SW 949: QUALITATIVE METHODS FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
Fall, 2008

COURSE OVERVIEW

This interactive, intensive seminar is designed to introduce the principles, methods and practice of qualitative social science research. The course is structured to address four domains: 1) philosophical underpinnings and ethical considerations in qualitative research; 2) considerations in designing a qualitative study and getting it off the ground; 3) major techniques for gathering evidence (e.g., observational/field research, interviews, and focus groups); and 4) fundamental strategies for analyzing and reporting qualitative data. Both positivist and interpretive approaches to the use of qualitative methods will be examined. Pragmatism as a philosophical foundation for qualitative social science research, as well as design and methodological features of research traditions of inquiry that have a distinguished history in the social sciences (e.g., narrative, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology) will be highlighted. The course will enable students to critically evaluate and enhance the “quality” of qualitative data (i.e., understand the essential strategies for ensuring analytic rigor), and learn how to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods.

This course is designed to provide substantive methodological content for various phases of the research process, accompanied by experiential learning opportunities. Students are expected to complete all readings and come to class prepared to discuss the readings and the implications for the development of their pilot and/or future research. Students will share responsibility for leading and contributing meaningfully to class discussions.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students should have increased:

1. Knowledge about the history, purposes, and underpinning philosophies of qualitative methods, and when such methods are appropriate.
2. Awareness of ethical issues and concerns salient in qualitative research.
3. Appreciation regarding how qualitative research design and procedures vary by the research tradition or approach (e.g., narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study).
4. Understanding of how to conduct qualitative interviews, focus groups, and field observations.
5. Understanding of how to gather and utilize documents and archival data
6. Understanding of how to prepare field notes and research logs.
7. Understanding of how to critically evaluate and enhance the quality of qualitative data.
8. Knowledge about how to prepare qualitative data for analysis and how to generate analysis units (codes, categories, memos) and procedures.
9. Understanding of how to critique, summarize, compile and report qualitative research.
10. Awareness of purposes and design considerations of mixed methods research.
REQUIRED READINGS

The following **required texts** may be purchased at the Underground Textbook Exchange, located at 664 State Street between Walgreens and the Credit Union (251-4444).


3) There are also several required readings that are available on-line through either the World Wide Web or through our UW-Madison library system [http://www.library.wisc.edu/](http://www.library.wisc.edu/). I will provide the citation and web address or indicate the data base where you may find the full article. The University is encouraging professors to find ways to keep costs down for students, and since these are available for free on the WEB or through our library system, I thought this would be convenient and cost effective.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

- **Attendance and active leadership and participation in class discussions and exercises (20 Points).** This is a seminar in which your ability to talk in an informed, and analytical manner, and engage in class exercises counts. Participation in discussion and critique of class readings and how course content relates to your research interests is essential to your success in the course.

- **Assignments (80 Points):** With respect for adult student’s diverse learning needs, a variety of assignments are provided from which students may choose their area of foci. Students will be required to review the course assignments and turn in a learning contract indicating the choice of assignments and dates for completion by the third week of class. See “Learning Contract” and description of course assignments for further information. Students will select from the following assignments for a total of 80 points. Students must select one major assignment and two minor assignments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Select One Major Assignment (40 points each)</th>
<th>Select Two Minor Assignments (20 points each)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-Class Workshop – Class Presentation (45 minute)</td>
<td>Interview Guide and Consent Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Paper</td>
<td>In-depth interview, Summary, and Transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Research Proposal</td>
<td>Field Observation and Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Portfolio Notebook</td>
<td>Coded Transcript and Analysis report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design your own Assignment (must obtain instructor approval)</td>
<td>Critique of Qualitative Research Reports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grades Points**

Grades will be assigned using the following conversion table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>100 point scale</th>
<th>Final Grade</th>
<th>Criteria of Work Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-93</td>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-89</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-83</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74-79</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
** Required Reading (In Course Texts or Available Online)
* Recommended Reading (online)

COURSE OUTLINE: TOPICS AND READINGS

---

Introduction: Philosophical Underpinnings and Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Research

---

Week 1: Friday, September 5

INTRODUCTION AND COURSE OVERVIEW
Welcome and introductions
Syllabus and assignment review
Getting oriented: Theoretical and disciplinary origins of qualitative methods.
Myths about and the nature of qualitative research
Distinguishing qualitative from quantitative methods and qualitative methods from practice.
Challenges and opportunities
Students will introduce their research interests and projects.


