here, it is clear there is still a relationship to research, even if that relationship is about distancing oneself from using research to inform one's practice. Additionally, you may associate with some aspects of educational research (e.g., valuing quantitative research), but not others (e.g., valuing qualitative research).

For this assignment, you will spend some time thinking and writing about your personal relationship to educational research. You can use the previous week's reading as you begin to frame your narrative, but you should be sure to place emphasis on your own voice and your own experiences. To help focus your narrative, you should spend time answering the following questions:

- What is your relationship to educational research?
- What are examples from your practice as a student affairs educator that you can draw upon to articulate further your relationship to educational research?
- What is your current understanding of issues related to educational research?
- What are you looking to gain from this course? Please note that in addressing this question, you should go deeper than saying, "I hope to learn more about issues related to educational research." Although this is an overall learning outcome for this course, you should write about what drew you to the course. What about research do you want to learn more about? Are there gaps in your knowledge that you would like to address? Are there certain things or issues on which you are hoping to gain more insight or different perspectives? Once again, you should place yourself as central to the learning experience and think about what you are hoping to gain as a result of being in this course.

This is a low stakes assignment, meaning that if you complete it and demonstrate thought and reflection, you will receive full credit. This assignment is both a way for me to get to know you better, but also a way for you to begin reflecting on how you are entering the learning environment. You should be thoughtful and think about who *you* are, as well as how who you are influences *your* learning. This is a personal reflection, so you should write this using first person language.

This assignment should be 2-3 pages, should be consistent with APA format, and is due to me via email by the start of class on **February 3**.

EDL 654 Google Doc Contributions (100 possible points; 10% of overall grade): Deep learning takes time and reflection. Additionally, the best learning is often done in community with others rather than in isolation. The topics, readings, and conversations we will be engaging

throughout the semester can be complex, which means it is important to be in conversation with each other about how we are making meaning of the texts we are reading and discussing. Due to this, you will be asked to contribute regularly to a shared Google Doc in which you will be asked to do the following:

- Keep track of any research-related vocabulary words that are new to you;
- Write questions that come to mind while doing the course readings (both questions you want to ask others as well as questions you have about the readings);
- Reactions you have to the readings and/or the questions your peers have posted; and
- Additional resources you know and/or have found based on the readings and course discussions.

You should be contributing regularly to our Google Doc. This does not mean you need to contribute every day, nor does it mean you can make all your contributions during the last week of class either. I trust you all can make good decisions about managing your own contributions to the Google Doc, but if this becomes a concern, we may revisit the issue at some point during the semester. (Note: if you would like more structure for this assignment, such as a set number of contributions, length of contributions, or style for contributions, we can discuss and decide this together as a learning community).

Mini Research Project (150 possible points; 15% of overall grade): A major learning outcome of this course is for you to make connections between how research and practice influence each other. For this assignment, you will perform a mini research project focused on student affairs educators. You will select a research paradigm (e.g., postpositivist, constructivist, or transformative) and a corresponding type of research (e.g., qualitative or quantitative). You will then construct either a short survey or a semi-structured set of interview questions that you will use to collect data from current full-time student affairs educators who do not work in the same functional area as you (we will spend time workshopping survey questions and/or interview protocols during a class period). You will then analyze your data and present it in a 20-minute presentation, both of which should be consistent with your chosen paradigm. For example, it would not make sense to have a chart of what percent of respondents think one way if you are using a constructivist paradigm.

If you choose to execute a quantitative mini research project, you should aim to collect data from 15 respondents. If you choose to execute a qualitative mini research project, you should aim to collect data from 3 participants, with a target interview length of 30 minutes. You will also be able to work in pairs for this assignment if you would like to do so. Presentations will take place during class on **May 5**.

Semester Long Inquiry Project (500 possible points; 50% of overall grade): Developing a research question takes a lot of time, reading, and collaboration with others. However, coming up with a good research question is the foundation of any good research study. A good question should convey the type of research (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods), hint at the research paradigm in which the question is rooted, and have a clear and concise focus. Unfortunately, the art of developing a good research question is often lost in the rush to learn and apply the findings from research studies.

