

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
EDUCATION RESEARCH – EDRS 590, SECTION 606
FALL 2004**

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Information is machines. Knowledge is people. Information becomes knowledge only when it takes on a “social life” – Fullan, 2002.

Schedule information:

Location: Alan Leis Center, Room 1

Meeting times: Thursdays, September 2nd through December 9th.
Students are expected to attend every class. Please contact the instructor by phone or e-mail if you have a problem that will prevent you from attending class.

Course description:

This course serves as the only research methods course in the master’s sequence in Educational Leadership. The general intent of the course is to help candidates to become better consumers of research, and to understand the ways education research relates to instructional leadership practice and school improvement. All of the program goals are active, to a greater or lesser extent, in this course. Candidates will begin to:

1. Develop the capacity to examine and summarize student performance data and use these data to identify school needs;
2. Develop an informed perspective on issues in education administration that is grounded in contemporary research;
3. Understand how principals can use research to enhance instructional leadership;
4. Use various social science perspectives as the foundation for advocacy and change; and
5. Be able to apply technology to the task of conducting education research.

Although the internship is a separate course, the Educational Leadership program has integrated internship activities into course work. In this course, candidates will engage in a variety of performance-based activities focused on Strategic Leadership (Area 1), “Information Management and Evaluation.”

The course addresses VADOE Competencies, ISLLC Standards, and NCATE Standards dealing with information management (use of data to inform decisions; principles of research and evaluation; use of information resources/data collection & analysis; effective communication).

Each class will include a variety of activities and exercises. Specific process goals for the class are as follows:

1. Classes will reflect a balance of activities that encourage the exploration of the use of research in instructional leadership. To promote an atmosphere that allows us to accomplish this, we will:
 - a. Start and end on time;
 - b. Maintain (flexibly) a written agenda reflecting objectives for each class;
 - c. Agree to disagree respectfully during class discussions;
 - d. Strive to be open to new ideas and perspectives; and
 - e. Listen actively to one another.
2. Student work will reflect what is expected from leaders. As such, students are expected to
 - a. Write papers that are well researched, proofed, submitted in a timely fashion, and that conform to APA guidelines;
 - b. Participate actively in class discussions in a manner that challenges the best thinking of the class;
 - c. Provide constructive feedback to others both on their ideas and on their written work, striving to learn from each other and to test each other's ideas.
3. We will endeavor to create a classroom climate that approximates what we know about learning organization. As such, it is important that we create a space that allows participants to try out new ideas and voice opinions without fear of ridicule or embarrassment. The hallmark of a learning organization is a balance between openness and constructive feedback; hence, everyone is expected to:
 - a. Come fully prepared to each class;
 - b. Demonstrate appropriate respect for one another;
 - c. Voice concerns and opinions about class process openly;
 - d. Recognize and celebrate each other's ideas and accomplishment;
 - e. Show an awareness of each other's needs.

Course objectives:

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Search online databases for recent publications relevant to a specific topic;
2. Write a brief summary of applied research on a topic relevant to the improvement of instruction at their school site;
3. Use education research to develop a position based on more than one's opinion;
4. Understand basic statistics (e.g., measures of central tendency & dispersion; basic inferential statistics) and their application in educational research;

5. Understand and be able to evaluate basic research designs and their application in answering important questions in education;
6. Apply a quantitative or qualitative research design to the study of a problem related to instruction and/or improvement at their school site;
7. Write more clearly and persuasively;
8. Lead and participate in group discussions focused on current research.

Course materials:

Gay, L. & Airasian, P. (2003). Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications, 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education. ISBN: 0-13-099463-4.

The required text is available in the GMU Bookstore in the Johnson Center. Note that this text comes with a companion website, which students will need to access on a weekly basis (<http://www.prenhall.com/gay>).

To successfully complete required assignments, students will need to have access to a personal computer with internet access, and the ability to use basic word processing and e-mail. Correspondence by e-mail will use your Mason e-mail account. We will also use Blackboard to facilitate communication and to post assignments and class handouts.

