CI 601: Foundations of Educational Inquiry
Fall 2016, School of Education, Iowa State University

Teacher: Isaac Gottesman       Thursday: 5:30-8:30
Teacher: Doug Wieczorek       Lagomarcino 2660
Office Hours: By Appointment

About the Course

CI 601 is a core course for PhD students in the School of Education that is intended to introduce first-year students to the landscape of scholarship in the field of education and initiate a process of reflexive inquiry so that students may engage in methodologically rigorous, substantively rich, and socially meaningfully work in the field.

The course is premised on the idea that fundamental to reflecting on educational inquiry is reflecting on the nature of knowing the social world. The course is thus primarily designed as an introduction to the philosophical foundations of educational inquiry and inquiry in the social sciences and humanities more broadly. What does it mean to know, and what is the relationship between the knower and the known? How can we inquire into our questions and support our claims about the world in which we live? These are epistemological questions—questions about how we justify knowledge—and ontological questions—questions about how we understand the social world. Furthermore, our answers to these questions are shaped by and grounded in complex social contexts, intricate value systems and individual and collective experiences.

The course will introduce you to these philosophical conversations about epistemology and ontology in social inquiry and help you begin to develop a rich understanding of methodological conversations in the field of education. In particular, we will pay attention to comparing and contrasting three methodological traditions dominant in the human sciences: Measurement (often labeled quantitative), Interpretive (often labeled qualitative), and Conceptual (typically associated with the humanities). The course will also introduce you to tools that will help you make meaning of these methodological discussions. The narrative below explains in detail how this course will pursue these objectives.

Significantly, the course does not advocate a single approach to educational inquiry—it is grounded in methodological pluralism. Our perspective is that scholars in the field of education should be familiar with the range of inquiry in the field, including the philosophical foundations of the traditions they see as best suited to answer their particular inquiry questions. The better we understand our own and other’s methodological choices, and the assumptions that underpin them, the better we can engage each other in substantive dialogue about educational research, its conclusions, and its uses. This is one reason why this class is co-taught by scholars from two different methodological traditions—so you can see that these debates are real, that different scholars have different (reasoned) approaches to research, and that there is a conversation to enter into.

Course Narrative

The course is divided into two parts. In Part I (the first three weeks), we will present a broad introduction to the institutional and scholarly landscape of education as an academic field of study. In Part II (the remainder of the semester), we will focus on the philosophical foundations of educational inquiry.

Part I: Introduction to the Field
Prior to our first meeting we will ask you to complete two assignments, both of which will be described in detail over email one-week prior to our first class. In addition to going over the syllabus, we will spend class time with each of these assignments. First, you will look at the mission, organizational structure, and programs offered, including your own area of study (e.g. special education, higher education, science education, educational leadership) at three different schools of education (we will give you a list of options) in addition to here at Iowa State. The intent is to get you thinking about the institutional landscape of the field. Second, you will read a now classic essay by Lee Shulman about what it means to engage in disciplined inquiry as part of a community of scholars. Shulman, retired from Stanford University and a past-president of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the primary professional organization for educational researchers, is an educational psychologist.

For our second meeting we will read David Labaree’s *The Trouble with Ed Schools*, which offers a historical and sociological, and often pointed, look at the state of the field, and education schools in particular. Labaree is a historian of education and Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Stanford.

During this week we will also introduce 7 Big Questions that we will use throughout the course as a tool to unpack epistemological and ontological assumptions in educational inquiry. These questions were initially designed by the late Ken Sirotnik, a quantitative methodologist and policy scholar, and Deborah Kerzman, a philosopher of education, for a course in educational inquiry (required of all Ph.D. students in the College of Education) that they co-taught at the University of Washington, Seattle from 1992-2004. In many respects, this course is grounded in that course.

In our third meeting we will focus attention on academic writing. For this week we will read two books. The first book, *A Rulebook for Arguments* by Anthony Weston (now in its 4th edition), will help us think about argument construction. The second book, *How We Write* by Hilton Obenzinger, a product of Obenzinger’s extensive conversations with leading scholars in a range of fields, will help us think about the experience of academic writing. Weston is a Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Studies at Elon University. Obenzinger is an award winning novelist, poet, and essayist who is also a Lecturer in the Program in American Studies and Department of English at Stanford.

