

Pre-Thesis: Research and Practice

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Research is a life project, not a one-time exploration – no matter how grand that exploration might be. The artist returns to the work to push further and deeper into that initial investigation. Omi Osun Olomo/Joni L. Jones

OVERVIEW:

In this course we consider the relationship between artistry, pedagogy, and scholarship. We will actively consider how scholarship contextualizes and informs research and practice as part of an MFA Thesis. We will develop a rigorous, original research question, research design/methodology, and thesis project that engage with salient scholarship and practices of the field. We will have multiple deadlines to support your consistent, ongoing work. You will create an annotated bibliography, key terms document, literature review map, introduction and need statement, and IRB proposal in addition to other documents of your choosing for your MFA thesis. To successfully complete the course, you will present your proposed practical research to your thesis committee and engage in a substantial revision of your materials.

Questions we will interrogate this semester include:

- What is research?
- How is research situated in various disciplines? (performance, design and construction, arts education/integration, community engagement, playwriting, etc.)
- How is research shaped and informed by specific theoretical perspectives?
- What is reflective practitioner research and how might I use it in my MFA thesis process?
- What is arts-based research and how might I use it in my MFA thesis process?
- Which scholar/practitioner/artist's work (research and practice) is in conversation with my work (research and practice)? How can scholarship, which advocates and critiques issues related to my thesis, be useful in framing my work?
- How do I engage in qualitative research and analyze my findings?
- What is ethical human subjects research in the arts, arts education and community-based practices? Why might artists/teaching artists/educators want to consider the views of others as part of reflective practice?

By the end of this course you will:

- **Create an abstract** for your thesis project
- **Create an annotated bibliography and key terms document**
- **Articulate your research design/methodology** in preparation for your MFA thesis document
- **Outline a formal literature review of the research and practice** in preparation for your MBA thesis document
- **Complete at least one draft of an IRB** for your MFA thesis document
- **Engage frequently in critical, productive reflection** on your own scholarship and practice and the scholarship and practice others
- **Select and complete** a significant final project that moves you forward in your thesis process.

Assignments, Workload, and Rubric

I'll provide more information concerning specific expectations for each assignment before each is due, but here's a quick overview. Although the general shape of the semester will stay as listed here, the specifics may change as I get to know you, your needs and interests.

A Note about Grading for this Course:

The course employs a unique grading system that focuses on continued progress over a single attempt at perfection. On many assignments you will receive a $\sqrt{-}$, $\sqrt{}$, or $\sqrt{+}$, which generally equates to C, B, or A level of work. You are encouraged to continue to revise each assignment until you reach an A level of work or a $\sqrt{+}$. *The expectation is that everyone can receive an "A" in 50% of this course.* 35% of the course grade will be determined in a more conventional manner where a "final" version receives a specific set of points and a letter grade. The final 15% of the course grade will be based on your attitude, participation and preparation. Please come to every class prepared, ready to engage in discussion, with the required assignment complete. The more you contribute to our group discussions, the more you will benefit from them. The seminar structure also provides a format for developing your leadership, questioning, analytical, and critical thinking skills. This is a class about preparing you for the rigors of practical research associated with thesis. We hope to build a personal discipline and community that will support you throughout your final 18 months in your program.

ASSIGNMENTS AT A GLANCE:

Annotated Bibliography	
Literature Map/Key Terms	>50 pts
Key Terms Description	
Abstract	
Discussion Participation/Teach-a-Text/Assess Tool Pilot	15 pts
IRB Draft	10 pts
Final Projects of Significance (minimum of 2)	20 pts
Practical Research Presentation	5 pts
TOTAL	100 pts

90 - 100 = A/ A-

70 - 79.9 = C+ C C-

80 - 89.9 = B+ B B-

60 - 69.9 = D+ D D-

MAJOR COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

Annotated Bibliography: The annotated bibliography is an ongoing project over the first half of the semester. You will have a weekly assignment to summarize and analyze sources related to your topic and guiding question. As you research please pay attention to the types of sources that you include (diversify your data) and make sure to document how each source is relevant/useful for your study. At least one of your annotations should be of a related thesis or dissertation that informs your work in some way (same advisor, similar methodology, similar practice, or similar context, etc.).

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION: Each annotation should be two paragraphs long. The first paragraph should summarize the main idea and arguments of the author in your own words. You can use one or two direct quotes with parenthetical reference as useful. The second paragraph should engage with how the source is useful to your guiding question/s and research. Does this source offer some new information or does it support the main body of literature? What does it make you think about or want to know more about as it relates to your research? Offer a full citation using MLA format at end of each annotation. Use concise, active language in your writing at ALL times. See also info on annotated bib in course docs on BB. The professor will offer comments on each annotated bibliography entry as it is posted. Each entry will be assigned a \checkmark^- , \checkmark , or \checkmark^+ . If you receive a \checkmark^+ , you are not required to revise. If you receive a \checkmark^- , \checkmark you are strongly encouraged to revise, and continue to revise until you receive a \checkmark^+ .

