I. Introduction/Purpose of the Course

This is the first in a sequence of courses that are designed to develop your competencies in conducting and assessing research. Our overall goals are to become conversant with current discourse on research and with the most fundamental research designs encountered in practice. The course has four broad purposes:

1) Developing a familiarity with the ongoing dialogue/debate around the different ontological and epistemological frameworks that comprise the research landscape in adult education and related fields of professional practice.

2) Cultivating competence in applying criteria for evaluating high quality research within these diverse paradigms.

3) Understanding the implications of different paradigms for the relationship between research and practice.

4) Becoming conversant with basic research designs.

Underlying these four purposes are more specific objectives:

1) To have you critically assess your own beliefs about the research process and what it means to establish trustworthy knowledge.

2) To have you demonstrate working familiarity with “traditional” foundational concepts of research.

3) To foster sensitivity to the political context of the research act.

4) To become capable of matching fundamental research designs to researchable questions.

5) To articulate how research contributes to effective practice.

We begin with a discussion of research paradigms in order to place the remainder of the course topics in context. From this context we will consider issues around experimental design, survey design and analysis, and field/case study research – all forms of research design and methods with which adult educators and human resource development
professionals need competence in order to meet the requirements of funding agencies, evaluate programs, produce valid data for purposes of enhancing their practice, and contribute to the knowledge base of the field.

II. Assignments

There are two assignments for this course:

**First Assignment – Literature Review on Frameworks of Research Practice**

The purpose of this assignment is to familiarize you with the three major paradigms of research that are prominent in the literature and to have you assess your own thinking against these frameworks. Write a paper reviewing the literature on research paradigms and the implications of each for major dimensions of the research process. This review should be descriptive of the three major paradigms around which discourse on research is currently centered — postpositivism, critical theory, and constructivism. Be wary of terms since some writers use “interpretative” to refer to constructivism, others consider themselves to be interpretative, but would not assume the mantle of constructivism per se. The term “naturalistic” has been used to refer to rather traditional postpositivistic research while Guba and Lincoln use the term in their 1980’s writing on program evaluation to describe their qualitative approach to assessment and research. The term “positivism” is commonly used to refer conventional postpositivistic research practice, often in a negative context. In short, it’s a semantical thinket out there. Begin your work with the Guba, Phillips, and Lincoln chapters (in The Paradigm Dialog) using the Guba and Lincoln framework on paradigms as a starting point for Post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism. Then the Guba and Lincoln chapter in the Handbook of Qualitative Research.

Your paper should include the following:

1) A description of the chief characteristics of each of the three paradigms. How would you define, describe, differentiate, explain, or conceptualize each to someone who didn’t know anything about them? Include in your discussion a critical assessment of the assumption underlying each.

2) A discussion of the important issues of trustworthiness (validity and reliability) of research findings in each. How would someone assess or evaluate a piece of research conducted in each of the paradigms? Include in your discussion a critical assessment of assumptions that underlie these various warrants of trustworthiness.

3) A discussion of what, if any relationship, can exist between the paradigms. Can a researcher move between the paradigms? – are they exclusionary?, can they be complimentary? In what ways, if any, can researchers speak to one another across paradigms?
4) A statement of which paradigmatic assumptions are most predominant in your practice setting. What are the implications (benefits and limitations) of this for your practice?

5) A statement of the paradigmatic assumptions you presently hold. Justify these assumptions.


**Second Assignment – Review of a Research Methodology**

Due date: Third Class Meeting. Page Guidelines – 10 to 12 pages. This paper will involve writing a literature review, utilizing the conceptual and research literature in an integrated fashion in support of an argument related to a research problem (as opposed to a paper on a conceptual topic). More explicit instructions will be provided during the first class meeting. Follow APA guidelines for organizing the paper and give complete bibliographic information on the sources cited. Creswell Ch. 2 is a resource, in addition to various readings provided by David Severson during his course last summer.

**III. Session Topics**

Session One: Windows to knowledge and knowing: The paradigm dialogue (or Wars). The terminology of research, (i.e. validity, reliability, research problem, research questions, hypotheses, generalization, etc)

Creswell, Chs. 1, 3, 7; Robson, Chs. 1-2; Guba; Lincoln; Phillips; Guba & Lincoln; Howe, Heron & Reason, 1997; Conklin; Rodwell & Byers;

Session Two: Traditional designs: Experimental, Quasi-Experimental, and Survey Research

Robson, Chs. 4-5, 8; Argyris, 1968; Cresswell Chs. 8, 10. Jick.

Session Three: The Case Study as method, including multi-case design, and comparative analysis. “What is a case” Fit with grounded theory, ethnography, etc.

Yin, Robson Ch 6; Gold; Eisenhardt; Dyer; Yorks, et. al. 1996; Baldwin: Flyvbjerg, Yorks & Whitsett, White; Denzin.
Session Four:  Action research.
Yorks, 2005; Yorks & Nicolaides, Heron & Reason, 2008; Reason, 1994; Argyris, 1996; Elden & Chisholm; Kowalski, et. al.; Yorks, et. al. 2007; Yorks, et. al. 2008

IV. Reading

We have selected three core books for this course. We recommend that you purchase these as a basic library. No one book provides a thorough and comprehensive coverage of research methods because of the diverse approaches to professional research practice. You will find these will serve as good references throughout your career at AEGIS and beyond.

The listing goes as follows:


In addition, the following are suggested readings for the class. As you will see, I am especially partial to exchanges among authors in the literature since such exchanges honor the principle of critical discourse, providing for point/counter point conversation that elucidates important distinctions and raises questions that might otherwise lie dormant. Such exchange is, or at least should be, at the center of productive research and intellectual activity. Accordingly, read Eisenhardt (1989), Dyer and Wilkins (1991), and Eisenhardt (1991) in sequence – Whyte (1996a), Richardson (1996), Denzin (1996), and Whyte (1996b) in sequence – and Yorks et. al (1996) and Baldwin (1996) in sequence.


613-627.


San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Obviously you should feel free to explore and incorporate other sources. Consider the above readings as providing a window to the diverse literature on research. Locate and utilize additional sources as appropriate. I invite you to suggest any readings you find especially helpful or engaging.