EPE 663: FIELD STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS *

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION:
Field research in an educational setting. Questions of theory, method, and application examined. Students plan and implement a study under faculty supervision. Prerequisite: consent of the instructor.

COURSE OVERVIEW AND GENERAL EXPECTATIONS:
This course provides an introduction to the use of qualitative methods in educational research. It includes consideration of: the historical and epistemological underpinnings of qualitative/naturalistic inquiry; the types of research questions to which qualitative methods are most effectively applied; major forms of naturalistic inquiry, their strengths and limitations; various forms of qualitative data; and common methods of data collection and analysis.

In addition, the course involves the step-by-step conducting of a qualitative research project by each class participant, and the development of these projects constitutes an essential part of the overall course. As a result, the course includes major foci on defining a defensible research project; selecting the research setting; gaining access to that setting; selecting study participants; engaging in observations, interviews, and document analyses; recording, managing, and analyzing data; and writing the research report. Each of these steps will be examined in the required and recommended readings and in the class discussions. We will also discuss other issues of import to the research process, such as researcher subjectivity, reflexivity, and ethics as well as professional, institutional, and legal guidelines, procedures, and requirements.

By the end of the semester, you will be expected to be conversant with the history, major characteristics, forms, techniques, methods, appropriate applications, strengths, and limitations of qualitative research as a means for expanding our understanding of and knowledge about education. You should also be able to discuss in an informed fashion the basic steps involved in conducting high quality qualitative inquiry and the issues of import to be considered within each step of that process. Finally, you will be expected to demonstrate that you can, in fact, conduct qualitative research.

MAJOR COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
The substantive course requirements are of two types. First are those dealing directly with the in-class portion of the course, including completion of the course-related reading prior to class time, leading of selected class discussions, and participation in all class discussions. This is a methods course and is based on the assumption that the best way to learn how to do research is to do research. Thus, while course readings and class discussion provide direction and guidance, the field exercises and final research report offer an actual, experiential introduction to the world of qualitative inquiry. These include 6 developmental, field-based exercises and a final report of research conducted during the semester.

All class activities will be enhanced if class participants are willing to learn from and with one another by sharing the ups and downs, the uncertainties, dilemmas and conundrums, and the successes -and failures- of our field experiences.

REQUIRED COURSE READING:

One text and a variety of article-length readings are required for the course. All may vary semester-to-semester. Texts required recently include:

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:

FIELD-BASED ASSIGNMENTS:

Unless otherwise indicated in class, all out-of-class assignments should be typed and include your name, assignment name, and work due date (and submission date, if different). Format, presentation, and citations of material should follow APA style.

I. Field-based Exercises:

Six field-based exercises are required throughout the course of the semester as noted in the Course Outline above. It is essential that each of these is completed and submitted on time because we will use them in our class discussions. It is also essential that these Exercises be completed in a timely fashion because they lead developmentally toward the final research project and report. These exercises do not have to be composed in polished prose, but they must be accurate, complete, and --as noted-- reflective. The intent is to provide you with practice gathering, recording, organizing, and presenting field data. To the extent possible, these exercises should be typed as well.

#1: Visual Observation:
#2. Speech Observation:
#3. Research Site Description and Mini Proposal:
#4. Observation Field Notes:
#5. Interview Text and Process Analysis:
#6. Content Analysis: Codes, Emerging Patterns/Themes, and Initial Assertions

II. Field Research Project:

The major and focal experiential requirement for this course is the conduct and write-up of a qualitative research project. Serious qualitative inquiry takes extended field research, and the constraints of the semester preclude that kind of commitment. Nonetheless, much can be learned from an initial exposure to and practice with the various methods and techniques of qualitative inquiry. The preliminary field exercises and final project for this course combine to provide that initial experience and with it, a taste and a sense of what qualitative research can be.

The final project report is a substantive presentation of your field research project. As such, it should include four major parts: 1). an introduction in which you describe the research problem/issue and guiding research questions; 2). an overview of the site(s)/setting(s) and people involved in the research project; 3). an overview of the research procedures you employed; 4). both description and interpretation of the major findings of your research, including patterns and themes in your data and your interpretative assertions about them; and 5). a summary and methodological reflections in which you describe your substantive conclusions, discuss implications of your analysis, and reflect upon various methodological issues you faced in the field and what you may have learned from them.

CLASS-RELATED ASSIGNMENTS:

Regular Class Sessions:

As suggested above, students are expected to attend class regularly and to have read and thought about all assigned readings for each class session before the class meets. This assignment provides the basis for useful and meaningful class discussions. In addition, there may well be some small group work and written tasks undertaken during regular class sessions, and students are required to participate in and contribute substantively to these, as well.

Discussion Leadership and Summary:

Every student is required to take the lead in the discussion of topic and readings for at last one class session. This assignment includes finding at least one other source reading on the topic and posting a web address / APA citation and an analytic synopsis of it on the web site before the class session. Assignment of class sessions will be done during the first or second class period. In addition, each student is required to post notes from at least one class session on the course web site. This posting is due no later than 48 hours after the end of the class session.
COURSE GRADING CRITERIA AND PRACTICES

Student performance in this course will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

* Command of the concepts and information covered in class and assigned readings;
* Maturity, depth, and sophistication of thought, including the abilities to analyze, synthesize, extrapolate from, and apply course content;
* Clarity and completeness of expression, including precision and accuracy of language usage and correctness of grammar, punctuation, and spelling in written work; and
* Willingness to participate in --as well as the quality and thoughtfulness of contributions to-- class discussions.

FINAL COURSE GRADE

Assessment of course performance will be based upon the following:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 Field Exercises</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Discussion leadership</td>
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<td>Session Analytic Synopsis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Report</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<td>(written = 50%; oral = 5%)</td>
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Determination of the final course grade will be made according to The UK Graduate School grading protocol:

A (90 -- 100) = High Achievement
B (80 -- 89) = Satisfactory Achievement
C (70 -- 79) = Minimum Passing Performance
E ( < 70) = Failure

* This outline is for informational purposes ONLY. It describes the general parameters of the course as it is taught by Susan J. Scollay, Ph.D. See the current instructor for more specific details and/or variations from what is offered here.