Expectations & Grading:

Consistent with expectations of a master's level course in the Educational Leadership program, grading is based heavily on student performance on written assignments. The assignments constructed for this course reflect a mix of skills associated with the application of research to educational leadership contexts. Overall, written work will be assessed using the following broad criteria:

- Application of concepts reflected in class discussion and readings;
- Creativity and imagination;
- Organization and writing. A clear, concise, and well-organized paper will earn a better grade.

Additionally, a portion of your class grade will be based on participation and the contribution you make to class discussions. The overall weights of the various performances are as follows:

Class participation - 25 points

Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions, in group activities, and in serving as critical friends to other students. As stated earlier, attendance is expected for all classes. If you must be absent, please notify me by e-mail or phone. More than one absence may result in a reduction in participation points. Likewise, arriving at class more than 30 minutes late or leaving more than 30 minutes before the end of class may result in loss of points.

Weekly quizzes – 25 points

The companion website for the Gay & Airasian text includes weekly practice quizzes.

The quizzes include multiple choice items (“practice quiz”) and open-ended questions (“applying what you know”). Each week, you will be expected to read the assigned chapter(s), complete the multiple-choice practice quiz, and e-mail your outcomes to me before you come to class.

Written assignments - 50 points

Several different types of written assignments will be completed during the semester. Each assignment relates to the application of educational research in your school setting. The assignments and a rubric for grading each assignment are described at the end of this syllabus.

Late work: It is expected that student work will be submitted on time, meaning no later than by midnight of the due date. Late assignments may receive a deduction in points. Assignments will not be accepted later than one week after a due date. Papers due on a day when you are absent must be submitted via e-mailed by the due date.

Rewrites: Students may rewrite a paper (other than the final) and re-submit the paper for grading. Papers submitted more than one week late will not be graded.

Grading scale:

- A = 95-100 points
- A- = 90-94 points
- B+ = 85-89 points
- B = 80-84 points
- C = 75-79 points
- F = below 75 points

GMU Honor Code:

Students are expected to abide by the George Mason University Honor Code. Violations (such as cheating, plagiarizing, lying, stealing) will be reported to the Honor Committee. Please refer to the University Catalogue or www.gmu.edu for the full honor code. Ignorance of the code is not a defense.

Assignments

September 9	Introduction, objectives Types of data	
September 16	Introduction to the research process: Theory, research & practice Use of research in educational planning & decision making	G&A 1

September 23	Research questions	G&A 2 Writing assignment 1 due
September 30	Developing a research plan	G&A 3
October 7	Subjects in research	G&A 4
October 14	Measurement in research	G&A 5 Writing assignment 2 due
October 21	Research design 1: Qualitative	G&A 6, 9 (skim 7, 8)
October 28	Research designs 2: Descriptive	G&A 10 & 11 Writing assignment 3 due
November 4	Research designs 3: Causal	G&A 12 & 13
November 11 ***TBA***	Statistics 101	G&A 14, 15
November 18	Independent work on research proposals	
November 25	Thanksgiving	
December 2	Evaluating research	G&A 18
December 9	Summing it up	Presentation of Research Proposals Writing assignment 4 due

Writing Assignment 1: Executive Summary of School Performance Data
10 Points
Due Date: September 23rd

Overview:

Data are tools – they represent a primary source of knowledge-building for school improvement. As leaders in your school, one of your primary tasks is to understand available data relating to your school’s performance in meeting its accountability goals. There are a variety of data available to you. Additionally, you need to learn how to communicate about these data to various stakeholder groups. In this task, you are asked to assemble these data, and prepare a short summary suitable for presentation to a site-based management team. (You can assume, for purposes of this assignment, that your site-based management team includes teachers, parents, and support staff.)

Tasks:

1. Identify the variety of published data on your school’s performance using your school system’s website and any linked websites (e.g., state education department). Additionally, identify any other data sources that might be available (e.g., staff surveys, accreditation reports) by asking leaders in your schools.
2. Assemble the relevant data for at least a two-year period. Be sure to include demographic data that describes the school (enrollment, attendance, gender, language proficiency, staffing); measures of student learning; and any perceptual data that might exist.
3. Determine your school’s primary performance standards: what is the school expected to achieve?
4. Prepare a summary that describes characteristics of the school and summarizes its performance. To do this, you will need to triangulate the data available to you – look across various sources to answer the question: How well are we doing? In addition, as a leader in your school, you will add value to your analysis by using your craft knowledge to add meaning to the data and interpreting what it means.
5. Include a brief summary section that highlights any challenge areas you feel the team should focus on in their improvement activities.

