

Introduction to Educational Research

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Methods are means to an end, and you control them by using things in your brain, like concepts, which are mental tools. You don't want to hand-me-down tools that are rusty with neglect. Know what you are doing and be willing to defend it. Martin, 2017, p.1

Course Description

This course is designed for first-year doctoral students in an interdisciplinary faculty pursuing social science research. This course covers ground from the perspective of social science research in general. It starts from the fundamental question: what is an explanation? Tracing the context of basic debates and methodological practices introduces some of the most common research traditions, such as ethnography, historical narration, standard causal analysis, small- N analysis, and formalization. By discussing the merits of each research tradition using concrete examples, this course seeks to move beyond the conventional categorization of research methods. This course aims at establishing a pragmatic foundation for doctoral students by seeing the strengths and weaknesses of various methods. We would also cover other practical research skills: How to locate research literature effectively? How to extract information from research articles?

Premises and Expectations

Methods courses are treated very seriously in this university. Actually, the majority of your doctoral training will be method oriented. A common approach is to dive directly into one particular technique, be it quantitative or qualitative. But I have something else in mind. Instead of doing the common approach, I want to take you for a detour first. We start with some basic, and to some people, abstract questions. Questions such as what is research, anyway? How do people poke around in the social world? I am your eccentric guide, not because I take joy in confusing people. Rather, I believe that as social scientists techniques are the tools but not goals. Our goal is to know things, the infinite details

about the students, the classroom, the school institution, and beyond. As educators, we also believe in the potential of changing things, changing people. But I will leave this task to others. In this course, I will try to show you how we make discovery about teaching and learning.

Obviously, this is a tall task for one course, let alone a mini one such as ours. Compromises thus need to be made. I have prepared many excellent materials but like any experienced teachers; I need to make some decisions on the fly. Why? Because teachers always need to tailor their work based on the students. Preparing too little, one runs the risk of starving the intellectual-craving students; Packing too much, one runs the danger of stifling the young minds. So, although this is the syllabus, we might change a few places here and there once I get to know you. The materials I listed consist a contour map, not direction of getting to a specific location.

Education is an interdisciplinary field. As such, I have prepared a variety of examples. I want you to be open-minded. There are always new things to learn from each other, even though you might initially consider them out of your field. This is because getting a new perspective is one of the perpetual sources of generating new ideas. Many of our field's forerunners are masters at such heuristics. I want to show you the trick, too. Another reason for championing open-mindedness is that closing oneself too early only limits you from seeing the beauty of the world. We are not soldiers who just want to defend our own turf. We are explorers and swimmers in the intellectual sea.

Apart from showing up, I also expect you to participate in class discussion. Asking questions, the real ones, always makes us a step closer to doing good research. But it is ok to start with stupid questions. This is how we learn.

Intended Learning Outcomes

- Students shall be able to memorize and describe basics debates of research methods.
- Students shall be able to apply their choice of methods to generate a reasonable general research question.
- Students can develop the ability to critique various research designs.
- Students can develop the ability to assemble evidence to formulate specific research questions.

Required Readings

One book is required in this course:

- *MoD* refers to Abbott, Andrew (2004). *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. W. W. Norton.

We will also use standalone pieces and book chapters to anchor our discussion on specific issues.

Course Policy

Course Evaluation

You should work individually for a final research plan. It won't be the actual plan for your dissertation but this is a first step toward a real research project. The plan should include:

- A brief introduction of the issue that interests you.
- A preliminary bibliography. You need to document how you cast your net and how you filter through your catchings.
- Additionally, pick several of your catch to annotate, synthesize, and critique them. No need to do this on all the items. Just a few. List your reasons why you chose them.
- Research question(s) you want to answer.
- A preliminary empirical design.

For this course, the bibliography is the key. My goal is to shape your habit into systematically collecting, reviewing, and assembling initial ideas that would lead to your research question and design.

