Qualitative Research Methods
SOCL 7213
Monday 1:30-4:30

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Course Description:
The goal of this seminar is to expand and refine your methodological imagination and skills by familiarizing you with a set of methodological strategies and techniques that are broadly defined as qualitative. This is not a seminar where we will debate the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative versus quantitative methodologies and analysis. We will be focusing on methods that are employed for the purpose of generating and analyzing data that are not normally tapped by or amenable to survey research, demographic techniques, or experimental procedures. Many of these methodologies require researchers to spend time in the social reality that is constantly being constructed, negotiated and contested by those who participate in it. As qualitative researchers, we will observe, listen to, and analyze the behaviors, activities, discourses, and productions of social actors.

In this seminar, you will learn the process of qualitative data collection and analysis. However, this is not simply a how-to course, as qualitative research is intimately connected to and driven by theory. This course is very theoretically oriented and many readings are quite dense. This is because methodological questions are secondary to questions of paradigm. Paradigm is (generally speaking) a world view that guides the researcher not only methodologically, but ontologically and epistemologically. Because I am the author of this course, it is only fair that I identify my paradigmic orientations from the start and locate myself within the construction of the course. Broadly speaking, I am a social constructionist who is heavily influenced by feminist scholarship, theories, and methods. That is, I view reality as mutually constructed between researcher and participant. There is not one single truth or reality; rather, there are multiple realities with differing material consequences based on one’s social location. Throughout my own research and this course, I pay particular attention to notions of reflexivity, power, subjectivity, representation, responsibility, and praxis. Substantively, I am a gender, sexuality, and family sociologist and the methodological examples I highlight throughout the seminar reflect my interests. Qualitative research encompasses a diverse, complex, and messy patchwork of theories and methodologies and I look forward to guiding you through this exciting learning process.

Course Objectives:
1. Provide students with a critical appreciation for the qualitative tradition in sociology
2. Acquaint students with a diversity of qualitative methods and associated theoretical, ethical, and pragmatic issues
3. Instruct students on how to conduct qualitative research that is descriptively rich, theoretically illuminating, and ultimately publishable.

**Required Course Materials**


6. A selection of articles and book chapters are available either in the sociology main office (Stubbs 126) or electronically. These are designated in the reading schedule by e=electronic and o=office.

**Student Responsibilities and Grading**

In Brief:

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<tr>
<th>Discussion Leader</th>
<th>150</th>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Class Participation</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methodological Assignments</td>
<td>200</td>
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<td>Term Project</td>
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Standard Grading Scale:

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<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>900 or more</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>800 - 899</td>
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<td>C</td>
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Discussion Leader (15 %)

You will be responsible for 1-2 (depending on class size) discussion facilitations during the course of the semester. When it is your turn to be a discussion leader, I expect that you will spend sufficient time organizing your in-class facilitation. You should do several things to prepare for your assigned weeks:

Be prepared to critically discuss (NOT SUMMARIZE) the readings. For empirical studies think about the strengths and weaknesses of the study's research design. How does the researcher integrate themselves within the researcher? Are there ethical issues? Does it generate theory? For methodological/theoretical writings, think about if you were to use this method/theory/analysis; what would be some concerns? How does it advance understanding of the topic? Has this reading strengthened your ability to measure theoretical concepts?

Develop 3-5 thought provoking questions for the class to discuss based on the readings for the week. You must provide the other students in the class and me with a copy of these questions via e-mail at least two days prior to class. Please deliver a hardcopy to my office and email a copy to me as well as your classmates. Having these questions in hand two days in advance is ESSENTIAL and should improve the quality of the class discussions as well (Please Plan Ahead!). You should be prepared to share your insights to the questions you develop.

Purpose: To provide you with opportunities to process the material and develop your ability to critique the readings. This procedure will: ensure that you take a pro-active role in the class, encourage you to discover materials relevant to the course that are not part of the assigned readings, and facilitate group discussion. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, you will be challenged to develop your public speaking abilities in a friendly environment. These talents are essential to your career development.