Executive Summary of School Performance Data

	Excellent	Fair	Poor
Introduction: Your executive summary should include a brief introduction. (1 point)	The paper includes a well-crafted introduction that defines the purpose of the summary and details sources you used.	The paper includes a brief introduction that alludes to the purpose of the summary.	There is no introduction.
Presentation of school data: Your executive summary should briefly present relevant data on your school's characteristics and performance. (6 points)	The paper includes a clear and concise presentation of demographic, school performance, and perceptual data. Tables or graphics are used intelligently to highlight data. Sources are appropriately noted.	The paper includes relevant data presented in a usable format, but it is presented inconsistently or haphazardly or it is hard to understand how the data relates to the school's performance objectives.	There is little evidence of data relating to school demographics or performance standards.
Conclusion: Your executive summary should include a brief conclusion that highlights future challenges. (2 points)	The paper includes a well-crafted conclusion that pulls together key points and highlights a number of issues that warrant attention.	The paper includes a conclusion that briefly summarizes the data findings, but does not highlight important areas for attention.	The paper does not include a conclusion.
Grammar and mechanics –audience and use of standard English (1 point)	The paper is written for a team of diverse stakeholders. The summary is free from errors.	The paper may be difficult to understand for some stakeholders, and/or has some errors.	The paper is full of jargon and/or has numerous errors.

Writing Assignment 2: Annotated Bibliography
10 Points
Due Date: October 14th

Overview: As emerging leaders in your schools, you need to develop the skills associated with accessing the knowledge base on questions that are important to the understanding and improvement of teaching and learning. An annotated bibliography provides you with the opportunity to learn how to sift through existing research on a question that interests you and to begin to organize the knowledge that you are gaining by reading this literature.

Task:

1. Identify a school improvement topic through discussions with leaders in your school. This might be a topic you are working on in a study group, one your department or grade-level team is discussing, or one your principal has identified as a priority.
2. Find up to 20 research articles that speak to the topic you selected. This is an iterative process; as you examine the literature, you will narrow your search by stating (and restating) a research question that defines what you want to know and why. You might identify several articles that are review pieces or syntheses of the literature themselves, but you should concentrate your attention on research (i.e., papers that present an empirical analysis using quantitative or qualitative methods to contribute to the knowledge base on an important question). Most of your research can be accomplished on the Internet, with support from your school library, the public library, and/or GMU libraries.
3. Prepare an annotated bibliography using the 5-8 most important papers you found. An annotated bibliography is a list of articles (or books) that includes a brief description of the work and an evaluation of its usefulness. The purpose of an annotated bibliography is to provide information about the relevance, utility, and quality of the source.
4. Your annotated bibliography should include a statement of the topic or research question you are investigating; five to eight annotated entries using the format shown below; and a complete reference list showing all of the papers you consulted. Citations should be in APA format.

An example of an entry in an annotated bibliography follows:

Goldschneider, F. K., Waite, L. J., & Witsberger, C. (1986). Nonfamily living and the erosion of traditional family orientations among young adults. *American Sociological Review*, 51, 541-554.

The authors, researchers at the Rand Corporation and Brown University, use data from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Young Women and Young Men to test their hypothesis that nonfamily living by young adults alters their attitudes, values, plans, and expectations, moving them away from their belief in traditional sex roles. They find their hypothesis strongly supported in young females, while the effects were fewer in studies of young males. Increasing the time away from parents before marrying increased individualism, self-sufficiency, and changes in attitudes about families. In contrast, an earlier study by Williams cited below shows no significant gender differences in sex role attitudes as a result of nonfamily living. (Source: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm#what>)

