CI 601: Foundations of Educational Inquiry
Fall 2015, School of Education, Iowa State University

Teacher: Isaac Gottesman       Thursday: 5:30-8:30
Teacher: Doug Wieczorek       Lagomarcino E165
Office Hours: By Appointment

About the Course

CI 601 is a foundational course for PhD students in the School of Education. The course is designed to introduce first-year PhD students to the landscape of scholarship in the field of education and to initiate a process of helping doctoral students develop a reflexive stance toward educational inquiry so that they 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. How we think about knowing the (social) world shapes what we are looking at and how we are looking.

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

Notably, this 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, which consists of our 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, which will cover 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, we ask you to look at the mission, organizational structure, and programs offered, including your own area of study (e.g. special education, higher education, educational administration, math education) at three different schools of education (we’ll 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 an 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 AERA, 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 look at the state of the field, and education schools in particular. Labaree is a historian 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 Kerdeman, 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. Kerdeman currently co-teaches the course with Phil Bell, who does work in the learning sciences.

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, Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace by Joseph Williams and Joseph Bizup (in its 5th edition), will help us think about the art and craft of writing. Weston is a professor of philosophy and environmental studies at Elon University (in North Carolina). Williams, who passed away in 2008, was a professor of literature at the University of Chicago. Bizup is a professor of English and director of the College of Arts and Sciences writing program at Boston University.

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 (measurement), ethnography (interpretive), and philosophy (conceptual).1 Reading

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1 Experiments, ethnography, and philosophy do not have to be the method-specific examples used to represent these three traditions. For instance, instead of experimental work the focus could be on large-data sets, instead of ethnography the focus could be on qualitative case studies, and instead of philosophy the focus could be on critical or theoretical essays. There is, however, a pedagogical reason to focus on experimental, ethnographic, and
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 ethnography, we will read articles by: (1) Bianca Baldridge (University of Wisconsin-Madison); and (2) Ariana Manual Figueroa (Rutgers University)

For experimental design, we will read articles by: (1) Valerie Jones Taylor (Spellman College) and Gregory M. Walton (Stanford University); and, (2) Russell Gersten (Instructional Research Group), Eric Rolfhus (Edvance Research, Inc.), Ben Clarke (University of Oregon), Lauren E. Decker and Chuck Wilkins (Edvance Research, Inc.), and Joseph Dimino (Instructional Research Group).

For philosophy, we will read articles by (1) Meira Levinson (Harvard University); and (2) Barbara Applebaum (Syracuse University)

Second, we will read methodological pieces about experimental design, ethnography, and philosophy that will help us dig deeper into the assumptions underpinning these methods and their respective methodological traditions. For experimental design we will read two pieces: one by Andrew Porter, an educational psychologist, and past-president of AERA, who teaches at University of Pennsylvania; the other is by Thomas Cook, a social psychologist at Northwestern University, and Vandna Sinha, a social policy scholar at McGill University. For ethnography we will also read two pieces: one by Harry Wolcott, an anthropologist, retired from the University of Oregon, who recently passed away; and, two, a chapter of a book written by Robert Emerson, a now retired professor of sociology at UCLA, Rachel Fretz, a lecturer in writing at UCLA, Linda Shaw, a professor of sociology at California State University, San Marcos. For philosophy we will read an essay by Nicholas Burbules, a philosopher of education at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and Bryan Warnick, a philosopher of education at The Ohio State University.

Third, three scholars, an experimentalist, an ethnographer, and a philosopher will present their work to the class over three class periods (one per week). They will not be walking into a bar together.

Fourth, 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. This will be divided into two days.

On the first day we will read the first three chapters of 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 philosophical work—these are classic and prominent examples of the traditions and thus illuminate similarities and differences particularly well. They also clearly show the history of what some have called the explanation-understanding debate in the history of empirically grounded work in the human sciences as well as illuminate contemporary tensions (real or perceived) between ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ work.
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 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.2

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

On the second day, we will read the final chapter of Philips and Burbules and classic pieces of work by Thomas Kuhn and Clifford Geertz. For Kuhn, we will read the preface and first chapter of The Structures of Scientific Revolutions (1962), which is often noted as the key text that shifted thinking in philosophy of science, and thus philosophy of social science, to a postpositivist position. For Geertz, we will read the first chapter of The Interpretation of Culture (1972), in which he calls for ethnographic and other interpretive work to engage in “thick description”. Geertz’s idea of thick description has had an incredible influence on work in the social sciences as well as in the humanities.

Kuhn, who passed away in 1996, completed his PhD in physics, but spent his academic career teaching in philosophy and history departments at Harvard University, UC Berkeley, Princeton University, and finally, MIT. Geertz, who passed away in 2006, spent most of his academic career at the Institute for Advanced Study, an independent research institute in Princeton, New Jersey.

On the third 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. Specifically, we will read classic pieces by Patricia Hill Collins and Sandra Harding that helped launch this push in thinking in the social sciences in the late 80s and early 90s. We will also read a more recent piece by Paula Moya that reflects on the previous decade of conversation about objectivity, and argues for post-positivist realist position that bridges the initial work in post-positivism and critiques that emerged out of feminist standpoint theory, particularly with respect to thinking about race and gender.

