SW 949: QUALITATIVE METHODS FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
Fall, 2012

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.

In general, the “seminar” format is considered a collaborative learning environment allowing for an exchange of ideas. The purpose of this seminar is to achieve a deeper understanding about the use qualitative methods for social science research. This course will provide substantive methodological content for various phases of the research process, accompanied by experiential learning opportunities, as well as student generated discussion. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the implications for the development of their pilot and/or future research.

Please note that for any seminar to be successful, seminar members must:

- Complete weekly readings and be prepared to participate
- Speak openly to the whole group, not just to the leader
- Develop good interpretive, literal and evaluative open-ended questions
- Come prepared with written questions to ask (see below)
- Actively and respectfully listen to one another and seek to understand what is being communicated
- Actively share one’s own insights, reactions, thoughts and ideas that are stimulated from the readings or the observations and comments of others
- Address an idea or argument by connecting it to what someone else has said; summarize the point you are responding to and then provide your own idea.
- Invite others into the discussion
- Be appropriate, respectful, and focused on topic
- Be comfortable with silence (Silence gives time to process thoughts)
- NOTE: The natural talkers will need to be disciplined in order to learn how to listen better; quiet individuals must learn to share their insights; everyone should speak during each seminar.

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 University Bookstore, 711 State Street, [1-800-993-2665 or 1-608-257-3784].


3) There are also several required and recommended readings that are available on-line at Learn at UW.

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 contribute 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.

- Participation credit will include submission of a typed weekly brief reflection paragraph (beginning week 2) and at least one discussion question arising from the readings that may become part of the basis for class discussion during the seminar period.

- The weekly reflection paragraph may address any of the following: 1) a personal response or reaction to the weekly readings; 2) a discussion of one’s prior or current experience that relates to a topic from the reading; or 3) thoughts about the implications of some aspect of the reading for one’s dissertation or research interests. The typed question(s) for discussion should be open-ended question, stemming from the readings that are in some way related to the course objectives. Students are encouraged to consider different types of questions such as interpretive (i.e., that ask for interpretations of the reading), literal (i.e., that elicit factual information that may be answered directly from readings to ensure comprehension), or evaluative (i.e., that elicit positions, or opinions about the reading). Students should write down the exact page and paragraph from the required reading that stimulated the question (if relevant). Students may design any questions relevant to the course objectives or consider using any of the following, but should consider what they would find most valuable to address learning needs:
What puzzles me is…
I’d like to talk with people about….
Don’t you think this is similar to…?
Do you agree that the big ideas seem to be…?
I have questions about…
How would this method be applied to a different topic or area of interest?
What does it mean when the author says…?
Do you agree with the assumptions that…?
What does this word or phrase mean?
Why is this point important?

Participation credit will also include mini “Class Prep” assignments noted on the syllabus. These may include topics to reflect upon while you are reading, questions to consider or activities to complete in advance of class (e.g., you will be asked to do a public observation with a class mate in advance of our meeting on week 6).

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 and two minor assignments from the following chart.

<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>Presentation-Facilitated Workshop (45 minute)</td>
<td>Interview Guide and Consent Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major Paper</td>
<td>In-depth interview, Summary, and Transcript</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qualitative Research Proposal</td>
<td>Field Observation and Field notes</td>
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<td>Research Portfolio Notebook</td>
<td>Coded Transcript and Analysis report</td>
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<tr>
<td>Design your own Assignment (must obtain instructor approval)</td>
<td>Critique of Qualitative Research Reports</td>
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</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 7

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 14

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.

Class Preparation:
- Remember to bring your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions to class (see pp. 2-3).
- Review the learning contract and bring any questions you have about assignments to class.
- As you do the readings for this week, think about what worldview, frameworks, perspectives and assumptions that you resonate with or that inform your ways of knowing and how these will influence how you approach the research process.
- We will have a Jeopardy game based on the readings today with prizes for the winning team.


Week 3: Friday September 21

ROLE OF RESEARCHER AS INSTRUMENT: ETHICAL ISSUES AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
Importance of reflexivity: Critical self-reflection
Self and relations in the field
Issues of gender, culture, social class, and vulnerable populations
Ethical issues in qualitative research
Informed consent, confidentiality and loss of privacy in the field

Class Preparation:
- Remember to bring your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions to class.
- Be prepared to talk about the meaning and purpose of reflexivity and the dimensions of reflexivity that may be particularly important to your program of research
- Be prepared to discuss the ethical issues that you anticipate will need to be taken into consideration that are particularly relevant to your research interests.