Annotated Bibliography Rubric

	Excellent	Fair	Poor
<p>Topic: The annotated bibliography is constructed around a topic statement or a research question that defines the knowledge base being investigated. (1 point)</p>	<p>The paper includes a carefully worded topic statement or research question that clearly defines the knowledge base being investigated.</p>	<p>The topic statement or research question is included, but is confusing or poorly delimited.</p>	<p>There is no evidence of a coherent topic statement or research question.</p>
<p>Bibliographic entries: Paper includes 5 to 8 entries that provide source citation and a summary of each source. (8 points)</p>	<p>Each annotated entry includes a bibliographic reference in APA format, and a brief summary of the relevance, utility, and quality of the source relating to the topic being investigated.</p>	<p>Annotated entries include a bibliographic reference and some discussion of each source.</p>	<p>Annotated entries provide incomplete bibliographic information and/or limited discussion of each source.</p>
<p>Grammar and mechanics –use APA style and standard English (1 point)</p>	<p>Paper is free from errors.</p>	<p>Paper has some errors.</p>	<p>Paper has numerous errors.</p>

Writing Assignment 3: Research Brief
10 Points
Due Date: October 28th

Overview: A research brief is a literature review or compilation of published work on a research question that both summarizes and evaluates what is known on the topic. The main difference between a research brief and a formal literature review is the intended audience: address your research brief to a practitioner audience (e.g., a site-based management team). Use your annotated bibliography and the papers you collected to do it to provide a synthesis of the knowledge base and to identify what is known (overlaps, consensus), what is not known (gaps), and what is missing (unanswered questions) in the extant research.

Task:

1. Write a clearly-worded, one-sentence research question that describes the purpose of your investigation. For instance, I might organize a research brief around a question like: “What is known about the impact of the school principal on student performance on standardized tests?” Alternatively, you can organize your review around a persuasive argument, such as, “Leadership quality has a profound impact on student learning and school improvement.”
2. Using the research literature you collected to prepare your annotated bibliography (and any additional sources you might identify), to provide a review of the literature on the question. This review should include a brief introduction that defines your topic and its importance; a body that summarizes the existing research; and a conclusion that summarizes what is known and identifies the current state of the research on the question. In the body, remember that this is not simply a listing – your review adds value by organizing studies, comparing them, and identifying strengths and weaknesses of established work.
3. Provide a recommendation based on your summary of the research. For instance, if your question was, “Should our school adopt transition first grade?” you would recommend a course of action, and a rationale for your recommendation (e.g., costs and benefits of adoption, conditions under which adoption might work, alternative courses of action that would yield similar benefits, etc.).
4. Your executive summary should be no more than six pages, and should include a reference list in APA format.

Research Brief Rubric

	Excellent	Fair	Poor
<p>Introduction: The research brief should include an introduction that draws the reader into the topic of the paper. Begin with a brief, broad summary of the topic, a “narrative hook,” and narrow down to a question or statement of the topic. (2 points)</p>	<p>The introduction defines the topic or question, briefly points out the trends in published work on the topic, and establishes the purpose of the research brief.</p>	<p>The introduction is present, but does not adequately address the question or lead the reader into the topic of the research brief.</p>	<p>The introduction is largely missing or wholly inadequate.</p>
<p>Body: The presentation of your synthesis should add value to the understanding of the research question by carefully organizing and summarizing the presentation of published work on the subject. (6 points)</p>	<p>The body of the paper is systematically organized to present major groupings of findings to provide the reader with a sense to the state of the knowledge base on the topic. Text demonstrate an awareness of and judgment about the quality of published work. Paragraphs are carefully constructed with clear topic sentences, transitions that connect major groupings of thoughts, and periodic assessments of the efficacy of past work.</p>	<p>The body of the paper is loosely organized, although the organizing schema is not entirely evident. The body reads more like a listing of prior work than an analysis of that work. The body is heavy on presentation and light on analysis.</p>	<p>The body of the paper lacks coherence and depth.</p>
<p>Conclusion: Draw the discussion to a close by providing the reader with a brief summary of what he/she just learned and a recommendation based on your findings. (1 points)</p>	<p>The conclusion summarizes the major contributions of the literature in terms of its contribution to answering the research question posed, and provides a recommendation consistent with your findings.</p>	<p>The conclusion draws the work to a close, describing in brief the work presented. The conclusion either lacks a recommendation on the question posed, or the recommendation makes no sense in terms of the findings presented.</p>	<p>The summary is abrupt, not obviously related to the literature presented, and /or lacks a connection to the research question posed.</p>
<p>Grammar and mechanics –use APA style and standard English (1 points)</p>	<p>Paper is free from errors.</p>	<p>Paper has some errors.</p>	<p>Paper has numerous errors.</p>

