

**George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
School of Education**

EDRS 897 D01Special Topics in Research Methods
Ethnography and Phenomenology
3 Credits, Summer 2021
May 17-July 24th
Tuesday/Thursday - 4:30-6:35–East 122

Faculty

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Prerequisites

EDRS 810 and 812 or equivalent coursework or permission of instructor.

University Catalog Course Description

Develops knowledge and skills of selected advanced research methods topic(s).

Course Overview

This course introduces the central concepts and methods used in ethnography and phenomenology to study and understand educational context, problems and processes. The course is designed to provide graduate students with an understanding of the value, develop an appreciation, and begin to hone skills to support the development of ethnographic and phenomenological research methods in education. The course will blend theory with practice to address interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary influences in educational research. Furthermore, the course will address the ontological and epistemological leanings of both, as well as explore the ways in which educational practices and processes can be deepened through the use of methods of data collection that are grounded in both practices.

Course Delivery Method

This course will include a combination of face to face and online interactions. Online components will be both synchronous (at times during our scheduled class time), and asynchronous. The course includes a variety of learning activities: discussions in seminar format, text-based/multi-media presentation of course materials, experiential learning activities including interactive assignments, cooperative learning group activities, online discussions and activities, and lecture.

My philosophy towards the content of this course is exploratory and investigative. Students are expected to be prepared, engage actively, and question their assumptions critically, and support peers in exploring their own perceptions towards research. Systematic study of an issue requires a deeper understanding of why the research matters, how it can be undertaken ethically, and the role the researcher plays in the process. As the instructor, it is my job to press students to question their own knowledge and beliefs, and as such, the course will depend on the active presence of students' over the class duration.

Learner Outcomes or Objectives

This course is designed to enable students to:

- Understand the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of both methods;
- Explore how variations of the method are used (for example auto-ethnography or critical phenomenology);
- Learn to hone writing skills for depth, breadth, and emotion;

- Analyze the ways in which the methods support educational research;
- Demonstrate understanding of critiques and challenges.

Required Texts

Creely, E., Southcott, J., Carabott, K., & Lynos, D. (Eds.). (2021). *Phenomenological inquiry in education: Theories, practices, provocations and directions*. Routledge.

Vavrus, F. (2021). *Schooling as uncertainty: An ethnographic memoir in comparative education*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Course Performance Evaluation

Participation (20%)

Class participation is important not only for each individual student's learning, but for the learning and success of our class as a whole. Class participation is a factor in grading; instructors may use absences, tardiness, or early departure in both on-line and campus class sessions as de facto evidence of non-participation and as a result lower a student's grade (Mason Catalog 2011-12).

Your presence alone is not a reason to get full points. Active participation in preparation, class discussion, group work and timely follow up for paper deadlines (more on that in class), will be considered.

Peer Circles (PC) (25%)

Every alternate week, you will meet with your PC. This small group of 2-3-4 will be created at the first week of class and this small supportive circle will meet every two weeks to plan for assignments, discuss readings with prompts that I have provided, or that I have solicited from you all, and will also complete mini-assignments on class topics. After each meeting, you will provide me with a quick recap (form for this will be provided on BB) that provides a sense of how YOUR thinking has evolved as a result of these conversations. You will upload these to BB. Each week is worth 5 points. These meetings should last about 1 hour at the least.

Honing your Observation Skills – (10%)

For this assignment, you will learn to paint a picture with your words of a particular environment. The goal here is to learn how to ensure that the reader can see your space, visualize the environment, and understand how the context of the space might be connected to the data you will be subsequently shared. Please identify a space you would like to describe. Since you will be writing a 4-page description of the space, please try to look for a place/space that gives you some richness and depth to discuss. This could be your living room, your classroom, your school, neighborhood, or a store, or park, or any other location.

1. Once you have selected the site, please bound this for the reader – is it the neighborhood or the street you live on? Is it the classroom or the school? Whatever you pick, please make sure that you can provide a rich description.
2. Paint a sensory picture for your reader – what sights, smells, and sounds resonate? What are tactile experiences that can be explained to a reader. How can you make the place come alive?
3. What details make the space unique? How do you hone your observation skills to note variations, oddities, what stands out?
4. Be detailed, creative and factual – try to avoid adjectives that don't add to the richness. For instance, “the street was incredibly loud, and people looked extraordinarily stressed”. Please refrain from words that add unnecessary superlatives – be detailed, but specific.

Please UPLOAD your paper to BB on June 1 and plan to share with your Peer Circles

Curating Stories (20%)

Due to COVID protocols, I cannot send you to a location to be with people to observe and speak, but you can work with people in other ways. For this assignment, you will be learning how to ask questions and make meaning from someone's story. Please follow the steps below to prepare a portfolio of material to highlight your learning.