**Part II: Philosophical Foundations of Educational Inquiry**

After orienting ourselves to the field and the practice of academic reading and writing, we turn our attention to the more specific question of educational inquiry: what is it and what does it mean to engage in it? This section of the course consists of six parts.

**First,** we will spend three weeks reading, side-by-side, work in three methodological traditions drawn upon in educational research (and the human sciences more broadly): measurement (empirical work, often labeled quantitative and typically focused on predictive causal/correlational explanation), interpretive (empirical work, often labeled qualitative and typically focused on understanding/meaning), and conceptual (non-empirical work, often associated with the ‘humanities’). There are many ways of grouping methodological approaches (the history of the human sciences is complicated!), and as you continue to do work in the field we hope that you will push and pull these groupings, which are certainly contestable. However, we believe that this grouping is a useful way of entering into discussions about educational inquiry. In order to focus our reading in these traditions, we will read scholarship that uses experimental design and large-scale data analysis (measurement), ethnography and qualitative case studies (interpretive), and political theory and social theory (conceptual). Reading articles side-by-side allows for comparing and contrasting the different methodological approaches. What types of questions do these methodological traditions (in their contemporary iteration) seek to answer? What assumptions do
these traditions, and thus researchers who participate in them, hold about how we can and do know the
social world? The lines between traditions is complicated and rarely clean, but looking at exemplary
research in each tradition will allow us to see that there are important differences in the types of questions
these traditions inquire into and the ways that these traditions think about objectivity, subjectivity,
validity, truth, evidence, and the relationship between the knower and the known—all core
methodological issues.

For experimental design and large-scale data analysis, we will read articles by:
   (1) ED: Valerie Jones Taylor, Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Spellman
       College and Gregory M. Walton, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at
       Stanford University.
   (2) LSDA: Thurston Domina, Associate Professor in the School of Education at University of
       North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

For ethnography and qualitative case studies, we will read articles by:
   (1) E: Ariana Manguel Figueroa, Assistant Professor in the Graduate School of Education at
       Rutgers University.
   (2) QCS: Irene Yoon, Assistant Professor in the College of Education at the University of Utah.

For political theory and social theory, we will read articles by:
   (1) PT: Meira Levinson, Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University.
   (2) ST: Zeus Leonardo, Professor in the Graduate School of Education at University of
       California, Berkeley.

Second, we will read pieces about experimental design and large scale data analysis, ethnography and
qualitative case studies, and political theory and social theory that will help us dig deeper into the
assumptions underpinning these methods and their respective methodological traditions.

For experimental design, we will read a piece by:
   (1) Thomas Cook, Professor in the Department of Sociology at Northwestern University, and
       Vandna Sinha, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at McGill University (Canada).

For large-scale data sets, we will read a piece by:
   (1) Emma Smith, Professor of Education at the University of Leicester (UK)

For ethnography and qualitative case studies, we will read a piece by:
   (1) Frederick Erickson, Emeritus Professor in the Graduate School of Education at UCLA.

For political theory, we will read a piece by:
   (1) John Dryzek, Professor at the Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance at
       the University of Canberra (Australia), Bonnie Honig, Professor in the Department of Modern
       Culture and Media and the Department of Political Science at Brown University, and Anne
       Phillips, Professor in the Department of Government at the London School of Economics and
       Political Science (UK).

For social theory we will read a piece by:
   (1) Charles Lemert, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Wesleyan University.

Third, we will read work in the philosophy of social science/educational inquiry about epistemology. The
intent of this section is to introduce you to central debates in educational research about epistemology,
especially about the relationship between the knower, the known, and a ‘community of scholars’ (an idea
introduced to us by Shulman), as well as ideas about truth and objectivity, the role of a researcher’s values and beliefs, and the significance of social context. This will be divided into two days.

