COURSE OVERVIEW

In this course, we will investigate what it means to utilize qualitative methods in social science research. To do so, we will 1) examine the epistemological underpinnings of qualitative research; 2) consider issues such as subjectivity, ethics, validity, rigor, and causality; 3) practice various qualitative data collection and analysis methods; and 4) discuss practical issues such as framing and operationalizing research questions, designing feasible projects, selecting samples, managing data collection and analysis, presenting and publishing findings, and pursuing funding for qualitative research. The goal of the course is for students to develop the skills, techniques, and knowledge necessary to design and undertake independent qualitative research (and/or mixed methods research)—or to be sufficiently conversant in qualitative methods to engage with qualitative scholarship in the social sciences. The final outcome of the course is that students walk away with an initial experience in qualitative research methods as well as a draft of a grant proposal for the National Science Foundation or some other equivalent that uses qualitative or mixed methods.

The course begins with present-day and past debates about how to best conduct qualitative research—and its place in the social sciences. We then move into an overview of qualitative methods and “doing” qualitative research. We will explore research design issues including developing research questions and selecting samples. We will then examine the collection, analysis, and presentation of qualitative data, using exercises and your own research projects to illustrate these processes—including observations, interviews, and content analysis. We will be concerned with practical issues that arise during the research process. We will close with a discussion of major issues in qualitative research including subjectivity, ethics, IRB, causality, validity, rigor, as well as touch upon how to conduct mixed-methods research.

LEARNING GOALS & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There are two learning goals for the course: conceptual knowledge and applied/practical knowledge of qualitative research methods. The best way to learn qualitative methods is to “do” them. Thus, the majority of this course involves doing qualitative research and discussing research issues and questions with each other. As outlined below the requirements for this course revolve around conducting a research project on a topic of interest as a pilot for developing an NSF proposal (or some other equivalent that you may propose).

The course is structured as a workshop, so you should come prepared with your work and be ready to give and receive feedback and discuss the readings. The goals of each day we meet are to 1) workshop what we have done outside of class in order to get peer and instructor feedback and 2) discuss the week’s readings, which will guide work outside of class. For the majority of meetings, pairs of students will facilitate classes (and provide class snacks!).

1) Class Participation - 25% of grade

Includes:
- Attendance to all classes
- Full participation in all discussions
- Facilitation of two class meetings (with at least one other student)

Also includes ungraded assignments:
- Short Autobiographical Statement (due Tuesday, January 17 at 3pm)
- Site description and explanation of selection (due Tuesday, January 24 at 3pm)
- Interview Protocol (due Tuesday, February 14 at 3pm)
- Group-completed comparative table of qualitative software & example of initial coding (due Tuesday, March 21 at 3pm)
- CITI training completion (due Tuesday, March 28 at 3pm)

2) Qualitative Process Products – 45% of grade

Includes:
- Edited Fieldnotes and Memo: 15% of grade (due Tuesday, February 7 at 3pm)
- Interview Protocol (due Tuesday, February 14 at 3pm)
- Content Analysis Memo: 15% of grade (due Tuesday, March 14 at 3pm)

3) Final Research Proposal - 30% of grade (due Tuesday, April 25 at 6pm to Canvas)

Both the ungraded and graded assignments should be submitted to Canvas—there will be descriptions on Canvas of what each of these entails.

COURSE RESOURCES

This course offers an introductory survey of qualitative methods. Consequently, the class will cover a wide range of literature—most of which will be provided as .pdfs via Canvas.

However, some texts are longer and you may wish to purchase for reference through the retailer of your choice (these we will not use until January 24 and March 14, respectively):


OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

General Communication

I provide very detailed information and instructions in all of the course documents. I will also send periodic Canvas announcements and/or emails about any further course information.
Please read all of the written course communications thoroughly!
If you have questions after you have read everything in a particular course document (syllabus, paper instructions, etc.), then feel free to ask me.
Please do NOT ask/email me questions that I have already answered in a course document or via posted announcement/emails. I will not respond to these questions.