1. Please identify someone who might be close to you and willing to share pictures, stories, and memories – this can be a child, a grandparent, a friend, a colleague or classmate, or really anyone you feel will be honest and forthcoming with you.
2. Ask them to recall their what school meant/means to them. Ask them to select 10 photographs that might be representative of their school years. Please note – they don't have to give you pictures of them in school – but any pictures that represent their school years – think about how you might define what that means and how you would translate that to your participant.
3. Do not get any details from the pictures initially. Study the pictures yourself independently. Ask yourself, what are you curious about? What do you think the pictures mean? What assumptions are you making and what truths are you sure of based on what you think you know about this person? Write a memo 1-2 pages about what you are seeing in these pictures.
4. Conversation 1 (C1)– In this conversation (about 45 minutes or so) with the participant, ask them to walk you through the photos, why did they pick them, what stories do they tell? JUST LISTEN. No questions – other than prompts (shall we move to the next picture? Can you expand on that a bit?). Thank them and tell them you will be following up with Conversation 2.
5. Review your memo, the pictures and the notes/recording of C1. Write a second memo, what did you get right, What did you get wrong? Where were your assumptions working well – where were you off base? Now what questions would you ask the person? From their stories and the photos? What is left unsaid?
6. Conversation 2 (C2- also about 45 minutes) – Speak with the person again, but this time, prompt their memories, evoke emotions, ask probing (gently) questions, and get a more detailed picture of these pictures and this person.
7. Select 1 picture and story, write a 1-page single spaced story about this picture and this person. Tell us how this moment represents school to them.
8. Please upload the two memos to BB under Assignments for me to review, and the story under the Blog site for everyone to read.

Final Paper (25%)

For your final paper you will be looking to demonstrate your theoretical grasp of either of the two main foci of this class – namely Ethnography or Phenomenology (E/P). While we will discuss intersections and connections between two, and address intersections of data collection, analysis and quality, this paper will allow you to 1) trace the larger theoretical traditions, 2) ontological and epistemological relations to E/P, 3) issues of quality, and 4) challenges and barriers that one might face in undertaking E/P studies. This paper should be between 8-10 pages, be clearly organized, and address the four main points shared above. Each will be worth five points, and five points will be linked to grammar, writing and ensuring that your paper follows APA guidelines.

Course Assessment

Assignment	Points
Participation	20
Peer Circles	25
Observation Skills	10
Curating Stories	20
Final Paper	25
Total	100

Grades on assignments turned in late will be reduced 10%, and assignments more than one week late will not be accepted.

Grading

At George Mason University course work is measured in terms of quantity and quality. A credit normally represents one hour per week of lecture or recitation or not fewer than two hours per week of laboratory work throughout a semester. The number of credits is a measure of quantity. The grade is a measure of quality. The university-wide system for grading graduate courses is as follows:

Grade	GRADING	Grade Points	Interpretation
A+	=100	4.00	Represents mastery of the subject through effort beyond basic requirements
A	94-99	4.00	
A-	90-93	3.67	
B+	85-89	3.33	Reflects an understanding of and the ability to apply theories and principles at a basic level
B	80-84	3.00	
C*	70-79	2.00	Denotes an unacceptable level of understanding and application of the basic elements of the course
F*	<69	0.00	

Note: "C" is not satisfactory for a licensure course

"F" does not meet requirements of the Graduate School of Education

All assignments will be evaluated holistically using a mastery grading system; the general rubric is described below. A student must demonstrate "mastery" of each requirement of an assignment; doing so will result in a "B" level score. Only if a student additionally exceeds the expectations for that requirement—through quality, quantity, or the creativity of her/his work—will she/he be assessed with an "A" level score. With a mastery grading system, students must choose to "go above and beyond" in order to earn "A" level scores.

- "A" level score = Student work is well-organized, exceptionally thorough and thoughtful, candid, and completed in a professional and timely manner. Student followed all format and component guidelines, as well as including additional relevant component. Student supports assertions with multiple concrete examples and/or explanations. Significance and/or implications of observations are fully specified and extended to other contexts. Student work is exceptionally creative, includes additional artifacts, and/or intentionally supports peers' efforts.
- "B" level score = Student work is well organized, thorough, thoughtful, candid, and completed in a professional and timely manner. Student followed all format and component guidelines. Student supports assertions with concrete examples and/or explanations. Significance and/or implications of observations are fully specified.
- "C" level score = Student provides cursory responses to assignment requirements. Student followed all format and component guidelines. Development of ideas is somewhat vague, incomplete, or rudimentary. Compelling support for assertions is typically not provided.
- "F" level score = Student work is so brief that any reasonably accurate assessment is impossible

Violations of the Honor Code include:

- Copying a paper or part of a paper from another student (current or past);
- Reusing work that you have already submitted for another class (unless express permission has been granted by your current professor before you submit the work);
- Copying the words of an author from a textbook or any printed source (including the Internet) or closely paraphrasing without providing a citation to credit the author. For examples of what should be cited, please refer to: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/02/>
- You may also not "reuse" fieldwork hours. Each placement must have 20 documented hours that are solely for each course that you are in; you may be at the same site, but the same hours may not be counted towards the same course.