Grading Policy

This course is evaluated on letter grades. Students will receive a grade based on the research plan.

S. <—> G.	S. <—> G.	S. <—> G.
≥ 93 <—> A	73-77 <—> B-	53-57 <—> D+
88-92 <—> A-	68-72 <—> C+	50-52 <—> D
83-97 <—> B+	63-67 <—> C	≤ 50 <—> F
78-82 <—> B	58-62 <—> C-	

Attendance

Weekly attendance is mandatory for this course. Students who miss more than two classes without proper justifications will not be able to pass the course. If you have legitimate excuses, please inform the instructor ahead of the scheduled class time.

Academic Dishonesty Policy

We must choose between what is easy and what is right. – Albus Dumbledore, in *The Goblet of Fire*.

The rules are [here](#).

Supporting Services

Psychological Counseling Service

SAO provides confidential and professional psychological counseling, aiming at enhancing students' adjustment to university life, capability to cope with challenges and psychological well-being. To make an appointment or learn more about the service, please contact us: sao.counselor@um.edu.mo .

Disability Support Service

SAO provides disability support services so students with permanent or temporary disabilities can have equal opportunity in education, university life and other services in the university. If you have physical, visual, hearing, speech, learning or psychological impairment(s) which substantially limit your learning or activities of daily living, please contact SAO directly. SAO will assess your special educational needs and communicate with your instructor so as to provide you with the most appropriate support. To learn more about the service, please contact us: sao.disability@um.edu.mo .