Email Communication:
I generally try to respond to emails within 1 business day, but I do not guarantee a response within 24 hrs. I do not answer emails after 6pm at night (especially the night that something is due; questions should be asked well in advance of any deadlines).

General Conduct:
Please be mindful of the general code of conduct that you would use in any classroom setting. I expect us all to be respectful of one another.

- Please do not arrive late to class.
- Once in class, please refrain from carrying on private conversations with your neighbor(s).
- Please refrain from texting, checking Facebook, or any other non-class activities during all class meetings. If you are found to be engaging in these activities, you will be asked to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class.

Missed Classes: Because we meet only once a week, the expectation is that you will attend all class meetings. If you must miss a class and you know in advance, please see me right away to discuss a way to make up missed work. If you are sick, you must get a note from a doctor as well as contact me to make up missed work.

Video/Audio: You may not video or audiotape lectures without my express consent.

Extra Credit: There are no extra credit assignments available in this course.

Accommodating Disabilities:
If you have or acquire any sort of condition that may require special accommodation(s), please inform me as soon as possible so that we may make the appropriate arrangements. Proper documentation from the Office of Disabilities Services will be required. They can be reached at 404-727-1065 or via the web at http://www.emory.edu/EEO/ODS/.

Academic Conduct:
All students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the policies of Emory College with respect to conduct and academic honesty. Anyone engaging in acts that violate these policies, such as plagiarism or cheating will be referred to the Honors Council. For more information see: http://www.college.emory.edu/current/standards/honor_code.html

Late Policy: Unless otherwise stated on the assignment sheet or in class, an assignment submitted after the deadline will be penalized 1 grade point for each day it is late, from the moment it is past due. If you require an extension due to illness, you must notify me prior to the deadline, and provide a note from your doctor.

Make-Up Policy: My permission is needed to makeup assignments. If you are going to miss a class and/or an assignment, please make every effort to notify me beforehand and to gather appropriate material to justify your absence. A mutually convenient time will be arranged for you to make up the assignment. Makeup assignments will only be allowed with an excused absence (e.g., illness, family emergency, etc.). A note from the Dean is required to make up the final paper.

I: DEFINING QUALITATIVE WORK

Week 1: Starting Points, Part I (Contemporary Context)
1/10 (In Class) Readings:

Recommended: National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant Solicitation – Sociology (https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2014/nsf14604/nsf14604.htm). If you are not a sociology graduate student, look for a solicitation that is appropriate to your field/level of experience. This will help you to orient your pilot study towards your final proposal. For example, the Global Religion Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship: http://grri.nd.edu/dissertation

Week 2: Starting Points, Part II (Past Context)
1/17 Readings:

DUE IN CLASS: Short autobiographical statement. As a way to introduce yourself and your research interests in a more formal way to myself and the class, bring a 3-5 page double spaced autobiographical statement that talks about your interest in your field and how your own
biography has shaped the scholarly topics that interest you.

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Share autobiographies and discuss how to develop research questions and projects out of your interests.

II. METHODS

Week 3: Nuts and Bolts Overview & Site Selection

1/24 Readings:


DUE IN CLASS: Site description and explanation of selection. As a way to start thinking about the pilot study you will do in the course, bring a 3-5 page double spaced statement about the research topic that interests you, possible places you could study this topic and what kind of research design (in terms of selection of a site) will help you understand this topic, as well as discuss the logistics of gaining entry (how do you think you’ll get in?).

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Brainstorm and discuss the research design issues that you might face with the research topics that interest you and the site you are thinking of selecting. Pay particular attention to sampling issues.

Week 4: Observation, Part I (Example: Schools)

1/31 Readings:


DUE IN CLASS: By this class you should have gained entry to your site and scheduled your observation(s) over the next week or conducted an initial visit/observation.

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Brainstorm and discuss the observations that you will conduct over the next week (you should have already selected a site and made initial steps to gain entry). Discuss a research question that interests you and plan to observe a field site that allows you to examine this question.

