

## **EDUA 8301 — Trends in Rural and Borderland Community Contexts**

*Fall 2026*

### **Instructor Information**

|                           |                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Instructor</b>         | John Decman, Ed.D.                                                                                                                |
| <b>Phone</b>              | 281-639-2792                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Email</b>              | john.decman@sulross.edu                                                                                                           |
| <b>Office Hours</b>       | <i>TBD and by appointment</i>                                                                                                     |
| <b>Instructional Team</b> | Co-constituted and co-taught with EDUA 8321 with faculty collaborator Jane Cooper, Ed.D. (281-841-4858, jane.cooper@sulross.edu). |

### **Term Details**

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|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Term</b>                | Fall 2026                                                                                  |
| <b>Course Dates</b>        | August 24 – December 9, 2026                                                               |
| <b>Synchronous Meeting</b> | Mondays, 5:00 – 6:30 p.m. Central Time, via Microsoft Teams                                |
| <b>Delivery Platform</b>   | Blackboard Ultra (blended: asynchronous modules plus mandatory weekly synchronous session) |
| <b>Credit Hours</b>        | 3                                                                                          |
| <b>Section / CRN</b>       | V01/12399                                                                                  |
|                            |                                                                                            |

### **ZONE 2 — COURSE-SPECIFIC INFORMATION**

### **Course Description**

This course supports students investigations into critical issues, historical developments, and contemporary trends affecting rural and borderland communities. The course will explore varied definitions, contexts, and lenses of “rurality” and “borderlands”, aiming for students to look at assets-based framing as they investigate their distinct social, economic, and cultural spaces. Historical and geographic diversity will expose new lenses of nuanced analysis to excavate challenges and opportunities locally. Interrogating local to global impacts upon their communities, students will begin developing their conversation with the larger academic field, while simultaneously gaining insights in impacts on future improvement cycles.

## Student Learning Outcomes

Four program-level Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) describe what you will be able to do by the time you complete this program. They align with program goals, CPED design principles, Texas superintendent preparation standards where applicable, and the Dissertation in Practice arc.

### **SLO 1 — Improvement Science and Organizational Learning**

Apply improvement-science principles to define, investigate, and address complex problems of practice within educational systems, designing, testing, and refining change ideas through iterative inquiry cycles that lead to measurable and sustainable improvement.

### **SLO 2 — Contextual, Ethical, and Transformational Leadership**

Demonstrate contextually responsive and ethical leadership, particularly in rural and borderland settings, by analyzing organizational conditions, engaging diverse stakeholders, and implementing strategies that advance opportunity and excellence.

### **SLO 3 — Applied Research and Data Literacy**

Design and conduct ethical, applied research that informs organizational decision-making and continuous improvement, using appropriate methodologies to evaluate the impact of improvement efforts within authentic professional settings.

### **SLO 4 — Scholarly Communication, Community, and Policy Engagement**

Communicate ideas, evidence, and findings effectively through scholarly writing, presentations, and professional collaboration, translating research into action by engaging policymakers, practitioners, and community stakeholders.

The course assignments and outcomes are aimed to progressively move and support student metacognitive awareness, targeted feedback of approaches towards mastery, productive struggle, student autonomy, and communities of practice.

## Development of Research and professional skills.

Throughout Semester 1, students will interrogate and think deeply and widely about their problem of practice in nuanced and external ways, utilizing research and professional skills that support academic and professional dispositional growth. Specifically, in this course students will complete among other things:

- **Problem diagnosis** – Understanding of complex organizational problems through varied diagnostic tools and techniques (fishbone, 5 whys, 6 Sigma), students will learn to think both linearly and broadly about their context and how their problems function. Reflexivity about what noise is produced in their analysis of their problems will be addressed.
- **Stakeholder engagement** – Developing, refining, and enacting structured and open interviews with community stakeholders about their problems of practice, students will deepen understanding and unearth tensions within their community that will impact future research.
- **Contextual and environmental analysis** – Analyze organizational conditions within specific geographic, economic, and cultural contexts, including rural and borderland settings.
- **Evidence-Based Professional Communication** – Synthesize qualitative and contextual evidence into clear, audience-appropriate written and oral communication for supervisors, colleagues, and community stakeholders.

