COM 968-52 Statistics for Social Research III

Susan Holmes

Omega Graduate School

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Professor

Dr. Sean Taladay

**Assignment #4 – Course Learning Journal**

The journal is a written reflection on your learning journey while working in each course. The Learning Journal integrates the essential elements of the course within your professional field of interest. The objective of the course journal is to produce a degree of acculturation, incorporating new ideas into your existing knowledge of each course. This is also an opportunity to communicate with your professor insights gained because of the course. The course-learning journal should be 3-5 pages long and include the following sections:

1.  **Introduction** –Summarize the intent of the course, how it fits into the graduate program as a whole, and the relevance of its position in the curricular sequence.

2. **Personal Growth** - Describe your personal growth–how the course stretched or challenged you– and your progress in mastery of course content and skills during the week and through subsequent readings – what new insights or skills you gained.

3. **Reflective Entry** - Add a reflective entry that describes the contextualization (or adaptation and relevant application) of new learning in your professional field. What questions or concerns have surfaced about your professional field as a result of your study?

4. **Conclusion** – Evaluate the effectiveness of the course in meeting your professional, religious, and educational goals.

**Introduction:**

The intent of having courses like “*Research Design and Methodology and Statistics for Social Research*” within a graduate program serves several essential purposes that align with the overall objectives of Omega Graduate School (OGS). First, the goal of OGS students is to become scholarly practitioners fortified and equipped to impact societal changes by integrating the word of God. Second, OGS has several degree programs, one of which is a Doctor of Philosophy in Social Research (Integration of Religion and Society) (“Doctor of Philosophy (PhD/DPhil), Omega Graduate School,” n.d.). These courses provide knowledge and confidence in academic research and design and are an intricate part of the dissertation phase of the program. If OGS desires to change the world through social research, then its graduates must be equipped to research, write, organize, and analyze data.

These particular courses are offered between cores 5-7 of the Ph.D./DPhil programs and allow one to read published dissertations, defend a research design, assess the research method for creating the research study, and compile and align critical elements of a dissertation. In the statistics course, one can choose a relevant research question and apply appropriate quantitative or qualitative research methods to produce significant findings pertinent to family, church, and community. In addition, the student can analyze statistical information critically in society or personal research to determine its validity, reliability, significance, or bias (*Course Resources - Google Drive*, n.d.). After completing their coursework, OGS students will be equipped to focus their research on a social problem or concern in an area of their professional or personal interest, integrate their faith, and influence a global society for Christ.

**Personal Growth:**

Growing or stretching throughout my coursework here at OGS is a given, something that I have begun to look forward to, and once again, this coursework did not disappoint. To start with, the *Research Design and Methodology II* course was offered asynchronously. There are pros and cons to this method. While the residency portion of the classes may be seen as a form of asynchronous learning because you are not in person, it does allow the students to engage with their professors. I could not do so with this course; it required lots of reading. The focus was on design differentiation, valid instruments, hypothesis formulation, and literature review structuring. All of these elements are significant to the dissertation process. I added all of the essential elements to my learning but incorporated more new knowledge from design differentiation.

Initially, my knowledge of design differentiation extended to understanding the difference between quantitative and qualitative research. However, quantitative and qualitative research methods represent two broad approaches to studying phenomena. Meanwhile, quasi-experimental and correlational designs are specific research designs within the quantitative realm. For example, this course gave us fictional data about religiosity and social behavior in a diverse community, and these two approaches were used to examine relationships and causality and answer questions like, “To what extent does religiosity influence individuals’ engagement in community service and volunteering?” Researchers often integrate these approaches to understand their research questions better. I also learned that the focus for using this method emphasizes numerical data, statistical analysis, and objective measurement. In addition, I read that quasi-experimental design involves manipulating an independent variable but lacks random assignment. It is used when actual experiments are impractical. At the same time, correlational design examines the relationship between two or more variables without manipulation. It assesses the degree of association using correlation coefficients (Salkind & Frey, 2019, p. 77).

In addition, I added to my knowledge of the literature review structure. Cooper's (1988) Taxonomy of Literature Reviews suggests that the literature review can be classified according to six characteristics: *focus, goal, perspective, coverage, organization,* and *audience* (Randolph, 2019, p. 2).

