

**Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey**

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**ESL, Low Literacy and the Adult Learner: Mapping the field**

**Spring 2016**

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Office Hours: By appointment	Prerequisites or other limitations: <i>None</i>
Mode of Instruction: <input type="checkbox"/> Lecture <input type="checkbox"/> Seminar <input type="checkbox"/> Hybrid <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Online <input type="checkbox"/> Other	Permission required: <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes Directions about where to get permission numbers: contact Caroline Coogan, caroline.coogan@gse.rutgers.edu

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**Course Description**

**Learning goals:**

- Identify and give examples of historical milestones, key policies effecting the field, definitions of language and literacy, and ways of "framing" (describing) adult learners
- Analyze how the history of the field, policies, definitions, and assumptions about learners these shape the learning and teaching opportunities of adult learners and teachers in Adult Literacy and ESL education
- Describe a range of adult basic education settings and approaches and identify underlying assumptions about adults, literacy, and learning that impact how learners are served there.

- Summarize current trends in research and practice
- Identify and apply instructional practices and match available resources and professional development opportunities for practitioners that can support their implementation

**Course catalog description:**

Students gain a sense of how research, policy, statute, and funding have shaped the field in terms of educational opportunities for adult learners. Students study key influences at the national, state, and local levels on service provision for adult basic education students who are striving to improve language and literacy skills and learn about resources that can support instruction. This course is considered foundational for practitioners.

**Required texts:**

Course reading assignments will be in the form of articles, videos, policy documents, etc. There is no required text book.

**Grading policy:**

Your course grade will be calculated based on the program wide grading scale as follows:

93-100 = A  
88-92 = B+  
83-87 = B  
78-82 = C+  
73-77=C  
72 and below = F

Note that graduate student can not be assigned a grading lower than a C. Therefore students receiving a final score of 72 or below will fail the course.

**Academic Integrity Policy:**

Any violation of academic honesty is a serious offense and is therefore subject to an appropriate penalty. Refer to <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml> for a full explanation of policies.

**Course Requirements****Attendance Policy:**

You are expected to participate in weekly class activities as described in each module of the course. In an online course, this is your way of attending.

## Summary of Requirements

### Assignments:

#### **1. Online discussions/Weekly activities (20% of overall grade):**

Weekly activities are designed to help you enhance your understanding of assigned texts, draw connections between them and your current experiences, critically analyze their relevance to adult education contexts, and synthesize across topics from week to week. You are expected to participate fully in all weekly assigned discussions/activities. The rubric below details how your participation will be assessed. The learning benefits of participating in weekly activities are cumulative. Although assessment points for each individual weekly discussion/activity are few, your diligent participation adds up to your being successful in completing all assignments and fully benefitting from the course.

#### **2. Assignment 2: Understanding the State Context (30% of overall grade)**

Much of how adult learners and instructors experience adult literacy and ESL education is shaped by state policy. Gathering descriptions of from one state and comparing them to others will help give you a sense of the range and variation nationally in how service is provided for adult basic education learners and how this may influence their opportunities to learn. There is basically no research that compares the impact of various approaches, but your investigation will give you a sense of what these differences are and enable you to speculate about how they matter. This assignment requires you to delve into state policy and service provision in your locality and provides you with opportunities to understand the range and variation across several states. This is a two part assignment.

Part 1. Select a focus state. If you are the only person from your state, choose it as your focus. If there are several students from the same state, one can focus on that state and others will need to pick another. Please sign up for your focus state by Week 2. Using state websites, describe what entity provides adult basic education, what qualifications teachers need, how many programs there are in the state, what services are available, how grant funding is administered, what regulations they have, what requirements there are for practitioners to enter the field and what professional development is offered, etc. You should generally poke around the website as much as possible to create the fullest picture you can. If possible identify a state staff person or local program administrator who can fill in gaps in your understanding.

