

PROSEMINAR II
SPECIAL EDUCATION 3011

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Course Description

Proseminar II is designed for first-year doctoral level graduate students in Special Education. The course focuses on research and professional issues in Special Education. Proseminar II incorporates five strands: the Special Education doctoral student experience at Peabody, research issues in the field of Special Education, research critiquing, group research simulation, and the special education qualifying exam.

Course Format

As the title denotes, Proseminar is a seminar or a form of class organization in higher education in which a group of advanced students meets under the general direction of a faculty member for discussion of topics of mutual interest. Consequently, several forms of class participation are required for course success. These include asking questions of and responding to class presenters, discussing topics assigned for each class, and making class presentations.

Class Schedule

Wednesdays, 12:30 to 2:45 p.m. in Wyatt 102

Readings

One required text is available in the bookstore:

Stanovich, K.E. (1998). How to think straight about psychology (5th ed). New York: Longman.

Steneck, N.H. (2004). ORI: Introduction to the responsible conduct of research. Rockville, MD: Health and Human Services Department, Office of Research Integrity. Order from <http://bookstore.access.gpo.gov>.

Other required readings will be distributed in class for students to copy.

Course Requirements

1. Two 10-page papers. The first should answer a question (concerning a research problem, policy issue, service issue, ethical issue) relevant to Special Education. The topic should be consistent with the student's interests. The second topic should be methodological; students will be given two questions to choose from. All papers must conform to APA style. A first and second draft of the first paper is required. (Feedback on the first draft should be used to modify the second draft. Each draft will be graded.) Paper 1 is worth 30 points, with a maximum of 15 points for the first draft and 15 points for the revision. Paper 2 is worth 30 points.
2. A series of four workgroup presentations related to the research simulations (see attached). Class members will provide feedback and discussion. This presentation will be graded in terms of substantive content as well as professional style. This series of presentations is worth 5 points of the total course grade.
3. A research report, written as if prepared for submission to a journal, describing the research simulation project. This paper is worth 35 points.

NOTE: Vanderbilt's Honor Code governs all work in this course.

Research Simulation
SPED 3011

Structure

The class will be divided into small groups of students whose substantive areas of interest are related as closely as possible. These small groups will be cooperatively responsible for class presentations related to the research simulations and will receive a group grade for those presentations. The purpose of the presentations is for the small group to receive formative feedback from other workgroups and from the instructor on each phase of the simulation so that modifications in the plan can be made prior to subsequent phases. The final product (i.e., the written research report) will be completed independently, and individual grades will be assigned.

Focus

The focus of the research simulation is group design. Group design was selected for two reasons. First, in a different required course taken this semester, the focus is on single subject methodology. Second, feedback from previous cohorts of students indicates that, even given the two statistics courses taken during the first year, students complete the first year in the program with discomfort with group design. Despite this discomfort, the majority of students in the Department of Special Education complete dissertations that employ group methodology. A major purpose of the simulation experience is to increase students' feelings of comfort with, as well as skill levels in, conducting group methodology studies.

Phase 1: Identification of Research Problem and Questions

Each group will identify its own research problem and related research questions. The research problem should represent the interests of all workgroup members as well as possible. The integrity of the problem will determine in part the success of the entire simulation. So, select a problem to which you can attach quite specific, "researchable" questions. Within this research area, identify 5-7 previous related studies to assist you in organizing your thoughts about important questions. As you generate research questions, you should try to envision an appropriate set of methods with which to answer those questions. If you cannot envision a set of methods by which to answer a question, it may be prudent to select a different question. The research question should involve treatment efficacy and how a study characteristic might interact with the treatment to produce differential effects.

It is important to emphasize that, although the degree to which the research problem is close to an individual's substantive area may increase the interest value of the simulation, every student should benefit from the experience regardless of proximity of the simulation topic to the student's interests.

For the class Phase 1 class presentations, be prepared to describe the research area, summarize the studies you are using to help identify related research questions, specify the research questions, and explain the rationale for the study (i.e., how the study will extend knowledge in the area and why it is important to conduct). Each Phase 1 presentation should last about 10 minutes.

Phase 2: Design a Study to Answer the Research Questions

Each workgroup will design a study to answer the proposed research questions. The design should include the following components: participants (including, as necessary, sampling methods, numbers, demographic variables on which you will collect data, methods for assigning participants to treatments, etc.), measures (including description, supporting technical information, examples of the scores that will be produced), procedure (including a thorough description of each step of the study), and data analysis. The Phase 2 class presentations should provide a thorough description of the design. Each Phase 2 presentation should last about 20 minutes.

Phase 3: Design and Use of a Data Coding System

Each workgroup will design a data coding system. Phase 3 presentations will include description of a sample coding sheet and documentation to support that coding sheet. Additional information will be presented in class prior to Phase 3 to assist students in completing this phase. Each Phase 3 presentation should last about 10 minutes.

Prior to the presentations of the data coding systems, each workgroup will be given responsibility for generating data (and filling in the data coding sheet) of a different group. Following the presentations, each workgroup will meet with the instructor to discuss the general patterns in the data to be created.

Phase 4: Data Analysis and Results Reporting

Each workgroup will enter their data into the computer and run their analyses in two ways: using analyses of variance and using multiple regression. Phase 4 presentations will include a description of results (i.e., tables of means and standard deviations, along with inferential statistics) and an interpretation of findings. Each Phase 4 presentation should last about 20 minutes.

Phase 5: Report Writing

Each individual will independently write a study, using the guidelines presented in class, to write a research report describing the simulation study. Students can choose analyses of variance or multiple regression for the research report, but printouts of both sets of statistical analyses need to be attached to the research report.