Late Work Policy

At the graduate level all work is expected to be of high quality and submitted on the dates due. **Work submitted late will be reduced one letter grade for every day of delay.** Because we live in uncertain times, if you have any extraordinary circumstances (think flood, earthquake, evacuation) that prevent you from submitting your work in a timely manner, it is your responsibility to contact the instructor as soon as possible after the circumstances occur and make arrangements to complete your work. *It is up to the discretion of the instructor to approve the late/makeup work.*

Course Withdrawal with Dean Approval

For graduate and non-degree students, withdrawal after the last day for dropping a course requires approval by the student's academic dean, and is permitted only for nonacademic reasons that prevent course completion (Mason catalog). *Students must contact an academic advisor in APTDIE to withdraw after the deadline. There is no guarantee that such withdrawals will be permitted.*

Students with two or more absences will not receive credit for the course.

Incomplete (IN)

This grade may be given to students who are in good standing, but who may be unable to complete scheduled course work for a cause beyond reasonable control. The student must then complete all the requirements by the end of the ninth week of the next semester, not including summer term, and the instructor must turn in the final grade by the end of the 9th week. Unless an explicit written extension is filed with the Registrar's Office by the faculty deadline, the grade of IN is changed by the registrar to an F (Mason catalog). Faculty may grant an incomplete with a contract developed by the student with a reasonable time to complete the course at the discretion of the faculty member. The faculty member does not need to allow up to the following semester for the student to complete the course. A copy of the contract will be kept on file in the APTDIE office.

PROFESSIONAL DISPOSITIONS

Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times. See <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/polices-procedures/>

Core Values Commitment

The College of Education and Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles: <http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>.

GMU Policies and Resources for Students

For COVID 19 procedures in Summer 2021: Students, please be aware of and follow all policies and procedures for Mason's Safe Return to Campus: <https://www2.gmu.edu/Safe-Return-Campus>

Policies

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (see <https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/> <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/>).
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (see <https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students **solely** through their Mason email account.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor (see <https://ds.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must silence all sound emitting devices during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

Campus Resources

- Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to tk2ohelp@gmu.edu or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/tk20>. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/blackboard-instructional-technology-support-for-students/>.
- For information on student support resources on campus, see <https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus>

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking:

As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Responsible Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/>

Recommended: Course Materials and Student Privacy

- Videorecordings of class meetings that are shared only with the instructors and students officially enrolled in a class do not violate FERPA or any other privacy expectation.
- All course materials posted to Blackboard or other course site are private; by federal law, any materials that identify specific students (via their name, voice, or image) must not be shared with anyone not enrolled in this class.
- Videorecordings of class meetings that include audio or visual information from other students are private and must not be shared
- Live Video Conference Meetings (e.g. Collaborate or Zoom) that include audio or visual information from other students must be viewed privately and not shared with others in your household

Tentative Schedule of Classes

READINGS to be completed by the START OF THE WEEK – Meaning all readings for the week should be complete by the Tuesday of the start of the week. Instructor reserves the right to make changes as deemed needed.

Week	Tuesday (Face to face)	Thursday (Zoom or PC meetings)	Readings	Assignments
1 Course Overview – Stories we tell ourselves	May 18	May 20	Vavrus, Introduction and Part I. Malinowski 1910 Garcia 2016	
2 Ethnography – Theory and practice	May 25	May 27 PC MEETING	Vavrus Part II Moustakas Chapter 1 and 2 Clifford 1983 Yon 2003 Miled 2019	PC MEETING Reflection #1
3 Phenomenology – theory and practice	June 1	June 3	Creely et al – Chapters 1, 2 & 3 Moustakas Chapters 3, 4 and 5 Van der Mescht 2004	Observation Skills Assignment due June 1
4 Power and positionality	June 8	June 10 PC MEETING	Creely et al – Chapters 4, 5 & 6 Moustakas Chapters 6 and 7 Kinkaid 2021 Powell 2021	PC MEETING Reflection #2
5 Narrative styles	June 15	June 17	Vavrus Part III Creely et al – Chapters 7, 8 & 10 Fassin 2014 Narayan 2003	

6 Quality and subjectivity	June 22	June 24 PC MEETING	Vavrus – Part IV Moustakas Chapter 8 Creely et al – Chapters 9 & 11 González 2004 Reyes 2020	PC MEETING Reflection #3
7 Taking risks	June 29	July 1	Sonkar 2018 Behar 1996 Behar 2007 Pennington 2007 Reed-Danahay 2009	
8 Field experiences	July 6	July 8 PC MEETING	Vavrus Part V Marcus 1985 Vossoughi & Escudé 2014 Cucchiara & Horvat 209 Burt 2018	PC MEETING Reflection #4
9 Barriers and challenges	July 13	July 15	Vavrus Part VI and Epilogue Creely et al – Chapters between 12- and 16 to be assigned.	
10 Course conclusion - Stories we tell others	July 20	July 22 PC MEETING	Fedigan 2020	PC MEETING Reflection #5 Final paper due VIA email – July 24th.