

Seminar: Qualitative Research Methods

Joy Pierce, Ph.D.

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Ofc. Hrs. T 12:30- 2:30 pm & by appt. (LNCO 2521)

Spring 2012

COMM 7360: Thursdays 3-6 pm**

LNCO 2920

**I prefer that you send course-related emails through Canvas*

***This is a hybrid seminar. We will meet from 3-4:30 and continue online*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines qualitative research methods from a communication perspective and provides a survey of qualitative approaches to assist you in selecting the appropriate method(s) for your thesis or dissertation. The assumption here is that you have had some prior exposure to empirical research methods through an introductory course surveying qualitative and quantitative approaches to studying human interaction, or a research assistantship. This seminar addresses more advanced issues of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and representation. We will highlight specific intellectual traditions and developments that have contributed to theories of interpretive inquiry, such as critical ethnography, performance ethnography, and autoethnography as well as qualitative approaches to doing Internet research.

In addition to theoretical discussions, you will conduct an in-depth qualitative study which will require a minimum of 20 hours of field research. You will select the methodological approaches(s) that best suits your research trajectory. We will engage in a variety of discussions leading to assignments that lead to firsthand experience in conducting original research. In other words, you will enact and reflect on the typical phases and activities of a qualitative research project – planning the study, negotiating access, creating and analyzing field texts, writing and disseminating your findings. My overarching goal is that students emerge from the course with a solid understanding of qualitative empirical research methods for the purpose of comprehensive exams and theses/dissertations, but also with essays ready for submission to professional academic conferences.

COURSE READINGS

Required Texts

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Emerson, R., Fretz, R & L. Shaw. (1995). *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press.

Markham, A. & Baym, N. (2009). *Internet Inquiry: Conversations about Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Additional Required Readings

Other required readings are available through eReserves or are on 3-hour reserve at the Marriott library. I will make some articles/chapters available as PDFs on Canvas. Note: Stake, R. *The Art of Case Study Research* is only available via hard copy reserve, so please allow sufficient time to copy/read the assigned chapters.

Optional

If you have not taken an introductory course addressing qualitative research methods, you should consult some of the following texts for vital background information:

Alasuutari, P. (1995) *Researching Culture: Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies*. London: Sage

Denzin, N. (1997) *Interpretive Ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Please note: If you wish to publish or present your research publicly, including in a dissertation, you must gain permission for your study from the university Institutional Review Board (IRB). It is up to you to submit your own IRB proposal. Please see me if you are unsure whether you will need to apply for IRB approval.

Note: The syllabus is a guide. Required reading assignments are subject to change.

Requirements: Your final grade is determined by your active, informed participation, assignments and final paper. You will work at your own pace to some degree based on the nature of this seminar. You must, however, complete and post your assignments by the designated date and time to earn credit. Canvas may or may not accept posts after the designated time. I do not accept late assignments. I will accept interim papers up to one week from the due date. However, you will get a 50% grade reduction for late work. I will not accept a project beyond the one-week late mark. I will not accept a late Final paper except under extenuating circumstances. If you are having difficulty with an assignment or paper, please see me as early in the process as possible

1. Attendance and Excuses - This seminar is designed to include a balance of discovery, discussion, writing and critique. If you miss discussions and milestones, you will find it difficult to earn a passing grade. If you miss class, you must get notes from a classmate. I am happy to answer questions or elaborate on the discussion session only after you have received and read the notes.
2. University disabilities policy - The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that reasonable accommodation be provided for students with physical, sensory, cognitive, systemic, learning, and psychiatric disabilities. Please contact me at the beginning of the semester to discuss any such accommodations. In order to establish the existence of a disability and/or request reasonable accommodations for this class, you should also contact the Center for Disabled Student Services (in the Olpin Union Building at 581-5020, voice or TDD).
3. About the accommodation policy and this course: All readings in this course are required and considered to be an integral part of instruction. While you may exercise your privilege to request an accommodation under University Policy, I will not grant any content accommodations
4. Withdrawals - Withdrawing from a course and other matters of registration are the student's responsibility. <<http://www.acs.utah.edu/sched/handbook/wddeadlines.htm>>
5. Incompletes - An Incomplete is given for work not completed due to circumstances beyond the student's control. University policy states that a student must be passing the course and have completed at least 80% of the required coursework. Arrangements must be made between the student and the instructor concerning the completion of the work. *Note:* I rarely grant incompletes. <<http://www.acs.utah.edu/sched/handbook/grpolicy.htm>>

