Instructor: Gretchen B. Rossman
277 Hills South; 545-4377
office hours: by appointment
gretchen@educ.umass.edu

Teaching Assistant: Gerardo Blanco Ramirez
gerardo@educ.umass.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND REQUIREMENTS

Design and Objectives
This course provides an introduction to the assumptions, language, logic, and methods of qualitative inquiry in a variety of settings. The emphasis is on the modes of thinking and specific practices associated with generic as well as collaborative approaches to qualitative research. We discuss paradigms, their usefulness in understanding the assumptions implicit in all inquiry, and the typical assumptions of qualitative inquiry. We also focus on conceptualizing and designing qualitative studies and discuss strategies for developing researchable questions and the issues associated with involving participants in the research process. The major work of the course is the conduct of a small-scale qualitative research project which entails a number of activities: (1) designing the project; (2) negotiating agreement to conduct inquiry; (3) practicing the specific methods typically used in qualitative research: interviewing, observing, and document or artifact review; (4) analyzing and interpreting the data gathered through the fieldwork; and (5) writing up the process and findings in a set of coherent and well-argued papers. Since learning about qualitative research is best accomplished by doing it, immersion in the course and its work is essential and typically requires a substantial time commitment.

Through readings, discussion, class exercises and assignments, we will work through the following topics:

♦ the assumptions and theoretical traditions of qualitative research;
♦ the role of the researcher in qualitative inquiry;
♦ preparing for fieldwork and negotiating agreement about the inquiry;
♦ typical qualitative data collection methods;
♦ collecting and organizing data in the field;
♦ analyzing and interpreting qualitative data;
♦ ensuring accurate, rich, and useful qualitative studies;
♦ ethical and political dilemmas in qualitative research; and
♦ writing the research report.

Requirements
There are two major requirements for the course: (1) the competent, thorough, and thoughtful completion of the small-scale research project, and (2) active participation in class in both small- and large-group settings. The written assignments help you reflect on and critique your learning about the practice of qualitative methods and to further the successful conduct of your project. All written assignments are to include appropriate references to the methodological literature that we read (and others that you may be familiar with). The following written assignments are required and due on the date indicated:

short prospectus describing your study – due Week 2 – February 4
preliminary personal reflections – due Week 3 – February 11
'first days in the field' paper including field notes excerpt – due Week 5 – February 25
interviewing paper including transcript excerpt – due Week 7 – March 11
reflections on ethical issues – due Week 9 – April 1
analytic memo – due Week 11 – April 17 (Wednesday)
final reflections – due Week 13 – April 29
There are detailed guidelines for each short paper and the final reflections paper which are included in the Guidelines for Written Assignments packet and will be discussed in class prior to the assignment. Written assignments are to be typed (11- or 12-point font; double-spaced; 1” margins) or word-processed using APA style for references and formatting, double-spaced, and left-justified. Please edit carefully for both mechanics and content. Don’t assume that just spell-checking the document is sufficient. In addition to the written requirements, I expect you to come to class meetings with all readings prepared, ready to discuss them and to participate in class discussions.

Grading
This course is graded with a pass-fail option. If you wish to exercise the pass-fail option, please inform me in writing by the third week of class (February 11). The criteria for assessing performance on a graded basis are applied to determine excellent performance (A); very strong performance (A-); strong performance (B+), and adequate performance (B). A grade of C indicates failure at the graduate level. The criteria are:

- Competent completion of the required papers – 80% (10% for each of papers 2-5, excluding the first short prospectus; 20% for the analytic memo; 20% for the final reflections paper)
  This criterion assesses students’ developing abilities to design and conduct a small-scale research project. This includes identifying and reflecting on issues that arise; integrating the methodological literature into discussions of those issues; and writing critically at the graduate level.
- Participation in class discussions and activities – 20%
  This criterion assesses students’ diligence and thoughtfulness in reading methodological literature, identifying points of contradiction and application, and applying key ideas from the literature to class discussions.

For the first three papers that are required for the course, I will give you fairly extensive feedback on your writing, including both line-editing and comments on your logic and the development of an argument. For the remaining papers, I will not give you this feedback but will take writing (both argumentation and mechanics) into account in assigning grades. Note also that I do not offer the option of incompletes for the class. All written work is to be completed on time.