Collins is a sociologist at the University of Maryland, College-Park (Emerita at the University of Cincinnati) and a past-president of the American Sociological Association. Sandra Harding is a philosopher at UCLA. Paula Moya is an English professor at Stanford University.

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, so 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

2 For an excellent recent book that complicates this clean (common) narrative about a shift from positivism to post-positivism see Joel Isaacs, Working Knowledge: The Making the Human Sciences From Parsons to Kuhn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
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 we believe this is a great way to do it.

**Fifth**, we will have a panel of faculty from the School of Education discuss topics and tensions in educational research. In preparation for this panel, we will read a recent roundtable discussion in *Educational Researcher*, one of the journals of AERA, about methodological debates in educational research. The participants are Pamela Moss, D.C. Phillips, Frederick Erickson, Robert Floden, Patti Lather, and Barbara Schneider. We will also read the official AERA definition of scientifically based research, a statement about the U.S. federal government’s Institution of Education Sciences’ research priorities, and the AERA guidelines on research ethics.

Moss is a quantitative methodologist who does work in the philosophy of social science at the University of Michigan. Phillips is a philosopher of education, retired from Stanford. Erickson is an anthropologist of education, retired from UCLA. Floden is a philosopher of education at Michigan State University. Lather is an educational theorist at The Ohio State University. Schneider is a sociologist of education at Michigan State University and a past-president of AERA.

**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.  
https://bb.its.iastate.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp

**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 others 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/ja/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 dso-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).

(2) There is a final essay that will be based upon the reading, discussion, and writing you have completed over the semester. We will discuss this essay, which will be 8-10 double-spaced pages in length, 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 3 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 (8/27): Intro to the Course**
(1) ‘Where is your field in the Ed School’ activity (sent week before class over email)

**Week 2 (9/3): History and Sociology of the Field of Education**
(1) David Labaree, *The Trouble with Ed Schools*

**Week 3 (9/10): Scholarly Writing**
(1) Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*
(2) Joseph Williams and George Colomb, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*

**Week 4 (9/17): Measurement (experimental) v. Interpretive (ethnography)*
(2) Ethnography: Bianca Baldridge (2014), “Relocating the deficit: Reimagining black youth in neoliberal times”

**Week 5 (9/24): Interpretive (ethnography) v. Conceptual (philosophy)**

**Week 6 (10/1): Conceptual (philosophy) v. Measurement (experimental)**
(1) Philosophy: Barbara Applebaum (2009), “Is teaching for social justice a liberal bias?”
(2) Experimental: Russell Gersten, Eric Roffhus, Ben Clarke, Lauren E. Decker, Chuck Wilkins, and Joseph Dimino (2015), “Intervention for first graders with limited number knowledge: large-scale replication of a randomized controlled trial”

**Week 7 (10/8): Methodological Underpinnings: Experiments, Ethnography, and Philosophy**
(1) Andrew Porter (1997), “Comparative experiments in education research”
(2) Thomas Cook and Vandna Sinha (2006), “Randomized experiments in education research”
(5) Nicholas Burbules and Bryan Warnick (2006), “Philosophical inquiry”

**Week 8 (10/15): Experimental Inquiry Presentation**
Presenter: TBA

**Week 9 (10/22): Ethnographic Inquiry Presentation**
Presenter: TBA

**Week 10 (10/29): Philosophical Inquiry Presentation**
Presenter: TBA

**Week 11 (11/5): Debates in Philosophy of Social Science I: From Positivism to Postpositivism**
(1) Denis C. Phillips and Nicholas Burbules (2002), Chapters 1-3, *Postpositivism in Educational Research*

**Week 12 (11/12): Debates in Philosophy of Social Science II: Postpositivism**
(1) Denis C. Phillips and Nicholas Burbules (2002), Chapter 4, *Postpositivism in Educational Research*
(2) Thomas S. Kuhn (1962), “Preface” and “Introduction: A role for history”
(3) Clifford Geertz (1973), “Thick description: Towards an interpretive theory of culture”

**Week 13 (11/19): Debates in the Philosophy of Social Science III: From Postpositivism to Standpoint**
(1) 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’?”

**Thanksgiving Break**

**Week 14 (12/3): Debates in the Philosophy of Social Science IV: Faculty Panel**
(1) Pamela Moss, D.C. Phillips, Frederick Erickson, Robert Floden, Patti Lather, and Barbara Schneider (2009), “Learning from our differences: A dialogue across perspectives on quality in educational research”

http://www.aera.net/Default.aspx?id=6790

(3) Institute for Education Sciences (2010), “Director’s final proposed priorities for the Institute of Education Sciences, November 1, 2010”
http://ies.ed.gov/director/board/priorities.asp


Week 15 (12/10): Wrap-Up

Final papers due on Thursday, December 17 at 5:10pm.

Bibliography


Institution for Education Sciences (2010). Director’s final proposed priorities for the Institute of Education Sciences, November 1, 2010: http://ies.ed.gov/director/board/priorities.asp


