Social Work 949
Qualitative Methods for Social Science Research
Fall 2018

Instructor: Tova Walsh, PhD, MSW
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Office hours: by appointment
Email: tbwalsh@wisc.edu

Class Days: Mondays  
Time: 8:30-11:30am
Credits: 3  
Location: Social Work 114
Instructional Mode: Face-to Face
Canvas URL: https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/67688

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to: introduce the principles, methods and practice of qualitative social science research.

Attributes and Designations: This course fulfills a requirement for the PhD in social welfare. Students are required to complete Foundation Research Methods Seminars on quantitative and qualitative methods for social science research.

Requisites: The course is required for PhD students in social welfare and open to interested PhD students from other departments with instructor consent.

How credit hours are met: This class meets for one 3 hour class period each week over the fall semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, data collection and analysis exercises, studying) for approximately 3 hours out of classroom each week. The syllabus includes additional information about meeting times and expectations for student work.

II. 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. 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.
III. LEARNING OUTCOMES

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.

IV. TEXTS AND READING MATERIAL

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.


Additional required and recommended readings are available on Canvas.

V. 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. 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 Canvas by 9:00pm each Sunday.*
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; or 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 question, stemming from the readings and in some way 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 stimulated 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 the 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 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 two major or 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>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation-Facilitated Workshop (45 minute)</td>
<td>Interview Guide and Consent Form</td>
</tr>
<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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<tr>
<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>Content Analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Critique of Qualitative Research Reports</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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>
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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>
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VI. EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTOR

Students are expected to:
- Attend each class session, actively participate in the in-class discussions;
- Carefully and critically read all required readings before coming to class;
- Complete all assignments by the due dates and times;
- Inform the instructor during the first week of the semester of any special accommodations needed for meeting class expectations (as approved by the McBurney Center);
- Be respectful of other class members—a diversity of views and opinions may be articulated during discussions.

The instructor is expected to:
- Assure that course objectives are being met;
- Be available to students by appointment and to answer questions through email during business hours;
- Give reasonable guidance on preparing assignments;
- Be open to discussing concerns about the course;
- Evaluate and return assignments in a timely manner.

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 above)
- 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: 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.

VII. COURSE CONTENT

** 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: Monday, September 10

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: Monday, September 17

**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 bring your weekly reflection paragraph and discussion questions to class
- 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: Monday September 24

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.


Week 4: Monday, October 1

**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 (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.


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


**Week 5: Monday, October 8**

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

**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 a partner and make plans to meet sometime during the next week in a public place to conduct a 15 minute observation independent of one another.

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 opportunity to share notes and discuss in class.


Major Techniques for Gathering Evidence

Week 6: Monday October 15

**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

**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. 8).

**Note:**

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* 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]


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, 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.


http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/2-01/2-01burkemiller-e.htm

**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. 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: Monday, Nov. 5**

**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:
  i. 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)?
  ii. 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?
  iii. What are the strengths and weaknesses?


Week 10: Monday, November 12

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)

Guest Speaker (10:00 – 11:30am): Christian Schmieder, Qualitative Research Specialist, UW Colleges and UW-Extension

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.


** Leech, N. L., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2007). An array of qualitative data analysis tools: A call for data analysis triangulation. School Psychology Quarterly, 22(4), 4447-584. [This article provides some illustrations of different examples of analytic approaches; You can skip sections on Domain analysis, Taxonomic Analysis, Componential Analysis]


Week 11: Monday November 19

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 on critiquing qualitative research reports, or if you have contracted to do the coded transcript and analysis report you may use the time to review your transcript several times to become familiar with it, give serious thought to identifying the analytic method that you intend to utilize, and begin the analysis process.
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.
- 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 13: Monday December 3

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

Guest Speaker (8:30 – 10:00am): Karen Staller, PhD, JD; Associate Professor of Social Work, University of Michigan, and Editor, Qualitative Social Work (a Sage Journal)

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 14: Monday December 10**

INTEGRATION AND SYNTHESIS
Putting it all together
Course Review
Looking Ahead
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?


Additional Recommended Resources:


VIII. RULES, RIGHTS, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

See the Guide’s Rules, Rights and Responsibilities

Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison’s community of scholars in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to studentconduct.wisecweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/.

Accommodations for students with disabilities

McBurney Disability Resource Center syllabus statement: “The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.” http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php

Diversity and inclusion

Institutional statement on diversity: “Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.” https://diversity.wisc.edu/