Attendance
Because of the dialogic nature of the learning in class, you are expected to attend every session. However, I do understand that personal circumstances sometimes intervene. Please let me know in advance if you must miss a class or as soon after the missed class as possible. I expect that you will talk with classmates to gather their understanding of what they learned in class; you may find it helpful to talk with more than one person. In addition, I will accept no more than two absences.

Accommodations
If you have some disabling condition or other circumstance that might require accommodation for the completion of written and other assignments, please inform us in writing as soon as possible to ensure your success in the course.

Academic honesty
Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and can result in your dismissal from the University. Please be diligent about using others’ words and work appropriately, given them credit for their ideas.

Class Interaction
The class will serve as a community of practice. Researchers and philosophers today consider a crucial component of inquiry to be the practice of discussing, testing, and reflecting on your understandings and experiences with colleagues. The critique of this community is essential for making choices about data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Thoughtful, informed, and interested colleagues are invaluable to your development as a qualitative researcher and to your interpretive process; time in each class will be devoted to this collegial and constructive interchange.

Qualitative research demands sensitivity to others and self, sustained engagement in the field, systematic record-keeping and reviewing, and on-going thought about all of the above. Discussion will be most useful to you and oth-
ers if you can maintain a stance of openness and respect, whether the class is considering one of the readings, someone’s viewpoint, a field experience, or a written assignment. The best time to question, paradoxically, may be when you think you know the most.

I ask that you keep confidential any discussions during the class. This respects your colleagues when they reveal the ups and downs of their work, as well as the confidentiality you have promised the participants in your studies.

Required Text and Supplementary Readings


Any proceeds that I receive from the sale of this book for the course are donated to a charitable organization.

In addition, there are supplementary readings available on Moodle. From time to time, I will add additional readings to Moodle.

Please keep in mind the course time-frame as you settle on a focus and plan how to implement your study. Narrow. Focus. Smaller and deeper is best. The aim is to create opportunities for you to practice and understand qualitative methods and then to make sense of what you have learned. If your topic is too broad or ambitious, you will not be able to accomplish this in the time allocated for this course. Please do NOT even consider taking an incomplete in order to give yourself more time to collect and analyze data.

PRELIMINARY COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1 – January 28 – Defining qualitative research
Introductions; overview of course; requirements; grading policy; texts; supplementary readings. Explanation of written assignments. Discussion about research in general and qualitative research specifically. Discussion about your research interests, including such issues as scale (smaller is better), conducting research in "your own backyard," and other issues.

Week 2 – February 4 – Who you are in the conduct of the study
Reflections on your personal biography/social identities in the conduct of a study; building and maintaining relationships; ethical issues inherent in fieldwork; ensuring rigor; issues of collaboration. Personal considerations: the role of the researcher; researcher as "instrument"; ethical and personal issues and dilemmas. Jigsaw on readings.

Read: Rossman & Rallis, Chs 1 & 2; Peshkin (MOODLE); Foster (MOODLE); Heshusius (MOODLE); Wagle & Cantaffa (MOODLE); Milner (MOODLE); Rager (MOODLE)

DUE IN CLASS: preliminary prospectus for small-scale study

Week 3 – February 11 – Trustworthiness and ethical considerations
Ways of ensuring that qualitative studies are credible, thorough, valid, and competently conducted. Lecture on various sets of criteria for assessing qualitative studies; considerations at the design, conduct, and writing up stages of the study. Critique of standard criteria for judging qualitative studies. Strategies discussed include collaborative analysis, use of 'critical friend,' participant sharing, documentation, journaling, triangulation. Considerations of ethical and political issues as central to trustworthy studies. Jigsaw on readings.

Read: Rossman & Rallis, Ch 3; Guillemin & Gillam (MOODLE); Etherington (MOODLE); Allen (MOODLE); Hemmings (MOODLE); Rossman, Rallis & Kuntz (MOODLE, optional)

DUE IN CLASS: preliminary personal reflections
**Week 4 – TUESDAY, February 19 – Genres of qualitative research: Designing a qualitative study**
Discussion about the major genres of qualitative research, including mainstream modes and more participatory and collaborative modes. Overall strategies/purposes for qualitative inquiry. Conceptualizing and focusing a topic for a qualitative research study. Framing the study; 'sizing' a study; considerations of 'do-ability'; issues in negotiating agreement about the study. Participant observation as a central qualitative research method. Preparing for fieldwork: issues of confidentiality; informed consent.