In an effort to understand and begin to hone this overlooked skill, you will spend the semester developing your own research question(s). You will start by choosing a broad area about which you would like to do research (e.g., second year students, living/learning communities, faculty-student interactions). This topic can be related to your assistantship or job, practicum experience, or just something about which you want to learn more. You will decide on this broad area for your research in consultation with me, and should notify me of your research topic via email before class on **February 10**.

After I have approved your broad research topic, you will write a thorough annotated bibliography that will be split into three sections. The first section will consist of 4-5 articles that you find about your topic from a postpositive research paradigm (due via email by the start of class on **March 3**), the second will consist of 4-5 articles you find about your topic from a constructivist research paradigm (due via email by the start of class on **March 17**), and the third will consist of 4-5 articles you find about your topic from a transformative research paradigm (due via email by 4:00p EST on **April 7**). The articles you find should be both scholarly (e.g., from educational research journals) and empirical (e.g., articles that are rooted in research rather than ones that are conceptual, theoretical, or opinion-based in nature). We will spend time together in class discussing how to go about looking for these articles, as well as developing a list of possible educational research journals where you may find some articles.

After developing your three sections of your bibliography, you will need to write a 5-6 page executive summary. This will be due to me via email by 5:00p on **May 12** and should include the following:

- A brief introduction to your topic;
- A literature review from the annotated bibliography you have developed throughout the semester;
- Your research question(s). These should be based on what you have identified as gaps in the literature you have read for your annotated bibliography and about which you discuss in your literature review;
- The research paradigm you propose should be used with the research question(s) you developed, along with a brief rationale for why you chose this particular paradigm; and
- A references section (this will not be counted in your final page count).

Your executive summary and all sections of your annotated bibliography should be double spaced, use Times New Roman size 12 font, have one inch margins, and follow APA guidelines.

My Relationship to Research II (100 possible points; 10% of overall grade): Using the first self-reflection you wrote at the beginning of the course, everyone's contributions to the shared Google Doc, what you learned from your Mini Research Project, and all our conversations with guests, you will write a final self-reflection about your relationship to research. This should *not* be a reiteration of your earlier writings, but should be an *extension of your thought*. How has your thinking changed? What articles, concepts, conversations, or perspectives have impacted you most throughout the semester and why? What does your new perspectives on research mean for you as you continue developing as an educator? How has your practice changed as a result of what you've learned in this course? What are questions you still have about research? All of these questions are fair game for this final self-reflective paper. You should also make sure to

integrate readings and course discussions into your essay, making sure to cite them appropriately and include a references section.

This essay should be 3-4 pages, use Times New Roman font, and have one-inch margins, proper citations, and a references page. The paper is due by 5:00p on **May 12** and should be emailed to me directly.

Grading Point Breakdown

My Relationship to Research I (Due on February 3)	50 points
Google Doc Contributions (Due dates as listed below in Course Schedule)	100 points
Semester Long Inquiry Project	500 points
Annotated Bibliography: Postpositivist articles (100 points; due on March 3)	
Annotated Bibliography: Constructivist articles (100 points; due on March 17)	
Annotated Bibliography: Transformative articles (100 points; due on April 7)	
Executive Summary (200 points; due on May 12)	
Mini Research Project (Presentations on May 5)	150 points
My Relationship to Research II (Due on May 12)	100 points
Course Participation	100 points

Grading Scale

1000 points: A+	870-899 points: B+	770-799 points: C+	670-699 points: D+
940-999 points: A	840-869 points: B	740-769 points: C	640-669 points: D
900-939 points: A-	800-839 points: B-	700-739 points: C-	600-639 points: D-

Course Schedule

January 27

Topics: Course overview and expectations; introduction to research
Reading: Mertens – Chapter 1: An Introduction to Research

Unit I: Research Paradigms

February 3

Topic: Postpositivist paradigm; Skype with Dr. Michael Woodford
Readings: Review postpositivism section of Mertens' Chapter 1 (pp. 10-16)
Research Exemplar #1: Garvey & Rankin – The Influence of Campus Experiences on the Level of Outness among Trans-Spectrum and Queer-Spectrum Students
Research Exemplar #2: Bowman – Disequilibrium and Resolution
Due: My Relationship to Research I

