SOCIOLOGY 585: QUALITATIVE METHODS

SPRING 2018
THURS 3 – 6
206 Tarbutton Hall

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Office: 205 Tarbutton Hall
Office Hours: Wednesdays 1-3pm; sign up online (https://calendly.com/drpuckett/office-hours) for a 20-minute meeting at least 1 hour before the time you would like to meet.

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 (or mixed methods research)—or to be 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 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; Weeks 3-14 with no facilitation Week 9 - Spring Break)

Also includes ungraded assignments:
• Short Autobiographical Statement (due Thursday, January 25 at 3pm to Canvas)
• Site description and explanation of selection (due Thursday, February 8 at 3pm to Canvas)
• Interview Protocol (due Thursday, March 1 at 3pm to Canvas)
• Group-completed comparative table of qualitative software & example of initial coding (due Thursday, April 5 at 3pm – one person from the class will email to Dr. Puckett)
• CITI training completion (due Thursday, April 12 at 3pm to Canvas)
• Draft research proposal (due Sunday, April 22nd at 6pm to Canvas & Google docs)
• One page of feedback for editing partner & comments for secondary papers (due Thursday, April 26 at 3pm to Google docs only)

2) Qualitative Process Products – 45% of grade

Includes:
• Edited Field notes and Memo: 15% of grade (due Thursday, February 22 at 3pm)
• Interview Transcript (of at least first 10 minutes of interview) and Memo: 15% of grade (due Thursday, March 8 at 3pm)
• Content Analysis Memo: 15% of grade (due Thursday, March 29 at 3pm)

3) Final Research Proposal - 30% of grade (due Thursday, May 10 at 6pm to Canvas)

Both the ungraded and graded assignments should be submitted to Canvas—there will 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, the follow text is longer and you may wish to purchase for reference through the retailer of your choice (we will not use until March 29th):


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, study guide), first check the Questions/Concerns thread on
Canvas to see if someone else has asked the same question, then add the question if someone hasn’t already asked that question.

Email Communication:
I try to respond to emails as soon as possible (i.e., within 24 hours). However, I will be slower to respond to emails at night and on the weekends.

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). This is distracting for everyone else in the room.
- 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 discuss missed work. If you are sick, get a note from a doctor and contact me about 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, no late assignments are accepted.
I: DEFINING QUALITATIVE WORK

Week 1: Introductions

1/18 (In Class) Reading:


Week 2: Starting Points, Part I (Contemporary Context)

1/25 Readings:


Recommended Readings - We will talk about choice of funding agency in Week 3 and you will use these to write your draft & final proposal.

  o Grant Proposal Guidelines:

    If you are a sociology graduate student: National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant Solicitation – Sociology (https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2014/nsf14604/nsf14604.htm). There is also a hard copy on Canvas.

There is also an example NSF Sociology Dissertation Improvement Grant and NSF proposal writing guides available on Canvas in “Week 2 Recommended.”

If you are not a sociology (or other NSF-funded area) graduate student: Look for a solicitation that is appropriate to your field/level of experience. For example, the Global Religion Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship: http://grri.nd.edu/dissertation

If you are an Emory graduate student: Professional Development Support (PDS) Funds (Emory) http://www.gs.emory.edu/professional-development/pds/index.html

DUE IN CLASS: Short autobiographical statement. As a way to introduce yourself and your research interests in a more formal way to 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 what you might want to study in the class and where you might apply for funding.

Week 3: Starting Points, Part II (Past Context) & Research Questions

2/1 Readings:


DUE IN CLASS: Come with some ideas about research questions you would like to address related to your topic that can be answered using qualitative methods.

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Brainstorm and discuss the types of research questions that can be answered using qualitative methods and possible questions you will pose in your research.

II. METHODS

Week 4: Nuts and Bolts Overview & Site Selection

2/8 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?). IT IS IMPORTANT TO GET ACCESS TO YOUR SITE EARLY - BE SURE TO CONFIRM THIS ASAP!

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Brainstorm and discuss research design issues you may face given the topics that interest you and your potential site. Pay particular attention to sampling issues.
Week 5: Observation, Part I (Example: Schools)

2/15 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 6: Observation, Part II (Example: Courts)

2/22 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 Field notes & Memo. See Canvas for guidelines and sample (under “Assignment Resources”).