For our first day we will read a book about positivism and postpositivism by D.C. Phillips and Nicholas Burbules. This reading will focus our attention on a broad shift that occurred in the sciences and social sciences in the mid-20th century that in one way can be described as a shift from thinking of empirical scientific/social scientific knowledge as resting on a firm foundation (called foundationalism), to thinking of all knowledge as tentative and fallible (non-foundationalism). In the first instance (positivism), knowledge is viewed as created absent a theoretical lens (it is strictly what can be observed and measured), created under conditions that purge all influence of value and social context, and aims to discover what might be characterized as a capital T “Truth” that enables us to predict/know the observable natural/social world. In the second instance (post-positivism), knowledge creation is viewed as a social practice (one that takes place within a community of scientists/social scientists), is consciously theory-laden, engages questions about the degree to which value and social contexts do and perhaps should influence inquiry, and aims to warrant lower-case “t” truth-claims.¹

Phillips is a philosopher of education, recently retired from Stanford, and Burbules, as previously noted, is a philosopher of education at UIUC.

For the second day, we will read three articles that push on the post-positivist position by raising specific questions about the epistemic implications of inclusion in and exclusion from research communities. For instance, if we start from the premise that research is a social practice that occurs within a community of scholars (the post-positivist position), does it matter who is in the community of scholars? Will this shape what is researched, how, and why? This will get us into conversations about standpoint and situated knowledge, conversations that have become extremely prominent in social science, and especially in educational research, over the past 20 years. This will also get us into a range of conversations about what are now often labeled “critical” approaches to social inquiry, ranging from Marxism to feminism to poststructuralism/postmodernism to critical theories of race (as well as combinations and other schools of thought), all of which began emerging in the academy in the U.S. in the late 1960s and 1970s. Specifically, we will read formative pieces in feminist standpoint epistemology by Dorothy Smith, Nancy Hartsock, Patricia Hill Collins and Sandra Harding.

¹ This is certainly a very clean narrative for an incredibly complex story. There are variations and degrees within positivist traditions (e.g. between Emile Durkheim and Ernst Nagel) and post-postivist traditions (e.g. between W. V. O. Quine and Thomas Kuhn). There are also many thinkers that are often labelled both depending on who is doing the labelling (e.g. Karl Popper and Talcott Parsons, who some argue bridge the two worlds). Furthermore, there are other ways to frame these intellectual traditions. For instance, many focus on what is called the explanation/understanding debate, which is a debate between those who want the social sciences to look more like the natural sciences, and thus focused on explanation (causal/correlational claims), and others who see the natural and social sciences as distinct and are interested in the social sciences focusing on understanding (especially interpretation). In this framing it is easy to see the measurement tradition and quantitative work in the explanation camp and the interpretive tradition and qualitative work in the understanding camp. Of course, there were positivists and post-positivists in both camps, at least if you use our courses’ narrative framing. The point: the clean narrative told in this course is offered as a starting point for engaging the conversation and not as an end point for learning about the philosophy of and/or the history of social science. For a closer examination of some of these complexities see Joel Isaac, Working knowledge: The making of the human sciences from Parsons to Kuhn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). For a reader that offers a collection of classic work in the philosophy of social science as well as it’s own take on the story told above, see Gerard Delanty and Piet Strydom (Eds.), Philosophies of social science: The classic and contemporary readings (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003). For an introduction to central issues in philosophy of social science, see Alexander Rosenberg, Philosophy of social science (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2015; 5th Edition).
Smith, a sociologist, spent most of her teaching years in the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. She retired in 1994. Hartsock, who recently passed away, was a political theorist and Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Washington, Seattle. Collins, a sociologist, is a Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Maryland, College-Park (Emerita at the University of Cincinnati) and a past-president of the American Sociological Association. Harding is a philosopher and Professor in the Graduate School of Education at UCLA.

There are three pedagogical reasons why we are reading exemplary pieces of educational scholarship before we read about methodology. First, we want you to unpack your own assumptions about what it means to know the social world. You have thoughts and ideas— what are they? How do they shape what you think of as “good” and “bad” research? Reading articles and trying to make sense of different approaches to research, side-by-side, will help you reflect on your own assumptions. Second, trying to understand what scholars are doing without too much theory on the front-end will allow you to dig into and try to make sense of the articles themselves instead of first getting lost in the theory. This second pedagogical reason connects directly with the third reason. This act of constructing your own meaning and interrogating your own assumptions about what it means to know will prepare you to read the methodological pieces. It is hard to read the theory without seeing what it looks like in practice. The theory will make more sense once you’ve read examples. Please trust us. There is no ideal way to dive in, but based on years of doing this approach, we believe this is a great way to do it.