February 10

Topic: Constructivist paradigm; Skype with Rachel Wagner
Readings: Review constructivism section of Mertens' Chapter 1 (pp. 16-20)
Paradigmatic Exemplar: Stewart – Researcher as Instrument
Research Exemplar #1: Tillapaugh – Breaking Down the "Walls of the Façade"
Research Exemplar #2: Strayhorn – Singing in a Foreign Land
Research Exemplar #3: Stewart – Perceptions of Multiple Identities Among Black College Students (note: this reading is optional)
Due: Topic for Semester Long Inquiry Project

February 17

Topic: Transformative paradigm; Visit with Dr. Stephen Quaye
Readings: Review transformative section of Mertens' Chapter 1 (pp. 21-35)
Paradigmatic Exemplar: Smith – Research through Imperial Eyes & Colonizing Knowledges
Paradigmatic Exemplar: Hill Collins – Black Feminist Epistemology (note: this reading is optional)
Research Exemplar #1: Patton & Catching – "Teaching While Black"
Research Exemplar #2: Hutcheon & Wolbring – Voices of "Disabled" Post Secondary Students

February 24

Topic: Merging paradigms; Visit with Michael Denton
Readings: Review merging paradigms section of Mertens' Chapter 1 (pp. 43-44)
Paradigmatic Exemplar: Kincheloe – Describing the Bricolage
Paradigmatic Exemplar: Abes – Theoretical Borderlands (note: this reading is optional)
Research Exemplar #1: Tillapaugh & Nicolazzo – "It's Kind of Apples and Oranges"
Research Exemplar #2: Abes & Kasch – Using Queer Theory to Explore Lesbian College Students' Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Unit II: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Concerns

March 3

Topic: Qualitative research; workshopping day
Readings: Mertens – Chapter 8: Qualitative Methods
Mertens – Chapter 12: Data Collection (pp. 351-355; 366-378)
Mertens – Chapter 13: Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Use (pp. 423-431)
Due: Annotated Bibliography: Postpositivist articles

March 10

Topic: Quantitative research; workshopping day
Readings: Mertens – Chapter 6: Survey Methods
Mertens – Chapter 12: Data Collection (review pp. 351-355; read 355-366)
Mertens – Chapter 13: Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Use (pp. 404-423)

March 17

Topic: Mixed methods research
Readings: Mertens – Chapter 10: Mixed Methods Research
Paradigmatic Exemplar: Griffin & Museus – Application of Mixed-Methods Approaches to Higher Education and Intersectional Analyses (note: this reading is optional)
Research Exemplar #1: Cabrera – Using a Sequential Exploratory Mixed-Method Design to Examine Racial Hyperprivilege in Higher Education
Research Exemplar #2: Museus – An Introductory Mixed-Methods Intersectionality Analysis of College Access and Equity
Due: Annotated Bibliography: Constructivist articles

Spring Break – March 24-30

No class March 31 – ACPA Annual Convention

Unit III: Evaluation, Ethics, and Politics

April 7*

Topic: Evaluation and assessment
Readings: Mertens – Chapter 2: Evaluation
Wise & Barham – Moving Beyond Surveys
Newhart – When is a Survey More than a Survey?
Bentrim, Sousa-Peoples, Kachellek, & Powers – Assessing Learning Outcomes: Student Employees in Student Affairs
Due: Annotated Bibliography: Transformative articles

April 14

Topic: Research ethics
Readings: Gunaratnam – A 'Traacherous Bind': Working With and Against Racial Categories
Fine, Weis, Weseen & Wong – For Whom?
Magolda and Weems – Doing Harm

April 21

Topic: Writing literature reviews
Readings: Mertens – Chapter 3: Literature Review and Focusing the Research
Marine – The How's (And Why's) of Composing a Literature Review in Higher Education

April 28

Topics: Politics of research; using research in student affairs practice; practitioner panel
Panel guests: Robyn Bowers (Otterbein), Demere Woolway (Johns Hopkins), Alandis Johnson (Miami), and Buffy Stoll Turton (Miami)
Readings: Davis – Have It Your Way U
Kezar – Higher Education Research at the Millennium
Pasque, Carducci, Kuntz, & Gildersleeve – Critical Concerns for Qualitative Inquiry in Higher Education & Opportunities for Resisting Methodological Conservatism: A Call to Action (note: these readings are optional)

May 5

Topic: Final presentations; concluding thoughts
Due: Mini Research Project Presentations

Due May 12

Semester Long Inquiry Project Executive Summary
My Relationship to Research II

****email to me by 5:00p on May 12****