Considerations in Designing a Qualitative Study and Getting it off the Ground

Week 4: Friday, September 28

THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS: GETTING STARTED
Selecting a topic: Formulating and framing the research questions
Literature review
The debate on the role of theory (or lack thereof)
Designing a qualitative study: Developing a research strategy
Developing a qualitative research proposal

Class Preparation:
- Bring weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions to class.
- Be prepared to discuss the following questions: What do we mean by the “research design”? What are the characteristics of good research designs? Where do you start? How does the approach to inquiry (e.g., grounded theory, case study, narrative research…) influence the study design?
- Creswell (2007) discusses the importance of the statement of purpose of one’s study and the value of developing central and sub-questions for one’s research study. After reviewing this content, think about a qualitative research study that you believe would make a contribution to your substantive area of interest. This may be a study you intend to carry out, or a completely hypothetical study that you think would be of value. Write a one sentence statement of purpose (see pp. 103-104 for a sample template), and possible central and sub questions that would be appropriate to explore. Bring the Creswell text to class for reference.


** NIH: Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research. (1999). Qualitative methods in health research: Opportunities and considerations in application and review.


Week 5: Friday, October 5

ENTERING THE FIELD: GAINING ACCESS
Selecting the site; selecting the case
Developing rapport
Sampling strategies in qualitative enquiry
Recruiting informants
Guest Speaker (11:00 – noon): Earlise Ward, PhD; Assistant Professor, School of Nursing

Class Preparation:
• Bring your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions to class.
• As you do the readings think about what researchers should take into consideration when selecting a site, what might increase changes of being successful at negotiating access to participants, how to determine the sample plan, sample size, how sampling considerations vary by research design and how you might approach site selection and sampling for the hypothetical study you proposed in class last week.

Important Assignment to do in advance of next week’s class: Memo for Field Observations for Next week.

Next week we will be talking about ethnographic research and the value of “observational” research. I would like you to have the opportunity to engage in an “unstructured observation” (i.e., focused on what is deemed relevant as events unfold) using the “complete observer” role (see Kawulich reading) so that we can discuss the experience of observation research in class. Please identify another student from class that you would like to work with. The two of you should plan to meet sometime during the next week in a public place to conduct a 15 minute observation independent of one another. You are free to choose any location that is of interest to you (e.g., a coffee shop, the hospital, a library, street corner, one of the student unions).

Remain as unobtrusive as possible, while taking notes of your observations. After the 15 minute observational period, review your written notes and write a memo recording the following:

• A summary of what you observed during the 15 minute period.
• A description of any analytic insights you might make based on your observations
• A personal reaction of thoughts and/or feelings of being an observer.

Please do not talk with one another about your plan for the observation, your reactions to the observation or share anything about your analytic insights and reactions. You will have an opportunity to share your notes and discuss in class.


* Munford, R., & Sanders, J. (2004). Recruiting diverse groups of young people to research: Agency and
empowerment in the consent process. *Qualitative Social Work*, 3(4), 469-482.


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**Major Techniques for Gathering Evidence**

**Week 6: Friday October 12**

**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

**Guest Speaker (11:15 – noon):** Lynette Studer, doctoral student in Social Work to discuss dissertation research and use of observational data.

**Class Preparation:**

- Bring your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions to class.
- Complete your 15 minute observation with another student and bring your memo to class (see instructions on p. 7).


* Fox, Nick. (1998). How to Use Observations in a Research Project. Produced by Trent Focus Group. [Note: this is a workbook of sorts with exercises related to observational research. No need to do exercise, but you may find helpful to skim through]

* (Online) Ratcliff, R. Video and audio media in qualitative research. [If you are interested in video media, check out Don Ratcliff’s dissertation in elementary schools that makes use of video: See: [http://don.ratcliffs.net/dissertation/](http://don.ratcliffs.net/dissertation/)]
Week 7: Friday, October 19

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

Class Preparation:

- Bring your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions to class.
- After reviewing the suggestions for crafting questions for the interview guide in the Fichtman & Dana article and reviewing the info on developing the interview protocol/guide in Creswell (pp. 133-136), draft a simple interview guide that is relevant to the hypothetical study purpose and central/sub questions you worked on a few weeks ago (What questions would you actually ask informants?).
- Bring three copies of a document that provides your concise statement of study purpose, one or more of the specific central and/or sub research questions you are interested in and the interview guide relevant to those study questions to class. Please don’t worry if this is perfected. After we have a chance to talk about the kinds of things to consider in developing the guide, and what good questions look like, you can reflect on the guide you created and get feedback from others as well.