## CONTENT REQUIRED

Access to on-line content including The Blackboard Course and Microsoft Teams is required.

## Required Texts

Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Harvard Education Press.

## Grading

| Component                                                   | Points       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Small Group Collaboration                                   | 150          |
| Formative Weekly Assignments                                | 300          |
| Integrative Artifacts and Rationale                         | 400          |
| Anchor Portfolio Development, Reflection, and Dissemination | 150          |
| <b>Course Total</b>                                         | <b>1,000</b> |

| Grade    | Points (of 1,000) | Percentage |
|----------|-------------------|------------|
| <b>A</b> | 900 – 1000        | 90% – 100% |
| <b>B</b> | 800 – 899         | 80% – 89%  |
| <b>C</b> | 700 – 799         | 70% – 79%  |
| <b>D</b> | 600 – 699         | 60% – 69%  |
| <b>F</b> | Below 600         | Below 60%  |

## Assignment and Grading Roadmap

**Every week** you will be expected to:

- Come to class
- Communicate with your small groups, synchronously in TEAMS and/or asynchronously on the Discussion Post in Blackboard outside of class.

Other Assignments will be submitted in Blackboard and will follow due dates as represented in Blackboard or in announcements and stated in class.

All submitted assignments and postings are due on Sunday Evening, this ensures that we can be responsive on Monday evening to your work in our spiraled lessons.

**All assignments are built and geared to allow you to grow and develop, towards your final assignment(s) in the course and your final dissertation.**

**Giving and receiving feedback.** Failure to complete assignment in a timely manner to receive appropriate feedback or revise assignments based on peer and/or faculty feedback will result in a diminution of your final grade by a percentage of 10% of the total amount. Any work turned in late may not receive full feedback.

Our intention is to give strong feedback throughout. The more fully you engage in the process of giving and receiving feedback, the stronger your abilities to move successfully through the program will become.

**Modules and Course Structure.** There are 10 modules throughout the semester. In your small groups formed at the beginning of the semester you will serve as collaborative co-constructors of knowledge throughout the first three modules and then become peer debriefers for fieldwork and writing.

|                                                                    |          |              |                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                    |          |              |                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Small Group Work (10)</b>                                       | 1 - 10   | 150          | Collaboration together, and peer debriefer                                                                                 |
| <b>Module Assignments</b>                                          | 1-6      | 300          | First Problem of Practice, positionality, systems map, problem diagnosis, interview protocol, field notes, data inventory. |
| <b>Integrated Artifacts and Rationale</b>                          | 7-10     | 400          | Synthesis Portfolio, Narrative Draft, Refined Problem of Practice, Symposium Presentation.                                 |
| <b>Anchor Portfolio Development, Reflection, and Dissemination</b> | After 10 | 150          | Final Assignment                                                                                                           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                       |          | <b>1,000</b> |                                                                                                                            |

*A note on jointly assessed work: this course is co-constituted with its Semester 1 companion, and two artifacts are assessed jointly by both professors: the Module 7 evidence work and the final anchor portfolio. The anchor portfolio is one integrated artifact containing components developed in both courses, and it carries 150 points in each course's gradebook. This is deliberate: the portfolio is the culminating evidence of the semester's single shared arc, and its weight in both courses reflects that both courses built it.*

## **BLOCK 2: Module Road Map**

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### **MODULE 1: RURAL AND BORDERLAND CONTEXTS AS IMPROVEMENT ENVIRONMENT**

- What is context, why is this important to know for educational reform and research?
- What are the contextual nuances of your problem of practice?

## **MODULE 2: DEMOGRAPHICS, GEOGRAPHY, AND OPPORTUNITY**

- How do your unique contextual nuances impact educational opportunities?
- What are the structural aspects of these nuances?

## **MODULE 3: FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE STRUCTURE OF PLACE**

- How can and do we conceptualize “rural” and “borderlands”?
- How does this impact how schools of these areas are understood and managed?