Compile your information and present it using VoiceThread or other tool through which you can present a visual plus voice over that explains your findings. It should be 5-8 minutes long. **Due by the end of Week 5. (15% of this assignment's grade)**

Part 2. After all descriptions have been submitted, you must read/listen to them all and then write a paper which compares and contrasts them. You should conclude with a discussion about what implications these have for the teaching and learning opportunities of students and teachers. This conclusion will be largely inferential but should be grounded in the discussion of

similarities and differences across state descriptions. Paper should be 5-8 pages long. **Due by the end of Week 8 (15% of this assignment's grade)**

### **3. Assignment 3: Field experience (40% of overall grade)**

This assignment is designed to give you a brief experience with the day to day realities in the field in an adult basic education, literacy, and/or ESL program. If you are not currently working the field, you should identify a local program to visit (other than your own). You will need to visit the program at least three times to observe, interact with students and staff/volunteers, and possibly help out in some way. This assignment has several steps that can be carried out over the second half of the semester starting after Week 7.

a. Propose a focus or focus question for observation based on the readings you have done in the course. For example, you could focus on how learners and literacy are “framed” in the program, how policy is shaping practice, or what views of instructional practice are prevalent. The proposal should include the name of the program you will observe, what specific class(es) you will observe (including day and time when observations will occur), the name of the person that approved your visit, and your observational focus. Please explain your focus in a paragraph of at least 5 sentences that includes what it is, why it is of interest to you, what you will look at during your observations to answer your question, etc. **Due Week 7. Do not begin observation until your observational focus has been approved by the instructor. (10% of assignment grade)**

b. Conduct at least 3 field visits. These can be as often as twice a week over two weeks or spread out over several weeks. Write notes during and/or immediately after each visit that focus on what you saw with regard to your focus/question. Make note of who you want to talk to, what you want to see, or what questions you would like answered during your next visit. **Complete field work during Weeks 8-11.**

c. Write a reflective summary of your field visits that describes what you saw, what your reactions were to it and what you learned with regard to your focus/focus question and questions, issues, concerns, curiosities and/or etc. were generated by this experience. Attach field notes as an appendix to your summary. **Due Week 12. (40% of assignment grade)**

d. Prepare a brief presentation of your reflective summary that describes what you observed and an interesting issue that you raised in your reflective summary that you would like to share with your classmates. You can include photos, video, and audio. Be creative in how you present your findings. This should be submitted in the Assignment 2 blog. **Due Week 13. (40% of assignment grade)**

e. Watch at least 3 other presentations and write a comment to the presenter that responds to the issues the presentation raised. You do not need to write any evaluative comments (although you can). This should be submitted as a response to the person's Blog posting. **Due by Week 15. (10% of assignment grade)**

Be sure to read what your classmates wrote to you!!

If you are working in the field already, you should treat this assignment as a teacher research project in which you raise questions about teaching, learners, or programs. Try to step back and make the familiar unfamiliar. Look carefully and systematically at something you have maybe taken for granted or maybe never thought to look at before.

#### **4. Final Synthesis/Reflection (10% of overall grade)**

Your final task is to reflect on what you have learned this semester and to think about how your learning relates to your current/future practice. Look across the weekly activities and your course assignments. Select 3 things you did in this course that are important to you for one reason or another. For example, maybe they represent your most significant learning, what was most interesting to you, what is most troubling or problematic. Describe them, explain why you chose them and relate them to what you consider to be your key learnings. Discuss how they may shape your practice going forward. Submit as a 2-3 page paper. Note this is both your Week 15 activity and your final assignment for the course.

### **Course Schedule by Week**

#### **Weekly Course topics**

##### **Topics**

1. Defining literacy
2. Defining adult learners
3. Descriptions from the field
4. History of adult basic education provision in the US
5. Population studies
6. Key statutes and policies
7. Instructional approaches
8. Instructional Contexts
9. Assessment
10. Standards and Competencies
11. Motivation and the ABE learner
12. Research in the field
13. Professional Development
14. Resources for teachers