Interview Guide Example:
Week 8: Friday, Oct. 26

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

Class Preparation:
- Bring your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions to class.
- After we have time for lecture and discussion, we will break into two groups so that students you will have the opportunity to experience designing the interview guide for a focus group, and moderating or participating in a focus group. The purpose of the focus group is listed in the text box below.
- Please prepare 3-5 questions that might be used as an Interview Guide in the focus group relevant to the study purpose below. Bring 7 copies of your questions so that they may be distributed to other group members to review.
- Please give thought to the following two questions: 1) Are you interested (willing) in being a group moderator? This experience would allow you the opportunity to practice running a focus group, ask questions, encourage diversity of perspectives and keep the group on task. 2) Are you interested in being an assistant moderator? You would be responsible to make sure that the room is arranged appropriately, remain unobtrusive (i.e., you would not contribute to the discussion, but you would take careful notes, provide an oral summary at the end of the group for the participants, and provide synthesized comments to highlight main points made when we reconvene for our large group discussion?

STUDY PURPOSE:
The purpose of this study is to understand the challenges and rewards associated with the educational experience of graduate students enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.


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### Fundamental Strategies for Analyzing and Reporting Qualitative Data

**Week 9: Friday, Nov. 2**

**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

**Class Preparation:**

- Bring your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions to class.
- After we have a chance to talk about strategies to evaluate qualitative research and methods of ensuring quality and rigor we will spend some time critiquing research reports from this week. Please bring the three research reports and the Creswell text with you to class.
- After reading the research reports, select two of them and be prepared to share your thoughts regarding the following questions:
  1. To what extent do you see evidence of methodological congruence in study purpose, design, methods and research tradition? Is the study purpose and research methods consistent with the type of study (e.g., grounded theory, ethnography…see Creswell)?
  2. Is there any evidence and how sufficient is it that the authors have employed strategies to enhance the quality and rigor of the study and trustworthiness? Do they explicitly discuss these?
  3. What are the strengths and weaknesses?


** Week 10: Friday, November 9

** 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

** Class Preparation:
- Bring your *weekly reflection* paragraph and *discussion questions* to class.
- We will do a coding exercise in class. Nothing special to prepare other than the weekly readings. The Kools et al (2002) article provides a nice illustration of a Dimensional Analysis that is often used in Grounded Theory studies.


**Week 11: Friday November 16**

**LAB: APPLICATION OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS—Class will not meet this week** so that you will have adequate time for the applied research experiences you must gain for the integration of your learning to enrich and complete the methods assignments. Please email the instructor to provide a one paragraph description of what you intend to work on. You may use this time to conduct and/or transcribe your interviews, complete your field observations or work on your major paper or research proposal. Students who are developing proposals may want to schedule time to meet with the Instructor to discuss their projects. Time may also be spent to critique qualitative research reports, or 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. It is strongly recommended that you begin the analysis process.

**Week 12: Friday November 23**

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

**Week 13: Friday November 30**

**LEAVING THE FIELD AND TELLING THE STORY**
Writing up the qualitative study
Organizing the report
Diverse structures for writing qualitative reports based on research tradition.

**Class Preparation:**
- Bring weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions to class.
- Be prepared to discuss your thoughts on how reporting a qualitative research study might be similar or different to reporting a quantitative investigation.
- I would be happy to allow time for you to work in small groups to talk about your various projects with one another during class, so think about if this would be useful and be prepared to ask succinct questions of your classmates to use time efficiently.


** Week 14: Friday December 7

** MIXED METHODS: INTEGRATING QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES

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

** Class Preparation

- Bring *weekly reflection* paragraph and *discussion questions* to class.
- Please bring the two research articles assigned this week (Lindhorst et al., 2008; Brazier et al., 2008). After we review mixed methods designs and design decisions, we will examine these manuscripts to see if we can identify the designs they employed and critique them.


**Week 15: Friday December 15**

**INTEGRATION AND SYNTHESIS**
- Putting it all together
- Course Review
- Looking Ahead
- Summary and Class Evaluation

**Class Preparation:**
- No need to do reflection paragraph or discussion questions.
- As we will attempt to integrate and synthesize the course material please be prepared to share your thoughts on the following question:
  - i. Now that we are at the end of the semester, what questions remain that you will want to further explore?
  - ii. What have you gotten out of this class (i.e., most important thing you learned) and what was the most valuable learning experience for you (e.g., in class activity, an assignment, the reading…)?
  - iii. Do you have any suggestions for course modifications that we didn’t address at midterm?