## **MODULE 4: HISTORY AND THE ETHICS OF ENCOUNTER**

- What and how can we know about the asset-based history of our place?
- What are the ethical risks of engaging community members?

### ***FIELDWORK WINDOW FOLLOWS THIS MODULE: Interview 1***

## **MODULE 5: THE LISTENER IS PART OF THE INSTRUMENT**

- How can researcher-as-instrument positively impact school-community relationships?
- How does listening change what you know and how you know about this “place”?

## **MODULE 6: WHAT THE DATA HIDE**

- What does our normal view of school success hide from our view?
- How does this “hidden knowledge” improve our practice?

### ***FIELDWORK WINDOW FOLLOWS THIS MODULE: Interview 2***

## **MODULE 7: WHAT COUNTS AS EVIDENCE**

- What evidence matters to the state, to the school, to teachers, to you?
- What evidence do we wish we had, but we do not normally have access to?

## **MODULE 8: THE STORY THE SYSTEM TELLS**

- How does integrating varied types and sources of data impact the strength of a problem of practice?
- How does one use precise, evidence-based writing impact the credibility of the claim?

***FIELDWORK WINDOW FOLLOWS THIS MODULE: Interview 3***

#### **MODULE 9: A PROBLEM IN ITS PLACE**

- How does connecting contextual evidence and analysis with research tools improve argumentation?
- How does critique impact the quality of scholarly work?

#### **MODULE 10: THE CONTEXT YOU CAN NOW SEE**

- What is a well-formed inquiry question?
- How does a portfolio impact the argument we make?

***AFTER THE SYMPOSIUM: the complete anchor portfolio (all seven components) is submitted at the final portfolio submission point in the companion course (150 points, jointly assessed, entered in both courses).***

### **Synchronous Session Participation**

EDUA 8301 is delivered as part of a cohort-based, synchronous-intensive doctoral experience. Weekly synchronous sessions, held Mondays from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. Central Time via Microsoft Teams, are a required and graded component of this course. Attendance at synchronous sessions is mandatory. Synchronous engagement is not optional and is not interchangeable with asynchronous Blackboard activity, given the cohort-based, discourse-dependent nature of doctoral improvement-science work.

Candidates are expected to:

- Attend each scheduled synchronous session for its full duration, with camera on unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor.
- Notify the instructor(s) in advance of any anticipated absence.
- Utilize your small group and Blackboard resources to make sense of missed material.

Repeated unexcused absence from synchronous sessions, or a sustained pattern of non-participation, will affect the participation component of the course grade and may be addressed under the program's professional dispositions review process.

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### **STANDING POLICY AND SUPPORT STATEMENTS**

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## **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) / Accommodation Statement**

SRSU Accessibility Services. Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. To help protect confidentiality, students seeking accessibility/accommodation(s) services must submit the Accommodation Request Form located on our website. Students are welcome to call the Office of Accessibility Services at 432-837-8203 or stop by Ferguson Hall Room 112 if they have any additional questions regarding the process. Our mailing address is PO Box C-122; Alpine, TX; 79832.

## **Distance Education Statement**

Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, such as library resources, online databases, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website.

Students should correspond using Sul Ross email accounts and submit online assignments through Blackboard, which requires a secure login. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website. Directions for filing a student complaint are located in the student handbook.

## **Academic Integrity Statement**

Students in this class are expected to demonstrate scholarly behavior and academic honesty in the use of intellectual property. Students should submit work that is their own and avoid the temptation to engage in behaviors that violate academic integrity, such as turning in work as original that was used in whole or part for another course and/or professor; turning in another person's work as one's own; copying from professional works or internet sites without citation; collaborating on a course assignment, examination, or quiz when collaboration is forbidden. Students should also avoid using open AI sources unless permission is expressly given for an assignment or course. Violations of academic integrity can result in failing assignments, failing a class, and/or more serious university consequences. These behaviors also erode the value of college degrees and higher education overall.