Read: Rossman & Rallis, Chs 4 & 5; Gregory (MOODLE); Levinson & Sparkes (MOODLE); London (MOODLE)

**Week 5 – February 25 – Gathering data in the field I – participating and observing**
Observing and interviewing are the primary methods for gathering data in qualitative research. This week begins a discussion about and practice in both methods. This week's focus is primarily on observing; the next week focuses on interviewing, although the methods are not neatly separable. Discussion of the spectrum of observation strategies: structured, open-ended, check-lists. Discussion of continuum of possible strategies. Preparing for observations; writing clear, detailed, and useful fieldnotes. Engaging participants in observing; sharing fieldnotes.

Read: Rossman & Rallis, Ch 6 & 7; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (Chs 2 & 3, MOODLE); Reger (MOODLE); sample fieldnotes (MOODLE)

**DUE IN CLASS: 'first days in the field' paper plus sample field-notes**

**Week 6 – March 4 – Gathering data in the field II – interviewing**
Lecture and discussion about interviewing: strategies, assumptions. Types of interviews: structured; open-ended; phenomenological; elite interviewing; interviewing children. Examples drawn from your small-scale studies.

Read: Rossman & Rallis, Ch 8; Riessman (MOODLE); Davies (MOODLE); Wieder (MOODLE)

**Week 7 – March 11 – In-class interviewing activity**
Review the guidelines for this activity on MOODLE.

**DUE IN CLASS: interview paper plus transcript excerpt**

**March 18 – NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK**

**Week 8 – March 25 – Gathering data in the field III – transcription and translation**
Issues in transcription and translation. Problem-solving in small groups about your projects. Special issues in interviewing: focus groups and their use in qualitative studies: definition and examples of effective use; interviewing "elites" and your peers.

Read: Tilley (MOODLE); Lapadat & Lindsey (MOODLE); Temple & Young (MOODLE)

**Week 9 – April 1 – Gathering data in the field IV – using documents, material culture, and the Internet**
Reviewing and analyzing artifacts and documents. Using the Internet in qualitative inquiry. Problem-solving around specific issues that have arisen as you have implemented your projects. Typical issues include: honing interviewing skills; focusing observations; transcribing; sequencing and pacing of data collection. Bring to class specific issues to discuss.

Read: Rossman & Rallis, Ch 9; Harber (MOODLE); Markham (MOODLE); Sixsmith & Murray (MOODLE)

**DUE IN CLASS: reflections on ethical issues**
Week 10 – April 8 – Analysis I: Identifying categories and themes
Discussion of strategies for managing and analyzing qualitative data. Considerations at the design, data gathering, and focused analysis stages. Strategies for organizing field notes, logging interviews, beginning analysis. Discussion of various 'standard' approaches to data analysis. Critique. Software to help analyze qualitative data.

Read: Rossman & Rallis, Ch 10; Wolcott (Ch 2, CR); Dexter & LaMagdaleine (MOODLE)
BRING TO CLASS: 2-3 TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS; 2-3 SETS OF FIELDNOTES

Week 11 – WEDNESDAY, April 17 – Analysis II: Developing insights & Workshop on analysis
Considerations for maintaining some control over the conceptual framework and data gathering during the conduct of a qualitative study. Linking emerging "lessons learned" to the conceptual framework. Preliminary data analysis strategies. Virtue of analytic memos. Small group work designed to share progress, develop analytic themes, discuss emerging focuses for the study.

Read: Rossman & Rallis, Ch 11; Hoskins & Stoltz (MOODLE)
DUE IN CLASS: analytic memo

Week 12 – April 22 – Analysis III
In your study groups, we will continue the process of data analysis, sharing your analytic memos.

Read: Freeman et al. (MOODLE); Sampson (MOODLE)

Week 13 – April 29 – Writing up qualitative data; Generalizing
Discussion of principles of effective presentation of an argument; supporting evidence; sufficiency of evidence; building a case for the conclusions reached. Issues in collaborative writing. Writing as a process for generating and refining ideas.

Read: Rossman & Rallis, Ch 12; Kennedy (MOODLE); Finfgeld (MOODLE); Richardson (MOODLE)
DUE IN CLASS: final reflections paper