Overall Class Participation (15 %)

I expect you to come prepared to all classes including those in which you are not the discussion leader. This means that you should read all of the material and think about the discussion questions that will be distributed prior to each seminar. From my perspective, the quality of your comments and questions is as important or more so than the number of times you speak. Your overall class participation also includes your class attendance. This course is organized to foster a group learning environment. For this reason, your absence not only hampers your ability to participate in class discussion but also precludes you from offering other students in the class insightful commentary that you may have offered if you had shown up to class.
Purpose: By assigning points to students' overall participation in this seminar, I hope to increase the effort students put into their reading assignments when they are not discussion leaders. I also want to ensure that everyone recognizes the value of being involved in an interactive type of seminar. We will all learn more from each other if we come prepared and are eager to share our thoughts.

Semester-Long Project (50%)

You are to prepare a paper based on the field work conducted throughout the semester. The paper should be analytical and shed empirical light on a methodological or substantive problem. A purely descriptive paper will not be acceptable. The final paper is to be written as if it were being submitted for publication consideration by an academic journal. Multiple-author papers are acceptable from team projects.

Your project will consist of several tasks:

Getting Started:

You will need to identify a compelling research question that can be addressed through qualitative methodology (specifically through observation and interviews)

You will need to choose a research setting and research participants. The research setting must be a public space.

Methodological Assignments: (20%)

Conducting qualitative research is a multi-step process. You will be required to fill out an IRB and produce a consent form. You will take jottings, fieldnotes, and memos. You will evaluate your peers’ jottings, fieldnotes, and memos. You will construct an interview guide, transcribe interviews and produce theoretical memos of your interviews. You will be required to code your data and evaluate the coding schemes of your peers. Yes, qualitative research is arduous but well worth the work! Because all of these are required steps to producing your final paper, you basically get credit simply by doing these assignments. While my expectations of your work are high, I understand that this is a learning process for each of you. Therefore, I plan to personally go over each of these small assignments with you if necessary.

Minimum Requirements for Methodological Assignments:

Groups (no more than 3 people per group): 5 sets of fieldnotes; 3 interviews (per person)
**Individuals:** 5 sets of fieldnotes; 3 interviews (Depending on where you are in your academic careers, this might not be written in stone. However, these must be methodological decisions we make together)  
***You must stay in the field for at least an hour each time***

**Writing a Qualitative Paper:**

You should organize your paper in the following manner:

1. Abstract  
2. Introduction (include statement of the problem and specific questions, rationale for studying these issues)  
3. Literature review and theoretical orientation (make sure this is clearly focused on your specific concerns)  
4. Research Design (include description of space, statement about data collection, recruitment and sampling, discuss reflexivity, detail the type of analysis you are using and your coding scheme)  
5. Findings…this is where the analysis comes in (I expect subheadings here!)  
6. Discussion (limitations, theoretical advancement, policy implications, areas for future research)  
7. Reference List  
8. Appendix: Interview guide, and other documents if necessary  
9. Your text, including the abstract but excluding pages devoted to references (and appendices if you have any), should be 25-30 double spaced pages (Please make every effort not to exceed 30 text pages). **Use 1" top/bottom and side margins and a 12 inch font.**

**Purpose:** This project provides you the opportunity to strengthen your ability to identify an important research question and to develop a strategy for conducting research that will address your question. You will also have the opportunity to leave the confines of the ivory tower and enter the field. This project affords you the opportunity to conduct qualitative research! From a practical point of view, this type of project prepares you for your future research efforts (theses, dissertations, and other projects).

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1 (Jan. 14): Understanding Qualitative Research**  
This must be read before the first class!  
**Reading Assignments:**

1. Esterberg, Kristen G. *Qualitative Methods in Social Research.* (Chapter 1).  
2. Gubrium, Jaber and Holstein, Jim. *The New Language of Qualitative Method.* (Chapter 1). (O)  
   *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36: 50-84. (E)

**Course Assignment:**
1. Begin to think about your semester projects. Decide if you want to work as an individual or in a group. If you decide to work as a group, begin conversing with your peers, aligning interests, and forming your groups.
2. Complete NIH human subjects training online.  

