VOICEOVER: Dr. Michael Patton begins this course on research design by introducing the topic of research and contextualizing it in the scholar practitioner model. He concludes the program with a discussion of two terms he believes should be in the vocabulary and consciousness of a scholar practitioner: epistemology and ontology.

DR. MICHAEL PATTON: I want to welcome you into the world of the scholar practitioner. So let's talk about that world and what it means to be a scholar practitioner. A scholar is someone who studies how the world is, to learn about the world, to contribute to knowledge about the world. And part of what distinguishes research from our ordinary walking through the world and being in the world is not only paying attention to it more systematically, but the commitment to record how we do that. To publish for others to review what our findings are, and in particular what methods we used to come up with those findings. What you'll find in the world of scholarship is that the controversies are actually not so much about the findings. The controversies are about the methods. How did you find out what you found out. The method finding linkage is key.

DR. MICHAEL PATTON: And so as a scholar you have an obligation and a commitment to record not only your findings but to document in great detail where those findings came from. How did you arrive at those conclusions. What instruments did you use. What was your sample. What was your relationship to the thing that you were studying? It is that commitment to study the world, to understand how it unfolds, that makes you a scholar. A practitioner is someone who is trying to make a difference in the world. Trying to help people, trying to change systems, trying to improve programs. And that linkage then between the scholar and the practitioner, is that a scholar practitioner is someone who uses the skills and the knowledge that comes out of scholarship to inform their action in the world. To inform their practice. Let me give you a favorite example. My daughter was born without one ear. And as she became a teenager we began talking with her about whether or not she wanted to have reconstructive surgery, to have an ear built. And we located one of the world's, by reputation, best reconstructive surgeons, and went to see him. And he talked to my daughter and showed her what he would do. But in addition to that, he had followed up all of the people on whom he had performed reconstructive surgery. He had interviews with them. And he was able to show my daughter satisfaction rates of different people who had had their ears rebuilt. And was able to show her data from teenage girls who were the least satisfied of his clientele, because they had such high expectations about how this would change their lives. So as a part of his practice, a skilled reconstructive surgeon, he provided her with data about how people like her responded to this surgery, the impact on their lives, and was able to gather data from her and help her think about what her life was like now. How
it might be different, what her expectations were, and compare that to data from other people, like her. He was a scholar practitioner as a reconstructive surgeon. If you're in psychological practice, if you're in a clinic, if you're in education, part of being a scholar practitioner is to follow up the impact of your work and find out, are you making the difference you want to me?

DR. MICHAEL PATTON : We call that reality testing. A scholar practitioner is careful not to fool themselves about the impact they have. We know from psychology that we all have rose colored glasses, we all have selective perception. As basically animals we prefer pleasure to pain, and so we'd like to think that we're doing good. That we're making a difference. The scholar practitioner brings to that desire to make the world a better place a commitment to empirically validate whether or not those hopes are actually being realized. Are you making a difference? Now that's a - can be a scary question. Because it's easier in some ways to live the unexamined life. To engage in the unexamined practice. The commitment of a scholar practitioner is to say here's what I hope to accomplish. This is the difference I hope to make. This is the contribution I hope to make. And then to employ the methods of research to find out, is that how it turned out? How do you know that you're doing good? Not just that you hope to do good, but how do you know? And that requires having criteria, that requires having data. That requires being willing to ask that hard question about what difference you're making. The scholar practitioner is committed to changing what's going on to get a better result. And that means using the methods of research in systematic inquiry to examine the effects of your practice, to improve your practice.

DR. MICHAEL PATTON : Now, many of you are unlikely to be full time researchers. Full time scholars. You will however throughout your life as a practitioner be a lifetime consumer of research. We live in the knowledge age. Knowledge is the currency of our time. To be an effective citizen, to be an effective participant in democracy, to be an effective practitioner, to be an effective parent, to be an effective colleague, to be an effective spouse, there is knowledge about what works and doesn't work in those arenas. There's also a huge amount of garbage out there. Especially with the Internet spewing garbage all the time. One of the commitments of a scholar practitioner is to be able to tell knowledge from junk. Is to be able to distinguish stuff that is true and validated and reliable from the stuff that people make up. Where they - assert things on the basis of their values and hopes that simply aren't true. So regardless of whether or not you conduct a great deal of research, you will always be consuming research. What diets work, what foods should you consume and not consume, what's the effect of red wine, what's the effect of caffeine? What kind of exercise programs work? What statements do politicians make that are true and not true? It's important for you to know those things.