Fourth, three scholars, one each from the measurement tradition, interpretive tradition and conceptual tradition, will present their work to the class over three class periods (one per week). They will not be walking into a bar together.

Fifth, we will read work specific to ethics and social inquiry. This will include an article on the history of Institutional Review Boards and the social sciences by Zachary Schrag, reading recent blog posts on Schrag’s IRB blog, reading the AERA guidelines on research ethics, and completing IRB training.

Schrag is a Professor in the Department of History at George Mason University.

**Readings**

Five books are available for purchase at the University Bookstore:


All other readings are either available for electronic download on Blackboard Learn and/or a link is provided in the syllabus. If readings change you will be given ample notice.
Rules of the Game

Much of this material is controversial and sure to spark debate. This is good! However, this makes it especially important that we listen to each other, respond to each other's arguments (not persons), and try to model the type of democratic discourse we would like to see thrive in the general public. In other words, please be critical, but definitely be thoughtful.

Additionally, there is a lot of reading in this course, as well as a lot of writing. In order for class discussions to be educative it is important for everyone to complete the readings and other assigned material on time. You should bring copies of the readings and your analytical essays to class.

Academic Dishonesty
The class will follow Iowa State University's policy on academic dishonesty. Anyone suspected of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Students Office.
http://www.dso.iastate.edu/ia/academic/misconduct.html

Disability Accommodation
Iowa State University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Sect 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you have a disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please contact me to set up a meeting within the first two weeks of the semester or as soon as you become aware of your need. Before meeting with me, you will need to obtain a SAAR form with recommendations for accommodations from the Disability Resources Office, located in Room 1076 on the main floor of the Student Services Building. Their telephone number is 515-294-7220 or email disabilityresources@iastate.edu. Retroactive requests for accommodations will not be honored.

Religious Accommodation
If an academic or work requirement conflicts with your religious practices and/or observances, you may request reasonable accommodations. Your request must be in writing, and I will review the request. You or I may also seek assistance from the Dean of Students Office or the Office of Equal Opportunity and Compliance.

Harassment and Discrimination
Iowa State University strives to maintain our campus as a place of work and study for faculty, staff, and students that is free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and harassment based upon race, ethnicity, sex (including sexual assault), pregnancy, color, religion, national origin, physical or mental disability, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, or status as a U.S. veteran. Any student who has concerns about such behavior should contact his/her instructor, Student Assistance at 515-294-1020 or email dos-sas@iastate.edu, or the Office of Equal Opportunity and Compliance at 515-294-7612.

Dead Week
This class follows the Iowa State University Dead Week policy as noted in section 10.6.4 of the Faculty Handbook http://www.provost.iastate.edu/resources/faculty-handbook.

Academic Issues Contact Information
If you are experiencing, or have experienced, a problem with any of the above issues, email academicissues@iastate.edu.
Assignments

There are two writing assignments in this class: weekly analytical essays and a final essay.

(1) The primary writing assignments in this course are weekly analytical essays. On the first day of class we will discuss what we mean by an analytical essay. We will give prompts for the essay within 24 hours after class. The essay will always be due at the beginning of the next class. This is because prompts will be based on where the class is at with the material. All essays should be 1-1.5 single spaced pages, Times New Roman, 12-point font, 1-inch margins all around. At the top of the paper in the left hand corner write your name and under that write the essay number (e.g. Analytical Essay #1). Do not write a title for your paper—use that space to write! Please submit an electronic copy so that we can comment electronically and also bring a hardcopy so you can have it for in-class discussion and activities, some of which will involve peer-review of essays (we are going to be spending quite a bit of time talking about writing this semester; peer-review is a central part of academic life).

Additionally, it is important to note that you will also occasionally engage in peer-review of each other’s analytical essays, and at times there will be rewrites based upon peer feedback. Details will be supplied as the occasions arise. Be prepared to share your work, something that is a core part of scholarly activity.