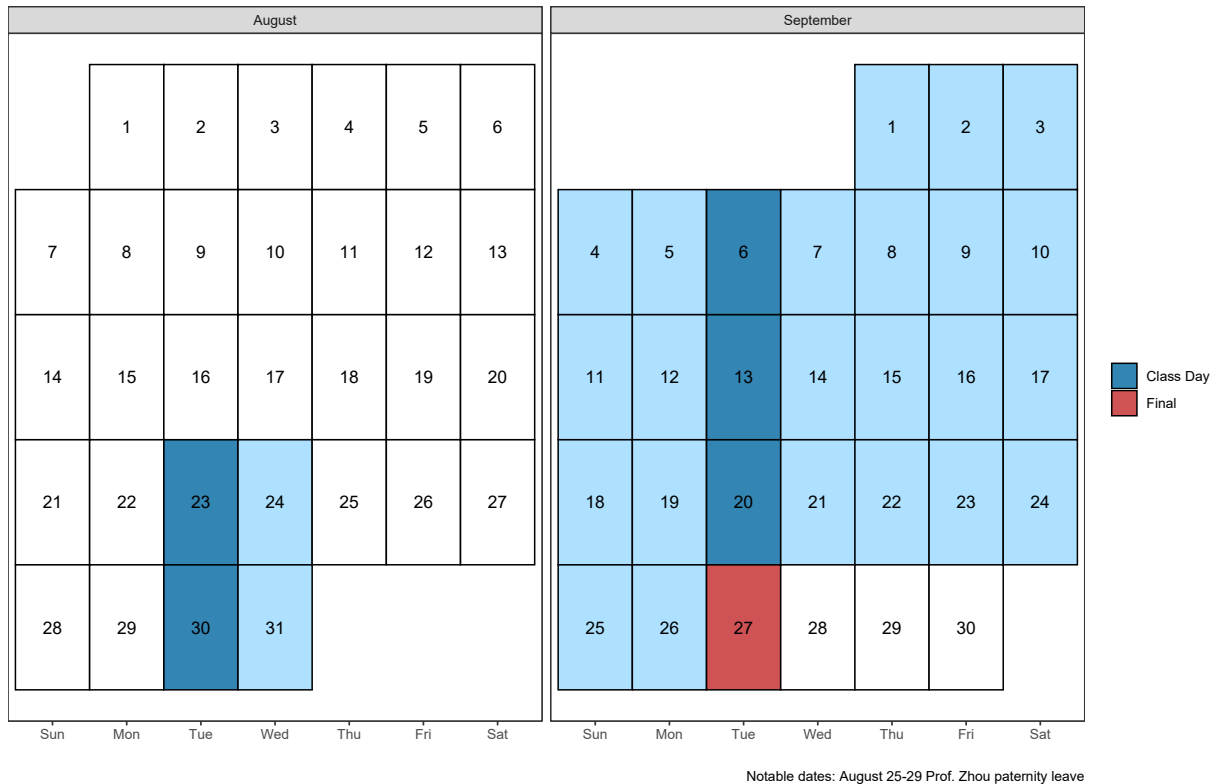


Figure 1: A Calendar for the Class (EDUC8005, Fall 2022)

Class Schedule

Students must read the following before Tuesday's class session. Important: class readings are subject to change, contingent on mitigating circumstances and the progress we make as a class. Students are encouraged to attend lectures and check UMMoodle for updates.

This is a short course so expect each week to be dense. If the classroom discussions could not answer your questions, do make an appointment with me.

Week 01, 08/22 - 08/26: Research, explanation and methods

Please read Chapter 1 and 2 of *MoD*.

Slides¹: <https://yisuzhou.bitbucket.io/lecture/educ8005/session01.html>

Recommended after class:

- Chapter 1 of Martin, John Levi (2017). *Thinking Through Methods*. University of Chicago Press. This is a good introduction book. What's even nicer is that there is a Chinese translated version. See [here](#). This book is more focused than *MoD*.

¹Slides will be updated before class. If you find an outdated slide from previous iterations, please check back later.

For those of you who want specifics, such as constructing a sample or how to do observation, Martin offers them.

Week 02, 08/29 - 09/02: Nature of social science knowledge & heuristics

Required before class: Read Chapter 3, 4, 5, and 6 of *MoD*

Slides: <https://yisuzhou.bitbucket.io/lecture/educ8005/session02.html>

Recommended after class:

- Chapter 1 and 5 of Abbott, Andrew (2001). *Chaos of disciplines*. University of Chicago Press. These chapters provides an overarching account of the dynamics of knowledge within disciplines. A Chinese translation by me will be provided. Read them when you want more explanation of the theories behind our discussion.

Week 03, 09/05 - 09/09: Finding the right literature

Required before class:

- Chapter 1, 3 and 4 of Abbott, Andrew (2014). *Digital Paper: A Manual For Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials*. University of Chicago Press.
- Chapter 6 of Mann, Thomas (2015). *The Oxford Guide to Library Research*. Fourth Edition. Oxford University Press.
- Both books have Chinese translations. They are readable but not great. Read them only as a last resort.

Slides: <https://yisuzhou.bitbucket.io/lecture/educ8005/session03.html>

Recommended after class:

- Chapter 7 - 9 of Mann's *Oxford Guide*.
- Chapter 2 of Martin's *Thinking Through*.

Week 04, 09/12 - 09/16: Reading literature

Required before class:

- Chapter 5 - 7 of Abbott's *Digital Paper*.

In class, we will use three pieces of empirical research as examples of how to read the literature.

Slides: <https://yisuzhou.bitbucket.io/lecture/educ8005/session04.html>

Recommended after class:

- Chapter 7 - 9 of Mann's *Oxford Guide*.
- Chapter 9 of Martin's *Thinking Through*.

Week 05, 09/19 - 09/23: Designing your own plan

We won't be able to discuss everything in such a short course. In the last session, I will share a path forward and some pragmatical strategies:

- How do you design your study?
- Is there any specific technique/skill set you should master?
 - Quantitative
 - Qualitative
- Should you catch up with the literature?
- How to redeem your bad writing?
- Some papers I co-wrote with my students.
- Managing the relationship with co-author.
- Where should you submit your first paper to?
- The (long) process of publication.

Your final research plan is due one week after Session 5.