ASSIGNMENTS

Readings – Each week we will read a set of articles and chapters. Be prepared to summarize the central argument and claims, discuss strengths and limitations, and pose additional questions on each reading. Additionally, be prepared to evaluate each reading's contribution to a given week's specific theme and the general philosophy and practice of qualitative research methods. These issues will provide a starting point for our discussions. In addition, I may ask you to complete brief in-class assignments to keep you on track with your research and to help me assess if you are prepared to collect and analyze your data.

Facilitation – A student [team] will be responsible for facilitating one 40-minute class discussion. You will be the in-class expert on that week's readings. In other words, pay special attention to the nuances of the articles, consider how the readings relate to one another, and look for insightful connections to larger issues. Often, these observations become the stuff of provocative discussion. You should look for interesting texts or observational excerpts that might help us to apply that week's themes and push us to think more critically about the theory and practice of method.

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Online Discussion – This is a hybrid course, therefore we will meet half the time and work online the other half. After each class you will post one question in the Discussion section on Canvas and respond to at least one question. You must complete this task by 6 pm the following day (Friday). I will participate in the discussions as well. If something arises that needs in-class attention, we will discuss it during the following class meeting.

Assignments -

1. CITI Report – Complete the online CITI Training initiative and submit a copy of your report. You must complete this assignment even if you do not intend to submit an IRB application. I will discuss this further in class. While not a graded assignment, your completion of the training counts toward your participation points.
2. Interview/observation guide – Prepare an interview guide for use at your site. Identify the type(s) of interviews you are likely to conduct, and explain why these types are most appropriate for your research. Describe how you would select and recruit interview participants, and explain the logic of your choices. In addition to providing a list of specific interview questions, identify the broader types or categories of questions you are asking and their purpose in relation to your research problem and question(s). If relevant, provide an updated RQ(s).
3. Preliminary Analysis – Try your hand at analyzing a segment of your data. Stay tuned for more details, as you will have a choice of formats.

Papers –

1. Position paper - In 2-3 pages, explicate a social and/or theoretical “problem” (i.e., mystery, quandary, tension, etc.) you plan to explore in your research site. Characterize your approach to the problem, culminating in a guiding research question (RQ) or a closely related set thereof. Using concepts from class, explain how an interpretive study of this phenomenon differs from a “hard science” (i.e., positivistic, hypothetico-deductive, variable-analytic) study. Please note that this is a place to start; your problem and question will likely evolve over the semester. You may revise for a higher grade
2. Research proposal – prepare a 10-12 page research proposal addressing the following issues: (1) title & abstract/summary; (2) rationale & significance; (3) conceptual areas of inquiry & literature review (i.e., characterize current discussions, debates, gaps, etc. in the literature, as well as how your study will engage these issues); (4) RQ(s); and (5) proposed methodology, protocol, & logistics. You can anticipate some findings if you’d like, but this is not required.
3. Fieldnote - Submit a completed fieldnote that represents at least 3 hours of participant observation. The fieldnote should reflect guidelines presented in course readings and discussed in class. Feel free (though it’s not required) to briefly characterize your developing approach to writing fieldnotes in light of course material.
4. Final paper - The culminating requirement for the course is a 25-page paper based on your original qualitative study. You will submit your paper on Canvas by 3 pm on Thursday, May 3. As indicated above, the semester research project entails locating a site, immersing oneself in its social action, analyzing the meaning of that action through participants’ eyes, and constructing an informed account of how that action contributes to our understanding of communication. This requirement asks you to build upon, integrate, and enhance the practicum assignments to produce a coherent, conference-ready/journal-length essay. The final paper should comply with APA guidelines.