## **Generative AI Use Statement**

The University does not recommend or endorse any specific AI tools or resources. Students should be aware that many generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot) store user input and may use this data to train future models. For this reason, students should never upload or share personal, confidential, or identifiable information—such as names, ID numbers, health data, or assignment submissions containing such details—into any generative AI platform. When using AI tools, students should verify whether the tool complies with student privacy standards as indicated by the University. Faculty may recommend specific tools that better align with institutional data privacy policies, but ultimate responsibility for data protection rests with users. Students are encouraged to use faculty-recommended platforms when engaging in coursework involving generative AI. The University is not liable for any adverse experience or impact when students interact with these tools.

## **Artificial Intelligence, Authentic Scholarly Work, and Iterative Growth – Course Guidelines**

We expect your work to truly represent your work.

Doctoral education is developmental and iterative. You are not expected to enter the program already possessing all of the capacities of a doctoral scholar. You are expected to develop them through the same cycle your Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice is built on: study, strategize, implement, analyze, and reflect. That cycle repeats every semester. Early work will not look like later work. It should not. Growth across time is an essential outcome of doctoral education.

The purpose of doctoral work is not simply to produce polished course deliverables or a completed ISDiP. The work itself is part of the learning. Wrestling with a difficult idea, constructing an argument, receiving critical feedback, recognizing weaknesses in your reasoning, revising your thinking, and trying again are not inefficiencies to be eliminated. Instead, they are central to the formation of a scholarly practitioner, and in our program, they are the constructs that are inherent in also growing as a leader.

### **Disclosure is Expected**

All substantive use of generative AI in work submitted in this course and in this program must be disclosed. Disclosure is a normal expectation of scholarly transparency. It is not, by itself, evidence of inappropriate AI use.

Your disclosure should identify the AI tool used and briefly describe how it contributed to the work. Provide this as a short statement appended to the submitted work, identifying the tool and describing its role in a sentence or two. You are not expected to document every prompt or interaction unless specifically required by an assignment. The purpose is to make the role of AI sufficiently transparent that faculty can understand how the work was developed and distinguish your intellectual contribution from assistance provided by the tool.

Substantive use includes brainstorming, drafting, structural feedback, and analytic support. It does not include grammar checking or citation formatting.

Failure to disclose substantive AI assistance misrepresents the process through which the work was produced and may constitute an academic-integrity concern.

### **Intellectual Ownership and Development Remain With You**

When you submit work, you are representing that its central intellectual work is yours. You should be able to explain how your thinking developed, why you made the choices reflected in the work, how you selected and interpreted evidence, how you arrived at your arguments and conclusions, and what role AI played in that process.

You should also expect your faculty to be interested in how your work changes over time. Drafts, feedback, revisions, discussions, research decisions, and earlier iterations are not merely steps toward a finished product. They provide evidence of your development as a scholarly practitioner.

You remain responsible for the accuracy, integrity, resources, reasoning, and scholarly quality of everything you submit, regardless of the tools used in producing it.

### **Our Approach is Developmental**

Faculty are not expected to police AI use through detection software, document watermarks, or similar technological indicators. Our concern is not whether a machine believes AI was involved. Our concern is whether you have been transparent about its use, whether the intellectual work remains authentically yours, and whether you are engaging in the iterative growth your ISDiP is designed to foster.

Because AI use is expected to be disclosed, a meaningful discrepancy, work whose sophistication, reasoning, or voice departs markedly from your disclosed AI use and your prior developmental record, may warrant further examination. Faculty may ask you to discuss or defend your work, explain its development, connect it to earlier iterations, provide relevant developmental materials, or otherwise demonstrate intellectual ownership. Faculty reserve the right to not assess submissions of work that is clearly not authored by the student.

Individual assignments may establish additional expectations or restrictions when independent performance is necessary to develop or demonstrate a particular competency. You are responsible for following those requirements, appropriately acknowledging sources, protecting confidential information related to your Problem of Practice organization or site, and complying with university academic-integrity policies.

Use AI when it strengthens your learning and scholarship. Disclose its role. Remain responsible for the work. Most importantly, do not use technology to bypass the struggle, feedback, revision, and growth through which you become a scholarly practitioner.