**No Class Jan. 21: Martin Luther King Holiday.** However we still have to meet on an alternate day/time...Sorry!

**Week 2 (We need to come up with a day/time when we can all meet): Doing Qualitative Research; Locating Your ‘Self’**

**Reading Assignments:**
1. Esterberg, Kristen G. *Qualitative Methods in Social Research.* (Chapter 2).

**Course Assignments:**
1. Projects finalized. This means you must have your ethnographic space and start thinking about possible questions you might ask your participants
2. 1-2 page narrative explaining why you chose the space/phenomena/issue. What is your personal and scholarly relationship to this project? Locate yourself in your research.
3. In class observation exercise

**Week 3 (Jan. 28): Ethics in Qualitative Research**

**Reading Assignments:**
1. Esterberg, Kristen G. *Qualitative Methods in Social Research.* (Chapter 3).
Course Assignment:
Complete IRB forms and consent forms.

Feb. 4th No Class Mardi Gras!

Week 4 (Feb. 11): Ethnography
Reading Assignments:
2. Esterberg, Kristen G. *Qualitative Methods in Social Research* (Chapter 4).

Course Assignment:
1. First set of fieldnotes due.

Week 5 (Feb. 18): Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes
Reading Assignments:

Course Assignment:
1. Second set of fieldnotes due with jottings
2. Switch fieldnotes and jottings with a peer

Week 6 (Feb. 25): Interviewing
Reading Assignments:
2. Esterberg, Kristen G. *Qualitative Methods in Social Research* (Chapter 5 up to page 107).

Course Assignment:
1. Preliminary interview guide due
2. Third set of fieldnotes due with jottings
3. Evaluation of peers fieldnotes and jottings due

Week 7 (March 3): Active Interview
Reading Assignments:

Course Assignment:
1. Reformulate interview guide if necessary
2. Fourth set of fieldnotes due

Week 8 (March 10): Objectivist Grounded Theory
Reading Assignments:

Course Assignment:
1. First interview due (must be transcribed)
2. Switch transcribed interviews with a peer

Week 9 (March 24): Constructivist Grounded Theory
Reading Assignments:

Course Assignment:
1. Second interview due (must be transcribed)
2. Evaluation of peers interview due

March 17th No Class Spring Break!

Week 10 (March 31): Making Sense of Objectivist & Constructivist Grounded Theory
Reading Assignments:

Course Assignment:
1. Fifth set of fieldnotes due
2. Theoretical memo of fifth set of fieldnotes due
Week 11 (April 7): Case Studies and Unobtrusive Methods

Reading Assignments:
2. Esterberg, Kristen G. Qualitative Methods in Social Research (Chapter 6).

Course Assignment:
1. Third interview due
2. Theoretical memo of third interview
3. Some preliminary coding due

Week 12 (April 14): Narrative Analysis and Autoethnography

Reading Assignments:

Course Assignment:
1. Coding

Week 13 (April 21): Visual Research Methods and Focus Groups

Reading Assignments:


Course Assignment:
1. Coding and writing

Week 14 (April 28): Writing up Qualitative Research

Reading Assignments:

Course Assignment:
1. More coding and more writing!

Final Projects due May 5th by 4:00

The following lists are to serve as references to guide you on your qualitative journey. The lists are certainly not exhaustive. There are many other journals that publish qualitative work and this list of books does not even begin to scratch the surface. Also note that the list of books is categorized into sub-disciplines for organizational purposes. However, many of these books fit in more than one area of sociology.
**Journals that Publish Qualitative Work:**
Gender & Society  
Journal of Contemporary Ethnography  
Symbolic Interaction  
Qualitative Health Research  
Qualitative Sociology  
Qualitative Inquiry

**Books that Use Qualitative Methodologies: Some Favorites**
*Note: The following is a list of readings recommended by faculty in the sociology department at LSU and some of my old friends from graduate school who are now scattered throughout the country*

**Class Stratification**

**Criminology/Deviance**


**Culture**

**Migration**


**Development**


**Education**


**Families**


**Gender**


**Medical Sociology/Health**


**Race**


**Rural Sociology**


**Sexuality**
