SW 949: QUALITATIVE METHODS FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Fall, 2010

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 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.

☐ 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Select One Major Assignment (40 points each)</th>
<th>Select Two Minor Assignments (20 points each)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation-Facilitated Workshop (45 minute)</td>
<td>Interview Guide and Consent Form</td>
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<td>Major Paper</td>
<td>In-depth interview, Summary, and Transcript</td>
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<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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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>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-93</td>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-89</td>
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<td>Good</td>
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<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>
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** 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: Wednesday, September 8

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: Wednesday, September 15

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.


Week 3: Wednesday September 22

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


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

Week 4: Wednesday, September 29

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


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


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*Week 5: Wednesday, October 6*

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


** Major Techniques for Gathering Evidence **

Week 6: Wednesday October 13

** 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


* 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/]

Week 7: Wednesday, October 20

** 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 Example:**

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

**Week 8: Wednesday, Oct. 27**

**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


Fundamental Strategies for Analyzing and Reporting Qualitative Data

Week 9: Wednesday, Nov. 3

**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 10: Wednesday, November 10 **

** ANALYSIS I: OVERVIEW OF APPROACHES & BEGINNING CODING **

Analysis within approaches to inquiry (comparison of five research traditions)

Approaches to content analysis

Developing codes and coding hierarchies

Thematic coding and categorizing


** Week 11: Wednesday November 17**

** 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. 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. You may want to begin the analysis process.**
Week 12: Wednesday November 24

ANALYSIS II: THEORY DEVELOPMENT & USE OF COMPUTERS & SOFTWARE
Coding hierarchies
Typologies
Grounded theory and Dimensional analysis
Searching for “negative cases”
Computer programs to help store and organize data


Week 13: Wednesday Dec. 1

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.


Week 14: Wednesday December 8

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


Week 15: Wednesday December 15

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

