

**Sample Reading Post:**  
**GEOG 586/MALAS 600B, Week 5**

Readings:

1. Davidson, Cathy N. 2017. Introduction. Pages 1-15 in *The New Education: How to Revolutionize the University to Prepare Students for a World in Flux*. New York: Basic Books.
2. Qualitative Methods 2017, SDSU Department of Geography Report: Perceptions and Knowledge of Geography on an American College Campus
3. Qualitative Methods 2017, SDSU Department of Geography Video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-f7wnqota8>
4. Stratford, Elaine and Matt Bradshaw. 2016. Qualitative research design and rigour. Pages 117-129 in *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 4th Edition (I. Hay, Ed). Don Mills: Oxford University Press Canada.

**Top Gun 2: Intellectual Space Travel at Miramar College**

From her opening with a reference to the hero's cycle to ending as a cheerleader for interdisciplinarity, I'm all in for the vision Davidson (2017) lays out in her introduction to *The New Education*. This is a movement that "seeks to redesign the university beyond the inherited disciplines, departments, and silos by redefining the traditional boundaries of knowledge and providing an array of intellectual forums, experiences, programs, and projects that push students to use a variety of methods to discover comprehensive and original answers" (pp. 13-4). Her vision is a welcome alternative to the calls for the techno or vocational fix, both of which I've endured in my time as a high school and college professor and whose failings I've experienced firsthand. The techno-fix, she argues, simply dumped technology into the classroom and digitized an outdated system (check). The vocational skills training-fix seeks to fund STEM and related fields while defunding humanities programs and other "frills" (check)—despite predictions by many (including IBM, p. 10) that most such jobs will be automated within twenty years. (Meanwhile, most CEOs majored in engineering, business, history, economics, computer science, political science, or business administration {Dumbauld, 2017, <https://www.straighterline.com/blog/common-majors-fortune-500-ceos/>}). While the diagnosis fueling these fixes may be correct, that college is out of date and out of

touch with today's needs, their solutions miss the mark by a long shot. Davidson wonders, "What would it mean to redesign higher education for the intellectual space travel students need to thrive in the world we live in now?" (p. 6). She argues that we need to *revolutionize* the way higher education works because of the way the Internet has remade the world. We need to teach active learning that encourages students to create new knowledge from the world around them; they must learn not *from* experts, but they must "learn *how to be* experts themselves" (p. 8). This would give "them agency, [and] arm them to take on a difficult world, to *push back and not merely adapt* to it" (p. 13, emphasis added). In sum, Davidson argues, higher education needs to start teaching students to learn how to learn. It's not about workforce readiness, it's about world readiness. How else can we prepare them for the unknown, the future where there "be dragons" and the next economic downturn, although invisible, is just over the horizon?

The report generated by our predecessors in Fall, 2017, is such a visually appealing and intellectually thorough document. I found both the summary of findings and future recommendations to be excellent and specific. I also think it's great how the students' voice comes through in the final product, as well. I also appreciated the survey in that it educates people about the Geography discipline while assessing their awareness. The video that accompanies it is mostly excellent as well. I appreciate the beautiful shots from all around the region—I was especially glad to see that Las Playas in Tijuana was included. The short excerpts from faculty interviews were insightful, if the sound was tinny. I also observed some unreflected positionality, not only in the selection and framing of the different locales, but in the portrayal of the people within them—I noticed that when showing humans on campus, the frame-rate was accelerated, but when showing fish and turtles, it was not. Although not significant, I wondered at the seemingly unquestioned romanticizing of "nature" in the video. Still, I find it an impressive and professional artifact.

In their chapter, Stratford and Bradshaw (2016) continue to provide the same kind of clear and well reasoned guidelines for, in this case, maintaining rigor in one's qualitative research designs. They are even more careful than the other authors we've read thus far in this text in that these are certainly not prescriptions. Indeed, the direction they provide is specific enough to be helpful but open enough to be applied across a range of research programs. For example, they cite Sui and DeLyser (2012), who argue that researches be mindful that all

methods “simultaneously enable and disable” (p. 120)—providing the helpful (if overly simplistic) labels for quantitative research as “extensive” and qualitative research as “intensive.” In terms of identifying one’s case, it’s important for researchers to be able to answer the question: “what is this case a case of?” (121; citing Flyvbjerg, 1998) but also be willing to see how the given case may resonate out to include other cases, as the Franklin Square case demonstrates. As with doing effective archival research, rigor and transferability of findings can be achieved by thorough exploratory and/or background work—the more comprehensive, the more confident we can be about who we select to include in our research and why. Their discussion of Patton’s (2002) purposive sampling is helpful as well—giving us just enough information to know where to go if we decide to use any of his strategies, which the authors note can be used in combination to great effect. What I appreciate most about this chapter is the rich but concise discussion of rigor and how to ensure it within our work. The key to rigor, for Stratford and Bradshaw, is the continuous circle (which has echoes of the PAR method), “starting from our interpretive community and involving our research participant community and ourselves, before returning to our interpretive community for assessment” (p. 126; citing Burawaoy et al. 1991 and others). Ensuring rigour also means incorporating checking procedures into the research process, such as the four major types of triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Baxter & Eyles, 1997): “multiple sources, methods, investigators, and theories” (p. 127). Without using the terms, the authors also note the importance of reflexivity in the research design. Thus, in just over ten pages, the authors provide loose but potent tools to help ensure that our research programs are rigorous and their results transferable while providing a primer of many of the keys to effective qualitative research in general. Stratford and Bradshaw even wove in a nod to interdisciplinarity and the need to reach across and into different disciplines to “enable collective consideration of ‘wicked problems’ that are difficult to solve because of their complexity” (p. 118). I wish I could be so efficient with my prose.