Writing Assignment 4: Research Proposal

20 Points

Due Dates: Presentations December 2nd and 9th

Written proposals due December 9th

Overview: While it is true that as practitioners, you are unlikely to embark on large-scale research projects in your day-to-day work, school leaders are increasingly expected to engage in short-term and action research projects to demonstrate the efficacy of school programs and practices. A research proposal demonstrates your understanding of all aspects of the research process, from framing a question to the systematic application of a research design to answer that question.

Task:

1. Examine Tasks 2, 3 and 7 in your text to familiarize yourself with the components of a research proposal. Your proposal will build on writing assignments 2 & 3, extending them by asking you to define how you would go about answering your research question(s) in your school setting.
2. In consideration of writing assignments 2 and 3, revise as needed your clearly-worded, one-sentence research question that describes the purpose of your investigation.
3. Using the research literature you collected and summarized, write an introduction and review of the literature on the question (as in writing assignment 3, G&A Task 2).
4. Complete G&A Task 3 to define the methodology you will use to answer the research question you posed and reviewed. Your methods section should include a description of participants (including any ethical considerations and/or permissions you will need to receive to conduct your study); the questions or instruments you will use to guide your data collection; the research design; and procedures you will use to conduct your study. Conclude the methods section with a description of the analysis you will conduct, and a timeline for your study (presuming that you intend to implement the study no earlier than Spring 2005).
5. Conclude your research proposal with a briefly statement of the advantages and limitations of the design.
6. Your research proposal should be no more than six pages, and should include a reference list in APA format.

Research Proposal Rubric

	Excellent	Fair	Poor
Introduction: The proposal should include an introduction that begins with a brief, broad summary of the topic, a “narrative hook,” and narrows down to a question or statement of the topic. (2 points)	The introduction defines the topic or question, briefly points out the trends in published work on the topic, and establishes the purpose of the study.	The introduction is present, but does not adequately address the question or lead the reader into the topic of the study.	The introduction is largely missing or wholly inadequate.
Review of relevant literature: The proposal includes a presentation of your synthesis of relevant research on your topic. (2 points)	The review of relevant literature provides the reader with a sense of the state of the knowledge base on the topic. Paragraphs are carefully constructed with clear topic sentences, transitions that connect major groupings of thoughts, and periodic assessments of the efficacy of past work.	The lit review is loosely organized, although the organizing schema is not entirely evident. The section reads more like a listing of prior work than an analysis of that work. The review is heavy on presentation and light on analysis.	The review of literature is poorly organized and/or lacks coherence and depth.
Methods: The proposal includes a methods section that clearly defines how you plan to conduct your study. (8 points)	The methods section clearly and concisely describes all facets to the proposed study, including participants; instruments; research design; analytic procedures; and the timeline for your study. Methods chosen are sensible and consistent; conducting the study as described could provide useful data on the question.	The methods section defines most aspects of the proposed study, though it is loosely organized and presented. While the methods, taken as a whole, are reasonable, it is not entirely clear how the study could be successfully implemented as described.	The methods section is poorly organized, omits several important facets of the study, and/or makes limited sense in terms of answering the research question posed.
Conclusion: Provide a brief summary of the proposed research, its benefits, and potential limitations. (2 points)	The conclusion summarizes the proposed study, the advantages of the design, and any limitations the reader should be aware of before endorsing the study.	The conclusion draws the work to a close, but does not clearly speak to the benefits of conducting the study or any potential limitations.	The conclusion is wholly inadequate or missing.
Grammar and mechanics –use APA style and standard English (1 points)	Paper is free from errors.	Paper has some errors.	Paper has numerous errors.