

**EDUC 619 – QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS**  
**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST**  
**FALL 2014**

**Instructor**

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**Course Meeting**

Tuesday @ 4 PM  
275 Hills South  
|Office Hours| Tuesdays 1-4 PM (or by  
appointment)

**Course Description**

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.

**Unpacking the Course Description**

Any person who reaches advanced graduate study has been introduced to a specialized form of discourse whether they know it or not. Our academic homes—fields, disciplines, and departments—all have idiosyncratic, specialized ways of thinking about, viewing, interacting with, and writing about the world. That discursive community tells us more or less directly what sorts of behaviors and interests are permissible and which are not. Research methods also have their own discursive communities, and in this course, we’re going to begin the task of figuring out what “rules” have been established for qualitative inquiry. More specifically, we’re going to examine the relationship(s) between: the assumptions and theoretical traditions; the role of the researcher; the role of research participants; the nature of fieldwork; qualitative designs, qualitative methods, and the difference between the two; data analysis; and representation of findings. In qualitative research, however, most of these “rules” are highly contextual since they must respond to the ambiguity of human experience and meaning-making. That means that we’re going to examine qualitative research as a series of decisions, negotiations, and compromises wherein there are no right answers save for those dictated by the ethical compasses of the researcher, the research community, and research participants.

## Course Texts

The following text is required:

Rossmann, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2012). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

You must also select one of the following for the original readings assignment:

Heath, S. B. (2009). *Ways with words* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Latour, B. & Woolgar, S. (1986). *Laboratory life: The construction of scientific facts*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Stevens, M. L. (2007). *Creating a class: College admissions and the education of elites*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

## Grading & Assignments

Grading will be based upon a 100 point scale with the following correspondences between the points earned and the grade awarded:

A	More than 94 Points
A-	90-93 Points
B+	87-89 Points
B	83-86 Points
B-	80-82 Points
C+	77-79 Points
C	73-76 Points
C-	70-72 Points
D	60-69 Points
F	Less than 59 Points

The following assignments are included in the course grade:

- 1) **Participation [20 Percent]:** I expect that you will attend each week's class meeting and that you will have reviewed the week's readings in advance. If that will not happen, I expect you to notify me in advance. Both elements are critical to your success in the course since our class meetings will consist mostly of discussion.
- 2) **Who am I? What is qualitative research? What's the connection? [20 Percent]:** Qualitative researchers are often concerned about issues of positionality. Addressing these issues requires asking questions about how a researcher's own values, beliefs, assumptions,

and past experiences shape the way that they go about their work. Qualitative research is also a term that encompasses many different approaches, traditions, and philosophies. For this assignment, you will need to produce a “draft” of an essay that addresses these issues and explores the connections between them. That draft will be due early in the semester, so you will need to draw upon your experiences and prior coursework to complete it. The first draft should be approximately 2-3 double-spaced pages in length. You will revisit your draft answer near the end of the semester—revising, expanding, and/or rejecting parts of it to reflect the way that your thinking has evolved. Your “final” answer to the question should make extensive use of readings and be 4-5 pages in length. **Initial Draft Due: September 16 (5 Percent of Final Grade) | Final Draft Due: December 9 (15 Percent of Final Grade)**

- 3) **Original Readings Assignment [20 Percent of Final Grade]:** For this assignment, you will read a book that expands on the ideas we discuss in this class and reports the results of original research. Acceptable choices are listed above. You will then write a paper discussing the book and providing your reaction to it. The paper should include 1) an explanation of the format of the book and a summary of key points; 2) a discussion of the qualitative design employed and how it relates to the book’s key points; and 3) a critique and/or counter-argument demonstrating possible methodological or interpretive limitations. You will need to cite relevant course readings (including from the week the paper is due) to support your arguments. There is no fixed page length requirement for this assignment, but it can typically be completed in 4-6 double-spaced pages. **Due: Varies by Selection (Noted Below)**
  
- 4) **Research Project [40 Percent of Final Grade]:** For this assignment, you will produce four short papers (2-3 double-spaced papers with appendices if appropriate) in the form of a qualitative memo. They should frequently reference course readings. These memos will include: 1) a prospectus, 2) an examination of ethical and political issues associated with your study, 3) a reflection on methodological issues encountered, and 4) a preliminary attempt at analysis. Further details are provided in the guidelines for the research project below. **Part 1 Due: September 27 | Part 2: October 14 | Part 3: November 4 | Part 4: December 2**

### **Nota Bene: On Class Discussions**

Trust is of paramount importance in this course. By way of elucidation, here is part of the “Class Interaction” section of Gretchen Rossman’s syllabus for this course: “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.” Since we are collectively engaged in the task of figuring things out, our class discussions must remain confidential out of respect for your colleagues and their research participants. I also ask that you interpret your colleague’s statements using a hermeneutic of good will and ask for clarification whenever necessary.

## **Nota Bene: Guidelines for Written Assignments**

**The prospectus** should do three things. First, it should describe the focus of the proposed study. This will necessarily be brief but should include the tentative research questions, puzzles or curiosities that have captured your interest and that you wish to pursue systematically. This section should be a paragraph or two. Second, the prospectus should describe the setting where you plan to conduct the study. Discuss the setting in modest detail, indicating how access to the site and people will be obtained. Even at this early stage, you should have discussed your ideas with some official in the setting to gain initial approval for the study. This should be one paragraph. Third, the prospectus should stipulate how you plan to gather data: in what ways, with whom, how often, and under what circumstances. You should sketch out at this point how you plan to meet the requirements of 8 hours of observing and 5 hours of interviewing (minimum).