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A Word About the Final Research Paper: You will engage in a number of assignments throughout the semester (details below), culminating in a journal-length paper based upon your original qualitative study. As indicated above the semester research project entails locating a site, becoming immersed in its social action through unobtrusive or participant observation, interviews or focus groups, and constructing an informed account of how that action contributes to our understanding of communication. This requirement asks you to build upon, integrate, and enhance the practicum assignments and interim papers to produce a coherent journal-length essay. Your paper must include the following:

- a. An introduction that briefly states the theoretical/social problem.
- b. A literature review that includes the conceptual/theoretical framework, including research questions.
- c. A thorough discussion of your research methods (tradition, sample, setting, data collection/tools).
- d. Your analysis and findings.
- e. Discussion and conclusion with implications, limitations and future areas of inquiry.

GRADING

I grade on a points system. Each assignment/paper has a point value. The seminar point sum is 100. You will turn in all graded assignments through Canvas. I will review papers and make comments using Track Changes in Microsoft Word. This is essentially a paper-free seminar. Because all assignments are graded through Canvas, you will have access to your points/grade-to-date from the first assignment to the last.

Points:

Paper 1 – Position paper = 5

Paper 2 – Research proposal = 15

Paper 3 – Fieldnote = 5

Final Paper = 40

Readings and Participation = 15

Assignment 1 – Interview/observation guide = 5

Assignment 2 – Preliminary Analysis = 5

Discussion Facilitation = 10

Note: The syllabus is a guide. Required reading assignments are subject to change.

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Week	Topic	Readings	Assignment & Due Dates
Jan 12	Introductions; course preview; IRB and CITI; qualitative research and worldview	CITI Training Initiative	Begin CITI training
Jan 19	Discipline and practice of qualitative research – debates, criticisms and ethics	Lincoln, ch. 7 Creswell, chs. 1 & 2 Christians, ch. 6 Markham, Introduction	✓ CITI report due today
Jan 26	Documents and mixed methods: Guest Speaker, Dr. Jakob Jensen	TBA	
Feb 2	Designing a qualitative study	Creswell, chs. 3, 4, & 6 Alussutari, ch. 5	Discuss proposed research site & phenomenon
Feb 9	Qualitative approaches overview – entering the field	Murphy, ch. 23 Charmaz, ch. 20 Markham, Question One	✓ Paper 1 - Position paper with research question(s) due today
Feb 16	Internet Research	Markham, Questions Three through Six	<i>Facilitators 1</i> ✓ Assignment 1: Interview/observation guide & consent form due today
Feb 23	Ethnography	Lareau, ch. 6 Emerson, chs 1-4 Creswell, ch. 7	<i>Facilitators 2</i> ✗ Negotiate access and begin observation <u>by Feb. 20</u>
Mar 1	Autoethnography	Morera Grainger Kahl Doloriert Stack, ch. 1	<i>Facilitators 3</i> Review and adjust guide(s) as necessary. Continue observations. Paper 2 - Research proposal due by <u>March 8</u> ✗ .

All assigned readings without demarcation are on eReserve

KEY: *see Canvas

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Mar 8	Focus Groups – writing fieldnotes	Emerson, ch. 5 *Fine & Weis, ch 9; Appendix 3	<i>Facilitators 4</i> ✓ Paper 2 – Research proposal due today
Mar 12-16	=====	=====SPRING BREAK=====	=====
Mar 22	Case Study – writing fieldnotes	Stake, Introduction; chs. 1, 5, 7, 10 *Stake, ch. 17	<i>Facilitators 5</i>
Mar 29	Data Analysis: Guest Speaker, Dr. Heather Canary	Markham, Question Two TBA	✓ Paper 3 - Fieldnote due today
Apr 5	=====	=====NO CLASS MEETING=====	=====
Apr 12	Reflexivity – drawing conclusions	Creswell, chs. 10 & 11	Assignment 2 - Preliminary analysis for discussion today
Apr 19	Writing and analysis – leaving the field	*Fine & Weis, Epilogue	Q & A about your research project/final paper.
May 3			✓ Final paper <u>due today</u>

Grading:

Paper 1 – Position paper = 5
 Paper 2 – Research proposal = 15
 Paper 3 – Fieldnote = 5
 Final Paper = 40

Readings and Participation = 15
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