DR. MICHAEL PATTON : As a consumer, you need to be concerned about knowledge, about facts, about what's going on in the world. That makes you a
sophisticated consumer. And learning how to tell solid research, learning how to
tell cumulative research becomes a part of that practice. The scholar practitioner
brings to their own practice an attitude of skepticism. An attitude that you need
evidence to make claims. This is one of the areas where I find students get into
most difficulty. Especially in psychology, but in the social sciences in general. Is
many people who come to adult education come with a lot of experience and with
strong beliefs about what works and doesn't work. Many psychologists are
involved in a form of practice where they're in a particular tradition of psychology
or operating on a particular model, or doing some techniques that they've been
using for a while. And I work with those students and ask them why they've come
into a master's program or a doctoral program, and what they often say is, I want
to prove that my model works. That's not the mindset of a scholar practitioner.
That's public relations. That's advertising. To try to convince people that
something you believe is true is PR, is advertising, is persuasion. What the
scholar practitioner wants to do is inquire into whether or not what you're doing
works. You bring then an openness to it, a reality testing attitude to it. Research
is not about proving you're right. Research is about studying how the world is.

DR. MICHAEL PATTON : And you may or may not be effective in what you're
doing. That is what this gives you an opportunity to do, to learn about what works
and doesn't work. Not to try to prove a prejudice, not to prove a predisposition.
Not to support your biases. But to find out how the world works. Now the beauty
of that is, and I want to speak directly to the anxiety that students often have
when they come to research. The beautiful of that is that you cannot fail. To find
out that your model doesn't work is not failure. That's knowledge, that's learning.
The world is the way it is. Our task is to find out how it is. That's the challenge. To
discover that the way we thought it is isn't the way it is, is not failure. It's
knowledge. Our history as a species is filled with propositions that turned out to
be false. That's how we build knowledge. So you can't fail at this, unless you
come to it with a closed mind, manipulating the data to try to make it come out
the way you wanted to make it come out. To be genuinely open to the way the
world is, and to find out how it is, and to record your methods of inquiry so that
others can see how you arrived at your conclusions, and to use those
conclusions to inform your practice - that's what makes you a scholar practitioner.

DR. MICHAEL PATTON : As you enter the world of scholarship you're going to
encounter jargon. There are words that scholars have used that lay people often
make fun of or don't understand or are intimidated by. And of course as
practitioners you know about jargon in your areas of practice. Every discipline
has jargon that is language it creates for its own use to distinguish things that it
thinks are important. In science and research in general, two important words
that you will encounter in this journey are epistemology and ontology. And I
encourage you as a scholar practitioner to practice those words so that they role
off your tongue and you can share them with people or respond to them when
you encounter somebody who may ask you, what's your epistemological
perspective?
Epistemology is the study of knowledge. How do we know what we know? And this is an important distinction within the scholar practitioner framework, because the framing of a scholar practitioner has a particular epistemology. One kind of epistemology, the one that's indominant in much of research and traditional social science, is that the way to study the world, the way to know the world, is to be separated from the world. Is to be outside, is to be independent, is to be objective, is to not be involved in what's going on in the world. That's an epistemological stance. It says that you can best know the world by being separate from it. The scholar practitioner epistemology asserts that you can best know the world by being engaged in it. That by being engaged, by being part of the world, you get access to things through your direct experience with lived experience that, by understanding what's happening to you as a part of your engagement, you get deeper insight into how the world is. So that's an epistemological stance. One that you will have the opportunity to deepen throughout this scholar practitioner journey.

And I simply introduce that term to you now so that you can pay attention to it, and ask yourself, how do I know what I know? What are my sources of knowledge? How do I deal with my own biases? How do I try to acknowledge bias? How do I control bias? What are different sources of knowledge? How do I establish the credibility of these different sources of knowledge. Those are epistemological questions.

Ontology about the nature of reality is especially important in psychological research. Because it addresses the issue of what is it that we're studying? What is the world made up of? Clearly there's a physical world, there is the, the, the world that is made up of tables and chairs and roads and trees. There's a world of living things. One of the ontological issues in psychology and in the social sciences is whether the nature of reality for human beings is different in some way than that physical world. For example, there is the constructivist perspective that says our language and our participation in a particular culture and a particular society conditions our experience of the world, so that what we think is real is actually a matter of perception. It's not real. It's what we've learned from our culture. We've been taught to think of certain things as real. And that makes them real, because we think that they are real. The, the very notion of a table is a cultural construct, from that point of view. In the physical world, there is simply this structure, but we know certain structures as something we call a table.

One of the classic examples of constructivism is the difference between a hamburger and a cheeseburger in American culture. Here are these two things that can have all kinds of condiments and different kinds of bread and, and different degrees of fat in the meat and it can be made on the grill or some other way. But, but we've decided that adding a piece of cheese to this
thing is in a different category than everything else that we may do to a burger. Well that's a construction. And looking at how we've constructed reality is one version of ontology. In this scholar practitioner journey then, you'll be invited to think about, how do you know what you know? And - what do you think about, what are your assumptions about, what it is you're studying. The very nature of reality itself. Those are big time, jargony words, and over the course of this journey they will hopefully become more real to you. Because as a scholar practitioner you will be expected to have an epistemological and ontological point of view.

DR. MICHAEL PATTON : So I welcome you and invite you into the world of the scholar practitioner. It's going to be a wonderful journey. You'll learn ways of inquiring into how the world is, and how your practice is, to improve that practice. And that will serve you well, both in being a participant in this world, and in changing it in the ways that you want to change it.