COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is designed for doctoral students interested to incorporate qualitative methods in their work. Structured as an interactive, intensive seminar, the course is designed to introduce the principles, methods and practice of qualitative social science research. The course addresses 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. A variety of research traditions of inquiry (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology) and methods of analysis will be introduced. 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.

The “seminar” format offers a collaborative learning environment allowing for an exchange of ideas. The purpose of this seminar is to achieve a deeper understanding about the use of 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 will be introduced to a variety of qualitative methods of inquiry as well as basic skills utilized by qualitative researchers, and students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the implications for the development of their current and/or future research. Students are encouraged to bring design and implementation questions to class.

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

- Complete weekly readings and be prepared to participate
- Engage with the whole group, not just the leader
- Develop thoughtful questions and come prepared with 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, allowing others time to process thoughts
- NOTE: Everyone should speak during each seminar, and this will require natural talkers to work on listening and quiet individuals to work on sharing their insights.
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 the strengths and weaknesses of a qualitative design 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, [ (800) 993-2665 or (608) 257-3784 ] and are also available on reserve in the Social Work Library.


There are also 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 contribution and engagement in class exercises counts. Participation in discussion, critique of class readings, and consideration of how course content relates to your research interests is essential to your success in the course.

- Participation credit will include submission of a 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. Each student has one “pass” to be used during the semester, meaning that you may choose one week to not submit a weekly reflection and discussion question(s). Weekly reflection and question(s) should be posted to the course Learn@UW site by 9:00am each Friday.

- The weekly reflection paragraph may address any of the following: 1) a personal response or reaction to the weekly readings; 2) a discussion of prior or current experience that relates to a topic from the reading; 3) implications of some aspect of the reading for one’s dissertation or research interests; or 4) integration of insights from the current week’s reading and prior weeks’ readings and class discussion. The typed question(s) for discussion should be open-ended questions, stemming from the readings and related to the course objectives. 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). When relevant, write down the exact page and paragraph from the required reading that prompted the question. Below are some examples of the types of questions that may be posed, but feel free to design different questions as long as they are relevant to course objectives:

  - I’d like to talk with people about….
  - Don’t you think this is similar to…?
  - How does this compare 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 doctoral students’ 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. Students will select from the following assignments for a total of 80 points. Students must select two major or one major and two minor assignments from the following chart. 

3
Select One Major Assignment (40 points each) | Select Two Minor Assignments (20 points each)
--- | ---
Presentation-Facilitated Workshop (45 minute) | Interview Guide and Consent Form
Major Paper-Critical Review | In-depth interview, Summary, and Transcript
Qualitative Research Proposal | Field Observation and Field notes
Research Portfolio Notebook | Coded Transcript and Analysis report
Design your own Assignment (must obtain instructor approval) | Critique of Qualitative Research Reports

**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>
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<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>
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<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74-79</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COURSE OUTLINE: TOPICS AND READINGS**

**Required Reading (In Course Texts or Available Online)**

* Recommended Reading (Online)

**Introduction: Philosophical Underpinnings and Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Research**

**Week 1: Friday, September 9**

**INTRODUCTION AND COURSE OVERVIEW**

Welcome and introductions
Syllabus and assignment review
Getting oriented: Theoretical and disciplinary origins of qualitative methods
Myths about 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 16

**EPISTEMOLOGY 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 submit your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion question before 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 you resonate with or that inform your ways of knowing and how these will influence how you approach the research process


Week 3: Friday September 23

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 submit your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions before 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 30

THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS: GETTING STARTED
Selecting a topic: Formulating and framing the research question
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:
- Submit weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions before 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 (2013) 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. 137 for examples), and possible central and sub questions that would be appropriate to explore. Bring the Creswell text to class for reference.


Week 5: Friday, October 7

ENTERING THE FIELD: GAINING ACCESS
Selecting the site; selecting the case
Developing rapport
Sampling strategies in qualitative inquiry
Recruiting informants

Class Preparation:
• Submit your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions before class.
• As you do the readings think about what researchers should take into consideration when selecting a site, what might increase chances 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 each other. You are free to choose any location that is of interest to you (e.g., a coffee shop, the hospital, library, playground).