(2) The final essay is a short (2-3 pages single-space) critical reflection of the methodological questions raised for you while reading the most recent issue of a leading scholarly journal in your field of study. This essay will be discussed in more detail towards the end of the semester. It will be due during finals week.

Grades

This is a doctoral level course and we expect writing assignments to reflect doctoral level work. At the same time, this is a doctoral course that is introducing first year doctoral students to a field of study. There is a balance here between high-expectations and realistic ones. Our expectations are high (we want you to be able to do scholarly work at the highest level), but they are realistic (we understand that you are beginning the process of doing scholarly work). In all of your writing, we expect you to be thoughtful and careful, which includes thoroughly copy-editing your papers.

In the academic world, your scholarship is not graded. Rather, your work either does or does not meet a standard for publication, and if published, it is simply debated, discussed, praised and/or critiqued by others in the community of scholars. Because this course is designed to help you enter into this world, we will not grade your work. Instead, your papers will either be accepted or you will be asked to revise. Unlike the world of educational research, however, you will have infinite opportunities to revise and resubmit! Our vision is for everyone in the class to receive an A, which means we will supply timely feedback and work with everyone to revise papers so as to meet our high, yet reasonable, standards.

In addition to completing the writing assignments, you are expected to read the required course material and come to every class prepared to engage in discussion. Even if you are absent, you are required to write the analytical essay due on the day you miss. If you miss more than three classes, you will not pass the class.

Weekly Schedule

(We reserve the right to switch things around; you will receive fair warning about any changes)
Week 1 (8/25): Intro to the Course

(1) ‘Where is your field in the Ed School’ activity (sent week before class over email)

Week 2 (9/1): History and Sociology of the Field of Education

(1) David Labaree, *The trouble with ed schools*

Week 3 (9/8): Scholarly Writing and Writing Workshop I

(1) Anthony Weston, *A rulebook for arguments*
(2) Hilton Obenzinger, *How we write*

Week 4 (9/15): Measurement (experimental design) v. Interpretive (ethnography)


Week 5 (9/22): Interpretive (qualitative case study) v. Conceptual (political theory)

(1) QCS: Irene Yoon (2016), “Trading stories: Middle-class white women teachers and the creation of narratives about students and families in a diverse elementary school.”
(2) PT: Meira Levinson (2011), “Democracy, accountability, and education”

Week 6 (9/29): Conceptual (social theory) v. Measurement (large-scale data analysis)


Week 7 (10/6): Methodological Underpinnings

(1) ED: Thomas Cook and Vandna Sinha (2006), “Randomized experiments in education research”
(2) LSDA: Emma Smith (2008), “Pitfalls and promises: The use of secondary data analysis in educational research”
(3) E/QCS: Frederick Erickson (2011), “A history of qualitative research in social and educational research”
(4) PT: John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig & Anne Phillips (2009), “Overview of political theory”

Week 8 (10/13): Writing Workshop II

No Reading

Week 9 (10/20): Debates in Philosophy of Social Science I: From Positivism to Postpositivism
Week 10 (10/27): Debates in Philosophy of Social Science II: From Postpositivism to Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

(1) Dorothy Smith (1974), “Women’s perspective as a radical critique of sociology”
(2) Nancy Hartsock (1983), The feminist standpoint: Developing the ground for a specifically historical feminist materialism”
(3) Patricia Hill Collins (1986), “Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of black feminist thought”
(2) Sandra Harding (1993), “Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is ‘strong objectivity’?”

Week 11 (11/3): Measurement Faculty Presentation

Presenter and Reading: TBA

Week 12 (11/10): Interpretive Faculty Presentation

Presenter and Reading: TBA

Week 13 (11/17): Conceptual Faculty Presentation

Presenter and Reading: TBA

Thanksgiving Break

Week 14 (12/1): Ethics and Educational Research

(4) Complete IRB Training: http://www.compliance.iastate.edu/irb/training/

Week 15 (12/8): Wrap-Up

Final papers due (electronically) by Thursday, December 15 at 5:30 pm.

Bibliography