**The ethical and politics issues memo** should reflect on the ethical and political issues that have arisen in the conduct of your study. Briefly describe your study to orient the reader before focusing on the ethical and political issues that arose. These might include learning personal information that is not relevant to your research questions or observing harmful behaviors in the setting. Another issue might be how you reached agreement on the extent and ways the participants would collaborate with you. Still another might be the power dynamics that you have observed or participants' concerns about how what they revealed to you would be shared. All studies involve ethical and political issues, but if you cannot readily identify the political and ethical issues you have encountered, think about those that might have arisen. Remember: the demand in considering ethical and political issues is not that you show how cleanly and tidily you resolved them; rather, it is to demonstrate that you are developing the sensitivities associated with ethically and professionally conducted research.

**The methods memo** should present a reflection on your early efforts at interviewing and fieldwork. Consider what you expected and what actually happened. Think about your own point-of-view both in the physical space and with regard to the researcher. What sorts of insights did these provide? Did they restrict? Think about the patterns of interactions that you observed and in which you participated. How did you record this information? Would you do it differently moving forward? Did you have a coding or shorthand system? Did it work? Were you seeing and hearing the same things in all of your data collection modalities? What follow-up questions arose for future study? You should include examples of both your fieldnotes and a transcribed interview in appendices.

**The analytic memo** provides a description of one or more pattern(s) that you have observed throughout your qualitative data collection. It does so by detailing the connection between a specific data point, other similar data points, the context of your study, and the wider interpretive lens that you are using. It is okay for any conclusions that you reach to be tentative and for you to discuss the sort of work that would be necessary to confirm them. You should provide thick descriptions of any observational data and excerpts from any interview data used.

## Course Meetings

### **Week One: September 2**

#### **What is 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 Two: September 9**

#### **Who are you in the context of a qualitative 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.*

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

### **Week Three: September 16**

#### **What does trust have to do with it?**

*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. Considerations of ethical and political issues as central to trustworthy studies.*

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

### **Week Four: September 23**

#### **How do we think qualitatively?**

*Major genres of qualitative research. Overall strategies/purposes for qualitative inquiry. 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)

## **Week Five: September 30**

### **How do qualitative researchers see the world?**

Nota Bene: Reviews of Stevens' (2007) *Crafting a Class* are Due

*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 field notes. Engaging participants in observing; sharing field notes.*

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

## **Week Six: October 7**

### **How do qualitative researchers ask questions?**

*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; Pitts & Day (MOODLE); Riessman (MOODLE); Davies (MOODLE); Wieder (MOODLE)

## **Week Seven: October 14**

No Class: The University says today is Monday

## **Week Eight: October 21**

### **How can qualitative researchers use preexisting sources of information?**

Nota Bene: Reviews of Latour & Wolgar's (1986) *Laboratory Life* are Due

*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; Bastedo & Gumport (MOODLE); Harber (MOODLE); Markham (MOODLE); Sixsmith & Murray (MOODLE)

## **Week Nine: October 28**

### **How do we move from multidimensional media to textual representation?**

*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 Ten: November 4**

### **How do we organize qualitative data?**

*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, MOODLE); Dexter & LaMagdaleine (MOODLE)

## **Week Eleven: November 12 (Wednesday Class Meeting)**

### **How do we make meaning of qualitative data?**

Nota Bene: Reviews of Heath's (2009) *Ways with Words* are Due

*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); Sampson (MOODLE)

## **Week Twelve: November 18**

### **How does what we've talked about fit together?**

*I will be at a conference this week, so I have invited a group of experienced qualitative researchers to share their experiences doing qualitative work with you. Additionally, I have set up two exercises that will assist you in responding to data collection "problems."*

Read: Geertz (MOODLE; I won't actually require you discuss this reading in class, but it's something you should read and doesn't fit elsewhere)

**Week Thirteen: November 25**

**Is there a specialized way of writing qualitatively?**

*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); Richardson (MOODLE); Yore & Rossman (MOODLE – optional)

**Week Fourteen: December 2**

**What have we learned this semester?**

Discussion of your small-scale projects. Plans for the future. Key lessons regarding qualitative design and methods.

## Course Policies

**Academic Honesty** - Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department head or chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent ([http://www.umass.edu/dean\\_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/)).

**Accommodations** - The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS), or Psychological Disabilities Services (PDS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify the instructor within the first two weeks of the semester so that I may make appropriate arrangements. Also, please inform the instructor of any religious observances that will require you to miss class or require special accommodation.

**Citation Style** - Wherever possible, you should provide references to sources utilizing APA style, which is standard in most education-related areas of study. The full guide to APA style is can be found in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (Sixth Edition). A short guide is available online at Purdue's Online Writing Lab (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>). In all written assignments, you should provide a bibliography. Apart from citation style, you may format your written assignments however you would like provided you do so consistently.

**Electronic Submission of Work** - Unless otherwise specified, all assignments should be submitted by email. I will respond to your email within one business day to let you know that I have received it. If you do not receive an email to that effect, you are responsible for contacting me to confirm that I have received it. Please do not provide a paper copy.

**Late Assignments** - It does not matter to me when you turn in your assignments; I will spend the same amount of time offering feedback regardless of when you submit them. However, it has been my experience that sometimes deadlines are missed because they are started too late, which in turn inhibits both the quality of assignment and what can be learned from it. *As a result, if you would like to turn in an assignment later than the date on the syllabus, I require that you notify me at least 72 hours in advance.* Late works for which an extension is not received will be awarded a grade one letter grade lower than that which it would otherwise have been assigned. All work must be submitted prior to the end of the semester; since a grade is supposed to be a measurement of learning over a discrete period of time, *I do not award incompletes.*