Map of your Literature Review: As depicted in Creswell's text, you will create a visual map of your annotated bibliography sources. This will be used to group key ideas and structure writing for the IRB proposal and the eventual literature review in your thesis document. Please include key terms in your visual image where useful and productive. You are encouraged to use a SmartArt Graphics or PowerPoint flow chart elements to construct the figure or are welcome to draw something by hand and scan the version for posting. The professor will offer comments and assign a \checkmark^- , \checkmark , or \checkmark^+ . If you receive a \checkmark^+ , you are not required to revise. If you receive a \checkmark^- , \checkmark you are strongly encouraged to revise, and continue to revise until you receive a \checkmark^+ .

Key Terms: During the first half of the semester you will keep a document of key term definitions and descriptions. This can involve direct or indirect references but should focus on putting ideas into your own words whenever possible. Consider the importance of reading the original source for definitions (and not using someone else's description/citation of another's words/ideas). You should have a minimum of six key term entries, which are 3-5 sentences long each. The genealogy of key terms should also be represented in your map of the literature. The professor will assign a \checkmark^- , \checkmark , or \checkmark^+ on each posting. If you receive a \checkmark^+ , you are not required to revise. If you receive a \checkmark^- , \checkmark you are strongly encouraged to revise, and continue to revise until you receive a \checkmark^+ .

Abstract: You will be required to write and revise a formal abstract for your project. The professor will assign a \checkmark^- , \checkmark , or \checkmark^+ . If you receive a \checkmark^+ , you are not required to revise. If you receive a \checkmark^- , \checkmark you are strongly encouraged to revise, and continue to revise until you receive a \checkmark^+ .

Discussion Participation: (15%) You will be expected to actively participate in all in-class discussion and explorations of assigned reading/s. You are expected to be prepared with all required assignments with complete drafts, which demonstrate significant effort. You should engage with colleagues in a supportive manner and be prepared to offer specific examples to support their opinions. You should be aware of air time and vocabulary, and be sure to include all class members in each discussion as colleagues may have a range of experiences to bring to the conversation.

- **Teach a Text/Particularly Pleasing:** Working individually or in groups, you will have 20 minutes to present/teach/discuss/activate a text (article, book, thesis/dissertation, etc.) that is particularly useful and illuminating (aka *pleasing!*) for your research. The text should represent a style of writing and/or approach to practice and research that appeals to you. Be sure to share selections from the text to illuminate your opinions. This assignment is not graded but will be referenced as part of your discussion/participation grade narrative.
- **Assessment Tool Pilot:** You will be invited to pilot at least one of your assessment tools for your research project during the last month of the course. This could be a qualitative or quantitative tool and will hopefully be based on some of the course readings and exploration. This assignment is not graded and highly flexible but the expectation is that all students will participate in some manner (even if they just practice reflecting further on their own work in written format). Your work on this pilot will be referenced as part of your discussion participation grade narrative.

IRB: (10%) During the second half of the semester you will work on all of the formal elements required for a successful IRB proposal including: specific, measurable research question/s; background and significance; research methodology and design; assessment tools; and, consent form/s. You will turn in at least one full draft of all portions of the application and submit a revision to your thesis supervisor for feedback. You may opt to continue to revise the document throughout the semester as part of your final course work or shift your attention to a different set of tasks for the final project. The professor will assign a \checkmark -, \checkmark , or \checkmark + on all drafts of IRB. If you choose to turn in a final revised IRB at the end of the course, you will receive a letter grade and points on the final version.

Potential Projects of Significance: (20%) During the final 1/3 of the course you will select at least two projects that will significantly support your growth and development and/or implementation of your thesis project or the written thesis document. To negotiate the tasks, you will submit a project proposal (template provided) to the Professor and include proposed projects with a breakdown of recommended points per task.

Potential projects might include:

- A fully developed practical project time line for the fall and related project materials (curriculum, letters of inquiry, post-show workshop, teacher training, recruitment materials, etc.)
- A pilot and revision of assessment tools to be used in thesis practice (ideally this would also include a written description of the pilot of at least one assessment tool and your findings)
- A complete IRB which has been revised until both the professor and thesis advisor agree it is ready for submission

- A complete, well-written draft of a written thesis proposal (12-page paper, template on BB, typically this information converts well into the written introduction for your thesis)
- Something else that you determine is essential for the development of your project.

Students will create drafts of their materials for peer review/presentation days near the end of the semester and present fully realized versions of their project/s during the final course day. All projects will receive a letter grade and points as determined and agreed upon in the Projects of Significance proposal.