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 7: Interviews, Part I (Example: Elite Firms)

3/1 Readings:


DUE IN CLASS: Interview Protocol. See Canvas for guidelines. ** SCHEDULE INTERVIEWS EARLY – THIS CAN BE CHALLENGING! **

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

Week 8: Interviews, Part II (Example: Healthcare)

3/8 Readings:


Shim, Janet. 2014. Heart Sick. New York: NYU Press (Introduction & Ch. 1 pgs.1-47; Ch. 3 pgs. 77-111; and “Methodology” pgs. 215-224).

DUE IN CLASS: Interview Transcript (of at least first 10 minutes of interview) & Memo. See Canvas for guidelines and sample (under “Assignment Resources”).

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 9: SPRING BREAK – ENJOY!

3/15: NO CLASS

Week 10: Content analysis/historical ethnography (Example: NASA)

3/22 Readings:

Vaughn, Diane. 1996. The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA (Chapters 1&2 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 would you look for? Is there anything based on your observation and interviews that documents might help you to better understand?

PART III: ANALYSIS

Week 11: Abductive Analysis and Theory Construction

3/29 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 and sample (under “Assignment Resources”).

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 12: Qualitative Software & Coding

4/5 Readings:


DUE IN CLASS: Group-completed comparative table of qualitative software and some initial coding. 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 13: Causality, Validity, and Rigor (plus CITI training)

4/12 Readings:

Small, Mario L. 2013. “Causal Thinking and Ethnographic Research.” American Journal of Sociology. 119(3): 597-601. [This is an overview of an AJS volume on causality in qualitative work; one of the empirical articles from this volume is included below, the rest are (highly) recommended, although I only listed one other article from the volume in the recommended readings below.]

Abend, Gabriel, Caitlin Petre and Michael Sauder. 2013. “Styles of Causal Thought: An Empirical Investigation.” American Journal of Sociology. 119(3): 655-681. [I selected this article because it gives an overview of ethnographic scholarship making causal claims—and is an interesting example of content analysis.]


Recommended Readings on Causality, Validity, and Rigor:


Recommended Readings on Ethics:


DUE IN CLASS: Be sure to upload documentation that you have passed the CITI basic course
for Emory (Social/Behavioral focus). https://www.citiprogram.org/

No assignment due is due, so a recommendation is to start work on your proposal draft using the guidelines of your choice – see Week 2 Recommended.

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 conducting your research? What questions do you have about the ethics of your work? What kinds of things could you ask for solicit grant funding support?

We will also look at guidelines for grants and talk about how to interpret them.

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

4/19 Readings:


Small, Mario L. 2009. *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life*. New York: Oxford University Press. [Note: I am posting Chapters 1-3 and the methods appendix, but because you will be working on your final papers, you will want to focus on Ch. 1 (intro to theory & methods), Ch. 3 (mixed methods), & appendices, and skim Ch. 2 since that chapter is primarily quantitative.]

**NO ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS – WORK ON PROPOSAL; DRAFT DUE TO CANVAS & GOOGLE DOCS (share with profpuckett.edu@gmail.com “Can Edit) BY SUN 4/22 AT 6PM.**

**WORKSHOP:** Have any issues come up in your writing thus far? What can we help you work through, if anything? We will continue to look at guidelines for grants and how to interpret them.

**PART IV: WORKSHOP & WRAP UP**

**Week 15: Proposal workshop & course evaluations**

4/26: Read editing partner’s paper in detail; skim two other papers.

**DUE IN CLASS:** Post one page of feedback for editing partner on Google docs & submit to Canvas. Also skim & comment on two other assigned papers on Google docs.

**IN-CLASS WORKSHOP:** We will workshop each proposal for ~25 minutes. The proposal writer will give an overview (5 min), their editing partner will give a summary of feedback (10 min), finally we will discuss as a group (10 min).

We will also celebrate all of your hard work and fill out course evaluations!

- FINAL PAPER DUE TO CANVAS THURSDAY, MAY 10 BY 6PM -