Week 2: Friday, September 12

EPISTOMOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY
Ways of looking at the world and research design.
Assumptions about what can be known and how to go about “knowing”
Epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry
Five qualitative traditions.
Philosophical and theoretical frameworks.


Major Techniques for Gathering Evidence

Week 6: Friday October 10

OBSERVATION AND USE OF DOCUMENTS/OTHER EXISTING DATA
Field strategies and record keeping
Types of observational research and planning
Video and audio media in qualitative research
Developing observational skills
Ethnography
Unobtrusive measures: Analyzing texts and material artifacts


** (Online) Fox, Nick. (1998). How to Use Observations in a Research Project. On line at (click on .PDF link: http://www.trentrdsu.org.uk/resources_resource_observations.html


** (Online) Ratcliff, R. Video and audio media in qualitative research. http://don.ratcliffs.net/video/


THE ART AND SCIENCE OF INTERVIEWING INDIVIDUALS

Types of interviews
Preparing for the interview
Considerations for before, during and after the interview
Interview quality: Interviewer qualifications
Transcribing interviews: Preparing the data


Interview Guide Examples:

* Interview Guide for Qualitative Interviews on Inter-generational Transfers http://www.ssc.upenn.edu/Social_Networks/Level%203/Transfers/qualitative/FTP_qualitative_guidelines.pdf and

* Qualitative Interview Protocol for Youth Study http://www.acoa.ca/e/business/entrepreneurship/youthstudy/appendixD.pdf
THE ART AND SCIENCE OF INTERVIEWING GROUPS
Focus group methodology: Advantages and disadvantages
Uses and abuses of focus groups
Sampling
Planning and facilitating focus groups
Analytic challenges in focus group research
Transcribing focus groups: Preparing the data


* Earley, L., Cushway, D. & Cassidy, T. "Children's perceptions and experiences of care giving: A focus group study." *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 20*(1), 69-80. Sorry, online full text is not available.

Week 9: Friday, October 31

LAB; APPLICATION - Use this time to conduct and transcribe your Interviews, complete your field observations or work on your major paper or research proposal. Students who are developing proposals may schedule time to meet with the Instructor to discuss their projects. Read materials for week 10. Be prepared to critique research reports from assigned readings.

Week 10: Friday, November 7

RIGOR AND QUALITY
Assessing the quality of the data
Trustworthiness and credibility
Guidelines for enhancing rigor
Standards of quality and verification within traditions of inquiry
Triangulation


Week 11: Friday November 14

LAB: APPLICATION - Use this time to critique your qualitative research reports and begin careful review of readings for next week. Give thought to analytic approaches that would be appropriate for our own research projects. If you have contracted to do the coded transcript and analysis report you should review your transcript several times to become familiar with it, and give serious thought to identifying the analytic method that you intend to utilize. If you are ready, you may want to begin the analysis process.

Week 12: Friday November 21

ANALYSIS: OVERVIEW OF APPROACHES & BEGINNING CODING
Analysis within approaches to inquiry (comparison of five research traditions
Developing codes and coding hierarchies
Thematic coding and categorizing
Grounded theory and Dimensional analysis
Searching for “negative cases”
Computer programs to help store and organize data


** Week 13: Friday November 27

**********Thanksgiving**********

** Week 14: Friday December 5

** MIXED METHODS: INTEGRATING QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES

What is “mixed methods” research?
Types of mixed method strategies
Design considerations
Data collection procedures


**Week 15: Friday December 12**

**TELLING THE STORY: INTEGRATION AND SYNTHESIS**

Writing up the qualitative study  
Organizing the report  
Diverse structures for writing qualitative reports based on research tradition.  
Putting it all together  
Course Review  
Looking Ahead  
Summary and Class Evaluation