## **Student Responsibilities Statement**

All full-time and part-time students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the Student Handbook and the Undergraduate & Graduate Catalog and for abiding by the University rules and regulations. Additionally, students are responsible for checking their Sul Ross email as an official form of communication from the university. Every student is expected to obey all federal, state and local laws and is expected to familiarize him/herself with the requirements of such laws.

## **Supportive Statement (Title IX / CARE)**

I aim to create a learning environment for my students that supports various perspectives and experiences. I understand that the recent pandemic, economic disparity, and health concerns, or even unexpected life events may impact the conditions necessary for you to succeed. My commitment is to be there for you and help you meet the learning objectives of this course. I do this to demonstrate my commitment to you and to the mission of Sul Ross State University to create a supportive environment and care for the whole student as part of the Sul Ross Familia. If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please don't hesitate to come and talk with me. I want to be a resource for you.

## **Counseling Services**

Sul Ross has partnered with TimelyCare where all SR students will have access to nine free counseling sessions. You can learn more about this 24/7/365 support by visiting [Timelycare/SRSU](https://www.timelycare.com/srsu). The SR Counseling and Accessibility Services office will continue to offer in-person counseling in Ferguson Hall room 112 (Alpine campus), and telehealth Zoom sessions for remote students and RGC students

## **University Libraries**

The Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library and Archives of the Big Bend in Alpine offer FREE resources and services to the entire SRSU community. Access and borrow books, articles, and more by visiting the library's website, [library.sulross.edu/](https://library.sulross.edu/). Off-campus access requires logging in with your LoboID and password. Librarians are a

tremendous resource for your coursework and can be reached in person, by email ([srsulibrary@sulross.edu](mailto:srsulibrary@sulross.edu)), or by phone (432-837-8123).

No matter where you are based, public libraries and many academic and special libraries welcome the general public into their spaces for study. SRSU TexShare Cardholders can access additional services and resources at various libraries across Texas. Learn more about the TexShare program by visiting [library.sulross.edu/find-and-borrow/texshare/](http://library.sulross.edu/find-and-borrow/texshare/) or ask a librarian by emailing [srsulibrary@sulross.edu](mailto:srsulibrary@sulross.edu).

Mike Fernandez, SRSU Librarian, is based in Eagle Pass (Building D-129) to offer specialized library services to students, faculty, and staff. Utilize free services such as InterLibrary Loan (ILL), ScanIt, and Direct Mail to get materials delivered to you at home or via email.

## Tutoring Center

The Lobo Den Tutoring Center offers FREE tutoring support to help you excel in your courses. Whether you need assistance in Writing, Math, Science, or other subjects, we're here to help!

Important Information:

- Drop-in and Scheduled Appointments: Flexible options to fit your needs.
- Hours of Operation: Monday–Friday, 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM.
- Workshops: Attend our regularly hosted academic workshops on STEM topics and professional development, often in collaboration with specialized faculty.
- Location: BWML Room 128.
- Contact Us: For more information or to book an appointment, email [tutoring@sulross.edu](mailto:tutoring@sulross.edu) or call (432) 837-8726.

Looking for additional support?

- Tutor.com offers FREE 24/7 online tutoring in over 200 subjects, including specialized support for ESL and ELL learners with native Spanish-speaking tutors.
- Access Tutor.com via Blackboard: Log in to your Blackboard account to get started anytime, anywhere.

Take advantage of these valuable resources to boost your confidence and performance in your classes. We look forward to helping you succeed!

## IRB and S2SIAR Governance Note

Semester 1 coursework includes structured interviews conducted as part of your emerging problem-of-practice inquiry. These interviews are formation-level fieldwork undertaken for course-based learning purposes and do not, at this stage of the program, constitute IRB-governed human subjects research. Formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) review, informed consent procedures, and human subjects research governance are addressed program-wide in EDUA 8333 (Semester 6), when your inquiry transitions to formal applied research. Questions about the distinction between course-based fieldwork and IRB-governed research should be directed to your instructor(s) or the Program Director.