Practical Research Presentation: (5%) On the final day of class, each student will have time to share elements of the final course projects. The exact nature, structure and grading of these presentations will be determined by the class mid-way through the semester.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- 1) Nicholson, Helen, *Theatre, Education and Performance*
- 2) Gibaldi, Achtert. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Latest Edition.
- 3) Creswell, John W., *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2nd Edition.
- 4) *Playbuilding as Qualitative Research: A Participatory Arts-Based Approach* by Joe Norris
- 5) The professor will offer specific articles and books to read throughout the semester as your research project continues to develop and evolve.

Many of our readings and resource materials will be available through our BLACKBOARD course Web site. This site can be accessed automatically through UT Direct or through <http://courses.utexas.edu>. We will also make extensive use of the Announcements and Discussion Board functions on our Blackboard site. If you have a laptop or other portable computing devising available to you, please bring to class weekly.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:

Your attendance and participation are required in this course. Any absence will have a detrimental impact on your ability to make satisfactory progress and contribute to our in-class conversations and practical explorations. You are allowed two absences. Absences beyond two will result in your grade being dropped by one letter. Please inform me PRIOR to any class or event you might need to miss. Of course, any assignments missed due to absences must be completed by their due date. Excessive tardiness will also adversely affect your grade. (A tardy will be defined as arriving 5 minutes after the beginning of the class or work session.) Three tardies equals one absence.

SPECIAL NEEDS ACCOMODATIONS:

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, please contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, or 471-4541 TTY.

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY:

Students who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University.

According to the *2006-2007 General Information Catalog*, "Scholastic dishonesty" includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, misrepresenting facts, and any act designed to give unfair academic advantage to the student (such as, but not limited to, submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor), or the attempt to commit such an act." If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please ASK me. You may also contact the Dean of Students, or find information online at http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis_whatdis.php

Weekly Course and Assignment Calendar

Assignments/readings are DUE on the date listed
(subject to change at instructor's discretion)

Pre-Thesis: Research and Practice Spring 2013

Week 1:
Jan 16th

Introduction and Course Overview

Intro to course goals and projects.

READ: Creswell, *Research Design* (pp. 23-25) on BB

BRING: a description of your topic for your thesis written in a single sentence

Assignment for 2/13 Mini Needs Assessment: (examples/prompts on BB)

- 1) Engage in a site observation related to your thesis research and make personal field notes describing the experience. Or, facilitate a pilot workshop related to the context for your fieldwork project and make personal field notes describing the experience.
- 2) Select a potential stakeholder for your project and conduct an informational interview with them about aspects and/or issues related to your project. Then, transcribe a portion of the interview. Or, create a brief survey and have a group complete it to gather information about needs related to project. These are informal assessments, conducted for learning and exploration.

Week 2:
Jan 23rd

What are our tasks for the semester?

GUEST: Education Librarian: Janelle Headstrom

RESEARCH SKILL: social sciences research design/worldview, annotated bibliography

READ:

- 1) Creswell, *Research Design*, pp. xix-45
- 2) IRB Template Proposal on BB
- 3) OWL annotated bib recommendations on BB
- 4) Thesis proposal guidelines for written documentation on BB

DUE:

- 1) Write and post **1 annotated bib entry** on BB by 1:00 pm from book or article you've already read in a prior class or on your own which relates to your thesis topic. Bring a hard copy of annotated bib entry to class.

Assignment: If useful, make an individual appointment with FAL Librarian Beth Kerr

Week 3:
Jan 30th

Which theories and practices shape my practical research?

RESEARCH SKILL: key terms

READ:

- 1) *Theatre, Education and Performance* by Helen Nicholson
- 2) Creswell, *Research Design*, (reference 39-43)

DUE:

- 1) Post **1 annotated bib entry** on BB by 1:00 pm for Nicholson book.
- 2) Post **two key term entries** for your thesis from Nicholson's text or Creswell on BB by 1:00 pm. Bring hard copy of one key term to class.

ASSIGNMENT: continue to work on observation and interview for context

Week 4: **What is reflective practitioner research?**
Feb 6th **RESEARCH SKILL:** reflective practitioner analysis
READ:
1) *Researching Drama and Arts Education* chpt. 1, chpt. 2 on BB
2) At least two articles/books for your own research
DUE:
1) Post at least **two annotations** of new articles/books on BB by 1:00 pm

Week 5: **How does a needs assessment help us refine our research project?**
Feb 13th **RESEARCH SKILL:** needs assessment
DUE:
1) Bring two copies of one page of reflective **field notes** in hard copy to class.
2) Bring two copies of one page of a transcribed interview related to a potential stakeholder in your project in hard copy to class.
DUE:
1) Post at least **two key terms** descriptions on BB by 1:00 pm
Teach a Text: Dave and Lindsay

Week 6: **How does advocacy and criticism of topics related to our thesis help us place our research in conversation with the field?**
Feb 20th **RESEARCH SKILL:** advocacy and critique
READ:
1) At least one advocacy article related to some aspect of your research – some examples listed in BB folder marked Adv/Crit
2) At least one critique article related to some aspect of your research – some examples listed in BB folder marked Adv/Crit
3) *President's Committee for Arts and Humanities* BB Adv (read exec summary and other sections as you have time)
4) *Drama for change? Prove it! Impact assessment in applied theatre* BB Crit
DUE:
1) Post at least **three annotations** on BB by 1:00 pm: one is advocacy related to some aspect of your thesis topic, one is a critique related to some aspect of your thesis topic (can use week's readings if salient), the third is an adv. OR crit., your choice.
Teach a text: Ben and Lara

Week 7: **What is arts-based research?**
Feb 27th **RESEARCH SKILL:** arts-based research
READ:
1) *Arts-Based Research in Education* (BB 16-47)
2) At least two articles/books for your own research
DUE:
1) Post at least **two annotations** on BB by 1:00 pm (you can use arts-based research chapters if salient)
2) Post at least **two key term** entries on BB by 1:00 pm
Teach a Text: Meg, Sidney, and Stephanie

Week 8: What is my research question/s and methodology?

Mar 6

RESEARCH SKILL: map of literature review, abstract, introduction/problem

GUEST: Stephanie Cawthon

READ:

- 1) Creswell, Research Methods (map of literature reference pp. 29-30, 32-35)
- 2) Creswell, Research Methods (introduction/problem statement 97-120, 120-126)

DUE:

- 1) Post a **map of your literature review** (can be visual or outline) on BB by 1:00 pm and bring hard copy to class
- 2) Post an **abstract** describing your research project, including your **research question/s** and bring hard copy to class, should reflect literature review

TEACH A TEXT:

Week 9: SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS

March 13

Continue to revise all work that has not received a \checkmark

ALL final revisions on Week 1-9 assignments are due by 5:00 pm

March 13th. No more revisions will be accepted after this date.

ASSIGNMENT: Complete first draft of IRB

RELAX ☺

Week 10: How can I use the IRB as an organizing tool for my thesis prep?

Mar 20

IRB Draft One Sharing and Workshop

Guest: IRB Rep

READ:

- 1) Posted assessment tools BB
- 2) Creswell, Research Design (173-202)
- 3) Read Successful UT IRB Applications on BB

Due:

- 1) Post **Full Draft of IRB template** to BB by 1:00 pm and bring hard copy to class.
- 2) Bring **drafts of assessment tools, consent forms** and QUESTIONS to class.

ASSIGNMENT by April 25th: Pilot at least one of your assessment tools and be prepared to share your findings by 4/25. Assignment will be discussed further in class on this date.

Week 11: NO CLASS NEW WORKS FESTIVAL

ASSIGNMENT by Friday 29: Email KD your proposal for final course project/s and discussion of why these specific artifacts will most serve your personal and project development this semester. Be sure to include information about what will be shared on April 10th with your advisor and May 1st for your final presentation. Also be sure to include your proposed point assignment.

Week 12: How do I use qualitative data to tell the story of my research?

April 3
Analysis Workshop

READ:

- 1) Norris, Playbuilding as Qualitative Research Methods (39-63)
(89-235 pick at least two chapters of interest, pay attention to form and content analysis, term definition, and the way research and performance theory and practice are in conversation)
- 2) To be assigned, read one example from BB
 - a. Qualitative ethnographic research to establish context: Dawson, *Shared Voices* (pg 11-39)
 - b. Thematic discourse analysis: Barker (pg 100-140)
 - c. Devised playtext with youth analysis: Coleman (pg 59-79)

**Revised thesis materials for committee meeting week of 4/10 due to committee by Monday, 4/8 at 9:00 am and posted on BB unless prior arrangement has been made with Katie and committee.

Week 13: Thesis Committee Meeting (no formal class)

April 10

Time to be scheduled 4/10-12 at convenience of committee, Katie & student

DUE: Revised draft of current thesis materials (could include IRB, advisory board, needs assessment, workshop plan, recruitment materials, assessment tool drafts, etc.) posted on BB by 1:00 pm

Week 14: Project/s of Significance: a peer review workshop

April 17

Class time will be divided amongst students for informal presentations and feedback/support from colleagues and professor

Week 15: Sharing our findings from our assessment tool pilot

April 24

Bring findings from your assessment tool pilot to class.

Week 16: Where have we been and where are we going?

May 1

Presentation of Project/s of Significance

DUE:

- 1) Post final documents by 1:00 pm and send to thesis supervisor
- 2) Prepare formal presentation to class of final projects and your semester's journey (15 min per person)