Once the appropriate type of review has been identified, the focus shifts to problem formulation. In this step, the reviewer decides what questions the literature review will answer and determines explicit criteria to dictate the inclusion or exclusion of an article in the review. According to Randolph (2019), at this point, it is essential to distinguish between literature review questions (i.e., questions that can be answered by reviewing the secondary research) and empirical research questions (i.e., questions that can be answered only through primary research). The literature review is the primary source of the empirical research question (Randolph, 2007c) ( p. 6). I also learned that a well-constructed literature review summarizes existing research and critically evaluates and synthesizes information, laying the foundation for the new study’s research questions, objectives, and methodology (Randolph, 2019, p. 6).

In the *Research Design and Methodology III* course*,* I learned the importance of evaluating criteria for ethical research with human subjects. During the residency portion of the course, the Belmont Report was mentioned. The Belmont Report is a leading work on ethics and health care research. Its primary purpose is to protect subjects and participants in clinical trials or research studies (Protections (OHRP), 2018). This report consists of three principles: beneficence, justice, and respect for persons. Under the principle of beneficence, I learned that researchers must also protect participants from exploitation. Any information participants provide through their involvement in the study must be safeguarded (Protections (OHRP), 2018).

In addition, I discovered various sampling techniques like snowball, convenience, and purposive. Snowball sampling is also called referral sampling. This technique is used to recruit participants in qualitative research. The method involves identifying a few initial participants who meet the eligibility criteria and asking them to refer others they know who also fit the requirements. Then, the sample size grows as referrals are added (SooleenAbbas, 2023).

Convenience sampling is as it sounds. Researchers use this method when time and resources are limited. It is a non-probability sampling technique; participants are selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate rather than their suitability for the research question. Qualitative research uses Convenience sampling to generate various perspectives and experiences. For example, it was used during the pandemic because of the urgency of the situation, and time and resources were limited (SooleenAbbas, 2023).

Finally, I learned that Purposive sampling, or judgmental sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research. In purposive sampling, researchers intentionally select participants with specific characteristics or unique experiences related to the research question. The goal is to identify and recruit participants who can provide rich and diverse data to enhance the research findings. In addition, Purposive sampling is used when researchers seek to identify individuals or groups with particular knowledge, skills, or experiences relevant to the research question (SooleenAbbas, 2023). Suffice it to say there are advantages and disadvantages to all of them.

My most challenging course has been *Statistics for Social Research III*. My knowledge has grown immensely, but I honestly cannot say that my confidence in this area has grown. This course is designed to teach students how to communicate using statistics, its unique language. We also learned how to use statistical software, which is helpful because it does the mathematics portion of the analysis for you. However, the student is responsible for programming the software with the correct information. Initially, we used a program called WINKS, and now we use a PSPP program. Using the PSPP software program, the researcher can add independent variables and conduct post-hoc analysis. One Post-hoc test is conducted after an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to identify which group differences contribute to the observed overall significance. As a researcher, I understand that the more familiar one becomes with the program, the more it can support you with other hypotheses for future studies. However, admittedly, I still need more practice.

**Reflective Entry:**

In my professional field of education, I analyze data and hypothesize reasons for the outcomes, and this course has supported my learning in this area. The data I am exposed to is quantitative and qualitative, and inferencing is a large part of the analysis. However, one of the challenges or concerns has been using artificial intelligence (AI) programs that students are unsuccessfully trying to use during standardized testing. Unfortunately, it is something that educators are now concerned about and how students can use this program as a resource, not as a way to give plagiarized responses.

**Conclusion:**

In summary, this semester, which has now turned into two semesters, has been the most new knowledge that I have incorporated thus far and equally challenging. I began a new position this past fall, which has been overwhelming. I am grateful for all the support that I have received from my professors at OGS. I am reasonably sure I would have taken a break from my studies during this time. Instead, I have been given extended time that has allowed me to continue to put forth my best efforts while learning and growing as a research practitioner. I also feel that the new course structure is more manageable for the adult learner still working and managing school and home. Once again, I was stretched in my learning and capacity to complete my assignments, and truthfully, I am feeling less connected to my peers at OGS, but I experience your prayers for me. Nevertheless, I am always grateful for the learning that occurred because of OGS.

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