Week 5: Observation, Part II (Example: Courts)

2/7 Readings:


Gonzalez Van Cleve, Nicole. 2016. Crook County. “Introduction” (p. 1-14), Chapter 4 "There are No Racists Here: Prosecutors in Criminal Courts” (p. 127-156), and Appendices 195-216.

DUE IN CLASS: Edited Observation Notes & Memo. See Canvas for guidelines.

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Share edited observation notes and memo and discuss the process of conducting your observations. What were the challenges? How did it conform to or challenge your expectations? What might you do differently next time? What kind of system did you use for taking notes and how did this work for you? Finally, to what extent do you think your observations will help you answer your research questions?

ALSO: Use your observation notes to think about interviews, working to match your interests/research question(s) with an interview topic and a set of questions. Discuss recruitment of a subject that will allow you to explore a research question that interests you.

Week 6: Interviews, Part I (Example: Elite Firms)

2/14 Readings:


IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Conduct “mock interviews” with classmates and give/receive feedback on these.

Week 7: Interviews, Part II (Example: Healthcare)

2/21 Readings:


Week 11: What would you do differently next time?
doing an analysis of the documents you selected?

**IN DUE IN CLASS:** Interview Transcript & Memo. See Canvas for guidelines.

**IN-CLASS WORKSHOP:** Discuss the process of conducting your interview and writing up transcripts. What surprised you? What was challenging? What would you do differently next time?

**Week 8:** Content analysis/historical ethnography (Example: NASA)

2/28 Readings:

Vaughn, Diane. 1996. The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA (Chapters TBD; pages 1-118 and Appendix C: “On Theory Elaboration, Organizations, and Historical Ethnography”)

**IN-CLASS WORKSHOP:** Discuss possible documents that you could analyze related to your chosen site (e.g., books, archival materials, websites). How could you go about collecting these materials? How might they answer some aspect of your research questions? What do you look for? Is there anything based on your observation and interviews that documents might help you to better understand?

**Week 9:** SPRING BREAK – ENJOY!

3/7: NO CLASS

**PART III: ANALYSIS**

**Week 10:** Abductive Analysis and Theory Construction

3/14 Readings:


Tavory, Iddo, and Stefan Timmermans. 2014. Abductive Analysis: Theorizing Qualitative Research. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (Chapters 1-5; pages 1-86)

**DUE IN CLASS:** Content Analysis Memo. See Canvas for guidelines.

**IN-CLASS WORKSHOP:** Discuss the process of identifying, gathering, reading, and starting to do an analysis of the documents you selected? What surprised you? What was challenging? What would you do differently next time?

**Week 11:** Qualitative Software & Coding

3/21 Readings:


**DUE IN CLASS:** Group-completed comparative table of qualitative software. Also, some evidence of initial coding of observations, interviews, and/or content analysis using qualitative software of your choice. See Canvas for guidelines.

**IN-CLASS WORKSHOP:** Discuss differences among qualitative software and how you have used it in coding your observations, interviews, and/or documents. What is helpful about using the software? What are the limitations of the software?

**PART IV: ISSUES IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

**Week 12:** Subjectivity, Ethics, and IRB

3/28 Readings:


**DUE IN CLASS:** Evidence that students have passed the CITI basic course for Emory (Social/Behavioral focus). [https://www.citiprogram.org/]

**IN-CLASS WORKSHOP:** Reflect on your own next methodological steps. What do you need to do in order to conduct your thesis or dissertation? What are the practical questions involved in entry, access, and conduct of your research? What questions do you have about the ethics of your work?

***After this class, you should focus on completing your final presentation and paper—no more assignments are due other than readings.***

**Week 13:** Causality, Validity, and Rigor
4/4 Readings:


Week 14: Mixed Methods Research (Example: Social Networks)

4/11 Readings:


PART IV: WRAP UP

Week 15: Presentations & course evaluations

4/18: No readings

FINAL PAPER DUE TUESDAY, APRIL 25 TO CANVAS