You are not writing about what you already “know” about what may be a familiar space; you are studying it carefully. Remain as unobtrusive as possible, while taking notes on 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 (what did you see?)
• A description of any analytic insights you might make based on your observations (what meaning do you attach to your observations?)
• A personal reaction of thoughts and/or feelings on being an observer

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


Major Techniques for Gathering Evidence

Week 6: Friday October 14

OBSERVATION AND USE OF DOCUMENTS / OTHER EXISTING DATA
Types of observational research and planning
Role of the researcher (observer, participant, member?), setting, ethics
Field note strategies and record keeping
Developing observational skills
Video and audio media in qualitative research
Ethnography
Analyzing texts (e.g., newspaper articles, agency case records, policy) and material artifacts

Guest Speaker (1:00-2:00pm): Hilary Runion, PhD candidate in Human Development & Family Studies, will discuss her dissertation research. She is examining jail observations and narratives during visits between children and their incarcerated parent, as well as coding children’s family drawings.

Class Preparation:
• Submit your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions before class.
• Complete your 15 minute observation with another student and bring your memo to class (see instructions on p. 8).


* (Online) 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]
http://web.simmons.edu/~tang2/courses/CUAcourses/lsc745/sp05/observation.pdf


Week 7: Friday, October 21

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:
- Submit your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions before class.
- After reviewing the info on interview guides in the Fichtman & Dana article and in Creswell, 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.


Week 8: Friday, October 28

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:
• Submit your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions before class.
• After we have time for lecture and discussion, we will break into two groups so that students will have the opportunity to experience designing the interview guide for a focus group, and moderating or participating in a focus group. Please prepare 3-5 questions that might be used in an Interview Guide for a focus group relevant to the study purpose below.
• Please consider the following: 1) Are you interested in being a group moderator? You would have 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 take careful notes, provide an oral summary at the end of the group for the participants, and provide synthesized comments to highlight main points when we reconvene as a large group.

STUDY PURPOSE:
The purpose of this study is to understand the reality television viewing habits of graduate students.


Fundamental Strategies for Analyzing and Reporting Qualitative Data

Week 9: Friday November 4

**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:**
- Submit your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions before 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:
  - To what extent do you see evidence of methodological congruence in study purpose, design, methods and research tradition? Are the study purpose and research methods consistent with the type of study (e.g., grounded theory, ethnography…see Creswell)?
  - 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?
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses?


Week 10: Friday November 11

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
Use of qualitative data analysis tools (e.g., NVivo, Atlas.TI)

Class Preparation:
• Submit your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions before class.
• We will do a coding exercise in class. No preparation necessary other than the weekly readings.


Week 11: Friday November 18

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:
- Submit your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions before class.
- Be prepared to discuss your thoughts on how reporting a qualitative research study might be similar or different to reporting a quantitative investigation.
- You will have time in class to work in small groups and talk about your various projects with one another, so think about what feedback would be useful and be prepared to discuss your work with your classmates.


Week 12: Friday November 25

**********Thanksgiving**********
Week 13: Friday December 2

**Guest Speaker (1:00 – 2:00pm):** Karen Staller, PhD, JD; Associate Professor of Social Work, University of Michigan, and Editor, *Qualitative Social Work* (a Sage Journal)

**MIXED METHODS: INTEGRATING QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES**
What is “mixed methods” research?
Types of mixed method strategies
Design considerations
Data collection procedures

**Class Preparation**
- Submit weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions before 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 14: Friday December 9

INTEGRATION AND SYNTHESIS
Putting it all together
Course review
Looking ahead
Class evaluation

Class Preparation:
• No need to do reflection paragraph or discussion questions.
• Please be prepared to share your thoughts on the following questions:
  o Now that we are at the end of the semester, what questions remain that you will want to further explore?
  o 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…)?
  o Do you have any suggestions for course modifications that we didn’t address at midterm?


Additional Recommended Resources:


