Independent Study
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Description: For this independent study, Sarah will create a plan for a course studying mixed methodology (quantitative and qualitative) from the educational perspective. As part of this course plan, she will write a literature review on mixed methods and develop a course syllabus including possible projects.

Overview

For many years, philosophical purists eschewed the idea of mixing qualitative and quantitative methodologies within a research project. Citing paradigmatic differences too great to reconcile, these philosophers believed that mixing these methods would inevitably lead to failure. However, many researchers have been mixing qualitative and quantitative methods, either knowingly or unknowingly, all along with the intention of best answering a particular research question. This pragmatic approach is becoming more accepted within education and other disciplines. However, most researchers have been educated in either qualitative OR quantitative methods. As Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003b) note, “[T]here are still many professors in graduate programs across the country who consider themselves and their students to be either QUALs or QUANs. These professors might not actively discourage their students from taking courses in the other research tradition, but they certainly do not encourage them” (p. 43). If students are exposed to both qualitative and quantitative methods, typically these are taught as separate from each other (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003c). The authors go on to suggest that the minimum requirement for an individual to become a mixed methods researcher is to take courses from each of the disciplines. However, in order to truly be a proficient
mixed methods researcher, courses specifically discussing the mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods should be available.

The purpose of this project is to provide a course plan for a mixed methods course designed for the graduate student in education. First, a syllabus will be presented, along with a breakdown of course topics and assignments. In order to supplement this syllabus, an outline of topics to be discussed at each class period will be provided. Finally, a list of references used in the creation of this project, including assigned readings will be provided.

Before discussing the syllabus and other materials, I would like to discuss the scarcity of literature regarding the teaching of mixed methodologies. As Creswell, Tashakkori, Jensen, and Shapely (2003) state, “Despite numerous papers and journal articles on mixed methods research, there is a minimal amount of material available on teaching mixed methods research courses or introductory courses with a mixed methods approach” (p. 620). Perhaps this lack of materials is due to the recent emergence of mixed methodology as being acceptable in social research. In addition, mixed methods research is still in its adolescence. The nomenclature is still in development. Given the newness of the methodology, perhaps it is not surprising that few articles or guides are available for teaching.

Appendix A provides a tentative syllabus for the mixed methods course. Appendix B provides a more detailed list of topics and research questions to be discussed at each class. These will be added to and revised as necessary.

Although Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003c) believe otherwise, I believe that it is important that students have some basic understanding of both qualitative and
quantitative techniques before undertaking the mixed methods course. This will save
time in the long run and allow for more focus on integrating the methods together. The
books selected as required texts are Tashakkori and Teddlie’s (2003) *The Handbook of
Mixed Methods Research* and Cresswell’s (2003) *Research Design: Qualitative,
Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. To date, the Tashakkori and Teddlie book
is the most comprehensive guide available, discussing topics such as the paradigmatic
framework and historical perspectives, types of methodologies and analysis, and potential
applications for mixed methods. Creswell’s book is more of an easy-to-use guide that
allows for quick comparisons among the three approaches. My intention is that students
would use the *Handbook* as their research “Bible” in order to look up specific topics as
needed. The Cresswell book is designed to be more of a “how-to” manual to be used
when collecting and analyzing data as well as writing up results. Additional readings will
be provided as needed in order to better understand certain topics or to stimulate
discussion.

The remainder of the syllabus was designed based on a combination of what I
believed to be important topics necessary to understanding mixed methods research and
the syllabi and references available in books and on the web. Creswell, et. al (2003)
performed a survey of 11 professors who had taught a mixed methods class. The chapter
presents possible course objectives, suggested readings, ideas for assignments, and
possible topics. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003c) also provide ideas for class topics and
possible challenges to teaching mixed methods, based on a course that the authors had
taught.
Regarding assignments in the class, students will be asked to write a weekly response paper, providing thoughts about a specified question. These response papers will be used to guide discussion in class.

Undoubtedly, having not taught a research methods class, the scheduled as laid out is tentative at best. It is difficult to determine how long certain topics might take to cover. If taught, the syllabus and course plan for future semesters will be revised as needed. Also, I had some difficulty thinking of appropriate research questions for all the topics. I will add to these as needed.