**Getting to Know: Megan Bailey**
Written by: Michelle Wooten (Ph.D. student in Educational Research)

*Megan Bailey is a doctoral student in Social and Cultural Studies and is working toward her Qualitative Research Certificate at the University of Alabama. She is also the Curriculum Development Director for the Center for Ethics & Social Responsibility at UA.*

What drew you into qualitative methods?
When I entered the Social and Cultural Studies PhD program, I didn’t have much of a background in social science research. My undergraduate degree was in history, and I assumed my graduate studies would be in history too. I initially joined the Social and Cultural Studies program because I was intrigued by the interdisciplinary aspect of it and how that helped me think through issues of inequality in education. My career is in service-learning, and I became very curious about how the history of schooling shaped current pedagogical practices and whether that was reproducing inequalities. The Social and Cultural Studies program didn’t have a Master’s option, so I decided to jump into the PhD because it seemed like the program would allow me room to do the kind of historical analysis I wanted to do—one that considered the role of colonialism and globalization in shaping education. Still I was very hesitant about social science research. There’s a great debate among historians about whether history is an art or a science.

I’ve always been very drawn to the art camp because I think that the historical and spatial context that historians are writing in is so deeply important to the way they think through and write through the past. That made me resistant to research methods courses because the social science research I had been exposed to thus far felt so exhaustingly formulaic. For over a year, I resisted entering the qualitative program because I thought it was going to be the same thing. But then I took Dr. Guyotte’s introductory qualitative methods course the second year of my program and realized that the courses were centered on the same theorists and problems I was grappling with elsewhere, so that is what attracted me.

What differing angle did the methods courses offer in contrast to your Foundations courses?
In methods we studied people like Patti Lather and Betty St. Pierre – who I wouldn’t have studied otherwise.  It felt like these scholars had read the same theorists that I had but in their writing were – paraphrasing from Adele Clark –having a cup of coffee (or in my case black tea) and thinking with them. Like the theorists are your mentors, even if you never meet them.

What do you think the methods course have enabled you in the Dissertation process?
My dissertation isn’t a ‘study’ in the regular sense of the word.  But I think it has helped me intentionally place theory in what I want to say – especially in the sense of collapsing the differentiation between theory and practice. If I’m using Gayatri Spivak or Eve Tuck, that has to mean something incredibly particular about what I say and where I am in the research/ writing. It means that I need to be attentive to the spatial and the linguistic effects of colonization and modernity- they sit with us and affect everything we do. I can’t abandon that in my thinking.

How have you seen yourself develop in your theoretical practice and articulation?
Absolutely. I first encountered Spivak while doing research for my undergraduate senior thesis.  She is critical of nationalism in India and what happened in the wake of the British Empire. My research was on how the British and Indian people disagreed on what colonialism is and what the Raj was.  So I read a lot of her work and was beginning to use the language, but I didn’t quite understand how I was using it.  I might throw in a word like “hegemony” because it seemed like it fit.  But when I started diving into her work more last year, I began realizing just how complicated her argument is. That’s so appropriate though because I was reading past the marginalized voices that she is saying I can never hear. What I’m trying to do now is to figure out what that means for me as a scholar and a human being.

What practices have you adopted during your program that have helped you move through your coursework?  I remember you saying in class one time that you aimed for reading a book a week!
Reading a book a week was insanely helpful.  I adopted that practice because I met a professor from LSU who had graduated from our program, Roland Mitchell.  He said that when budding academics were defending their research or doing job talks, he could always tell who had been reading.  So I spent Year 3 of my program reading 53 books.  I read everything – if we were assigned a section of a book in class, I would read the whole book.  Or if I really liked the way someone was thinking, I would read everything I could by that person. There’s so much that I don’t know about the work we’re doing in education foundations and research; I just felt like I needed to read to map out the ideas. I still read a lot, but I have pivoted away from reading as much so I have time for writing as well. Right now, I am trying to get a few articles published.

So you can sense that now?
Yes, I was told by a lot of people that the comprehensive exams would be so overwhelming.  But for me it was a very calm process – it was the most relaxing two weeks of my life!  Everything was building during my year of reading and so when I began writing, it just flowed.  It was neat seeing how it shaped up. It really confirmed for me personally that I’m doing the work I should be doing.

Why was obtaining the qualitative certificate important for you?
The methods courses ended up being some of my favorite.  Additionally, I liked that the 18-credit hours would allow me to teach methodologies as a faculty member.  I also have an increased sense of confidence in interviewing – something that requires a lot of courage for me since I’m an introvert. Conducting qualitative research has also made me a much more organized student:  collecting large amounts of student data requires a lot of diligence in organization. But perhaps most importantly for me, I have become really attuned to ethics in my interactions with those involved in any research process.